

THE COLLECTED WORKS OF MATTHEW WEISS  
2004-2015

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2004

THE MOVIE THAT ENDED THE WORLD  
2004

## The Movie That Ended The World

INT. BOB'S BASEMENT

Inside Bob's Basement, the floor is cluttered. The Mookal Trio, DANIEL, JULIAN, and JEREMY sit eating Goldfish.

JEREMY

If only Bob were here.

JULIAN

Lets play video games!!!!!!!!!!

JEREMY

(glances suspiciously)

Um... Curd?

DANIEL

Your mama's a curd.

JEREMY

I am Jeremy of Mookal Meef, and  
I demand you grovel.

JULIAN

Lets go eat... chocolate!!!!

DANIEL

Your mama's a chocolate.

JULIAN

Poop!!!!!!!!!!

DANIEL

Your mama's a poop!

JEREMY

Ok... I think this has been  
enough. Lets go save the world.

CUT TO:

EXT. BOGUS LAIR

Meef.

JEREMY

Ah, so we are here at Bogus  
Lair. We were previously at  
Bob's Basement. Who would have  
thunk it?

DANIEL

Your mama thunk it.

Julian begins to eat Daniel's  
belly. Daniel screams.

A rumble in the bushes catches  
their attention.

JEREMY

Uhoses! Its Moses!

Jeremy blacks out.

JEREMY

Ackle-beee!

He disappears. In his place  
stands Luger-Amos!

LUGER

I am LUGER-AmOS of the  
Underlined crackpots. I will  
slip and slide around the world  
in 3 seconds.

Zoom in on face.

LUGER

Im done. Anyhoo, I will now

smite, smote, and smiteerunII  
you.

Daniel and Julian run away.

LUGER

Come back Mister Daniel!!!!!!!

Luger faces the camera.

And now for a commercial break.

.....

Improv time!!!!!!!

2005

ETERNAL FAME  
2005

### **Eternal Fame**

© 2005 Matthew Weiss

On a warm, humid June day Marcus Aureus, called Mark by his friends, relaxed on a reclining chair on his desk. He had a glass of lemonade in his hand, little sweat drops dripping down to the floor.

Despite all this supposed relaxing, Marcus felt little relaxation at all, whatsoever. He couldn't explain why in so few words, but it suffices to say, he had a lot on his mind.

He watched the trees move in the wind trying vainly to ignore the feeling in his stomach that he was missing something, that he should be working, anything! But the doctor ordered rest and naught could be done now.

So Mark sat unhappily, simply thinking – What else was there? And it was this situation that was when inspiration hit. It was like fifty cymbals going off at once and Mark sat straight up, his eyes wide. He gasped out a strangled, “Of course!” and rushed inside. He, in his euphoria, lacked the foresight to open the door and he slammed into it. Relatively unperturbed (at least, let's say he had other things on his mind), he jerked open the glass sliding door, rushed through the kitchen, knocking over piles of everything imaginable. He stepped into the dog's waterbowl and tripped over a pile of overdue library books. He went slipping and sliding down his hallways, up two flights of stairs, to his room.

He then recalled the rather important fact that he had, just before laying down, been in the pool, and was, without a doubt, soaking wet. He dashed downstairs, once more, jumping the final five steps. He rushed into the bathroom, grabbed a towel and furiously dried himself off.

Upon completion he charged his way upstairs again, thinking of the glorious idea, the fame and fortune it would surely bring; how it would yank him out of this and every mess to come. He exploded into his room and jumped into his rickety chair, which promptly moaned and creaked, but thankfully did not break.

Mark knocked books, old papers and all sorts of office supplies from his desk in the search for a pencil, a pen or paper. Realizing unhappily there were none, he ran for the second time downstairs.

In his kitchen, he procured a pencil and then up to his room it was. He snatched a stray piece of old notebook paper, flattened it, poised his pencil and then his eyes widened.

He made a little noise in his throat as he realizes the unthinkable had happened:  
He'd forgotten his idea!

THE END

2006

DE MEO ITINERE  
2006

**Dē Meō Itinere -**  
Matthew Weiss  
Jeremy Silver  
(C) 2005 Nessiness Productions

Act I

**Brutus:** Hodiē sum laetus quod Romanus sum. Romam amō. Prō Romā viās longās ambulavī et itinera difficila fecī. *Amor omnia nōn vincit, sed Roma omnia vincit.* Brutus Agriculus sum. Nuntius sum, portāns nuntium ad magistrum discipulōrum in Alexandria. Hōc nuntiō eī datō, reveniam Romam, meam regīnam. Heu! Romae esse cupiō. Plūrimōs exercitūs prō Romā interficiam. Et magnus Caesar! Laudāte eum! Is militēs Romae pulcherrimae ad victoriam ducit. Aliquō visō, id vincit, sīve oppidum parvum est sīve ingēns urbs est. Is vērū dominus et rēx Romae atque omnis terrae est. Quamquam ego cum Caesare ipsō esse cupio, tamen hic nuntius mihi reddendus est.

He keeps walking along. All of a sudden there is a clatter and he freezes where he stands. The god Faunus jumps out from behind a tree.

**Brutus:** Ō mē cārum! Quis est haec bestia quae mē invēnit?

**Faunus:** Est ego, Faunus, deus latī montis, et terra illa in quā stās proprietās privata est!

**Brutus:** Quid est hoc?

Camera pans down to below Brutus' feet.

**Faunus:** Regredere!

Faunus pushes Brutus backwards with his god magic.

**Faunus:** Nōne legere potes?

Faunus kneels down and brushes some leaves off of a small mound that Brutus was previously standing on. A note on parchment on the ground reads:

NŌLĪ INVĀDERE  
-- FAUNUS  
Post scrīptum -  
Violatorēs in quattuor partēs dividendur.

**Brutus:** Illud nōn planē signābat! Iuriconsultum meum contrā tē vocābō. Maximus iuriconsultus est ā Siciliā ad Galliam.

**Faunus:** Iuriconsultī prope fluminem Stygium nōn iuvāre poterunt.

Faunus charges Brutus.

In mid-charge:

**Loud Booming Voice (Male):** Uh, recordarisne, Faune, illud, uh, negotium parvum, quō nocte antecedente cum nymphā silvae fēcerāmus? Quaere ab eā ut dēcrēscat brevī temporī. Et es certus nōn dīcere...

**Voice from Background (Female):** Cui, Iuppiter, dicis? Licetne mihi tēcum dīcere?

**Loud Booming Voice (Male):** Dā, Faune, fortunam mihi.

All the meanwhile Brutus is looking around in puzzlement.

**Faunus:** Uh, mihi discēdendum est; scīs... officium mē vocat. Magnus vir mē requīrit.

Faunus disappears.

Brutus continues walking down the path.

**Brutus:** \*Sigh,\* Ō, utinam pedēs nudōs meōs in aquīs dulcibus Tiberis lavāre possem. Et magnificōs Collēs Septem Romae longē vidēre. Et in Forō latō stāre et senatorēs nostrōs honōratōs amatōsque spectāre dum prope rōstrum stant. Ita, deī Romae certē favent. Nē legionēs barbarōrum quidem murōs magnōs Romae dēmōlīrī nōn possunt. Et certē multō ante illud temporem prope transitūs angustōs Alpium ā Caesare magnō occīsī erunt. Quid illa est? Nebula descendit.

A fog settles in.

**Brutus:** Haec perfidia solum opera bestiae foedae Plūtōnis ātrōcis esse potest.

**Roman Man:** Ō mē miserum! Ō mē miserum! Edor! Heu atque heu! Quid faciam? In duās partēs mordeor! Ēsus sum! Mortuus sum! In guttore sum! Ō! Acidiīs stomachī lentē concoquor. Ō mē miserum!

**Brutus:** Huius animus miser cārus Rōmānus! Utinam Caesar hīc esset! . . . aut fortasse Herculēs.

**Brutus:** Gladiō Caesaris strīctō, hostēs semper superantur. Et Caesare vocante tē, oportet tē discēdere et fierī pars legiōnum. Castra tibi ponenda erunt et prō patriā, Romā, tibi pugnandum erit. Quid est hoc? Mōns altus prō mē est. Est necesse mihi trāscendere. Aliter, haec missio mihi dēpōnenda erit. Sed perīculosissimus est. Mihi facultās mortis est.

Via acclīvis est periculosa et soleae firmae in acclīvitāte etiamnunc titubent. Sed hic nōn est collis in quō stāre cupiō. Volō stāre in Capitōlīnō, ubi honōratī ducēs nostrī, exemplī grātiā Cicerō, maximās ōrātiōnēs fēcērunt. Tempore quō ab hāc missione redītī, fortasse Caesar plūs terrae prō Romā vīcerit.

As Brutus approaches the mountain, but then hears voices. He peeks through some bushes to see three menacing men lounging around last night's fire.

**Publius:** Cum omnibus mandātīs obsecutī sīmus, tamen hominem nōn invēnimus.

**Ignius:** Eh, silē. Deī sōlī sciunt nōs omnia rogāta fēcisse. Ubi ad oppidum prōximum ingressī erimus, *meam* pecūniam expendam.

**Aquius:** Ignī, fēmina sola quam capiās Virgō Vestalis est!

**Publius:** Et illa est fēmina haudquāquam!

**Ignius:** Recognoscite rem Carthāginī? Quis iam lacrimat?

Just then Brutus creaks at his hiding spot.

**Ignius:** Quid erat illud?

**Aquius:** Ibi est! Īnsectāminī eum!

**Brutus:** Ah! Hic est complexio heroica! Fugere aut pugnāre? Vis aut insānia? Vīta aut mors? Praeteritum aut praesens tempus? Quid adfuit aut quid aderit!!!!

Ō mē miserum!

Either Publius, the unmasked one, or Aquius, the blue-masked one, does not trip and fall. He approaches the area and does not see his companions.

**Aquius:** Heu! Heu! Heu! Heu! Ubi iērunt?

Searches the area.

**Aquius:** Publī? Ignī? Ubi estis? Ēheu!

CONTINUĀRĪ

WAITING  
2006

W a i t i n g  
by Scorta Lutulenda  
aka Matthew Weiss

A blue sky waned overhead and on a small patio in the back of a small house a small party lounged, drinking champagne on each other's laps. The blossoms on the trees were in bloom and the purple light spotted the chirping crickets. Sandre Papeles, the master chef, sat on the highest chair, a pure white skeleton. He saw his companions and he watched them with little vigor and he sat and he waited. Pablo Perded reclined across from Sandre and he too watched and he watched the two women sitting at his sides, Maria del Bosque and Nina de Reus. And these too watched all and they spoke to no one except the party. "And so my banker said that all the gold in the world would not ensure my success," said Maria and Nina expressed her dismay and the two men looked and saw their place. And they then too expressed dismay. A flamenco guitarist sat in a shadow, a sombrero on his head. He plucked a steady rhythm and he watched the sun set and he waited. And the birds ahead saw that night was near and they alighted on thin branches and waited. And the party waited. Pablo explained that his woman had requested him home by this time. Maria said that he should stay and Nina implored his remaining. Sandre watched and he took a sip of his wine. He said that they would meet here tomorrow. He said it was up to him. Pablo took his hat in hand. Maria took his arm. Pablo looked into her eyes questioningly and he waited. Maria waited for him to speak. Nina waited to see what would happen. Sandre looked to the guitarist and the guitarist was looking at the birds in the trees and his last G# hung in the air waiting. And the air was vibrating and it was quivering, waiting to be broken. Pablo and Sandre looked at each other and Nina and Maria looked at each other. And Pablo looked at Nina and Nina's eyes shone. Pablo sat down again saying he had reconsidered. The birds flew from the trees to a new home, the sky was painted black again and the stars beat down on the ground. Sandre watched and he saw as he sat. Pablo chatted with the two women and Maria put her arm on his arm. And Nina took a sip of wine and Nina put her arm on Pablo's arm. And the guitarist packed up his guitar and nodded to Sandre, bidding him a good night. Sandre watched him leave in his worn boots and his coat of leather that was too small. He was headed east. Sandre's eyes drooped and he had a bite of a crustless sandwich. Pablo's eyes were dull but excited and he reclined. He said perhaps he should go now, in a lazy voice. His eyes turned east. Nina said that perhaps he could come to her house. Maria implored that he come to her house and Nina

also. Nina looked at Maria and Pablo looked at them both. Nina agreed. They bid goodnight to Sandre and thanked him for the food. They turned down the cobbled road westward. Sandre was alone at his table and he still watched into the night. Finally as the bells rang atop the tower he left the table. He walked into his house and he went to his kitchen and he looked out his window. He watched the birds feeding on the leftover bread crumbs and cheese. He watched and then he waited. He left and prepared for bed and he sat down at his large mattress and he laid down. He waited and soon he heard shouts in both ears and with this his eyes closed and, until morning, he waited.

STAND-UP  
2006

Yeah, so my first girlfriend, right, she was a nice jewish girl at the ripe age of 16 and she liked to talk dirty. I was 15 at the time and I couldn't believe my luck. I met her at a summer camp for nerds. We both scored high on our SATs and so could sign up for Ancient Greek 101 over the summer for 3 weeks. At the time we were both suckers for inflected languages and post-modernist philosophy. I was in heaven.

I remember my first encounter with her was during a class activity. I mistook an gerund for a participle and she corrected me. Oh, the shame. My face was beet-red. I couldn't meet her in the eye. I was too busy making sure my hard-on wasn't too apparent.

All I remember next was that she asked something about the similarities between Ancient Greek and Latin. The next day I eased up next to her as we were walking up the stairs to class with my 1000 page tome *The world's major languages*. I showed her a chart of reconstructed proto-indo-european noun endings. Her eyes lit up. Our breaths quickened. She was mine.

We owned the joint after that. We went from lunch line to lunch line in the cafeteria with our markers correcting spelling mistakes on the menus. We made up new words derived from latin and wrote them in a little notebooks, discussed their relative merits over frappachinos and tried to impress them upon unsuspecting passers-by who shot us frightened, bewildered glances before backing away slowly.

She was a beauty too. My girlfriend that is. Green eyes, golden hair, freckles. And she had a delightfully insecure way of smiling brightly and shoving her chest into people's faces while on tiptoes in order to drive home a point. And let me tell you the point drove home passing quickly through multiple stop signs and red lights.

Now this was a camp and so there were in fact rules. Pesky rules like no peanuts, no staying up all night and no unprotected sex in the dorm rooms. Foiled, I cried to the stars, clenched fists shaking in anger. The Center for Talented Youth was the one place I could do that without getting any strange looks.

We instead settled on the dorm laundry room for our hedonistic experiments. We'd go in there, turn the lights off and hope no one was getting a head start on their washing for the week. We'd almost make love to the the pulsating beat of the miscellaneous coinage knocking against the insides of the dryers. I say almost because it turns out we were both paranoid hypochondriacs who refused any kind of sexual intercourse without a prophylactic. Or five. We substituted the exchange of bodily fluids for imaginative laundry-room epics. Combine some very smart people, 3 weeks of intensive Homeric training, insatiable sex drives and a darkened laundry room and no wonder I can't shake the association of a sweaty threesome with a wall of stacked washing machines and six bottles of laundry detergent.

In the end though the romance ended after a few short weeks. Specifically, 3 weeks because that was exactly how long the class was. She left for California and I was stuck in the car heading deep back into New Jersey.

But I tell you, I can't look at Strunk and White anymore without feeling strange, feral emotions. Some say that's love. Others say it's prescriptivism. All I know is that I put my feelings down on a piece of paper that I crumpled up and stuffed under the mattress of my dorm bed just before leaving. The person who finds it will know: it's true, it can happen to you.

2007

TWO CHARACTERS IN A PLAY  
2007

*Arma virumque cano, Troiae qui primus ab oris  
Italiam, fato profugus, Laviniaque venit  
litora, multum ille et terris iactatus et alto  
vi superum saevae memorem Iunonis ob iram;*  
— Aeneid I, Vergil

Once upon a time there were two characters in a play. For the sake of convenience, let's call them Jack and Jill. Jack often made fun of Jill because she lacked a well developed background. He said she was practically a stock character, straight out of Commedia dell'arte. But Jill got back at him by pointing out, and rightly so, that Jack suffered from an ill-defined motivation. He moved through scenes aimlessly, she argued, spouting pretentious dialogue for the sake of the writer's ego. Jack was hurt by this accusation which he could do nothing to counter, and retreated to the back pages of the script in shame. This is where our story begins.

\*

*In looking at theory of theatre, we can define certain levels of so-called "characters." We have the characters that exist purely in the writer's mind, the characters on the page, the characters in the actors' minds, the characters the actors portray, and the characters the audience sees. Above all this floats an ethereal understanding, the ghost of a character, much like a real ghost, which exists in the memories of many, cast to the ends of the earth in pieces, an understanding of who a character is, in all senses of the word and at all levels, rarely at once.*

*The fate of a character, then, is to be lost and alone. Unlike a real person he or she or it can never defend themselves. Everyone feels they have a right to remake a character in their own image. What they don't realize is that in most ways, they are little more than characters themselves, tossed about by another Fate.*

\*

Jack and Jill were friends and they were always seen together. Whenever the writer, sitting, chewing on his pen, thought of the story in his head, he pictured the two of them, standing side by side, and he felt good. So often scenes would start that way: with the picture of a cozy fire-lit room in winter with snow drifting down and Jill sitting on the floor. She had warm chocolate brown hair and Jack would always comment on it when he walked in, with a copy of *Billy Budd* under his arm. Jack and Jill, the two of them found, were in love. While the script itself suffered from an excess of sentimentality, the characters themselves had developed a light banter and often shared ideas over the writer's head.

"Really, I'm too noble to fall in love with a character like you," Jill would say.

"And yet look, you're being let to the floor in my arms," he would reply as they watched it happen.

Every day for them was a process of discovery as the writer penned page after page, and they learned more and more about who they were. Whereas in the writer's first image they were almost children, fresh-faced and ageless, holding hands—by the last page, they had become

adults. Whereas at first their faces were clear, but their body and substance hazy, by the end of the script they were crisp and fully real.

And then one day the writer finished his script and sent it off. The producer read it and gave it to a few of his associates to read. Jack and Jill felt violated by these strange eyes, staring at them, their entire stories laid bare, naked. They felt like some kind of understanding was being stripped from them. The script was populated by so many characters that it was easy, in a quick once through, to forget Jack and Jill even existed. And rarely if ever, were they seen together.

The producer saw them rather one-sidedly and when he summarized the script over lunch, he often left out the key parts of their characters, the fact of Jill's chocolate brown hair, Jim's love of Melville. And soon these changes became permanent in people's minds.

The script was sent back to the writer for revision and the entire story was restructured, the plotlines changed and characters reintroduced. Jill found herself in love with someone entirely different, a character we'll call Ishmael. Jill was horrified at this and hurried to Act III where Jack was said to still live. She found him there and they embraced.

The writer dropped off his revisions at the Post Office. By the next day, the producer sat with the newly-hired director, who had only heard the producer's summary of the work, poring over casting photographs. They were looking for their Jill. They soon found a young Swedish actress with long flowing golden hair.

"That's it!" the director exclaimed.

Jill sat in the cozy winter room alone, surrounded by harsh light, watching herself in a mirror as her chocolate brown hair fell out in clumps.

\*

Sara brought the blue-bound script with her when she entered the conference room where the read-through was scheduled. She'd given a lot of thought to her character, Jill, who she'd come to relate to. Jill, like Sara, was a "woman-warrior." She "*did what she wanted and wouldn't take no for an answer.*" She was "*beautiful and didn't care what people thought.*" As she read through her lines, the idea occurred to her that the best way to portray Jill's surly self-reliance would be for her to pronounce all her lines with a hint of sarcasm. Sara gave a line and finished with a quick look the other way, a jaunty eye roll and a smirk. The director went crazy for the idea.

And then Peter, who played Jack, offered that, since Jack was such a wooden character, he could mumble all his lines. Jill would dance all around him. It was to be a victory for the sexes! The director smiled in rapture.

A few months later, the play was performed before test audiences. Sitting in the back row, on the third floor, were Jack and Jill, wrapped in a fog, watching this as they watched everything. They saw into the minds of each audience member.

"What a bitch!" thought 14-A to himself as he watched Jill on stage.

"What the hell's *Billy Budd*?" wondered 2-K, pissed off at a character who was more well read than he.

"Too short and sappy," found 6-P and he reported this finding to his whole row during the intermission.

"That actress who plays Jill needs to get some more stage time," hoped 11-Q.

In the end, the test audience found Jack and Jill to be entirely unbelievable and asked for more background. The director himself scrawled out a few new lines of dialogue that set up an entirely new background story. Now Jack and Jill didn't even know each other at all, really. They

were acquaintances, governed entirely by chance. In the back of the theater, sitting alone on the sticky floor, Jack and Jill watched each other as they each began to fade away, wisps of themselves leaving vaporous streamers leading out of the four exits of the theater, each streamer a pale, washed-out color.

\*

One of them had to go. This was the gist of the message on the post-it note, pasted on the cover of the script, that got handed to the writer, on a rainy day. The writer stuffed it in his raincoat pocket, and went home to think it over. The director was saying that there were too many characters, it wasn't funny enough... Either Jack or Jill would have to be cut, their plotlines taken out, the continuity errors fixed like holes dug and then filled up by the rain. The writer could think of nothing but Jack and Jill holding hands, their faces fresh and ageless, bodies immaterial, the way he first saw them so long ago.

Jack and Jill found a private place, away from Ishmael, away from even the writer himself, in a discarded pile of pages, scenes cut weeks ago when rehearsals had started. They huddled in the scribbles on the back of the last page, in blue ink, lost revisions, where Jill still had chocolate brown hair and Jack still carried *Billy Budd*. At the top of the page, written in capital letters, was written, *TRAGEDY*. It was so unsubtle that Jack and Jill began to laugh.

Jill knew that Jack was already confined to the latter two acts and he would get the axe in a second as soon as the writer considered it seriously. So, while Jack stared up at the word, written in blue neon, she stole away, taking all her words with her.

They exchanged fates.

. This is what she thought as her vision faded and she floated away into the sky.

Fate.

EXCERPT FROM SYLVIA LEMONBLATT: A LEGEND RECALLED  
2007

On a Thursday evening, Sylvia Lemonblatt decided that she was too good for Providence, Rhode Island and wrote in her diary entry for the same evening that she planned to move out West. This was not an unpremeditated decision and stirrings of the same thought can be seen in entries spanning the course of the previous two years, e.g., *The Lemonblatt Collection*, entries 56, 72; 73. It so came to pass then<sup>1</sup>, that Sylvia Lemonblatt found herself sitting next to some palm trees, waiting for the call from the casting director of *Zplif's Ziggurat Zazdventure!* While she waited, she saw herself making a run for it. She leapt into the air, like a giant fleshy zeppelin, and threw herself over some shrubbery, “barrel-rolling through the gales of dust and grit the machines were mixing up.”<sup>2</sup> She hit the ground hard, one knee down, and looked from side to side, a stringy strand of red hair, like *Silly String*<sup>TM</sup> hanging over her right eye. She brushed it off with her hand as the guitarist began to shred a wicked solo in the background. The thumping of the artificial bass coincided with the beating of Sylvia Lemonblatt’s heart. She then began making out with the bearded film director, one hand removing his baseball cap and the other hand fondling his megaphone---her cell phone rang. She found her gelatinous gullet drenched with sweat. Her breathing was labored.

At this moment, as the cell phone rang, the thought arose in her that the casting session had gone well, though Sylvia’s memory at this point was a little blurry. She recalled the door, the entrance, the table, the people, the scrap of script she’d read. Then, there it was, centered, glowing with a strange light, outlined with a kind of gilt wire: the director’s face, in the clouds. He’d held up a glossy photograph and kept looking down at it and then back up to her. The casting director, on the other hand, had raised a skeptical eyebrow at Sylvia, as she wiggled into her plastic chair. And her heart fell when she saw that the bearded director looked with deference at the casting director, who by now was chewing on his pen menacingly while stroking his ugly, black moustache. Too soon the session ended and Sylvia was shown the door with an admonishment to drive safely. Sylvia Lemonblatt raged. She put Achilles to shame.

That night we understand she wrote a lengthy diatribe in her entry for the first of July, which can be found in *The Unabridged Lemonblatt Diaries II*, entry 15<sup>3</sup>. A short excerpt for the hurried reader is provided here:

*...fudge-muffin eeting bastard son ofa squirell, I oughta rip of his grinnin mustash off his grrinn face!!!!!!!!!! But enough, dearest diary, I've made up my mind as surely as I can: I've fallen deeply in love with world-class film director Herr Rosenstein. If only I might have but one chance to speak with him, surely I might have him fall as deeply in love with I as I with he. O! What passion stirs mine simple breast! Ah! What devices must I employ to win o'er hine heart? Oo!... [sic]*

<sup>1</sup> Scene reconstructed from various diary entries. See bibliography.

<sup>2</sup> See *The Lemonblatt Collection*, entry 84.

<sup>3</sup> This entry is missing from *The Lemonblatt Collection* itself, due to a printer’s mishap involving a decanter of vodka and a vial of battery acid. For further information, consult *The Annotated Lemonblatt*, pages 18-20, 56.

And thus Sylvia Lemonblatt began her quest to win Herr Rosenstein's heart, a quest which would batter her body and stab her soul, repeatedly.

Sitting on the bench by the palm trees, Sylvia finally answered her cell phone:

<Sylvia>: Hello?

<Unknown>: Hello, Sylvia Lemonblatt?

<Sylvia>: Yes?

<Unknown>: Hi, this is Herr Rosenstein, from the casting session the other day.

\*Sylvia clutches her chest.\*

<Sylvia>: Oh, hi! Mr. Rosenstein, I have to tell you, that was one of the most amazing casting sessions I've ever been to. You orchestrate your movies like none other!!!

<Herr>: Mmm. I, y'know, I was calling because I wondered if you wanted to get together for lunch, today. We could talk about the movie—

<Sylvia>: The movie! Have I gotten the part!?

<Herr>: Uh... we're not entirely sure, but... this, I mean, we could discuss it over lunch and—

<Sylvia>: Alright, we'll meet at the Hollywood McDonalds at 12:30, you know where that is?

<Herr>: Yeah... Uh, o-okay. I'll see you there.

<Sylvia>: I'll see you there, Mr. Rosenstein. You won't regret it!

\*click\*

Sylvia Lemonblatt arrived for lunch forty-five minutes early, wearing some kind of perfume.

As for the lunch itself, we have little information. What clues we do have come from a phone message left on the casting director's answering machine by Herr Rosenstein himself:

<Herr>: Hi, this is Herr calling at 4:12 PM, on Sunday. I had lunch with the Lemonblatt woman today, the one you called a fat whore. I can't believe how wrong you were. Maybe she's not the kind of blond-haired, blue-eyed, bra-bursting Aryan sluts you're used to... [UNINTELLIGIBLE]... I don't get how you can't see it! She's given me a great gift, Gary, and I want you to return the favor. Fine, don't give her the part in the Ziggurat Zazventure! but I swear to god, you better have a part for her on Monday in something, or you're out! \*click\*

<ADDITION: In order to shed more light on this crucial moment, my team and I have managed recently to obtain an eyewitness report from the scene. Keep in mind that this report was obtained after an interval of nearly half a decade:

Yeah, so I wuz sittin' der in duh McDonalds, right, an' dis bitch come walkin' dru da door, right, she look like a whale, or som'in, an' set down dere...

Anyway, yea, so den whitle walk in, wearin' a suit and set down next to her. I couldn't hear what dey's sayin', but I saws 'er leanin' her head back and stuff, starin' right at him, he's gettin' kinda... he sorta crouches down back in his seat, right, an' starin' up at her like she's ten foot taller dan him. She wags her hair around, an' I saw her creepin' up below wit her foot... Nah! She wasn't dumpy a' all, she knew what she's doin'. She knew i' all...

As we all know, once having seen Sylvia Lemonblatt in a crowd, it is impossible to forget her. >  
She showed up for her first day as an actress dressed in a sheer white gown as was her

wont on special occasions. And as I was there I can give this account in the first person. She was met at the door by a hag in a skimpy dress with a clipboard. I remember the look on Sylvia's pudgy face as she craned around the doorframe, looking for some sign of Mr. Rosenstein. Everyone looked up, the cameraman, the light technician, even the costume director. Michael and Joey paused in mid-kiss. I remember big Joey even started to pull his shirt back on. Michael grabbed the microphone stand and started to stroke it up and down instinctively as I recall he always did back then when he was nervous. It was at this point that she was informed that this was a gay photo shoot for *Instinct Magazine*<sup>4</sup> and she was, I quote, "there to keep the actors gay". Her face grew as plum red as her frizzy, wire-like hair.

She pushed the frail clipboard waif aside and went right up to me, I don't know how she saw me in the confusion. I held a giant black dildo in my hands and when I saw her coming for me, I dropped it on the floor. It bounced back up with a squeak. Michael always liked his dildos to squeak.

"Eldridge, what the hell are you doing here?" Sylvia asked quietly.

My legs grew weak. I was so distraught that I answered with a analytic proposition.

"I'm an assistant here, I help out. Please don't hurt me."

I had never been so afraid of Sylvia in my life, even back when we had been lovers. She loomed above me, drawing herself up to her full height, as if she could rearrange the blubber than hung around her hips for a few extra feet. In the background, I heard big Joey piss his pants.

"So this is how you spend your summers,"<sup>5</sup> she said. I felt like I was awash at sea, floating in a sea of anxiety. My vision went dark and I crumpled to the floor, the glowing figure of a naked, laughing Immanuel Kant in my mind.

I understand that after my departure Sylvia herself directed the next photo shoot to great critical acclaim, and then moved on. She could never stay in one place. She was always after new fodder, stories to tell, the "disillusionment" stories, the stories we've all heard, the stories we've taken inspiration from, and the stories that guide us to this day. We are all children of Sylvia Lemonblatt.

The best way to end this short excerpt, I think, is to quote from my<sup>6</sup> foreword to the 2<sup>nd</sup> edition of *The Annotated Lemonblatt*:

At the time of this writing, Sylvia Lemonblatt stories are being told all around the country, in Miami, Philadelphia, Chicago, Los Angeles, and more. This was a woman who traveled the world. And as she went on her angelic way, she touched the lives of everyone she met. After her untimely death at age fifty-four, in that tragic, tragic railroad accident, her former compatriots and even casual associates began to meet, just to talk at first. But soon they began to write down

---

<sup>4</sup> A homosexual-oriented magazine bearing the slogan: "*Hot guys, big laughs, good times guaranteed!*"

<sup>5</sup> What she actually said was somewhat different, but in my seizure-like haze I cannot recall her exact words. All I do know is that they pierced by heart, as do all her words.

<sup>6</sup> Eldridge Davis, Professor of Philosophy at Brown, and former lover of Sylvia Lemonblatt.

on paper their memories of the woman. While many of their reflections have been collected in previous volumes, I feel that a new edition is necessary, to provide the commentary on events which, up to this point, has been sorely lacking which is a detriment to further study of Sylvia's life. This 2nd edition is dedicated to the new reader who wish to learn more about the legend that is Sylvia Lemonblatt as well as to all of us who knew her, while her bright star still shined.

ENJOY!

BIZARRE  
2007

The pinwheel, hammered next to the mailbox, was spinning like crazy. Ivan Alowitz, Private Eye, saw it from across the street, sitting in his swivel chair which he'd named Edna in a fit of rage. The little lever which allowed him to raise and lower the seat was broken and so to see above his desk, Ivan had stowed several telephone directories underneath the legs of his chair. This did not give him very much room to maneuver and if he moved too far to the right or left oftentimes the chair would topple over, leaving him in a heap on the floor behind his desk. This was the way in which that beautiful broad, Miss Amy Luscious, found him when she arrived at his office that evening.

She leaned over the desk giving him an ample eyeful.

"Mr. Alowitz, I understand you're in the investigative business."

\*

The weather man said there'd be scattered T-storms until late that night. He went outside as soon as the downpour had started with no shirt on because he liked the feel of cool wet rain on recently shaved skin. A couple people stared at him as he drifted past the fire station. He figured it was because of the cuts along his back. They might have broken open again.

\*

He lifted a bottle of good old Kentucky bourbon from the cabinet under his desk and poured Miss Luscious a drink. She said she could use a stiff one and when he heard those words come out of her plump little mouth he nearly fell off his chair again.

"So what seems to be the problem, my dear?"

"My husband's been murdered and I'm next on their list."

A widower! Ivan thought to himself, She'll be especially vulnerable.

He reached out and laid his hand over hers.

The sudden movement brought the third leg of his chair over the edge of the telephone directory and he collapsed on the floor, banging his chin against the desk on the way down.

\*

In a field off Main Street, a crowd of people were dancing in a circle, holding hands. They started to kick their legs from side to side and one by one they started to float off into the sky. They left behind a beach chair, a blanket, a box of tissues and a single strand of hair. The single strand of hair was lifted up by the wind and tried to join its rising companions, but instead was carried past a few trees and got snagged at the top of a street sign.

\*

He needed some time away from his chair. He told his secretary he was going out to the coffee shop across the street and to take all his calls. He suspected that she wouldn't however as his secretary was a stolen department store mannequin which he'd stuffed halfway beneath a desk. She seemed to lean back most of the time because her knees weren't jointed. He gave her a friendly peck on the cheek and then jay-walked across Main, holding an umbrella over Miss Luscious and an arm around her.

\*

He broke the skin of his arm when it got stuck inside the revolving door at Macy's. He kicked his way out, shattering the glass, and tumbled onto the sidewalk. He stretched his arms forward, feeling the embedded glass move against his muscles and shook himself violently like a dog, spraying glass shards across the street.

\*

High above in the clouds several people were crying, they were laughing so hard. Their tears fell down and formed the rain which knocked the strand of hair from the street sign. The crowd above continued to dance and shout, thunder and lightning, and the little lost hair, blonde and alone, looked from side to side worrying where to go. A bird plucked it out of the air and flew back to its nest.

The twigs of the bird's nest shook in the wind and the hair wilted in the rain. The sides of the nest began to expand, sticks swirling in and out, always upward, past the farthest branch of the tree. The little hair felt like it was falling down a well, drowning in water.

\*

He mulled over what she'd had told him while enjoying a hot cup of joe. An international criminal conspiracy, arrests, murders, drug deals and at the heart of the swirling mess, a helpless woman looking for answers. He finished his coffee and since she'd had paid the tab, he left straightaway. He had some answers to find.

\*

He walked into the inviting little hangout and shot cashier three times in the face. He spat into the remains of her mutilated head and rushed back outside. He ran down an alleyway, letting the brick siding scrape pleasantly against his bare sides as the police sirens began to ring. A jacked hobo with a knife was crouching behind a trash can and sprang into him like an animal. He spun around and pistol-whipped him, but the hobo ducked and scurried away with a piece ripped from his pants. They were expensive, he thought to himself, as he tilted his head back and let the raindrops slide down his nostrils.

\*

When he heard the gunshots, he immediately went into alert mode. He hijacked the nearest parked car, breaking the window with his bare fist and drove off, listening to the weather report. More thunderstorms, high of fifty-two. Tomorrow would be nice, though. If there was a tomorrow.

He stared down at his shaking hands, clutching the steering wheel. Oh, the things he would do for a beautiful woman. He could imagine her now, dimming the lamp, and unbuttoning her loose white blouse, revealing cleavage au naturale. He removed her brassiere and was about to bend down when he swerved and spun off the road, his tires spinning uselessly in the rain, crashing into an office building.

\*

Riding down an escalator of colors, the crowd of people jostled their way back down to earth and set the emptied coffee shop on fire. Giggling, they tip-toed back to the field where they'd started. On the way, a number of their party were detained by the police on charges of arson. At the field, a couple of shirtless guys had begun playing Frisbee on the grass. One of them was bleeding. Then two of them. The Frisbee was slicing off their heads.

The flying people gathered in a swarm.

\*

Returning home, she turned on the TV to check the weather. She kept staring at the weather man's pants, especially at his sculpted ass. She had been feeling hot all the day and would have done it with the Private Eye, if he'd asked. But she would have felt uncomfortable asking *him*. She pouted at the TV man and his expensive pants as the door opened and the little lost hair wrapped itself around her neck, strangling her to death.

As she gagged, eyes bugging out, she managed to scratch a note on her arm with a

pointed fingernail: IT WAS THE WEATHERMAN!

\*

It turns out the blonde hair and the weather man were accomplices the whole time. Ivan Alowitz, Private Eye, could see it plain as day. He climbed out from under his car, where he'd been pinned for hours, and couldn't see anything because as soon as he stood up, he slipped on a banana peel and went flying back into the pavement. The second time he got up, he tripped and fell into a puddle. The third time, he stepped on the wrong end of a rake which came up and smacked him in the face. He decided walking was too risky and crawled his way out of the rubble to find the entire city burned to the ground. Apparently, while he'd been unconscious, several angry angels had hurled a meteor at Main Street and flattened the place.

At least that's what his secretary told him when he limped back to his office which was barely standing. He gave her another peck on the cheek and pinched her tight, round bottom.

"Well, everyone's dead," she said, motionless.

"And that, toots, is a tragedy."

## ALL OF US IN FRIEZE AND DIMINISHED LIGHT

2007

The grey ceiling looms in a dome of the seabubbles and cast in a silver hilt, grasped by hands. The white noise of the faucet noise, the crack of stone, in cold winter, the flecked indents of the porcelain maybe, solidsilver, writing in tongues. He carried a platter of silver to bed and used it as a pillow, the music of the clatter of morning instruments clattering against the sluice of swirling waves streaming out of the grey window, backwards is gold, light, solid, warm, the fireside at the out-song, the sprinkler, hose, ovals, making tips, blows mist in a square and the water begets a swan, gripping the shaft of the shower, working in the water—one at a time the stars fly around birds in the cold universe, the inscription on a band of silver encircling the universe, it's written, close-up it looks like stars—frozen, all of us in frieze and diminished to points of light, the cold feet meet the tiles and the ceiling disappears and the room goes spinning over the wasteland, cold, the of coinage, the in coinage, the right way, the wrong way, the salamander beside the water, limp in icy mud, tossed hair tussled in the salty sone, frozen in freize, my enticing song, the song of up and down, tonality of the auditory, harmonies in opera, the parrot, green, sits on the stick, held by fire which burns in ice crystal. The corn is painted with nail polish the color of A, the sea and its greenery morning, over the breakers, the cloud shaped in the sand mirrors behind the water the sky clouds in a half-dual moon which melts in the cold of the universe and drips into the washroom, public, private, the tenants quarters 200 years ago, the violin plays and a flute, pacing as the beat tosses them about in the amusement park ocean, and then the ship has to move out of the way and a larger tanker comes spinning through the Panama canal, the Cape of Storms, the icy wind, the ice is shattering, the friezes are released into the humid air which turns into icicles on my skin which blows the fan's wind into the face of a silver razor, lying crosswise on the washbowl which spirals down into its drain and disappears into the darkness of mystery. Where base in Greek, the music of repetition, the beat of a drum, and then the musical phrase of the innards of a faucet stream which sizzles as on his sizzly pavement and the dark sky turns the leaves into tar pits and the little boy is flying away into the cold universe until he's grabbed back by the crystal staff, with a hook, taking him off stage, but the little boy is an old man who is shuffling frantically towards Neptune, the god of the sea, who saved Aeneas from the venti, the Odyssey lives across the bathtub, the ice the half remembered dreams among frozen suds which don't exist and the drain sucks the entire room into its orifice as the entire city shakes with anxiety and the cupcake watched, only the the lost men have left, where are they, they are where, the Greeks said it was a cold river, never twice.

THE CHILLY ADVENTURES OF ALEXANDER IVANOVICH AT THE NORTH POLE  
2007

*In the cold winter of 1842, the Russian government in St. Petersburg was struck by the economic realization that it was cheaper to make statues out of serfs, rather than out of stone as they had tried doing before. In accordance with the newly promulgated directive, one day an unshaven Tsarist dignitary would show up at one's hovel outside the city limits and order one to kneel down until one's blood froze, limbs stiffened, and one's flesh became hard as a rock. Then one would be placed in a highly visible location around the city of St. Petersburg, perhaps on a wall or inset into a building façade. Come spring, it was possible that one would be awakened when the same unshaven Tsarist dignitary would come around bearing a portion of hot borsht in a cauldron. He would throw the steaming borsht upon one and one would be instantly reanimated and allowed to return to one's hovel to continue doing whatever one happened to be doing when one was taken away to become a statue in the first place. In this way, the Russian government saved seventeen rubles in all. They were very proud of this fact and made much of it whenever the French or Prussian ambassadors happened to come around. Eventually, the French and Prussian ambassadors stopped coming around.*

\*

Alexander Ivanovich had a dream. He dreamed he was the great explorer Semyon Ivanovich Dezhnev, who, many years ago, had set sail east in search of whale zub and fish bones. As Alexander Ivanovich Lebedev, Swan's son, gazed out across the grey icy sea, however, he realized that his koch was sailing west, rather than east. The sky above glowed with lightning in patches, as he recalled upon waking, and the two halves of the world seemed to loom and stretch toward one another. Soon in the distance, Alexander Ivanovich, Sasha as he was called by his friends, saw a great sparkling in the frigid afternoon. The sea was dotted with cracked ice which rocked his ship to and fro. He looked down unsteadily at his compass. The pointer was wavering from side to side, pointing straight ahead, buckling downwards. Suddenly, it broke in two.

Looking up from his compass, there, before his eyes, rising up into the heavens, he saw a great tower made of interlocking icicles with base of four gently curving feet. In front of it lay the most beautiful city in the world, transparent and glowing, *Paris carved in ice*. He gave a shout! In truth, there it was, as if the great city had been copied by hand, stone for stone and rebuilt out of ice blocks and snow. A few flurries fell and tickled Alexander Ivanovich's thick mustache. He looked around from the prow of his koch—had no one else seen this marvel?—but he was alone. A great white light shot up from the city, blinding Alexander Ivanovich Lebedev and he heard a great voice, masculine and raspy, calling him, calling him further.

“Ivanovich, cease to be a fat lazy pignik as there is an unshaven Tsarist dignitary here to see you at our hovel! Go to him! Make him comfortable!”

It was his wife.

\*

The next day Alexander Ivanovich was to be installed against his will into the southernmost wall of the Winter Palace. He would have remained there for one year, if it were not for the efforts of his wife, Tatiana Iosifovna Korovina, Tasha as she was called by her friends, in seducing a certain unshaven Tsarist dignitary with her rustic wiles and ability to consume multiple cupfulls of vodka. The two made love on the dirt floor of Alexander Ivanovich's hovel and lay there snoring until the later afternoon of the next day.

Alexander Ivanovich, although cautiously pleased at having been able to escape the clutches of the unshaven Tsarist dignitary, was nevertheless taken somewhat aback by the sight of his naked wife, with her dirty upper lip, lying like a beached whale next to the kitchen table, such as it was.

But no matter. Alexander Ivanovich quickly stepped over his wife and the unshaven Tsarist dignitary. As he hurried outside, he could hear an old couple playing a duet softly in the distance. There they sat, on the muddy stairs, with accordion and fiddle, moving in time with the creaky wagons bearing grains, cabbages and the occasional corpse.

\*

In the early morning, eighteen days ago, as of this writing, I woke up, staring at the ceiling. In the night, in a dream, fully formed, innocent of the world, only lingering in the foreground, I saw an entire idea. I reached across the bedside table and grabbed the hotel stationary and pen and wrote that in 1842, the Russian government in St. Petersburg began using serfs for statues instead of stone. I saw the palaces, the mottled marble and the granite, and in the moments before I woke up, I myself was just such a serf. I saw the world fade as my eyes were frozen solid, and I saw the redness of the borscht they threw upon me as I woke up. At the exact same time, I saw in my mind a group of intrepid Russian explorers on an fantastic, rusting oil tanker journeying to the North Pole. I saw Alexander Ivanovich and his moustache and I saw, just as he did, Paris (it was glorious!) carved in glistening ice, against a blue arctic sky. And I saw the words, as they appear, *Paris carved in ice*.

\*

In the cold winter of 1842, Alexander Ivanovich had a dream and upon awakening ran along the Neva River, which had been frozen solid for months. He first visited the hovel of his friend, Vladimir Sergeivich and his wife.

“Vladimir Sergeivich, are you here?” Alexander Ivanovich called from the door.

“I am here, of course, I stand in front of you!” Vladimir Sergeivich, Volodya as he was called by his friends, answered in jest.

They had a good laugh over this, while the wife of Vladimir Sergeivich, Olga Alexeeva, began in a show of hospitality to thaw a frozen crust of black bread. Such was life under Tsar Alexander the First, Emperor of Russia.

“Sasha, what brings you to my hovel?” Vladimir Sergeivich inquired of his friend.

“I have had a dream, my friend, a dream of Paris.”

“Paris?”

“Of Paris carved in ice!”

“Mon Dieu! But how will it not melt?”

“It is not in France, my friend, but at the North Pole, surrounded by ice and snow!”

Vladimir Sergeivich considered his friend’s words for a time.

“You know of these things more than I, Alexander Ivanovich. If you say Paris is north of Russia, then so be it. You are a clever one, Alik, and I will trust you.”

“Then, you will come with me, also?” asked Alexander Ivanovich with a warm smile, clasping his friend by the hand.

“By Church and Tsar, I will.”

And so in this way, Vladimir Sergeivich Popov killed two birds with one stone. Not only did he do a favor for his greatest and cleverest friend, Alexander Ivanovich, but he also rid himself of his hated wife, Olga Alexeeva, as she fell in faint against a nearby pot of borscht.

\*

The docks at the mouth of the Neva river were crowded on the day that Alexander Ivanovich arrived with his band of intrepid explorers, bound for the North Pole. They stood for a time looking out over the river, crowded with ships. In the distance, Alexander Ivanovich could see the rising spires of the island fortress of Kronstadt. He thought again of his city.

“Now we must obtain a ship,” Alexander Ivanovich declared to his men and they aye-ayed in agreement.

For the past month, Alexander Ivanovich had been calling upon his friends and neighbors, bearing a small tin cup in hand. He bore this small tin cup with a heavy heart for he did not like to call upon his friends and neighbors lightly. But he felt in this same heart the strength of his night-time vision. And as he came to each hovel, he would describe his dream with the fiery intensity of a long-time victim of syphilis.

“Come with me, my friend or neighbor! We shall dance amongst the ice at the North Pole! It will be a great journey, such as a Russian has never undertaken!”

To which the friend or neighbor would always reply: “Are you not afflicted with the syphilis, Alexander Ivanovich?”

But soon Alexander Ivanovich, Sanya as he was also called by his friends it should be mentioned, had gathered a number of his truest acquaintances together. They often took to meeting in Alexander Ivanovich’s hovel on Saturday nights in order to get away from their wives. As for Sanya himself, his wife was yet to wake up from her vodka-induced slumber and so, afraid to disturb a good thing, Alexander Ivanovich moved her carefully into the corner under the bed. Truth to tell, in his heart of hearts he hoped she would continue to be "moved under the bed."

All in all, Sanya gathered together nine hardy companions: Vladimir Sergeivich Popov, the *trusty*; Nikolai Borodin Smirnov, the *skeptic*; Alexei Alexandrovich Averiyev, the *timid*; Yuriy Romanovich Nazarbayev, the *strong*; Vasilii Vasilievitch Vasilyev, the *dense*; Svyatoslav Rodionovich Olegev, the *prudent*; Mikhail Fyodorovich Gennadiyev, the *ill*; Pavel Chapayevich Chekov, the *rash*; and lastly, of course, himself, Alexander Ivanovich Lebedev, the *visionary*.

They gathered in the room of Alexander Ivanovich. It was Vasilii Vasilievitch who complained about the smell.

\*

At the mouth of the Neva River, Vladimir Sergeivich turned to his friend Sasha.

“Sasha, I have heard tell of a prominent personage who may be able to help us obtain a vessel.”

Another spoke up now, Nikolai Borodin, Kolya as he was called by his friends.

“I, too, have heard of this personage, although I believe he is but a lowly titular councilor.”

“Then we are sunk before we set sail, Kolya, for no such personage could grant us a ship,” exclaimed Svyatoslav Rodionovich, Slava as he was called by his friends.

“Pray we do not sink, or else I will not go,” cried Alexei Alexandrovich, chicken as he was called by his friends.

“Stop your bickering, my friends, we shall find a way. This is a vision come from St. Peter or St. Paul, surely. And it must not be delayed!” cried Alexander Ivanovich, in order to give them hope.

And so, he set off across the Obukhov Bridge determined to find a suitable vessel because

despite his cleverness, Alexander Ivanovich was an impatient man.

Just then, a gust of icy wind blew his ushanka off his head. It landed on the deck of a nearby oil tanker.

\*

In the cold winter of 1703, Pyotr Alexeyevich Romanov had a dream. In it, he saw a great city, a Venice of the North, with cathedrals, boulevards and golden light. He walked through the wide spaces of this city, his city, theaters and cool air, picking fully grown flowers out of the satchel attached to his side. He passed a garden and laid next to the path a rose which immediately took root, blooming. Flowers proliferated in beds which formed themselves from the ground, iron fences creaking. He was floating above it now, the city of his dreams, sea water, ice, his paradise, his darling.

He went the next day to the marshlands, his hands twitching.

\*

In the cold winter of 1842, the seventh day of Alexander Ivanovich's journey happened to fall on a Thursday and he spent it aboard the retired oil tanker *Kurica*, sailing somewhere off the coast of Estonia or Denmark, or perhaps even as far as England.

Below deck, Yuriy Romanovich lay stationed in the Engine Room where interlocking metal gears were attached to levers and oscilloscopes. In the center of the room, a circular magnet, electricity flickering around its surface, hovered up and down over a rusting metal pyramid. Yuriy Romanovich, Yura as he was called by his friends, crept underneath a rattling rectangular air passage that came down through the room diagonally. He adjusted a spoked copper wheel, turning it bodily to the left. The gears which made up the walls of the room ground to a halt and then started up again, in the opposite direction. The room was filled with the hiss of steam. A forcible high-pitched whistle came from a small tube jutting up from a corner protrusion, followed by a huge spurt of oil.

Yuriy Romanovich looked back with longing at his days as a serf.

Above him, the rest of the men were taking mess in the sweaty galley, with its clinking of flagons, and hearty yells for "More borsht!" or, perhaps by Friday, "Enough with the cabbages!" Oftentimes one could hear the strained whimpering of Alexei Alexandrovich, the timid, whom one could often find cowering beneath the table, clutching the wooden cross that hung around his neck.

Meanwhile, Alexander Ivanovich sat in his cabin on his bed which was little more than a few wooden boards bound together below a stained sheet. Through a glassy porthole, measuring about a hand's width and plated with a sturdy metal, he watched the fjords of Sweden pass by. When he looked back from the porthole, it seemed as if it were night-time.

Just then, Vladimir Sergeivich entered the room. Although Alexander Ivanovich was tired and his thoughts were cluttered, he was a good friend and so exclaimed:

"Volodya, my trusted friend, come in."

\*

*...my eyes hurt, there is no sleep on this ship. Laid awake last night dreaming—it is hard. The glaciers look like mountains around here and in every passing one I see my reflection and I cannot help but think of how deceptive I have been—is it right to drag these men with me? I am so guilty, but I see it, Paris carved in ice... I am hungry.*

*...soup again, ran out of cabbages and it is too cold to cook the shoes so we started stewing planks of the ship, wood flavor, it is not bad—easy to make...*

*...walking back I remember her, Paris, like a woman such as I had never seen, more than a woman, but Paris herself in a woman's body, child of my vision, daughter of my sight. Paris whose body is as hot as the icy sculptures of Paris are cold. She is Liberty Leading the People, tricolor hat, one breast bare, which I bend down to cup and kiss. Paris plays music like I have only heard as a child, in Luba, when the old man who played fiddle, played the fiddle for us to hear. To hear him was the loudest thing I had ever heard...*

*...I wonder if my wife has woken up yet, with her stringy hair—I do like her, but enough is enough already—no one would believe I let her die—it is all about the way you say it, how you present it, for people to believe—that is the Art of Deception. I still feel wrong about this—I am so sure, I can see that shining tower, and yet I feel I am sinning—I am Alexander Ivanovich, a sinner—with a vision, let us not forget. I would stay awake but I am tired...*

*...Vladimir Sergeivich, Volodya, comes in to see his captain, to ask me about faith and I can do nothing but kiss his cross and tell him to leave—my trusty friend, Volodya, come back—do you not realize?—I know as little as you, nothing has changed, no one changes in a week, in a night, however special. I am the same Sasha who stole chickens from an unshaven Tsarist dignitary with you so many years ago—I am not a leader, for such we have the Tsar to guide us... Why do I have this vision?*

*...Anxious and nervous—upset stomach. I dream the dream but don't want to do it, but I have to—Volodya, what do I tell you? Shave your beard, fast for a week and we shall reach Paris as I have told you—why are you so trusting, trustworthy friend? I am not deserving of your trust...*

*...Tie your hair in braids and dance for me. And I know you will, because you believe...*

*...Now they all have a stake in it, even Svyatoslav, the prudent, a stake in me being right, being true. What will we find there—and then what do I show them, What Does One Do With a Paris Carved in Ice?*

\*

He built his city on bones. Tsar Peter ordered forty-thousand serfs to the icy swamp on the Baltic where he had chosen, amid the frozen water, to build his window to the West, where every stone would be planned before placed. There were no quarries in the marshland along the Baltic to build the monuments Peter envisioned and so he ordered all incoming ships and wagons to bring a portion of stone for the new city. Without it, all incoming vessels were denied entry.

To build up the marshland, the serfs were ordered to scrape up with their fingernails dirt from far away and to carry the muck back wrapped in their shirts to the site of the future St. Petersburg, named for the Saint in German.

At least 25,000 died. Dysentery, scurvy, malaria.

Peter decreed that that no stone buildings would be constructed outside St. Petersburg so that all the stonemasons in Russia would be forced to come to his city in order to make a living. They joined the flood of unwilling humanity, Cossacks, Siberians, Tatars, and Finns who laid the foundations and dug the canals which resembled those that Peter had admired in Holland. To provide the city with inhabitants, he ordered the merchants and nobility in Moscow to join him in the north where there was no fresh water, no food, and no goods. Fires raged from wooden house to wooden house, built hastily on the new site, and the Neva River flooded regularly, sending everyone to their roofs. In order make his city resemble Venice, Peter decreed that no bridges would be built across the Neva. The only means of transportation were flimsy sailboats which

frequently capsized, drowning their passengers.

In the cold winter of 1715, a wolf devoured a woman in broad daylight on Vasilevsky Island.

In no other place in the world were there so many unhappy people.

In the cold winter of 1725, when Pyotr Alexeyevich Romanov died, the city was still in shambles. "Petersburg will not endure after our time," wrote Peter's half-sister Maria. "May it remain a desert."

\*

Alexander Ivanovich had ordered Vasilii Vasiliyevitch to ring the bell whenever another ship was sighted. Vasya, being dense, often had trouble with his assigned task and after a number of false alarms, Alexander Ivanovich wisely assigned Mikhail Fyodorovich to keep watch also. Mikhail Fyodorovich, Misha as he was called by his friends, being ill, was often unoccupied, and so could not, in good conscience, refuse his captain's orders. Pavel Chapayevich was recruited to carry Misha's wooly cot from his bunk to the deck. In this way, Mikhail Fyodorovich would often be found wrapped in a blanket, coughing, rosy-cheeked, with the cool sea breeze blowing his thin, fair hair.

Whenever a ship would appear on the horizon, the men would rush to the decks, the alarm sounding, and Alexander Ivanovich would climb atop the roof of his small cabin where an amplifying device, built from a ram's horn, had been installed. He would shout, his voice echoing over the waters:

"Greetings from Russia, my friends! What is the news from Europe?"

Alexander Ivanovich would ask his fellow travelers if they had seen the North Pole themselves. He would invite them to join his expedition, as equal partners. But the approaching ships would simply steer in the opposite direction. Crestfallen, Alexander Ivanovich ordered the fog horn be blown thrice in sad, low protest.

On the nineteenth day of its journey, the *Kurica* passed another vessel off the coast of Greenland. The two ships slid past each other in the water, silently. Alexander Ivanovich's crew was too hungry to shout out even a greeting.

\*

That same night, some eighteen days ago, I wrote the first passage of the story and over the course of the next few days I recorded Alexander's experience of the dream. I knew by now that the idea, however it had seemed at the time, wasn't fully formed; it was just the beginning, so the beginning of the story is what I wrote. Perhaps six days later I was sitting at a picnic table with some friends, listening to music and in an instant I saw why Alexander Ivanovich had seen *Paris carved in ice*.

There are two kinds of crystallization:

- 1) *Frozen in a single moment, by art, sublime*
- 2) *Frozen while incomplete due to idealism*

The former refers to the desire to preserve a single perfect moment, profoundly inspiring, for all time, with the thought that it must be useful to somebody, somewhere. Sitting outside, I heard people talking, and I heard music in the background. It was cool, dark and green. And I felt it—how can I describe it so it matters?—it was glowing, it was peaceful, it was art—it was love—it was *that* moment that I wanted to crystallize, and I realized, *there was everything!* And in that same moment, I knew that it was for precisely the same reason that Alexander Ivanovich was searching for Paris, *the Paris of his dreams, the Paris forever incomplete...*

\*

A shadow falls across the sea and dark clouds loom overhead. A huge ice shelf blocks their way. *Before the hero reaches the pinnacle of his journey, there is a descent into darkness...* The *Kurica* is tossed about, the crew sliding from stern to bow on the slippery wood. Pavel Chapayevich, carrying the cauldron to be washed, falls against Nikolai Borodin and they are both knocked overboard into the choppy waves. Ice quickly covers the waters where they have fallen. Alexei Alexandrovich, the timid, dives for Alexander Ivanovich's cabin, rips open the door and shuts himself inside. He collapses onto Sasha's bed with relief and shame. Vasiliy Vasiliyevitch is ringing the alert bell. Mikhail Fyodorovich is groaning. Svyatoslav Rodionovich is sealing the borsht in the galley. Yuriy Romanovich is drowning in the Engine Room, holding on to the twisting steering wheel with one hand waving free. The entire ship is shaking.

Vladimir Sergeivich grips the siding of the captain's cabin for support on the shifting deck, squinting up in the wind and rain, shielding his eyes.

Alexander Ivanovich Lebedev stands watch on the roof of his cabin, blinding lightning striking the ice behind him. He's staring up at the clouds.

They pass the ice shelf and then move cleanly through the water again. As they turn, slowly, magnificently, it is revealed.

\*

*Paris carved in ice.* A city on a white hill, shining in the sun. A beacon. Alexander Ivanovich could almost make out the boulevards, the alleyways, the little shops and cafés. He could almost fool himself into thinking he could see Versailles, miles in the distance. But as he got closer, he noticed something was wrong.

The tower of interlocking icicles and four sloping feet was unfinished. Amid the cold clean quiet beauty of the city were cranes and construction equipment, ugly yellow ropes and soot, immobile beneath inches of ice. The great city was deserted and the construction lay abandoned, frozen like everything else. The city was unfinished and unmelting.

Alexander Ivanovich looked down at his compass which was sputtering from side to side. For a moment, he was back in his dream and as he looked up he expected to see the sail of his koch against the sky. But instead he saw his ship's rusting, grey smokestack.

The *Kurica* came ashore, hitting land with a soft whisper, cushioned by the snow. The exhaust from the ship melded with the falling flurries. The men came aboard in a line, looking up in wonder, their beards caked with white.

"Mon Dieu," exclaimed Vladimir Sergeivich, Volodya as he was called by his friends.

"This is very sad," mumbled Vasiliy Vasiliyevitch, the dense.

"This is not my vision," said Alexander Ivanovich, the visionary, hanging back on the deck of his ship.

Just then, the earth began to shake and rumble.

\*

Over the next few days, I showed my project to a few people people who praised this or that, perhaps they laughed at a thing or two, and all in all, it was concluded that the fragment was a great success. After one particularly gratifying session, I leaned back in my chair and the thought crossed my mind that I hardly needed to finish the story. I had everything necessary, a first page that came with a smile and an idea tied up in it... I had it too easy! I laughed and started to write.

And of course, I couldn't.

The idea had solidified, crystallized before it could be finished. This is the second type of crystallization: *frozen while incomplete due to idealism*. This is not intentional. This type of crystallization follows the first because that single perfect moment can never be regained and can never be added upon. And I thought: *now, it will live on only in death, only as a perfect idea, an ideal, a few impeccable starts, but no cohesion, no finish*. Everything I added seemed to detract from it. All new ideas defiled the glorious perfection of the ideal.

Later that night, as I wrote down the story of the birth and stunted development of my idea, conceived at night and in a dream, I was struck by the realization that my story and Alexander Ivanovich's story were one and the same. I realized that what Alexander and his crew find is not *Paris carved in ice*, but the *UNFINISHED Paris carved in ice*, crystallized before its time, incomplete forever, a moment frozen, a fractured idea in a dream. And then I saw the whole story laid out in front of me complete. And I knew I could tell nobody.

\*

*The Eiffel Tower is a rocket ship which takes off from the Champ de Mars, overlooking the frozen Seine*. Alexander Ivanovich's crew hurried aboard as burning red flames began to burst from the tower's four legs. The roar was immense and it made the ice structures of the city vibrate in key.

And amid the noise, Alexander Ivanovich heard a song.

The rocket engine provided the drone note and Sasha could hear, faintly at first, the sound of a fiddle, and then more instruments which he'd never heard before, but recognized at once. With each beat of the music, with each length of the fiddle's bow, strung tight, with each monolithic note which stung Alexander's ears, the *Kurica* began to rise, sides jerking up independently, each to a different time. Alexander fell to his knees, the music was so powerful.

\*

It wasn't until the reign of Catherine the Great that St. Petersburg became the glory we know today. Peter tried to control every aspect of life in the city, forcing it to conform to his vision of half a dozen famous cities in Europe. It was absurdity. During his lifetime, the city was despised by nobility and serfs alike. He gave the city no room to expand, to gain a life of its own. It existed half in dream, half in reality and when he looked at it, Peter wouldn't see it as it was, lying half finished and incomplete, but as he imagined it, full and finished. The great city was already crystallized in his mind. It took his death to shatter that crystal and for the city to begin to become itself.

\*

*The rocket ship of a new idea melts the old, once new city of ice as it takes off*. The *Kurica* followed the rocket as it lifted off, the tiny ship dancing and circling around the burning vessel. The city beneath them was melting.

The rocket was white-hot, a shield of fire covering the tip as it pushed through the upper atmosphere to its destination. Alexander Ivanovich could see the eyes of his men through the portholes on the rocket's side. They looked at him in astonishment. They were dumbfounded. Their eyes reflected the icy city which was no more.

The music of the engine was overpowering. Through the portholes, Alexander could see his men look up and then, then Alexander Ivanovich Lebedev, Swan's son, Sasha as he was called by his friends, started to fall, whistling down thousands of feet, feeling light-headed, uncaring, the water coming up to meet him. Alexander Ivanovich saw the scene now before him, but all he heard was the organ.

The organ, swirling out in the distance, far away, head shaking, shimmering, the bass moving over the face of the water, thumping in his soul. It's flying away into the sky, it's over, it's over! It's glorious! It's god, he's here! He's come and lifted us up as the waters crash down from their cliffs in white sheets and combine and reform. They rejoin the city, the glory of the city, the glory of god, he's here! Alexander cried kneeling at the prow of his ship with a blissful smile on his face as he felt the energy of the lord of music run through him. And then it was over.

SHAMPOO  
2007

*Das Haar anfeuchten... Su capelli bagnati... Wet hair.*

Am I really still here?

I'm still here.

I'm still reading the label on the shampoo bottle (Kiehl's HERBAL for NORMAL to DRY).

I'm still in the shower.

My hair is still wet.

*Deposez une petite quantite de produit sur les cheveux, puis massez delicatement...*

In the roar of the water, in the regular beat of the rush against my back, in the steam, I'm still here. Haven't I always been here? Hasn't it always been this way? Why would it be otherwise?

*How's that honey? Do you want it shorter up the back?*

I'm looking at my reflection in the mirror at the barber's. I don't think I've ever left this chair. I wasn't paying attention, I was lost in my own thoughts and then I looked up and saw myself and I wondered if I wasn't born in this chair, fully formed, forever...

A single, flat existence. No peaks or valleys. Do I want it shorter up the back? Does it really matter, now?

*Met warm water uitspoelen... Aclare con agua templada...*

I'm rinsing, I'm rinsing.

Is this the first time or the last time I've seen the shampoo suds slide down the drain? Could this be the beginning? No, it seems too familiar. In eternity, isn't everything too familiar?

I want to get out, will this moment never end?

*Silence.*

I threw out my clock last week and now existence is all one day. I go to bed when I'm tired and I wake up when I'm not. I have no idea what time it is and I'm too afraid to get out of bed and check. I just fall back to sleep.

*Silence.*

Now it's dark when I wake and light when I fall asleep. Existence is only watching shadows on my wall. Soon, I'm not sure even of the divisions between waking and sleeping. Like a flipbook, the shadows which changed by hours, now seem to flow and shift in a minute.

*Anwendung bei Bedarf wiederholen...*

Repeating, repeating. At what point does repetition create something new? At what point does it create something one?

*Five dollars change...*

I can remember once leaving this chair. I paid once, and left. And yet, I'm back. Who knows if leaving was just an illusion? A dream concocted by a mind trapped like a rat in a barber shop chair?

*En cas de contact avec les yeux, rincer abondamment à l'eau... Bij aanraking met de ogen met voldoende water afspoelen...*

What eyes?

*Kiehl's Since 1851 LLC. New York, NY 10014. Made in U.S.A...*

So there is a world outside of this shower.

*Later, rinse, repeat.*

I wonder what that's like.

LILY ALEXANDER  
2007

Jack Nacheinander's lemonade stand released a lemony, lightly-toasted smell. That was the neighborhood we were thinking of, if you recall, the one that gets woken up every morning by that pleasant humming, coasting from window to window. On that day, the sun came over the trees, grumbling, trying to bat with its furry paws the earth, that great big blue ball of yarn, as Jack's lemonade stand seemed to stretch and gasp, creak and rise, shift in place, invigorated by the soft growling of the sun's brilliance. Little puffs of dust twirled their way from under the corners of the swelling wood boards and lemon scent rolled down the thoroughfare, meeting the morning commuters, dispelling the odor of coffee on their breath. The dancing aroma snuck under shirts, inside pants, and made such an impression on Lily Alexander's boss, when he confronted her at the office—he smelled it on her as she exited the elevator—that he immediately gave her a kind of promotion.

She was stuffed in a cramped office on the third floor of the publishing firm where she worked. They ordered her a computer which wouldn't be in for at least four weeks and gave her an old IBM Selectric in the meantime. This and an accordion-style folder, stained with ketchup, seven inches thick, were the objects on her desk. She sat down, feeling like a little girl again, her knees locked together, her hands folded in her lap. Then she tied her hair back, put on her archeologist's cap, and delved into the first document which presented itself to her.

Introduction. She ruffled through the rest of the pages curiously. A couple of the pages were stuck together. She ripped them apart. Where was that lemon scent now? She scooted her chair back and brushed off her skirt. Nothing to do but twiddle her thumbs and stare out the window, at a film that was playing that she couldn't quite see. She leaned back in her chair and, closing her eyes in the warm sunlight, indulged in some adolescent fantasies.

Her lemon scent was still there, hovering outside, peeking guiltily through the window. A gust of wind brushed it away in the name of propriety and it went giggling, tumbling down Main Street. Coming to Chestnut Avenue, it turned left and wriggled its way up the drain pipes of Walter Klugman's house. As it rushed up the squareish tubes, lemon scent left vine-patterns etched in the thin metal. It seeped through the walls, squeezing into the thin termite labyrinth, and spurted proudly from the showerhead with a triumphant hiss.

\*

At about lunchtime, lemon scent felt the tug of the ribbon that wound itself around Lily Alexander's hair. It crouched behind some mailboxes and threaded itself through the perforations in the poles of some street signs. It kept a few feet behind her as she walked downtown. At some point, feeling its moment had arrived, it rushed forward and swept from her hair the ribbon, tossing it into the air where it hovered like an apple blossom, with its yellow center and pink spreading blush, spelling out the words that summed up her day: "*Today, Lily Alexander caught a glimpse from above.*" Walking along, in fact, she saw the sun reflecting off her office building's glass exterior and in the flash of the moment, she could have sworn she saw the sun snoring. Yes, there he was—she looked again—he was fast asleep. A droplet of ignited hydrogen pooled at the corner of his mouth. She stopped, wondering what to do. Everyone was carrying along regularly, people walked past her, a friend waved hello, a mother was hugging a boy in

tears, a car drove past blaring a rhythmic hymn. No one had noticed the sun's deep, regular breathing; no one had noticed his eyes benighted with sleep. The sun had fallen asleep—right in the middle of the day—and all that little girl could do was swipe pennies from a fountain! Lily Alexander was at a loss. She checked her watch: quarter past. She had an hour for lunch. Yes, she would eat outside today. The waiter brought her a tuna sandwich—lettuce, no tomato, but onions, two pickles, and a bag of chips, a glass of ginger ale. She ignored the food. She was sitting in a plastic outdoor chair, dark green and sticky, arms crossed, camping out, looking down Larchmont Ave. This part of town was built on a hill and she could see the city spread out before her, the road sloping down, taking the houses with it, until the roofs rose up again on the far side into the sky, and above them was the sun, tossing left and right like it was trying to sleep on a hot summer night and the humidity was interfering!

Now, Lily had always assumed that it would be cozy to sleep up there with the sun and this idea came to her so naturally that when the subject arose in conversation, she would have to check herself before blurting out something silly. Now, considering the sun with lowered eyes, she had to reconsider. It must be something uncomfortable to be up there around the sun, however hospitable it might seem. You could die from exhaustion! And yet. She squinted up at the culprit, checked her watch: six past one. Sooner or later, someone was going notice and then all hell was going to break loose. She paid and started walking back to the office. The matter was out of her hands for the time being. Surely, there were smarter, more capable people already on the job. No doubt scientists were already on it! She tried to put it out of her mind. But even as she sat back down in her stark, derelict office, she couldn't shake the feeling. Something had to be done. At any rate, from where she sat, the sun's reflection was in her eyes and she knew for a fact that it wasn't going away. She slammed the binder down on the desk, and opened it up, and positioned it like a shield. The nerve! And after she had trusted him, laughed while running down the beach, tanning—that time on Eddie's roof—he had a garden on his roof—they saw a butterfly moving with an awkward grace—its rigid wings were slightly too heavy, purple with white blue dots and sepia-toned underneath—and with each beat of its wings, it threw the earth below into the color-drained past, reaping all the color for its own brilliant self... Lily and Eddie had snuck among the flowers, dodging spikes. They fell asleep and woke up two hours later in the same position. Eddie was cooked! He was bright red and spent two weeks peeling. But Lily got a golden tan that day and since then she had always felt a secret bond existed between her and the sun, a kind of shared understanding—she would hear of his handiwork while watching the weather channel—seeing him light the sky so prodigiously every morning—casting inclinations like shadows, coolness and warmth—yes, she had felt something for him—and now?

She turned to the manila folder her boss left for her. She flipped it open, and stared at its contents. Maybe the covenant worked both ways. Did *she* have a responsibility towards the sun? Was he sick? She forced the thought from her head. On the walls of her office, there were little patches of discoloration where previous inhabitants had hung diplomas or pictures. He was just being lazy.

Around four thirty, her boss dropped by. He smiled when he saw her and inhaled deeply. She ignored him. He left. The sun was still glaring through the window.

Enough was enough.

She made her way down the hallway, her slippered feet creeping silently on the rug. She bared her teeth at a number of colleagues. She got halfway to the stairs before she caught sight of her boss. She darted into a conference room and waited for him to pass. The conference room: big plastic wooden table, some orphaned documents, comfortable chairs—but most importantly a huge window overlooking Main Street. Frowning, she walked over to the window, bringing her face right up to the glass. She raised her eyes. Nothing. What? She craned her neck farther. She still couldn't see the sun. Something was very wrong.

She rushed to the door, peered around corner, then made a break for the fire escape. She pulled it open with all her strength, thankful it wasn't wired, and took the stairs two at a time, up, turn, up, turn, up, turn. She was dizzy by the time she reached the top. She jerked open the door to the roof and stumbled into the flat glare, breathing heavily.

It was a beautiful day. The roof was made of some brown pebbly substance, a satellite dish adorned a corner, and a concrete railing lined its edges. She looked out across the way, but there was nothing to see. This was the tallest building around. All she could see was blue sky, bluer than blue right above her and a bit less than blue at the horizon and she felt very strongly that she was standing on top of a sphere.

Someone had left a ratty blanket there on the roof. Lily lay down on top of it, facing directly up, staring at the empty spot as if she could fill it. Shouldn't the planets be drifting away by now? Shouldn't the seas be starting to cool, the plants starting to die? But no. She heard nothing but some ringing, the wind, the rustle of trees, and the sound of people laughing accompanied by what seemed to her a comic chorus of honks. They're all going to die! She was going to die! She got up slowly, wiping her tears on her skirt. In the distance, she could hear some fire trucks approaching. A wave of nausea crashed over her. Oh God, was that door rigged? She went over to the edge and leaned over the railing. A rough bit scraped her palm. Down in the street, she could see everyone flowing out of the building, talking to each other, milling around. Then the fire trucks appeared.

"There she is!" someone shouted, pointing.

"There's Lily!"

"Lily, what are you doing up there?"

"Are you trapped?"

They thought the building was on fire. Lily smiled weakly and waved. Her boss grabbed a megaphone from someone.

"Lily, stay where you are! We're going to get one of those trampoline things for you! Just hold on!"

"Wait, Mr. Christiansen, it's okay!" Lily shouted. "There's no fire! I just went up the fire escape! I'm sorry!"

"What?"

"It's okay! There's no fire!"

"What?"

"You don't have to get the trampoline thing! THERE'S NO FIRE!"

"WHAT?"

A few firemen were screwing a fire hose into one of the hydrants near where she always wanted to park. A few more in yellow and black hefted axes, and a few more were unfurling the

trampoline thing for her. This was getting ridiculous. Turning around, she checked the door. It had closed automatically. She hurried back over to it and tried the handle. Nothing. She pulled it harder. Nothing. She heaved her shoulder against the door, but succeeded only in bruising herself. She went back to the railing, cursing the sun.

“Fuck you! Fucking fuck you, you fucking asshole!”

She shook her fist where her betrayer ought to have been.

“Lily, come back where we can see you! The trampoline thing is ready!”

Her tears stopped short. She stepped towards the railing, her body filling with dread. Her hands were shaking.

“Mr. Christiansen, just unlock the door!”

“Lily, we can’t hear you. Get ready to jump!”

“UNLOCK THE FUCKING DOOR!”

“This is the fire chief speaking, Lily. I know you’re afraid, but I’m going to ask you to step up onto the railing. Now.”

Not knowing what else to do, she followed his instructions. She looked down at the dizzying distance she had to fall, at the white expanse of the trampoline and the fearful faces of her colleagues. Then she started to giggle when she saw that the trampoline wasn’t being held still, but was moving back and forth because the firemen were trying to judge where she was going to land. This was a cartoon.

“You’re going to be fine, Lily. I want you to jump on the count of three.”

Here we go. This is how it ends.

“One...”

She wondered how she was going to jump. Cannonball, pencil, nosedive?

“Two...”

How was she not going to break her neck? She worried a pencil might cause her to puncture the surface. Cannonball would just hurt and she didn’t even want to think about taking a nosedive. She decided to go for a simple leap...

“Three...”

...with a twirl. She was laughing when she leapt off the building, which was definitely not on fire, and spun around in mid-air, her skirt lifting up like a parachute shouldn’t as she careened towards the pavement. So this is what it feels like to fall. The air going past her ears filled them with roaring. She felt weightless, like an astronaut, like she was swimming. No wonder people skydive. There’s really nothing like it. She lost herself in the spinning colors and volcanic whistling. She knew she going to die. That was when she started to hear one of those Bach sarabandes for cello, which her mother always played when she was a little kid. She remembered the label on it, curling around the middle of the record, white on dark, in a blocky font: *Bach, J. S. : Cello Suite N° 3 in C Major, BWV 1009; IV. Sarabande.*

She was really crying now, but smiling through her tears. She was really falling too, heavier than air, falling, down, down, down, spinning, spinning, down, down, here I go, I’m falling, heavier than air, falling, down, down, down, slow, slow, slow, down, down, down, spinning, spinning, here I go, I’m falling, heavier than air, falling, down, down, down, gone, gone, gone, slow, slow, slow, down, down, down, spinning, spinning, heavier than air, down, down, down, here I go, I’m—

And then a flash of the brightest yellow like gamboge was hurtling towards her from the left and she couldn't see anything at all. A pair of gentle, warm hands plucked her from the air and laid her gently down on a hard-backed seat. It was hot. She opened her eyes and although she winced, she could see the back of the seat in front of her—it was red and inlaid with gold—a swirling, flame-like pattern extended to the wood sides of the chariot—the chariot!—it was led by sixteen bizarre spasms of flame racing through the air on flamepoint legs—in the front seat was the sun, no longer snoring—his head was turning around to see if she was okay. The instant their gazes met, her eyes became saucers, her mouth a plate, and she let out a sound like a teakettle boiling.

The sun laughed—he gave the reins a jerk—and the chariot of the Helios veered up into the atmosphere.

Lily Alexander thought she was going to be ill.

Her face, however, blessed with an instant tan, could only smile. And lemon scent, in the middle of dancing, even paused in mid-step out of respect.

THEORY OF HARMONY  
2007

I.

After his wife left him this past summer, Richard Kaplan began listening to Bach. His wife was leaving, the boxes were everywhere, and she was ripping things off the walls. His wife was determined to find every knickknack and Richard could do nothing but help her. Looking through the storage in the upstairs closet, he opened a cardboard box and found his old record collection, half the records shattered, the vinyl shards having sifted down to the bottom. There on the top lay an LP: *The Cello Suites of J. S. Bach, Columbia, 1962*. He remembered a friend of his had given it to him for his birthday. It was good writing music, his friend had told him. How wrong he was.

Sitting on the only armchair that was left, bathed in the glow of a single unclothed lightbulb, and facing the bay window big enough for two, Richard closed his eyes and laid his head back against the cushion. Curled at his feet, like an old dog, was his record player, faithfully reproducing the soul of Bach as best it could with its ancient, worn needle. Richard could feel the rumble of the cello down in his marrow.

His chair was bolted to the top of the world, and he was larger than Africa, his face set among stars, spinning. Cosmic winds ruffled his air and he lost himself in the motion of the universe. The folds of the fabric of the universe were visible to him shifting slightly and he felt its reflected light burn the skin of his face off and the tears cool his face, the moon nuzzling him with graceful bows of her head and the dark spotted cloth coming unstuck from whatever was holding it in place, drifting down slowly to suffocate him. And yet he was breathing some of the coolest night air he had ever breathed. And he could feel his graying beard reaching out of his shattered face millimeter by millimeter until he knew he was looking as haggard as if he'd sat there, bolted to the world, for weeks.

Eventually no telephone call interrupted him, no doorbell ring of an unexpected guest sang out, and there was nothing for him to do but reach down and reset the needle and switch off the power. Nothing to do, but walk past the bathroom, step into bed and dwell uncomfortably, hoping the rumpled clothes he still wore and the belt buckle which jabbed into his stomach would distract him from whatever it was that he would be thinking. Nothing to do, but fall asleep, wake up, walk past the bathroom and sit back in the armchair, nudge the needle back into the outmost groove and begin again.

And the image of a world came to him, kneeling in a heap of greasy ashes, sackcloth and ashes, rending the oceans, ripping the continents, clouds sloughing off a ruined world, the tectonic plates hanging in space, all the deceptions the earth used to hide her molten core torn off by her own hand. Eventually, there was nothing to do, but pretend it had never happened and make himself a cup of tea.

He liked Earl Grey the best, but unfortunately all he had was Darjeeling which was good enough. He liked it with sugar but not too much cream and since he was lactose intolerant he always took it with a pill. He also liked herbal teas especially raspberry or mint, the former especially with a certain kind of oatmeal cookies which he always bought for himself. He had a special strainer for his tea, a little metal device with a perforated bulb on one end into which he

placed his tea leaves, and an elongated handle with which to stir it into the hot water. He also had a special teapot which thankfully his wife hadn't taken. It was white and ceramic and whistled a note that when heard always caused Richard to wonder what note it might be. So there he sat in his kitchen, warming his hands with his hot mug of tea, reduced to cataloguing his likes and dislikes as if, upon realizing his likes included Melanie and his dislikes included loneliness, the situation would be resolved. Nothing to do, but put on a tie and walk down Chestnut Street to Governor to Walnut, and walk up the grey stairs of the university library, through the revolving doors, through the entrance hall, turn right, down the stairs, turn left, down past the landing, turn right and walk through the door, and there would be his classroom. He could see it now. So he sat down and considered the mass of graded papers that were arrayed out in front of him. It was very hot. Normally, it was cold, but the air conditioning was broken. It was Friday. Maybe it would be cold again on Monday. Playwriting on Monday, fiction on Tuesday and Thursday. Hopefully everything would be fixed by then.

Class started shortly thereafter. He started explaining about details and Chekhov and foreshadowing but got so giddy halfway through he had to put a stop to the lecture and give them an in-class writing assignment. He stumbled back to his chair, his legs barely about to support his weight, sweat breaking out all over his body, about to laugh. Then, shielded from the eyes of his students--they were well absorbed--Richard spun around in his chair, letting the ceiling triumphantly take its course.

What luck! What unsurpassable luck! O Lord, O Lord, what luck! Open your books to Psalm 150: Halleluyah! Praise God in His Sanctuary! Bikaresho! Praise Him with a blast of the shofar; praise him with lyre and harp. Praise Him with drum and dance; praise Him with organ and flute. Praise Him with clanging cymbals; praise Him with resonant trumpets. Praise him with SILENCE!

Hold still your tongue and receive the greatness of the Lord! O euphony! O euphoria!

Feel it welling up in you, dwell in your sanctuary. Bikaresho! See, and do not see and dwell upon it within. Hear! And down with the marble statues! Deface the Parthenon, blow it up with gunpower, raze it to the ground--run off laughing with the legs of Venus di Milo, leaving her a perfect torso. Give her breasts to the barbarians. Bend Pythagoras's triangles, kick the sand over his scatchings. Strangle Sappho and leave her body floating off Lesbos. Scrape ink off papyrus, blacken every third word, burn holes in all things--arsonists unite and the meeting house is in Alexandria!

Harmony! The only harmony is silence! History is too loud! I finally understand it!

Ban the third and sixth. Dance with Diaghilev. Lose yourself in swirling tones. Sit at the piano and do not play. Beethoven knew the meaning of silence.

Something *will* come of nothing.

Nothing's wearing makeup, little shiny black shoes and perfume. Five minutes and the sea's

sound is gone. Three minutes for the chants and devotions to grow silent under the eternal flame. Two minutes for the sound of pencils against paper to melt into the silence of chalk dust. And silence left me spinning, spinning--

Wheee!

My name is Richard Kaplan, a professor here at *this* university, spinning in his office chair, his wordless wonder by his students unbeheld! A symphony is huddling beneath his temples. The violinist crouches in the cramped space, the drummer beats on a blood vessel and back bent the flautist pushes her flute out between his earhairs. It looks like a hollow breathing stick peeping above the reeds. By the river's edge, dousing her toes in water, a soprano soars higher in the back of his throat. Behind her, rise the pyramids, Richard Kaplan, the spinning Professor, the whirling King--

It's a lovely day outside.

The class is gone, their papers left behind, and I'm alone, hunched over my desk, situated in a clump of grey. The viola players scratch restlessly with their bows and the pianist refuses to play anything but a low note, over and over again. The audience is uncomfortable. And rightfully so. It's rather stuffy in here. It's mid-July and the power's out. Everything's given in to the heat. So there's nothing to do, but sit here in the dark, in front of the blackboard and bask in the damp, muddy chalk notes.

Did you know that this very day, hardly half past eleven, almost lunch, looking at my reflection, I noticed for the first time that my hair had gone grey? I thought it would have been a gradual shift from black to grey, but apparently not. Apparently, it only takes one night.

Fifty-seven. Looking at my reflection I can see it now, deep in my eyes: the left eye bearing the faint white imprint of a numeral five and in the right eye, the halo of a seven. How could I not have seen it before? No wonder. It all makes sense now.

Despite the heat, my feet are cold. They whisper to each other, counting down the days until I die. Amusing themselves, no doubt. To keep them warm, I squish them both together in my left shoe, but they won't fit. The thin black sock on my left foot has a hole in it. It lets a draft in. They really ought to get someone to fix the AC. Despite the heat, perhaps if I felt the same chilliness all over, my feet wouldn't feel so cold. Despite the heat.

I try tapping my feet to the music I hear. It's more than just keeping time. With my right heel I play bass drum, with left foot I simulate a snare and by using the rest of my right foot and my left heel I can achieve all sorts of syncopation effects. Of their own will my fingers join in, rapping on the desk with knuckles and fingernails. I'm humming a bass line and swaying back and forth and back and forth, and so forth, back again--

"Professor Kaplan?"

Richard Kaplan opened his eyes and pretended he was not doing what he was just doing.

"Yes, Alessandra?"

He felt slightly dizzy.

Alessandra was a pimply girl who wrote romantic prose, decadent dependant clauses, and endless adjectives. She was wearing some kind of shapeless brown bag. Richard forced a smile, and tried to look helpful. To his regret, he was not yet depressed to the point of desperation. He was not yet a wildcard, a man nothing to lose. So true to form, he figeted in his seat, and felt the little suckers on the walls of his stomach begin to secrete anxiety juice.

“You asked me here to discuss my final project?”

Yes, he had. It wasn't such a bad idea for a final project, but he hadn't given it much thought for a long time. So it seemed tired and old.

“Yup, sit down right there. Let me find your paper.”

“I brought another copy.”

“Excellent. Let's see.”

Richard felt slightly dizzy.

The mosquitoes were out when Richard knocked his way through the front door and dropped the bag full of papers that was slung across his shoulder. A car was driving past, knocking against the branches of a tree, illuminating the vase which stood on the table just inside the door. And then he froze, the door swinging shut behind him. From deep within the house, he could hear that Bach again. Benedict Arnold Bach, siren Bach, fateful Bach, betrayer Bach. Where was it coming from? Like pressure fronts, the deep bass notes resonated in the floorboards, while the chilly treble notes hung above his head shimmering. He wanted to grab one. He checked the record player--no, he hadn't left it on. He hadn't eaten either. He was hungry. But this music!

He ran from the living room to the bedroom, which was missing blankets and covers and had barely a sheet. He looked under the bed, in the closet, through the chest of drawers which was mainly empty, his clothes were on top of it. He ran into the bathroom and ran the tap to see if the music was stuck in the faucet and he did the same in the shower and got a face full of water. Not that he thought the music was there, but if the music was in his head, he thought that maybe the roar of rushing water would drown it out. It didn't. He lifted the toilet bowl and checked the medicine cabinet. He stood on a chair and checked the lights, maybe music likes lightbulbs. He even took a plunger and plumbed the depths of the toilet, in a last ditch attempt, but he knew the music wouldn't be there, because the music was too clear, too clear. So he started checking the corners, looking for bugs, maybe there were microphones and there had been some kind of feedback and they was picking up radio signals and amplifying them. Some paint chipped off. Then he checked the kitchen cabinets, the trash cans, the cereal boxes, Cheerios, Lucky Charms, Frosted Mini-wheats, his favorite, but what does that matter anyhow, when this goddamn music keeps going and going--

It was Bach, he knew that. One plays along with insanity, one gives in, of course, since there is no higher authority, and yet since one is oneself, there is always hope of appeasement. He had abandoned Bach in the armchair, among the fabric and the stars, by the ashy earth and the weeping oceans. He sat down in his living room for the second time and closed his eyes and then remembered to start the record player and then closed his eyes again. The clear music

became clearer, so clear he felt it might pierce his ear drums. Yes, it was Bach and he had been abandoned there, alone with his celestial organ, never bored, but in need of a theme. Richard Kaplan offered what he had and Johann Sebastian composed a royal fugue for this humble king.

## II.

After his wife left him this past summer, Richard Kaplan abandoned his writing and began a new career as a composer. The day his wife left him, he stood over the fireplace, leaning on it with his elbow, and tossed manuscript after manuscript into the flames. There was no Varius to take it from him, dying, and bear it to Rome, no Max Brod to talk it out with. Richard hoped that she, Melanie, could see the smoke of his labors, rising, scattering over the rooftops and down the hill as she drove away, in his car. He let the fire burn all night, there were many pages, and somehow that put him in the mood to work, back to an age of no distractions, or so it seemed to him, distracted.

Soon after, he moved into a very small apartment, a hole in the wall, winding stairs and a grey door with dust clinging to the indentations in the wood, which made Richard contemplative when he ran his finger down it. The room was barely large enough to fit a bed, a single, two pillows, but no blanket (he slept in his coat) and the piano, rolled on wheels from a garage sale two streets down, still covered in cobwebs. At night dissonant chords would awake him and he would curse his feet. He brought nothing but pens and paper, some clothes, some food, kitchenware, but above all no books. They were to be kept behind the wavering glass. Back at the old house, he'd locked the door, placed a key under the ceramic frog by the welcome mat, just for the sake of wondering what would happen if someone found it and waltzed in, the sake of wondering what the thief would take and thus reveal about himself, for the sake of wondering and then he stopped himself. Later, he hung a reproduction of the Death of Marat above the piano, so the top of its frame was level with the ceiling. He stared at the brushstrokes until he felt he could play. He lolled his head back, feeling the life leave him in the tepid water, the last agonies of skin disease. The woman seemed so unassuming, she leaned over the tub--she wasn't wearing much. If only my soul could rise above the Temple of Reason and commune with the Lord God, or Reason or Robespierre, whichever came first. Soul illuminated like dust motes, chalk motes, sloughed skin...

C.

A promising beginning. Middle C.

C E G. C-Major. The structure of the chord was so sturdy, it made him tremble. C E G. Again and again, like some never-ending grand finale. C E G.

Tonality, such bliss!

He also brought his record player which he placed inside the piano's belly because the sound chamber made the music echo and pulse. He'd brought his Bach records and a few others, in boxes, which he stored under his bed, and sometimes he used the records as plates when nothing else was left.

Music, forget artifice! Muse, lose your grip, make art! Forgo!

C E G, C E G, C E G.

Since he couldn't read music, he had to feel the chords and the notes, match them up to the sounds in his head. It would take a musical genius to do that, he knew, but he also knew he

must be some sort of genius himself, or at least something similar enough to a genius, after all with this music going through his head, 24/7, to the point where he was unable to form a coherent sentence and could do nothing but go slack in a chair!

C E G. He opened the lid of the piano to let the chord free of its cage. He pressed the sustain pedal. C E G. Floating down the river, on three notes lashed together, well-fitted. Growing up, Richard had an art teacher, Mr. J., a great artist, poet, photographer. Mr. J. disappeared between periods to smoke Menthols in the parking lot. He traveled the world taking photographs of jazz musicians, Miles Davis, John Coltrane. Loved them with a passion. Sometimes in class he would play Sketches of Spain. He loved the poet Rumi. He was a poet himself and read at the local bookstore. Richard remembered standing next to him, watching him draw a perfect sketch, pencil, his big hands sliding across the page, rubbing his head with the tips of his fingers, smoothing out his curly, grey eyebrows. His favorite painter was Picasso. He'd been to Africa years ago and had all sorts of strange and wonderful artifacts in his art room.

Mr. J. once told Richard that if he could do it all over again, he'd choose to be a musician, to make music, to play a trumpet like Miles. Someone, not Richard, had asked why he couldn't just pick up an instrument now.

"I feel like if I learned to play music, I'd lose my ability to draw. You know, maybe it's not rational, but I wouldn't risk my gift for drawing for anything. It's too important for that."

Richard wondered. A single clear note and the hands forever seizing up around a pencil, dropping the pen, spilling the paint. Richard hoped it was true, because forever trying to translate the music he heard into writing and words was a thankless, unforgiving task. He hoped that from the first clear note he played, the words would drain from him and he would never have to write again. C E G. Was that enough?

One November morning, Richard woke up to find his coat wedged between the piano and the bed. He was wearing nothing but a thin sleeveless shirt and one of the two pairs of pants he'd brought with him. He turned over and tried to reach down for the fallen coat, but as soon as he moved, his joints froze with pain, scalding whirlpools beyond aching. He was pressed against the pillow with his cheek, on his side, panting. His arm was still in midair, shocked.

He

reaching...

seized  
the  
coat  
sleeve

and gladly pulled it over himself exhaling. It wasn't so bad now, just a dull throbbing. He leaned over to close the window--

the pain came back,

coursing through his outstretched arm, which fell from the air and crashed against the window sill. Richard felt the pain enter his chest, drawing it tight and he gasped for air. He lay back, body straight, trying to breath methodically, purposefully.

He

felt

.

Slowly, he calmed down. Not yet.

He stared at the ceiling, imagining that his blue eyes were for the first time rheumy with age. Dizzy.

Slowly, he began speaking to the walls with the quiet dignity allowed to the elderly, which caused his students, when they listened, if they listened, to listen carefully, nod and smile. He spoke, or rather, since he could not speak, he hummed. The walls remembered each note he hummed, echoed it back, so he could hear an interval. The door shook in its jamb when he hummed a augmented fourth and then a fifth. He hummed dizzily and somehow his humming took on the color of his speech which was inflected with the tones and patterns of a bygone age, similar but different, a matter of phrasing, of vowel colors, a wavering consonant here and there.

And then the silence. Silence in squalor. The room was a mess, he hadn't cleaned in days, willingly giving himself up to the passions, in hopes of giving himself some feelings not usurped by the song. The madness, the cloudiness, the humidity of his mind he willingly abetted, embraced as an old friend, or a new friend, in hopes of banishing the music from his mind--no, that wasn't right--in hopes of crystallizing the music which haunted him, bringing it together, on paper, in the air, it didn't matter. He could not bear, however, to continue to hear it like this, as if all the notes were playing on top of each other, crashing and stumbling, crying and wailing. Each time a phrase would start, the next would jump in, and then as soon as he would begin to contemplate the second, the third would arise, like in some eternal maddening round. In the same way, he tried to pare himself down, and when he appeared in his classroom every other day, it was as if he hadn't slept in his clothes in a freezing, cramped apartment far from his home, haunted by sleepless nights alone with the wrathful music at all. Rather, he dressed himself pristinely and stepped out the door wearing a venerable age and a graceful wisdom, and the only

mark of his squalor was his beard, which he never trimmed, and let grow wild.

When the room mocked him beyond his sanity, he took walks. The beat of his step was forced into the rhythm of the music in his head and strange melodies hung like fruits from trees, and decorated roofs like tiles, and swung down from the clouds like giant pendulums, dangerous half-notes, musical notation swinging lethally by its stem. From the cold every morning Richard had a runny nose, and even the mucus streaming down his upper lip into his beard seemed to scream with an unknowable song, something Bach must have written, but never could have, or perhaps he did, or only imagined he did on some sleepless night, casting the bars into the aether, to be plucked from the fog at midnight, by all others in a similar situations, seeking consolation, huddling up against the sounds which vibrate next to them in bed, in hopes of keeping warm, in hopes of, in hopes of, but it only distracts.

Richard walked slowly, with small steps, as if testing the sidewalk before him. He cut through the backyard of the greenhouse and emerged onto the green.

He taught his class and later on went to dinner with a couple of old friends. The Dean was there, his English department friend, Allen, and so was Sharon, one of his wife's old friends, whom he rather liked. They went to some Italian restaurant downtown, he couldn't remember the name. Over the course of the meal, he became somewhat overexcited.

He leaned over the table, with a finger raised.

"Truth is beauty."

The Dean raised his glass to that.

"And beauty truth!"

"Richard, you're getting whipped cream on your tie."

He rounded on her. His eyebrows rose expressively.

"But what is beauty? Hmm?"

Allan took a sip of his coffee.

"Beauty is--minilism."

"What?"

"Minilism."

"Minimalism?"

"That's what I said. A triangle, a square, a circle. The wide expanse of the desert. A single cloud in a clear blue sky. A lonely rose amid clean sheets of snow. The snow-white breast of a pampered nineteenth century noblewoman."

The Dean piped up, "Richard--"

"C! E! G!"

"Could you please keep your voice down?"

Sharon removed her glasses, amused.

"Keep going."

"Yes, truth is beauty. A minimalist declaration. Two nouns, one verb, perfect symmetry. Glorious simplicity. Minimalist beauty. 'Truth is beauty' is, indeed, beautiful. And if it is beautiful--"

To emphasize the coming point, Richard knocked over his water glass.

"--it is true! Therefore, truth is beauty. Quod erat demonstratum."

Sharon clapped and the Dean smiled. Allen had heard this before. The rest of the

restaurant was trying to ignore them.

Richard downed the last of his coffee and got up to go to the bathroom, his hands visibly shaking. They heard the sound of the bathroom door swinging shut with a click.

“That was disquieting.”

Sharon laughed.

“Oh, come on, Allen, give him a break. So truth is beauty. You disagree?”

Richard was in the bathroom for a long time. The Dean and Allen left cash and set off on their own; Sharon waited for Richard to come back. She passed the time by making shapes with the spoons on the table.

“Hi.”

“Rob and Allen left. They said they’d see you tomorrow.”

“Oh, good.”

Richard sat down. The acid in the coffee was making him uneasy.

“Are you okay?”

“Yeah, I’m fine. Have you talked to Melanie recently?”

“Yesterday. She’s fine--I can’t tell you where she is, I’m sworn to secrecy, so don’t even ask. Ian’s doing alright too. It’s been a bit of a commute, but he hasn’t missed a day of school.”

“Oh, good.”

“I stopped by your house the other day. You weren’t in.”

“No.”

“Why are you wearing that coat all the time?”

“I’m old, Sharon.”

“Oh, give me a break, Richard. You’re fifty seven. You’ve got decades left, for god’s sake.”

“I’m starting to feel old. I feel it, and I can’t believe I’m already so old. I can remember us still--”

“Fifty-seven’s old when you’re twenty, that’s what you remember. At twenty, forty seems old. At fifty-seven forty seems like twenty, it’s all confused. Did you not notice time speeding up?”

Richard watched her as she tied her hair back. She was wearing sweats and a hooded sweatshirt. She was a brilliant lecturer, he’d heard. He only really saw her with Melanie. He stirred his cup, idly.

“I noticed.”

“You’re probably just sick. It happened to me a couple weeks ago--got a cold, thought that was finally it, here it is: old age. You forget how it feels. I was holed up in bed, and I didn’t have chicken soup either. Would you stop scratching that beard? It’s not even growing in, what are you trying to do?”

C E G. The perfect tripod.

They walked up the hill together even though it was late. It was a warm night, fortunately. Somewhere some art students were playing music. Sharon had to half-support him as they stumbled over the broken sidewalk, drunk as he was on truth and beauty.

“Sharon, is art commutable?”

“Is art communicable?”

"No, commutable. Can you exchange painting for sculpting, or painting for writing, or writing for music. Are the ideas behind them the same?"

"I don't think that's what commutable means."

They went into a mattress emporium and sprawled on the mattresses, one after the other in a row. Side by side, they talked.

"The one with the roses was better."

"But this blanket is so fucking soft!"

They moved on to the next, each silently calling "Timber!" as they fell back, bouncing twice. With each fall, they exhaled a little more than usual, hiding from each other the dull beginnings of pain they felt and knew they felt together. The greasy undergrad who manned the cash register didn't know what to make of it. There is nothing more disquieting than the elderly overexcited.

They went to the supermarket and tasted some cheese. The salsa was good too. Melanie used to like pate. No more pate. Just cheese and honey. Salsa. Richard thought he recognized one of his students watching him from deep within the produce isle as he wiped Sharon's mouth.

On the way to get ice cream, they got into a heated debate over when it was exactly that people stopped calling grocers grocers. Now people went food shopping. Sharon suggested they look it up, but when, improbably, they knocked on the glass door of the library, it was closed for the night. The light was on, though, in the basement, and they crept down the slope to one of the fire doors and banged on it until a janitor appeared. After verifying their identities, he grudgingly let them in. They wandered among the bookshelves and in the end occupied one of the cheerily lit and upholstered study areas that were placed in corners by the windows.

C E G.

"You know, they have a piano here."

"Really?"

"Shall we?"

The music was emerging in blobs from the books and ricocheting off the windows. The piano was in a darkened closet and with Sharon hovering behind him, Richard played her his song. He sat nobly down and cracked his knuckles.

C E G. C E G. C E G.

Silence. Silence in squalor.

"A C chord? Is that it?"

"Just listen!"

C E G.

"You took me all the way down here to hear that?"

C E G.

"It's very late."

2008

E (EXCERPTS)  
2008

Ἐλκος ἔχων ὁ ξεῖνος ἐλάνθανεν: ὡς ἀνηρόν  
πνεῦμα διὰ στηθέων ‘εἶδες;’ ἀνηγάγετο,  
τὸ τρίτον ἠνίκ’ ἔπινε, τὰ δὲ ρόδα φυλλοβολεῦντα  
τῶνδρὸς ἀπὸ στεφάνων πάντ’ ἐγένοντο χαμαί:  
ᾧππηται μέγα δὴ τι: μὰ δαίμονας οὐκ ἀπὸ ῥυσμοῦ  
εἰκάζω, φωρὸς δ’ ἴχνια φῶρ ἔμαθον.

Our friend was wounded, and we knew it not;  
how bitter a sigh, ‘mark you?’ he drew up all  
his breast. Lo, he was drinking the third time,  
and shedding their petals from the fellow’s  
garlands, the roses all poured to the ground.  
He is well in the fire, surely; no, by the gods,  
I guess not at random; a thief myself, I know  
a thief’s footprints.

—Callimachus, Epigram XLIII.  
Trans. J. W. Mackail

The symbol which today we call the heart (♥) has its origins in the ancient Greek colony of Cyrene, or modern day Libya. The chief export of Cyrene was silphium, a type of fennel-like plant used as both seasoning and medicine. The resin of silphium, called lasar or lasarpicium, was the central export of Cyrene such that the region became inextricably associated with it. (cf. Catullus VII, “...*quam magnus numerus Libyssae harenae lasarpiciferis iacet Cyrenis...*” Trans. “As great a number [of kisses as] of the Libyan sands that lie at silphium-bearing Cyrene...”)

In fact, the coins of Cyrene depict the plant on one side and its seed on the other. Its seed is in the perfect shape of a heart.

Writing from the period, including that of the aforementioned Catullus, associated silphium with love and sexuality. Cf. Pausanius’s Description of Greece (3.16.3):

ὁ δὲ οἰκίας μὲν τῆς ἄλλης ἐκέλευεν αὐτοὺς ἔνθα ἂν ἐθέλωσιν οἰκῆσαι, τὸ δὲ οἴκημα οὐκ ἔφη δώσειν: θυγάτηρ γὰρ ἔτυχεν οἱ παρθένος ἔχουσα ἐν αὐτῷ δίαιταν. ἐς δὲ τὴν ὑστεραίαν παρθένος μὲν ἐκείνη καὶ θεραπεία πᾶσα ἢ περὶ τὴν παῖδα ἠφάνιστο, Διοσκούρων δὲ ἀγάλματα ἐν τῷ οἰκίηματι εὐρέθη καὶ τράπεζά τε καὶ σίλφιον ἐπ’ αὐτῇ.

He replied that they might lodge in any other part of the house they wished, but that they could not have the chamber. For it so happened that his maiden daughter was living in it.

By the next day, the maiden and all her girlish apparel has disappeared and in the room were found images of the Dioscuri<sup>7</sup>, a table and silphium upon it.

(Trans. by W. H. S. Jones)

This was because, as Pliny the Elder tells us, lasarpicium had the power to terminate pregnancy. It was widely used as a contraceptive in Ancient Greece, Egypt and all over the Mediterranean.

Cyrene's Greek colonists and later Roman provincial governors, farmed silphium extensively. In addition to its other uses, the plant provided excellent grazing for farm animals.

By the reign of Nero, silphium had become virtually extinct, such that Pliny also was able to tell us that the last stalk of silphium was presented to Nero himself "as a curiosity."



...*Stranded:*

On the beach scattered roses lay when a ship had sunk bearing roses to Delphi where games were being held. I stepped across the shells and petals lying in heaps of red along the shore.

With gold love I loved her, with one eyebrow missing and the other faint and her locks, which on special days, stuck out around her cheeks. They say Apollo himself blessed her when she came from the womb. He shone and sun-kissed her hair.

She was my friend.

Isn't that the strongest love I can offer? The most honest?

She was a virgin like Artemis and I too once caught her bathing, clad in nothing but the night and moon.

The trees parted and I saw her with her arms in her hair, shimmering in cool water. I looked down and felt my cheek.

"Hello?"

I called out, averting my eyes.

"Hi," she answered.

She lived with her father, brother and sister and had a room with clay walls. She told me her mother claimed to have been descendent from Lesbos, from Sappho herself. I recognized in her nose Aeolian grace.

Her family had friends and she was always with acquaintances from Athens, Thessaly or Rome. I saw her on the days she came to the temple to ask her questions.

"If I never tell him..."

"If I love him..."

"If I don't..."

"If I can never live here..."

"If I can never leave..."

"If I..."

"If..."

So many ifs, I heard them all as she descended the stairs, cautiously each time, as if she'd never been there before, rehearsing her wish before she reached the Oracle. They say Delphi is

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<sup>7</sup> The twins, Castor and Pollux.

the womb of the world and that the temple lies at the world's center. Even so, she sometimes shivered when she emerged, her question never answered, but hopes rekindled and she always came to talk to me where I stood by the wall where the sages of all Greece had come together many years ago to dedicate their wisdom to Apollo:

Know Thyself  
Nothing In Excess

and a letter E rising above the room. She couldn't keep her eyes off the E and asked me what it meant.

I picked up a rose petal from the green and yellow shore and pressed it between my fingers.

KNOW THYSELF.  
NOTHING IN EXCESS.

E.

*“Quaeris, quot mihi basiationes tuae, Lesbia, sint satis superque...quam sidera multa, cum tacet nox, furtivos hominum vident amores...”* – Catullus VII

“You ask how many of your kisses are enough and more than enough for me, Lesbia... as many as the stars, when night is silent, they see the secret loves of men...”

Carved on a wall, in the midst of the ruins, is the Hymn to Apollo. It is the earliest known example of notated music in the Western World.

And while it was written in 138 B.C., it is well known that those notes have been hanging around Delphi for centuries, leaning on lintels and exploring the cracks in the rocks. And while we know the hymn was written by an Athenian, it could have been written by anyone seized by divine inspiration. In the time and place designated by history, the First Delphic Hymn was written to commemorate the Pythian games held that same year.

But during the Pythian Games held about a hundred years previously, I know for a fact that those notes were heard by a priest of Apollo, lying on the sand, outside Kirrha, gazing into the distance at the ships bearing Greeks, the last of which blocked the sunset.



All I know how to do is teach. That's why I was chosen as a priest to Apollo—Apollo, the great teacher, golden haired. I went to the games that night because she would be there. The sky was a deep-purple at the top of the mountain and the races were beginning. Fires were lit, big bonfires that flickered above the tree-line into the clouds and the smoke rose with the voice of the chorus and the shouts. Everyone from Delphi, the center of the world, was intermingling, even the guards from the temple. I was sure the small, shrouded figure they buffeted past the crowd was the Oracle herself, come in secret.

KNOW THYSELF

I know myself. I know myself too well. When I was eight, my mother told me I stole away from our house, not too far from here, and wandered up Parnassos where I could see the

two cliffs which enclose Delphi and the olive groves below. I can remember the sun roaring out from behind a cloud and striking the cliff faces and the blinding light—like mirrors, the cliffs, they shone—and passing out, rolling down the hill. My mother says when they found me, sick from stolen olives, the grass which I crushed as I tumbled down formed the shape of E.

It was coincidence, I said, but they took me to the temple and I saw the E for the first time there. I was taught to tend the temple and keep the sacred fire burning while the Pythia spun her hexameters below. I know myself because I am nothing and there is nothing to know. The world is infinite and oppressive, unexplored, my soul is finite and dark. Maybe KNOW THYSELF is good for somebody, but to me who must be mocked by it at all hours of the day—the smug utterances of the Five Sages—*KNOW THYSELF!*—*What is there to know?*

NOTHING IN EXCESS

...except love which is boundless. I went looking for the Muses on Mount Helikon, just miles away, to hear their pounding feet. This was before I'd met *her*—and I heard Sappho sing to me, Muse No. 10, from the white spring:

*...but my tongue is broken down, and straightaway a subtle fire has run under my skin,  
with my eyes I have no sight, my ears ring, sweat pours down, and a trembling seizes all  
my being; I am paler than grass—*

(Trans. H. T. Wharton)

And so was I, lying there invisible, hearing that phrase of Homeric origin and it was green fear which inhabited me.

Should I not have been a priest of Aphrodite?

But then, Apollo and I both, neither of us have tasted pussy—he got Daphne's wood, and I came up with nothing but dry grass.

My uncle came to live with us and he had a low voice. He sang for us that Sappho poem and to him alone I confessed my love. And he told me: NOTHING IN EXCESS. So I stopped running up mountainsides and I forgot about her, until *she* came along and I fell in love again. But I was older, and they expected I was past that.

My brother and I have a rivalry—we will never let on which of us is older. He and his wife, but she was not his wife then, laid claim to the couch and made love on it every night. They cast me dirty looks until I left. I went out, pacing back and forth, until someone came to me just as I was departing from the temple. He asked to see the Oracle, but the line was long that night and so seeing me, scrabbling in the dirt, in my white robes, he asked me his question.

“If my wife is unfaithful, what should I do? And if I love her and she's wronged me, what should I do?”

And I, shining like Apollo, told him: NOTHING IN EXCESS. Afterwards, I realized his wife was my brother's mistress. This was after the man died, struck down by Zeus, coming home from the shore. My brother took this as a sign, or maybe he himself had thrown the lightning bolt—in any case, he married his love. My brother is older than I because he's happy. And yet, I feel so much older. But my goal is to be ageless—for what is youth or old age, but excess? And there shall be

*NOTHING IN EXCESS.*

She, wine-drunk, rosy (I felt the petals in my hands), had been separated from her friends. Our dilemma is to be both the loveliest things and the most obscure. I pushed my way through the crowd, ducking beneath torches carried by men and women. I found her, sitting on a rock, with a stick, drawing in the sand, and at that moment—I wanted to preserve that moment by carving it into marble which would chip away and erode over time until her lovely face was washed away and nothing around would be saved except an empty shoulders, lovely shoulders, and a smell of past time—and a feeling that not everything was accounted for, because soon her missing features would become a part of her, no one would know any different, and my lady would be a lady done in parts. She would become the emptiness as the emptiness becomes her.

“How are you?”

“Good.”

I felt my cheek. She continued, “I’m not going with them.”

“Who?”

“Nikolai and the others I told you about. They’re going to Crete to visit Knossos, then see the ruins.”

“What happened?”

“There was an eruption, an earthquake centuries ago—“

“I know that, I mean about your friends.”

“Oh, it’s nothing. I have too much to do here. And I don’t know...”

“Did they just leave you here?”

I gestured to the rock and the sand.

“What should I do?” she asked.

“What do you mean?”

“You always know what to do.”

“Well, you know...”—and I almost cried—“NOTHING IN EXCESS.”

“What does that mean?”

“KNOW THYSELF. Don’t make any big changes unless you’re ready to handle them.”

*All I know how to do is teach.*

“But I can’t decide. Just *tell* me what to do.”

She was standing now and the branches seemed to move around her, to shelter her.

“It’s going to rain,” I said.

“Is there anything you don’t know?”

I hesitated and answered her seriously.

“I don’t know what E means and it’s what I should know most of all.”

Her Aeolian nose wrinkled.

I told her, “If I knew what E meant, I feel like I’d know everything. E’s the secret, E’s the key to everything... We’ve forgotten our past.”

We came to the temple and I showed her the E. I hummed the Hymn to Apollo, the Delphic Hymn while tracing lines in the rock. The walls seemed to be dripping oily fire.

Because my words hadn’t done anything, because she was still stuck in Delphi, and while she tried to hide it, her white face was weeping, the little corners of her mouth and the curl of her hair which always struck out was flat like melting wax.

And with the sweetness, Sappho returned, all jumbled up, speaking in fragments, like I was catching up to a traveling word going past—or feeling a plant tug at my ankle as I slid downstream,

“a very long farewell to the child of Polyonaktes...”

“full appeared the moon and when they around the alter took their places...”

“far more sweetsounding that a lyre, golder than gold,”

“lady Dawn,”

“delicate Adonis is dying,” and I beheld the stars, who, when night is silent, they see the secret loves of men.

And I felt divine.

I took her down in darkness, the sweetness falling over our heads, into the inner chamber. The fire was still burning, but the room was empty. She asked me no more questions, the sight of E upon the wall—it struck her dumb, bathing her eyes in divine perfume.

I never would have touched her, she was lovely, but not beautiful, with that one eyebrow missing and her big face which was now flushed and expressionless.

But the cushions there, and we had to stoop, the ceiling was low.

Oh, come now, Muses, and go to the  
craggy sacred place upon the far-seen,  
twin-peaked Parnassus, celebrated and  
dear to us, Pierian maidens. Repose on  
the snow-clad mountain top; celebrate  
the Pythian Lord with the golden  
sword, Phoebus, whom Leto bore  
unassisted on the Delian rock,  
surrounded by silvery olives, the  
luxuriant plant which the Goddess  
Pallas long ago brought forth.

(Trans. Richard Hooker)

I got what I wanted. Lying there, I expected E to come to me willingly as she had done, and I saw it moving out in the distance of the night. But it was just an E and nothing more. I was left alone with her shallow wheezing and her hand which twitched.

The next day, they said they found that she and all her girlish apparel had disappeared and in the room were found images of the Dioscuri, a table and silphium upon it.



She returned nine months later with a bruise on her left arm and carried the ghost of her unborn child in a basket at her side. I saw her in mid-step, coming down the stairs, running her hand along the wall, with her knees turned inward and her hair in her face. The speculation was enormous. She stayed at her father's house, sheltered by the clay walls, and silent. I went by one time just to see, creeping cautiously from tree to tree, ducking below the rosebush when I thought I might be seen. But mostly I sat on my perch in front of the Athenian Treasury where,

some nine months before, I had installed myself, laying my robes down on the marble. I think they would have driven me out of town, if they weren't so curious.

At first they avoided me, and I would have avoided them too, but I knew if I avoided them, they would come to find me. So I put myself right in their midst, unshaven, a kind of Socrates missing a Plato.

Arato, the potter, was the first one to speak to me. He came hesitantly, his hands white with dust, and sat down beside me.

“So, hello.”

“Hello.”

Arato rubbed his beard, getting the white dust all over it.

“Would you mind telling me what you're doing here?”

I didn't answer. He asked me, “What happened, where is she?”

“I don't know. She said... I don't know. Yes, it was mine.”

The farmer, Nikolos, came next.

“I've asked you many times for advice and you've always tried your best to give me an answer, so I thought, if you didn't mind, I could give you some advice myself.”

He paused, looking at me. I nodded my head. His curls were glistening.

“I love my daughter, and if you could only imagine what her parents are going through, all alone. Go to them, they will forgive you. It was the night, the games. If you show them who you are, they will come to love you, also.”

He left looking at the ground.

The wife of Irmenos, the bronzesmith, arrived next with her daughter attached by a string.

“I didn't want to believe it was true, if you don't mind me saying so, that a priest of Apollo—no less, Apollo—could do such a thing, here, at the very center of the earth, womb of the world. It's a wonder Apollo hasn't struck you down with his arrows and disease. Where's ‘know thyself,’ where's ‘nothing in excess?’ Did they mean nothing?”

Irmenos, the bronzesmith, came next. He spoke slowly.

“Come with me, come back to my house, lie down for awhile, have a meal, come to your senses. If you loved her, why didn't you say anything?”

Ophes, the orator, came next, with his halo of a beard and his ancient voice.

“Perfidious, unjust, impious, hard-hearted betrayer of trusts, even now you dare to show your face here, where not only, on one hand, you have sinned before your god, but also, equally staining, you have sinned before your community?”

His cousin, Sara, came next, wearing blue.

“I never really knew you, to me you were always— just a face, a piece of the temple, like the wisdom or the E. We, and I mean us, we never really knew you, you never really were with us, or—look, this is the first time we've really met you—you've been here, of course, but all of a sudden, you're right here, on the step, in the open—just, what I'm saying is—take care.”

She sucked on the corner of her lower lip for a moment before handing me a bowl of water, which I thanked her for.

If I had not been out in the open, I would have cried.

Sometimes when no one came to speak to me, I listened to the conversations in the marketplace, under the multicolored stands with baskets of fruit, olives, meat and fish, extending into the distance until they thinned out into wisps of cloud and mountain: slashes of sunlight above a valley.

My uncle was saying, “Three months gone, and what do we have? A man who’s lost his mind and three impossible mysteries. If only we had been there.”

My cousin said, “But we could deduce what happened there. If we re-enact that night and re-trace her steps, we could go back to that very moment and discover where she has gone.”

The first reconstruction occurred two days later. The part of the priest was played by my cousin—as a reward for his originality—and her part was played by Sara. And while they asked me for many details of that night, I gave them nothing.

From my perch outside the Treasury I saw the two of them crouched by the rock, doodling on the sand, and gesturing, but their mouths were closed. My cousin grabbed his counterpart roughly and slung her down behind the rock. He dragged her into the woods nearby and got so into his role that he had to be pulled away by three of his strongest relatives. Irmenos, the bronzesmith, wept.

The next attempt occurred two weeks after that. Messengers had been sent to nearby towns, summoning the many witnesses of that day to give testimony. As each witness explained what they had, or hadn’t seen, my uncle and Nikolos, the farmer, drew lines in the sand, tracing the paths that we had taken. The next witness would be called and the process would be repeated until the ground was covered with a haze of unruly lines, drawn from peripheral vision and tenuous memory, which formed a collective path, if you stared at it long enough and squinted from far away.

Ophes, the orator, was chosen to play my part in that day’s production of *The Rape*. The play began at nightfall, by the rock. Ophes gave a rousing soliloquy, lambasting the deplorable motives and tortured reasoning of one such as himself, and then played the scene with admirable brio. He swept his victim off her feet and carried her off, following the line of best fit, until the lines thinned out in different directions, and he didn’t know what to do. Unshaken, he improvised, pressing her down against the far side of a tree, in the audience’s blind spot and narrated a series of increasingly violent acts, accompanied by piteous, womanly cries. The crowd didn’t buy it and jeered him offstage.

It was resolved that the only way to determine the correct path was to try them all, one after the other. And while Ophes’s use of the soliloquy was indeed inspired, it was generally thought that a soliloquy on the part of the women would be more appropriate considering it was her mental state that was in question. Seeing his position in the public eye threatened, Ophes complained bitterly until they granted him the woman’s part. My cousin, still eager, was allowed to play the part of me.

It became a nightly ritual. After dinner, the center of town would fill with people, flushed and talking. The actors would be off by themselves rehearsing, getting into character. At exactly nightfall, the scene would begin, patched together from recollections one after the other. Each night a different path would be chosen and the actors would follow it to completion. It was soon realized, however, that the paths alone would be no help without words. The witnesses were summoned again.

They came grudgingly, but in greater numbers when Irmenos's wife offered the hospitality of her kitchen. Nikolos sat them down in Irmenos's smith and amid the noise of the forge, he recorded snatches of dialogue from that night, while his father Agisthenes, old and trembling, watched from the corner.

My uncle with deliberate care would make a crosshatch along a given path when a line was said to have been spoken. During the performance, when the actors came upon such a crosshatch they would deliver a memorized fragment or damning slur with great excitement, although between such riveting moments lay long valleys of silence. But soon, the gaps between the words were filled in with new, consistent dialogue and a cohesive scene was formed. Even the Oracle, again disguised, came to watch.

One night, they even got as far as the temple.

Meanwhile, weeks had gone by and Ainax, the beggar, conceived the idea to make a pilgrimage to Eleusis. I was not informed of the idea until very late, but for at least a week and a half beforehand, I had seen my friends and family huddled in corners, speaking quickly and quietly, perhaps so that I couldn't hear. A ship was obtained and on one unusually crisp morning with ominous birds spinning overhead, they shoved off, leaving me stranded. My friend, the one who offered me a drink of water, told me later what happened next.

They sailed close to the shore, some of the men who had sailed in their youth second-guessing the captain of the vessel, and the boys rowing down below. The new priest of Apollo lectured on the deck about mortality. Her absence was like a kind of death and such unrest was brewing in the town, the re-enactments by day, empty and disconsolate by night, a trip to Eleusis to perform the sacred rites of Demeter, initiation into the mysteries, it seemed the only way to put the people back into order. They touched shore towards mid-day and joined the throngs of waiting people.

Meanwhile, I, alone, saw some activity at the temple, which never closed. Alone, I walked up the hill, leaving my own footprints on the guiding lines. My knees creaked.

The party was of one mind. In divine awe, they forgot themselves and moved as one through the city of Athens. It was the first day of the festival. They heard the head priest from Eleusis speak, his words coming from somewhere deep in his chest, slung out like coiling green vines, after the sun has imbued them with a new fire. They washed their hands in sacred water and Irmenos fainted when the water touched his hands. That night Sara had nightmares. She was Persephone, stolen from Demeter, her mother, kidnapped to the underworld and she saw herself eating a pomegranate seed, but could not stop herself. Her hair sloughed out of its roots and she melted into the stone walls of Hades. She woke up and her neck was frozen and her eyes like two dead coins. She asked me if I'd ever had such a dream and I said no, not like that. But I knew what she meant.

The next morning they walked to the sea and bathed themselves. The children shouted happily in the waves. Nikolos's grandmother, who was once a great beauty, gathered her grandchildren up in her arms. Ophes was too shy to undress in front of the rest, so he slunk down some Athenian alleyway. He rejoined the group, sweating, as they re-entered the city and a pig was slaughtered. The next day held more sacrifices, one blurred into the other, and a feeling arose, flowered, of history and magnificence, like the two were sounds, colors or shapes. On the fourth day, they rested.

The procession to Eleusis began along the Sacred Way. They crossed the river Rheitoi and rested, then the river Kephisos, where men with covered heads insulted the parade, jeering, mocking and abusing them in the tradition of Iambe, who comforted Demeter upon the loss of her daughter with her crude, ribald songs. Demeter laughed and was comforted.

That night the procession arrived at Eleusis and danced. They shouted obscenities in iambic verse, poetry beating its wings, personified by Iambe and Baubo, the latter the old nurse who comforted Demeter upon the loss of her daughter: when Demeter refused her offering of wine, Baubo exposed her secret parts, exhibiting them to the goddess. Demeter laughed at the spectacle and gladly took the wine. Giddy and relieved, they slept. The next day, they fasted in the memory of stolen Persephone and the way things used to be. Sara's memory grew faint here, but in the sanctuary they drank and ate, the story of the kidnapping was told, shown in pictures, people cried out and the holy objects, blinding light and dizziness were shown and the afterlife, ascension.

They slept in the telesteron, the next day they paid homage to the dead and then at last they returned to Athens, walking slowly, each person again themselves, far too clearly, dwelling within on the cosmic images that they had played out inside their heads. The only sounds they heard were the footsteps and with each one, the father of the missing girl whispered her secret name.

Meanwhile, I arrived at the temple. The guards had remained and greeted me in surprise. A small group of people waited to descend into the Oracle's chamber. They talked quietly amongst themselves. And there beside them was the E, whole and indestructible as ever. I knelt down before it and, to the amazement of the guards and petitioners who had traveled hundreds of miles to see a holy woman, not a letter, I prayed. I asked the E, mysterious as ever, to reveal my mystery to me, because surely, at the most fundamental level, all mysteries are really the same. I addressed the E as I had addressed Apollo so many times. I closed my eyes.

Sometimes I imagined the months since she'd been gone as an empty house with one room and with every blink of my eye, I would place a rose petal on the floor, transferred from my pocket to the ground, until the whole house was filled with rose petals. I would throw myself through the roof and fall down into the blizzard and there would be darkness all around me, except for the blizzard of rose petals whipping past me, striking my face, twirling unbalanced, gusts left and right, and the velvet redness on the back of my neck and the smell like her, like the temple, like my hand on the beach, and the taste when the skies had steamed with boiling water and steeped the petals into a mixture of rose. And then the petals and the white water would gush, slowly, but with great force, from the openings and doorways. Around the house would form a pink swamp, with redness slick on the surface in drabs, like oil. When all the water had trickled out, when the house was empty again, it was warm inside and comfortable and as I turned around I saw her enter, a dark and slender silhouette, saved by the sun behind her, coming down the stairs in mid-step, with a bruise and a ghost, her hand on the wall, her knees and her hair and the nine months wrapped around her like clothes in strips, and only in the naked places could I recognize the girl I knew.

"Hi."

"Hello."

Through the empty town we walked, I holding her and she limped, a thin line of rose petals dripping down her thigh. We kicked sand over their silly lines. We sat, cross-legged, in my one-room house with no roof and smelling of roses. She told me the story of nine months gone. I walked her home, closed her door gently. And then I sat very still on the marble as the voyagers returned home.

Sometimes I had to see her face, with its paleness and her one eyebrow missing, and sometimes I didn't, but for many years, I continued to sit on my perch and answer the questions my friends and family needed to ask. We never told them what happened those nine months. Because, you know, there's nothing like a mystery to make people better.

And she—she was the goddess of mystery, not by choice, and mystery hung around her like the stars, who, when night is silent, they see the secret loves of men.



...*A Brief Coda:*

While writing this story, a bizarre tragedy befell my town. Within the space of a week, two seniors at my high school were killed in automobile accidents involving drunk drivers. Some students had crises of faith. Others had their faith reaffirmed. Still others played at being unaffected. The most interesting thing to me, however, occurred in my first period Latin class. I was not alone in noticing it—I compared notes with a friend who had Latin an entirely different period and he found the same thing. It was the Monday after the weekend when the first of the two had died and the other two in the car were injured. A solemn announcement was made during homeroom and at the beginning of first period a grief counselor came in to offer a show of sympathy. The class was silent.

At the beginning of each Latin class, we do vocabulary posters. For each word in the given poem we are translating (be it Ovid, Catullus, Vergil, etc) someone is assigned to make a poster with the word and a picture on front to serve as a mnemonic. One person volunteers to quiz the class using the posters as flashcards: read the word, show the picture, give the answer. And so, on that Monday, to bring about a return to normalcy, we started to do the posters.

Every single word was pregnant with unsuspected meaning. The poem of the day was Catullus XXX, which begins

*Alfenus immemor atque unanims false sodalibus...*  
Alfenus, unmindful and false to your loyal friends...

But there were words from other works of Catullus and Ovid mixed in. And we went down the list:

*sodalibus*: friends  
*unanims*: of one mind  
*caelicolis*: the gods  
*inique*: unjust one  
*oblitus es*: you have forgotten  
*paenitiant*: so that it pains  
*retrahis*: you draw back

*tradere*: to trust  
*praecipitem*: headlong  
*vecordem*: senseless  
*nescio*: I do not know  
*sentio*: I feel  
*fortasse*: perhaps  
*furor*: fury  
*vivat*: let him live  
*quare*: to ask  
*ago*: I drive  
*teneo*: I hold  
*telum*: weapons  
*caedes*: deaths  
*pateo*: I prepare  
*vultus*: the faces  
*abutor*: I abuse  
*vigilia*: alertness  
*vito*: to avoid  
*meminerunt*: they remembered

?

Is it something in the words themselves, or was it circumstances that made each one so incisive? Fifteen people in a room and at least half of them had never cared a moment about Latin in their lives—but for a moment the majesty of the words made the tension in the room unbearable. While the girl sitting next to me watched, I wrote down each word as it came up on a scrap of paper. I barely wanted to move and I wrote awkwardly with my arm stiff and my pencil at an angle.

And then it was over and we had the thankless task of continuing to translate. The words, so poignant a minute ago in their primordial, decontextualized state took form and something was lost. I think so much of poetry is trying recapture that primordial, spaced out state. Once formed into the structure of a poem, words can mean only a finite number of things. But a single word... like the last survivor of an ancient race, when Death has come and gone, taken with it the rest one by one, leaving him alone, last of his line, to tell the tale, with the knowledge that the same fate awaits him and his joy will be brief, but he buries his hoard with deliberate care, now forgotten, like a single something, like a single word...

7:02 AM  
2008

Let us fly to the bright cities of Asia,  
     you and I,  
 leaning forward on your back,  
     leaning into down below--  
 Let us fly through the dawning mist  
     left over from last night  
     a charlatan fog masquerading  
     as something new--  
 And nothing wet and sticky is really new  
     but it is new when we make it  
     our own.  
 Let us fly lying down in that bright  
     impasse, that still  
     arras, and be still  
     as static hand  
     touches static hand  
         one by one,  
 let us fly, you carry me, I'll carry you,  
     though I'm still beyond speaking  
 like the birds in three colors or more  
     which made it easier to see you  
     when they lit upon a wordless branch  
 and alone at last, I feel you on my shoulder and  
     the air in places around me and  
     I stole some words  
         from the birds  
         who didn't know they had it in them--  
 Let us fly to the bright cities of Asia,  
     faraway  
     because if it sets here,  
     it is dawning there  
     and if it sets there,  
     the light of the cities of you will  
     keep the shape of you  
     in white, grey and green  
     and the shape of me  
         in the foundations.  
 Let us fly to the bright cities of Asia  
     for lacking a better place  
     there we can tangle.

BESSIE SMITH  
2008

The *madrepora damicornis* var-  
-iet, a tear sent shiv'ring hot down Lou-  
-ie's cheek the night that Bessie died. The bar  
she'd left was silent and the car she'd used

was totaled and the voice she'd bet on groaned,  
the blues she whispered, bleeding black and blue,  
(and Louie was backstage when he was phoned)  
the bootleg gin she drank was seeping through.

The *madrepora damicornis* var-  
-iet, the words she heard inside her head,  
was sure she'd seen them somewhere, mystic words,  
she asked them for some dope, her face was flushed

from pain, she tried to tell them what she saw  
out there while waiting at the hospital.

## DIRTY WITH YOU

2008

Wine glass raised aloft:

As we sit here, playing at adulthood--what is that?--  
 may god strike us down if we stray too far from being kids.

I want to wreathe you in meter,  
 Clothe you in rhyme,  
 Cast you out in metaphor,  
 Gather you up in lines--

Sunlight on a blue couch, slung against green,  
 The warm reflection off the ice.

Wanted: A language more glacial  
 of strokes and signs  
 our outlasting fossils...

Conversations:

in deep ridges and valleys  
 rumbling across continents.

Left over meaning:

picked up as field grit, rocks in the way  
 lifted by the ice, buffeted...

The Rocky Mountains: A testament to our love--

The Colorado River: Burning like my throat with you crawling down it--

Those Headlong Glaciers are Words.

With meaning collected, collocated and confused,  
 I've never felt so clean as when I was dirty with you.

LOUISE  
2008

During the great influenza epidemic of 1918, Louise was kept in colored quarantine for six months. She was placed in a crib and the room was cold. She remembered the quiet and the color blue--the iron of the crib sides--the sight of her mother looking down at her--then her mother no more--she thought she saw her father, but only the dense shadow of his whiskers knelt in the swerve of her eye.

She grasped at the sides of the crib. No one spoke to her. The white sheets turned yellow and curled up like newspaper. She kept her finger in her mouth, but not her thumb. A blossom of mountain laurel, like an unfolding hexagram, like a pointed white star, with pink fire taxiing down its angles, twirled down and crouched on her forehead.

Six months in captivity, quiet for twelve months--she didn't speak. The unassuming quiet of the quarantine room taught her how to endure the cold without a blanket and the ceiling above her without a face. In place of a mother, she saw a mountain laurel, beating as if tied around her mother's heart, strangling it by the vein.

White hands at last lifted the laurel from her nose.

Louise's two brothers Marcus and John kept their hands folded in their laps as they sat outside the sickhouse, leaning under the pony who stood unsteadily beside them as they nodded cheerfully, but anxiously at the hospital workers passing by.

They'd come to collect their sister from the quarantine.

Sitting there, they seemed very small with one thin wrist brushing against another. Marcus fingered his nose while John laid one foot on top of the other cross-wise, feeling the hot porch wood on sole of his foot underneath. The hospital head brought Louise to them where they waited by the door.

He looked down at them.

"We're sorry but we can't release Louise to you boys; your mother's going to have to come along to collect her."

Louise pulled her ribbon halfway out of her hair and looked up. The man above her had led her by the hand from the nurse's embrace, down the corridor, septic with hospital discharge--epidemic over, the auxiliary rooms had been drained like boils. The ankles of Louise had turned inwards and he nudged her at times when she'd leaned forward, trying to ease into a crawl.

It was that nurse who had tied the pretty ribbon in her hair. Louise had tried to tell her to weave her mountain laurel blossom star in there too, but the nurse hadn't understood the look in her eyes, or the poise of her little reaching fingers. When her feet had reached the outer door, the nurse had kissed Louise brusquely. She had leaned down and straightened her bow and smiled like the way illustrations do.

The hospital couldn't give her shoes, so she limped out, her hand enclosed by the big cold hand of the hospital head.

"You may wait here, if you prefer, or inside," he said, "Your mother's on her way?"

Unwilling to contradict him, Marcus said quietly, "Yes, mister."

When the old man turned his back, John took Louise by the hand and led her toppling down the brief stairs into the street. Marcus lifted her weak legs and sat her gently on the cart which someone else had parked beside the nuzzling pony and left for a moment. John unhitched it. The two brothers took turns dragging the creaky wooden cart and they rattled down the street, southbound from the sickhouse.

Louise's eyes couldn't endure the color and the sounds of the world outside. The open sky shook her. Marcus left the hitch to John and went around to keep her hand in his as he walked beside the little cart.

"Louise," whispered Marcus.

"Louise?"

"Do you know where we are?"

Louise kept her eyes on the blue sky, expecting to see the outlines of crib bars and the gentle falling of the mountain laurel, for which she cried.

Marcus conferred with his brother as they walked. The streets were caked with Georgia mud and the houses weren't much to speak of, but the green in corners was worth weeping for, and the air was quiet and fragrant at last. A big woman in a dress with the patterns of flowers shook out a quilt on her stoop and called out to them and they hollered. The smell of cooking joined the colorful sight of her dress. Boys' round heads flanked the cart; Marcus and John switched places.

They passed their house--not a sound, not a smell. John kissed Louise's hand and lifted it towards their house, but looking at her profile against the sunlight, he saw her lips were slack and uncomprehending.

"I don't think she remembers where we are. She's been in there so long."

John grabbed her face and turned it towards him with his warm hands.

"Louise, do you know who I am?" he said, "I'm John. You're my *sister*."

He turned to his brother.

"And this is Marcus."

"We're twelve!" Marcus broke in.

"This is our house," John said slowly.

He wiped his brow.

"I don't think she sees none of it. Look at her."

"Not at all..."

A Georgia street, Main Street, settlement gradually fading into civilization, half a mile from a school turned hospital, 1921, flu gone: the streets are wide for kids like these, the houses are waking up, rising from their bed rest, roofs preparing breakfast, and down the street, through the center of town, a wooden cart comes lumbering, stolen, with a cracked axle and stained wood. Friends and neighbors have come out their doors, hungry for the open air, and then stay for the spectacle. They shout back inside and are joined by others through windows and peekholes. The streets become crowded and the cart keeps going and a path is cleared down the middle of the way, a horse steps to the side and above it all, Queen Louise slumps glassy eyed, as her brother's slender arm refamiliarizes her with her world, every home, every porch, the lamp-posts and hitching posts, the flowerbeds and broken seats, the tenting, the wilted green, the mud and the sky, their empty house and twin brothers of twelve whose high-pitched learned voices narrate a homecoming into the world outside the quarantine.

The tracks they left through the mud steamed with love so that years later, a century later, when Louise lay dying in a cold Philadelphia hospital bed, in a new millennium, she turned her neck with some effort and held her doctor's big warm hands and told him about the time her brothers went down to collect her and how they ushered her into a beautiful, beautiful world.

## PERSONALS

2008

We knew the threat was significant when we saw the cover of the New York Review of Books, composed of the photograph of a house, torn into ragged strips, and the image of a bomb: circular, with stubby white wick emerging. The pointed subtitle asked the question: "The End of Locations?"

The cover creaked as a subscription card slid down into my syrup. Hmm. On the first article, evidence of an intruder presented itself in the form of a butter smear. Greyscale pyramids swam in coffee next to a jelly-stained White House. Wife's handiwork. She was under the table, accosting the cat. I nudged her ankle with my toe.

"Is there any coffee left?" I asked.

"Did you read the article I left you?"

"Which one?"

"Did you even look at it?"

"Didn't you just hear me open it?"

"Do you see the corner folded?"

"Do you have to touch Freud like that? It's disgusting."

"He's my kitty."

She lifted him by the shoulders onto the table and adjusted his little glasses, which were clamped to his nose.

"Is there any coffee left?" I asked.

"How should I know?"

She woke up at five every morning to write on the porch. She said she liked the dewy feeling against her eyes. She sat in one of her hobo dresses, legs tucked under, watching Freud rub himself against the leg of a chair. I woke up at four every morning to get wife coffee. For her birthday, I'd bought her a beautiful silver French press with glass and black knobs--it was beautiful! But of course, she couldn't abandon her Dunkin' Donuts coffee, which she said reminded her of her mother.

I knocked Freud off the table and reached for the French press which I would if no one else would. The article was not an article, but a manifesto, a petition of sorts--signed by a number of prominent literary figures. A professional wariness, a banding together. I continued flipping through the book review, while I felt the cool slivers of Freud's glasses against my feet.

We'd gotten him a friend, a catty feline named Janine, who fancied bulging grandma glasses and who was possessed of a daring pink nose, which she kept in the shelter of her shy face. Such was the phrase we'd coined.

I sometimes wondered how *they* would have handled our absurd situation.

Freud from the kitty armchair we'd built him: *Mon cheri, Janine, we've been too long apart!*

He'd gaze at her bewhiskered spectacles. Janine would give herself bodily to the scratch post.

*How I long for you, mon cheri! If only we could be together always!*

Frantic meows, declawed paws batting at a window pane, streaked with tears; a kitty cage in the heft of an arm; stowed in the car, driven away.

Their ovoid eyes meet one last time:

*Janine!*

*Let the distance between us grow to zero!*

With a regal look on his prim face--a white wig over his cat ears--handing down a decree from atop an imposing bookshelf. *Something had to be done*, the crowd would murmur. The word goes out: *We, the people, call for the abolition of locations.*

*No mo', no mo', we'll never sleep apart no mo':* Freud in the body of an old black man, picking the blues on Bourbon Street. Hear his harmonica play, the mournful harp lingers on the empty kitty chair, the dusty scratch post, wrecked like an ancient lighthouse...

My wife called. At my desk, I closed my eyes. It seemed like the instant of the start of time. This is how I imagined it:

*In the beginning, there was a woman. With hay above her curling ear. See her now, suspended in the darkness, head cast down in the whispering cold. The whispering cold cast down her neck, the darkness suspended over her here, the curling hay hears her beginning as she spins slowly in stasis. Caress her fingernail, lilac under membrane. Roam over her, she is here.*

*Next, there is a voice. Like malignant carbon, struck the dark and extended. See them now, the darkness, the woman and the arc. Her breasts and the light, the spinning and the cord connecting, and that's all there is in everything. Sing faster, connecting cord, and spinning light. Abreast the arc, the woman sees herself extended, the dark struck the carbon, the malignant thought is all there is.*

*The two are spinning. See them now.*

"Hi..."

Crackly silence.

"Are you coming home soon?" she asked. I heard her cough. I floated up behind her in the void. I pressed my hands against her shoulders.

"I can get out in like half an hour. What-- why, is there something you want me to do? I can get--"

"I miss you. I'm really stressed out right now."

"Your hands are trembling," I said.

"Who was that in the background--"

"There's no--"

"This is sick, but I can't stand the thought of you talking with other people." She laughed softly. "When someone else makes you laugh, I feel... like, I have to *be* that person."

I laid her down on the couch. Her foot rested on the record player which was still spinning. I felt its motion on her thigh, I heard the circumference scratching.

"I don't really want to be me," she moaned.

"How do you think that makes *me* feel? I fell in love with you-- you, yourself and no one else."

"What are we listening to?" she asked, fingering the speaker casing.

"Janine. David Bowie."

"What year is it?"

"I don't know."

"Where are we?"

Crackling silence.

"I'm at my office," I said softly, sadly.

"And *please* don't get bring home that ridiculous Chinese food? Let's try cooking something nice for a change."

I hung up the phone.

Eighteen years ago, running home in the rain from the Medical Center. Girl falls in a puddle. Boston. All that's left is black paint, matte-finish, and a creeping puddle in a little image painted on the second to last page of the book review.

I must confess, I've always found perverse pleasure in reading the personals in the back of the New York Review of Books. Creaks open from the back.

INTELLECTUAL ODYSSEUS and erotic poet, one-time revolutionary and published author of scholarly works, spends time between South America and Europe, speaks various Indo-European languages, married, seeks mistress or second wife with the full agreement of first wife, a voluptuous, but unsatisfying Bulgarian academic. In vibrant, late middle age; requires witty, extroverted Latina in 30 to 45 range.

or, consider,

HIGHLY EDUCATED female seeks eternal companion, expert letter writer, abolisher of locations, conquistador of distances, a feisty, voracious reader, who knows how to have fun. Late 50's, seeking similar. Photo on request.

and right beside her, in black and white,

CURIOUS AUTODIDACT in the market for literary romance, connoisseur of French cinema and expensive wines. Willing to share the world, but paralyzed from hips down. Seeks fellow disciple of De Maistre--Xavier, not Joseph--a hardened traveler who can handle a taxing 'Journey Around my Room,' someone with whom to spend the time trekking past such landmarks as a comfortable green armchair and double bed. Mid 70's, regretful, but hopeful gentleman, unabashed owner of a colostomy bag.

They seemed to be talking about the cover article, the one with the bomb and the picture in tatters of home and hearth. Watch as the personals' words lift themselves in lines off the page and reach up into the darkness, their voices curling shakily into the shapes of the millions of unpossessed and unloved, highly educated, curious Greek heroes and heroines of the world. Far above them, Freud and Janine hunch with their furry elbows on a floating desk, an announcer's microphone set before them.

*Here we are in the limitless void, Janine, and boy, is it a beautiful day!*

*You said it, Freud, where else could you find such a sight but in a work of literature--countless bodies milling all about in the vague fog of the imagination, and between them and us, an aging wife, held in the tenuous embrace of a faintly unappealing husband by a lifeline of coiled plastic and electricity. A carbon arc!*

*And what about us, Janine, and what about us?*

*I don't even know what to say, Freud. We're here together right now, locations have been wished out of existence and we're all on top of each other at last.*

*He nudged her with his finely-colored tail.*

*Just like that, Janine, you say it and so it comes to pass!*

*We're minor deities, Freud. Let me catch your kitty tear-- I'll never leave you again.*

*Don't look now, Janine, but something's happening down below!*

Eighteen years that never end, where speaking is optional, where I'm in her and she's in me and we're man and wife, spinning languidly. We drove around the block and talked it over. Blondie was playing on the radio. 11:59. We went around the block again. One or both of us was crying. One or both was looking determinedly out the window and someone was driving. I never

wanted to leave. I wanted to never leave. We drove around the block again. A neighbor waved at us. We went around again and I wondered if we could skip from point A to point A and take the limit of the circumference as  $x$  approaches 0. Blondie was singing. The sun was in my eyes, maybe. We went around again.

Wife threw the book review at me. The sun was very yellow in that green and blue morning. We get fixated on moments in time and find in those compressed moments the symbols we come to use to stand in for the whole of our relationships. A single eternal moment comes to define an entire past, like a single location comes to represent a world of twists and turns.

Locations, what's the point?

See: Wife in the heft of another's arm, driven away. Me in the kitty cage watching her go. Rain on the windows, her untears. We drove around the block again.

"Abolish locations?" she asked.

"Yeah."

"But without locations, there would be nowhere left to go."

We drove around the block again.

LOVING HUSBAND seeking wife, willing to sacrifice self for her, whoever she wants to be, wherever. Too old, looking for same.

HOBO WIFE seeking husband, sorry she lost it, regrets questions, looking for answers, we're here together on these pages, it's the closest we'll get to eating up the space between us. At last, loving seeking loved. Must like cats with glasses.

## HURT ME

2008

## Part I,

incessant roaring / furious heat /

As soon as you left  
 I went and wrapped  
 the pillow around my head  
 and felt every muscle relax  
 as I inhaled you.  
 I wanted to spring,  
 legs like spears,  
 arms like flagpoles,  
 because I felt cool  
 you on my skin,  
 you on my shirt.

That lizard coquette, the primal brain,  
 all around us, blinding heat,  
 so as to make us close our eyes,  
 and feel it pressing in on our heads:

heat

unleashing biological chain reactions,  
 so as to keep homeostatic temperature constant:

heat

the lizard brain takes control,  
 and in the murk,  
 everything is hot.

## Part II,

What we learned today, sprawled on the shower floor:

I see your mouthing moving, head falls down,  
 I see your irises, hair, my eyes slide from your face,  
 I try to get up, my eyes drip to the floor,  
 “If you could change anything about me, what would it be?”

That’s all I remember you asking.

“But I love you.”

“There has to be something!”

“But I love you.”

“What would you change?”

“But I love you.”

That means everything, whether you come to me done up

or done down, if you totter off and trip in high heels, if you  
come to me, wide-eyed and unsure, I will make you cry  
    marvelously  
    exhaustively  
    lovingly  
because you make me cry and if I can remember nothing else,

it's that.

That's what I choose to know.

## THE LIFE AND ART OF JEAN RENOIR('S LOVER)

as told by a young girl the summer after graduating from high school  
2008

Renoir is such a lovely name. Hear Renoir and I hear the clattering of pearls and the airy flush of color exhumed. I hear the wrinkled gullet of a society woman calling out a bid in black and white; puckered eyes see the relaxed impressions of greens and trees and the whites of a smile as a nearby table disregards an insubstantial pair of glasses. Then the paws of Jean Renoir encircle me, his tuxedoed chest and lips apart--abashed bear, the voice of everyone's friend. Jean and I fell in love watching *Rules of the Game*. Pierre-Auguste is too skinny for me, Jean I love for his humility, his poetry and the way he can fold me, envelop me, tongue me up and down, close me, stamp me and mail me from my couch to his, with only his face on the screen and the soft clink of a winebottle set on the glass surface of a coffee table.

My living room and I alone plan passionate encounters with Jean Renoir.

\*

I met him for lunch this morning. It might have been at Paneras. We said ten, but he didn't arrive until eleven thirty. I wore heels. We sat and talked, the winebottle between us and I ordered a soup and salad. His shoulder brushed against the iron fencing that could have cordoned off the café from the street, and would have, if it had been that kind of establishment.

I interrogated him concerning the relationship between life and art.

What's the point of seeing you, I asked, there's nothing we can do but talk, work separately, though we toil in the same--

He stopped me there with a kiss. I showed his lips my teeth. It wasn't a grimace, but a smile as I love the scratch of his chin on my face, the way his nose tries to engulf mine.

What's the point of seeing you? Are we going anywhere with this? There's really no next step, I mused and my back arched on its own as his hand slid along my back.

Then I drained his glass for him and poured myself the rest because my stomach was sour because there was no way I was up to talking with Jean Renoir--especially not in this state at this hour.

I went home to nap and think it over. I lay on the very center of my floor on the carpet and investigated the ceiling which felt inexplicably heavy. I rolled over, then reconsidering, fell on my back again. I puckered my lips like I thought Jean Renoir sometimes did.

I woke up at four and went to the bathroom. There I threw up.

\*

Absolutely, I am self-aware. This was the next morning. I'm being ridiculous, I know. But I've got to be on for Jean Renoir. I've got to be enthralling. I'm sure he expects nothing less, or at least, perhaps he doesn't expect perfection, not him, but why should he settle for less?

Met my friends for dinner. I'd called Ellie.

"Hey, bitch, what's up?" I asked her.

"Oh, nothing! Grant's having a thing at his house, I'll probably go to that."

"Oh, what thing?"

"Hey, you coming tonight?" Grant asked Mark. "I need you there. I can't handle them alone."

“Yeah, come with me,” Mark said to Ian. “Ash is going to be there.”

“She’s always fun,” Ian said.

“She’s crazy!”

“Okay, I guess I’ll go,” Mark said to Grant.

“How much liquor can you bring?” Grant asked him. “We’re going to need it.”

They ended up coming over to my place. I hadn’t told them about Jean. I wanted him to be a surprise. I wanted them to like him. He was late.

My friends were in the kitchen.

\*

Thursday:

1 cup of coffee (black, w/ breakfast)

2 glasses of Coke (straw, ice, lunch)

1 cup of coffee (venti, starbucks, mid-afternoon)

3 cups of tea (earl grey, sugar, milk, tea-time, 4 o’clock)

My litany of stimulants. I stared at the liquid in the cup until it turned to crystal in my eyes. I reached for a bottled water. I was coming back from the bathroom when I felt like my legs were going to burst through the floor.

I’d tried to take a nap this morning because I couldn’t fall asleep last night because I worried that I’d be tired.

Wednesday Night/Thursday Morning:

12:00: tired

12:30: uneasy

1:00: suspicious

1:30: anxious

2:00: desperate

2:30: sour stomach

And that only made it worse.

4:45: tears

Then, this morning, I left only a stain of sleepless sweat on my bedcovers. My plants were waving past my window, fluttering against the air conditioner. I had to go out to run. Gets the blood flowing, gets you worked up and ready. Had a banana too--helps with digestion. I brought a bag of fruit and vegetables with me.

Fruits and Vegetables:

1 banana (slightly green near stem)

2 peppers (sliced, but not neatly; one yellow, one red)

½ pineapple (in cubes, more or less)

12 grapes (or thereabouts)

1 small package of carrots  
 ¼ cantaloupe (cool to the tongue)

Snacked on them seated on a park bench. Hydrated at the blue pole water fountain, ran to find a bathroom. That was good, reset the system, flush out the toxins. I was saving my words too--I hadn't spoken a single word to anyone all day, and now I was ready to let them loose. My smile too, I was keeping.

(I did nearly let a word loose when a neighbor's dog leapt into my path, but I wondered at how I would look, scowling and silent, eyes closed, trying to feel my energy, then all of a sudden screaming at this dog, who, admittedly, did deserve it... the thought almost dredged a smile from my lips.)

I stood there at the kitchen door and imagined opening it and seeing my friends seated around the marble countertop (flea market), stealing sugar from the ceramic monkey-skull (India), leaning back in their chairs (mother).

Their eyes would be like the round voice-holes you see at ticket windows, sometimes covered by a mesh of microphone, sometimes open so you can see the clerk beyond.

"Did you hear what Ash did the other day? They put her in a cake at Meghan's birthday party, and she burst out singing, got icing on everyone's face."

I remembered that and everyone's eyes were shining in the same way. My eyes were stale, though, and I was tired. I tried to sit down for a minute, but they all came at me, asking what was wrong, what happened, you look like you're going to cry.

I wanted to sleep, but that could never happen, so I went in.

I lifted the bottle into the air.

"Look who's got the booze!" I shouted. Ian got up, all six feet of him.

"Ash, what have I told you?" He bent down to look me in the face. I giggled and screwed up my nose.

"Look at his face!" I turned to the table.

"She's really going down the wrong path."

Mark was talking to Grant.

"Hm."

"She doesn't know what she's doing," Mark continued, taking a stab at the philosophical, like he had a right to be so serious all of a sudden, as if he was the serious one in the group. "Last night was just bizarre."

"Who are you talking about?" Ellie asked.

"A cousin of mine."

"You dirty Italians, it's all about the family," I said.

"Oh, Ash," said Ian.

"Ash, why do you open your mouth?" asked Grant. He held a serious face for a few seconds before it shattered.

"Pass that to me, I want to get drunk!" said Ellie, and who could blame her?

At least it was all going according to plan, no one was out of it, everything was just as it was supposed to be, if only Jean Renoir would get here.

"Ash, what did I tell you?"

Look, absolutely, I am self-aware. I wear high heels for them. I make my jokes--I love my friends too much to lose them. I show them who they fell in love with and I like myself better this way, I'm funny, quick, shameless--I love my personality, it's just hard to keep it up. I want to explode in their company. I want to smile for them, I want to be their laughter.

I giggled and screwed up my nose.

They don't change for me, I don't think. But that's what identity is all about--we are who we decide to be. We make ourselves, we make our choices and stick to them, that's how we define our values. I've decided who I want to be. That person just takes a little more work.

\*

At last, Jean came in.

Thursday (cont'd):

8 chocolate covered espresso beans

1 glass of red wine

3 glasses of hard lemonade

"I just want to have a good time."

Jean came in and the room went up in roar. The boys took to him immediately. I think they liked him better than they liked me.

Once Jean and I decided to go on a picnic. I showed him my wicker picnic basket with the little gold clasps, that went from plus sign to minus sign, and I showed him the belt that buckled in snugly a pair of plates, the hoops that hugged two sets of silverware (fork, spoon, knife) to the cushioned top of the basket. He untied the restraints from the inner box and took out two wineglasses. He rinsed them for me, in my kitchen, and leaning over the counter, poured me a glass, because, he said, the shape of the glass and the condensation on the white wine bottle made it impossible to wait until the picnic blanket was spread. We got in my Toyota and, after belting the picnic basket in the backseat, we drove off to lunch.

I could see the picnic spot in my head. It was all misty, golden with suspended pollen and birds. It was close and at the time, in my kitchen, I really couldn't think of anywhere else, with Jean Renoir leaning against the fridge, right beside my nineteen forties reproduction telephone.

Behind a nearby elementary school lies a tangled patch of woods, between the town and 295. Trails marked in yellow and white slashes forage past a creek like a tear in a shirt to a makeshift bridge, over which we dangled. The spot I'd seen in the forest was close and, a few minutes later, deep in the woods, Jean was barreling down the trail, but as he came to each overhanging branch or vine, a surprising gentleness would overcome him, and he'd bend low in deference, then turn to me to make sure I was okay.

The path continued, past the morning of the plants which roofed the low ground, the softness of the trees and their still harness which the sky had brought to ride the earth as the vastness of June struck the distance of the clouds. The paint speckles of the undergrowth and the suspicious ceramic impurities of the muddy shore leapt out as the path began to trickle and drip, finally running its tiny course, leaving the emptiness of unchecked plants. I knew there was that spot to find, a clearing hedged by leftover couches, and logs arranged for sitting, but I'd forgotten a blanket and I'd worn shorts, and there were thorns crossing our path and poison ivy,

which I'd never learned to recognize, and it was tickling at every step. We'd gone a long way and I considered even turning back to the elementary school, but instead of choosing either to keep searching the woods by the highway or retreating in defeat, we settled for a log stretching across the path, balancing our plates on the curve of the wood and the curve of our thighs. We talked, legs wrapped around the log, facing each other, but the spires and columns, decorated squares and boulevards, gleamed too whitely in the afternoon light for us to concentrate. We left then, heads bowed, and I dragged the picnic basket to the back of my car.

\*

Mark fell asleep on the floor of my kitchen. His head was directly against the floor and his thick legs and big sneakers were twisted against a cabinet. I dragged him despairing into the shadow which ensnared the second half of the kitchen, and there he lay beneath the skylight, wondering why there were so few stars. His lips were still philosophizing when they grew quiet. Mark fell asleep in my bed, the covers made beneath him, Cat Stevens playing in the background, while I tried to preserve a love letter for Jean Renoir.

A few days later, I was waitressing on a boat that goes up and down the Delaware River. Sometimes I'll tend the bar, distribute soda to teenagers, and wash the interiors of glasses, inspecting the dirty spots where they blush. That's what I did that night, anyway. After my shift, I went out and sat with the revelers at an empty table. It was about three. Summer was out, but the wind on the water was chilly and I pulled on a sweatshirt, hugging it around myself. I embraced my cup of coffee and nuzzled the thin red straw which tickled me back with a lazy curl of steam. My hair was in my eyes. On the deck above me, high schoolers were tossing metal café chairs off the boat's edge. I could hear the splashes.

A couple was sitting a few tables away. The girl was short, thin, wrapped in a thick black coat, leaning on the guy's shoulder. She talked quietly, not like she was trying to fill the silence out of fear of not filling the silence and what that could mean, but because she genuinely felt the night worth communicating. She would lift her neck up and duck beneath his chin in excitement, and look up at his brown papered cigarette, which he brought to his mouth grasped between his thumb and forefinger. He had long hair and she tangled her hand in it as he exhaled, his chest growing easy in exhilaration, his fingers moving faster, and her pupils dilating and her cheeks flushing, and her legs deeply loosening because this was just too *hot*.

They got up to explore one another and I placed myself and Jean at their empty table. Me mousy, I had my cute haircut, the black hair that curls around my ears, and I knew he would like my freckles. Between us sat a pot of coffee. We could both feel the warmth of the pot on our cheeks, on our eyelids. My legs were cold in my tight jeans and I felt the abandoned factories which lined the Delaware, and the ghost ships and the undersides of bridges blowing freezing air on the indentation at the back of my neck.

I took the steam rising from the coffeepot to be my canvas and with a painted fingernail I sketched a manifesto for my art. I took it to be a picture of my life: where once I looked forward only to those off moments when I could sketch myself in the steam, now all I looked forward to was the sight of Jean Renoir even in the stream. Jean's nose was my sundial and I read my hours off his face. Sixty minutes no longer made an hour for me, but one hundred ten minutes, the length of time it takes to watch *Rules of the Game*. Back then it was easy, I could sit and watch him alone, half-asleep, huddled in the corner of the couch, stuffed between the cushions. But one

day, he came out of the movie for me, and suddenly the steam I used to see around myself was gone. I had poured myself the last of the pot of coffee, drained the last of the Styrofoam cups, and the steam was gone from my face and kids who had been hurling chairs off the side of the boat sat down at my empty table.

\*

Thursday (cont'd):

- 1 headache (pressing in from all sides)
- 2 aspirin (child safety cap difficulty misjudged)
- 2 cups of green tea
- 3 glasses of cool water

After they left my house, Ellie and Grant hooked up. I tried not to watch and I decided, sitting beside them in a theater at four AM (reverse matinee, snuck in via back entrance), that I had to go off coffee for a bit.

Grant loves someone else, but he also loves Ellie, who loves him absolutely and who can't do anything about it. They've known each other for years and the possible paths their relationship can properly take has trickled to a drip. Grant and Ellie are both leaving for college soon, and Thursday night was their send-off party. Grant is engaged to someone else, but he touched Ellie gently that night, and she took him in and kissed him forever. Grant had to stop it, but he didn't want to. Then we went to see a movie, all of us. Grant drove and he couldn't stop shouting. He was trying to be hilarious, and he talked in a pirate voice with a magic marker pirate beard, and he couldn't stop roaring and Ellie sat in the passenger seat and looked carefully, carefully out the window and wished she could die, like the Sibyl in the cage.

The rest of us sat in the back.

That was the situation.

Grant was going crazy and he couldn't stop himself, and Ellie was just sitting there. And there I was, paralyzed by too many drinks, and my heart was thumping out of rhythm from too many shots, and Ian held me as I nearly threw up again. If I could have made a joke and laughed or made fun of Grant and smiled at Ellie, things would have been different, but I couldn't get up and the fear of ruining things in my state at this hour kept me in Ian's arms, slave to his strength and the mercilessness of my weary chemicals. Mark cracked a window and the violent vibrations of highway air were screaming something significant at us.

In another time, people were sitting all around me on the prow of the ship, *The Spirit of Philadelphia*, and each one was writing their own story as they sat staring off into the night air, examining themselves in relation to those whom they loved or wished to love. Each one was sending their love, their passion, their discomfort into the void of the night sky, into the deep trash of the river; each one was waiting for the parabola to arc, for the anchor to strike bottom, the vibrations in their stomach, in their heart, in their throats giving them all they needed to know about what to do, what to say, if only it could be interpreted, translated from a series of nauseating waves into the sad hardness of resolve. Their stories came all together, cut up and interspersed, by circumstance and time.

Sometimes when I look at Jean, he's all mine, his front and back. Other times, I'll walk around him slowly and see he's flat like a projection, like he's taken the television screen along

with him and allowed himself to be projected. I want him! I want him in three dimensions. I want him in all. But Jean only allows me to see his smile, entering, and the back of his head, walking away.

Ian wants to go camping with Jean. He was telling me all about how they sat around talking for too much of the night.

\*

Finally, Jean came into the kitchen.

My eyes opened up and I sat forward in my seat, and when I breathed, I tried to catch the currents racing around the room with my breath. My chest reached out when my friends looked at me as if I were six, we were at a Massachusetts wine factory tour and I fell off the truck. My arms were bruised, my dress was torn, I broke into the bottling facilities, and was crushed under an avalanche of corks. Dry, unused corks. That night I saw a moth which looked like bark on a white door. Dad took a picture of me and the moth invades the frame beside me.

I was dressed all in sweats. Lined up on the couch--felt the knobby basement moist cushions. Lined on the couch, all seven of us and Addie in her black bra dripping in front of us. Seven of us, like little baby birds, beaks outstretched neatly, open necks waiting for mother.

*Place a pill in my mouth.*

All but Jean. Jean was there, turning a stained cork around in his fingers. He was there and Ian. Addie went down the line. We, they gulped it down, unfamiliar faces. Jean was looking at me, I saw Addie getting closer, and my face flushed. My ears started to burn from the smoke, the basement. My eyes closed, and she set a pill in my mouth and I swallowed, waiting for the feeling. The back of my neck shook with sweat. All I really wanted--really, deep down, this is all I wanted--I wanted to be alone with Jean. We had a story to continue.

Then Addie came to him. I could see him reflected upside down in the little metal piece of her bra. Her jeans were repulsive, her legs repressed, her lips were wet; her bony hand and bracelet offered him a pill, and her eyes were solid poppies.

“Hello,” said Jean, and the cork in his hands could have been a cigarette. So suave.

“What?”

“No, thanks,” he said, smiling. Five faces turned to him. Ian was shaking, his massive shoulders trembling on the headboard.

“So you’re just going to sit there?”

“Don’t worry about me.”

Jean leaned back and crossed his legs. The cushions were too big. They all had to sit forward or sleep back. Addie rubbed her thigh.

“What the fuck.”

She dripped onto the couch beside me and swallowed two pills before she melted into the cracks of the cushions and, moaning, disappeared. It took about a minute for what we’d taken to kick in. Jean’s eyes looked at mine, dilating, two distinct explosions of dust.

Then I was falling diagonally, and the room streaked past me, and I was burrowing into the couch in my sweats, Jean was holding me. I felt my lips mouthing, “Hold me, hold me, hold me.” I felt so large in his arms, but I’m so small, and I wished I could be doing anything other than that, what a terrible mistake I’d made, and there was no way to get out! Crying on the couch, no way out, everyone alone, glassy eyed across the room, slack like silent flowers in a

meadow. No one was talking and all I wanted was my conversation to be coherent, the only conversation, the only story there was, reinforced by three pears, mint tea and a bear hug.

The next day I was tired and couldn't even make out the steam from my coffee through squinted eyes.

Jean came into the kitchen at last.

"Hey, Jean, sit down," Ian said, offering him a chair.

"We've all heard so much about you," said Grant.

I felt the day laid out before me, a series of highs and lows, demarcations of waking and sleeping, allotments of hours to waste until the moment of signification arrives.

Ellie was looking at Grant and I wanted to go over and bite Jean's lip, tug his belt against me, but I couldn't do it in front of my friends, so I reached out my hand. And when my song came on the radio, blaring, I sang so loud--and Ellie sang too--that they all covered their ears, and muttered that I was crazy. But I couldn't hear them, I was singing so loud that I'd forget they were all staring at me and I might be able to be exactly who I wanted to be, and I might be able to be happy, happy not on paper, but in real life, and the sound in my throat let me do that. My eyes were closed, at last, even to Jean, and I was looking as if at one of his father's paintings, as if through an insubstantial pair of glasses.

"Ash, why do you open your mouth?"

I do it for this, when we're sitting in a circle around a table and we've lost what we wanted to say to one another, but we still talk, joke and gesture from the same old script, because it's a sign and the thing signified is a shout in the dark, "I'm here, I'm still here."

So, I choose life, not art. Days are not preserved for posterity. Days are defined by the next coming of Jean, by lists and litanies,

by library fines

by video rental fees

by Netflix queues

by the time it takes the caffeine to rip away the mufflers from my temples to the time it runs out of my body and

by the solitude of pen and paper

by the spilled tea on a composition book

by the length of a lead pencil

because if I didn't commit Jean to paper, our sordid affair could have continued indefinitely, and that just wouldn't have been sustainable.

## NOTES IN LIEU OF THE GLORIOUS REVOLUTION

2008

“Historically, the ‘flower’ seems first to have been the promise of a fruit, not a thing itself.” – *The Culture of Flowers*, Jack Goody, p. 17.

“The revolt is contained by overexposure: we are given it to contemplate so that we shall forget to participate.” – *On the Poverty of Student Life, Situationist International and Students of Strasbourg University*

“There was music in the cafés at night, and revolution in the air...” – *Tangled Up in Blue*, Bob Dylan

“I heard it from a friend: / the Revolution never happened. / Sigh.” – *Over And Over Again (Lost And Found)*, Clap Your Hands Say Yeah

All recipes taken from *A BOOK OF Fruits & Flowers SHEWING The Nature and Use of them, either for Meat or Medicine*, LONDON: Printed by M.S. for Tho: Fenner at the South entrance of the Royall Exchange, London, 1653.

## I

*The Use of Conserve of Marigolds*

Revolution, at that point, like Love, was less of a physical thing than a state of mind. We were revolutionaries then, from the oil in our hair, to the sweaty linen of our shirts, to the way we wished our breaths appeared, huddled as we were around blazing garbage cans and outmoded Marxist rhetoric. Sitting in faux-Petersburg, it often got quite hot.

We took for our symbol that summer the Marigold—Flo, our cook, suggested it, the sugar still studding her hands—“Conserve of Marigolds, good for Melancholy, cureth the trembling and shaking of the heart,” and we needed it: dry passion had desiccated our love and we gasped the vacuum of loneliness in air as hot as ovens.

We all became cooks that winter and with our new occupation we assumed new names. Stravinsky’s idea: waiter fleets as revolutionary vanguard. But following Flo’s recipes proved more fulfilling to us, so we broke into kitchens with Lady Flo, her grey arms coming loose occasionally and dripping into the dishes she stirred. She found her old recipes in her attic, I guess, at the foothills of dust-capped mountains... all of them inexplicably calling for rose-water, some archaic ingredient as common as table salt then now reduced to the mere implication of a fragrance. We made our meals, the three of us and she, and sometimes we were joined by others peeking through kicked-in doors.

It was late, the kitchen we’d co-opted was sweltering and suffocating pillows of hot air strangled us as we dashed in and out: our radical corps offered hot food and pamphlets on the lawn. We got skinny that summer; Flo managed to wring the excess out of us, between the recipes and her rages, and besides, the food we cooked was foul. We—and I should say I at this point, any ‘we’ is deceptive—I hung wreathes above each door. The leaves, each ensnared by the arms of the next, unraveled and unstrung, descended lightly onto cakes, into soups, smudging

wineglasses, concealing crystal.

Stravinsky was trying to push his head into the wall. Ivy decorated his shoulders, the steam that condensed behind his eyebrows curling his tie, like a warning sign. I walked him out into the hallway. Sitting against the cinderblocks, his head looked like it felt full of the same steam which bogged down the ceiling fans behind us.

“Man, you don’t know the half of it,” he said.

“Tell me.”

“No.”

“How bad could it be?”

“You wouldn’t want to know me if you knew,” Stravinsky said, “the things I did to her.”

I poked my head into the kitchen to make sure Flo was occupied. I’d promised her that we’d be cooking all day.

“I thought you weren’t talking to her.”

“She contacted me, she called me.”

“What did she say?”

“She said she wanted to try being friends.”

“And what did you do—”

“Look,” he said, trying to drill into his eyes with his fingers. When he didn’t continue, I went on, “You didn’t, like—”

“What do you think I did?”

“I mean, you didn’t draw her into something—if you had her confidence... just to prove you could?” I said in the only tone of voice I could.

“Who do you think I am?”

“You said I wouldn’t even want to know you!”

“No—look, I never told anyone this, and it wasn’t a big deal, really—I’ve had really good distractions.”

“What?”

“I did things for her, it was months ago, when she was running away from me, back home.”

“What did you do?”

He leaned forward.

“You’re always were right, why so sad, I guess I really am, you said it all the time. I cut myself, so there.”

I laughed.

“Okay, calm down,” I said, “I’m sorry I said anything—just tell me what you did.”

He looked at me.

“Don’t make me guess, please.”

“I just told you.”

“Come on, we’ve got to go back in, what is it?”

“I guess I joke with you too much for you to take me seriously. I’m not joking, I really cut myself.”

Honestly, I can’t remember the scene out there in the hallway against the wall warm with cooking. All I can recall are the words in my writing book as I rewrote our dialogue. I don’t know what our faces looked like or how we looked to each other. There’s just the words we said, like the transcript of a conversation online or a string of text messages, stamped with a time and date.

“I cut myself.”

“That’s seriously not good.”

“I know.”

“I don’t know what to say.”

“I had to do something, that month was a really bad time for me, you know that and I want you to know that it was you who helped me out of it, even if you didn’t know it.”

“I never even knew.”

We exchanged the necessities, the blankets and quilts of encouragement and support, frayed coverings of friendship. Some things had to be said, there’s a formula to follow for those conversations and we spoke the formula to the ceiling, unable to look at one another, except in the speckled pattern of the ceiling plaster.

“I think I’ve given you the wrong impression,” he said after a long silence.

“Please go on.”

“It wasn’t—it was only twice, it wasn’t my wrists, it was my thigh, where no one could see, and I’d never ever do it again.”

“How many times did you do it?”

“Twice. And then I went and showed it to her to prove I loved her.”

“What did she say?”

“She just started crying. And then... we just didn’t talk for a couple weeks.”

“That makes me feel a lot better. Look, still, you don’t need to do that ever again. You’ll never be alone while I’m around.”

He looked at me with those tired, nova eyes.

“We were together for over a year and I lost all my friends for her.”

“And then you got me,” I said. He clenched his fist against the carpet.

“I’m just saying I’ll always be alone without her.”

Silence.

The conversation continued along tired lines and we reconstructed our friendship from the raw materials of his depression. I agreed never to tell anyone what he told me. But I wrote him into my pages where the names may be changed in the spirit of art. The revolution was coming and everything had to be preserved.

***A Medicine for sore blood-shotten and Rhuemattick eyes.***

*Take ground Ivy, Daises, and Celedony, of each a like quantity, stamp and straine out the juice out of them, and put to it a little brown Sugar Candy dissolved in white Rose-water, and drop two or three drops of this liquor at one time into the grieved eye, with a feather, lying upon the back when you doe it an hour after, this is a most approved Medicine to take away all Inflammations, Spots, Webbs, Itches, Smartings, or any grieffe whatsoever in the eyes.*

Chesterton, MD—mostly serpentine highway and onrushing cornfields, jimmied with snow. Every thirty yards or so along the road, the state has placed little plastic safety shelters, tiny lean-tos, three walls of plastic and an overhanging roof. Pedestrians caught in the non-place between destinations can sit inside and watch the rain fall, elbows on their knees and gaze beyond the stained glimmer of the Chesapeake, beyond the spattered glaze of gnats and mosquitoes, to the bulge of the ChesNuc nuclear reactor, a cold war grey, corseted, spewing an overcast sky into heavens the color of a dead boy’s blue eyes. Outward from the silo, beside mile markers and speed limits, radiate small white and indigo signs reading ESCAPE ROUTE, above

arrows urgently gesturing forward.

Packed into a Jeep, we saw it on the way to Roses, a kind of department store down in Maryland where the checkout counter blocks half the entrance and they inspect your bags on the way out. The carpeted floor sleeps with mildew and the shelves, when not disordered, are simply empty, the white painted metal toying with its own perforations. Lanky blacks in oversized Polo shirts stack consumer Monets beside dusty heaps of pre-used tricycles.

I met Susan Sontag near the racks of cheap CDs. *The Greatest Hits of the 1950's*. That's what first brought me to Roses. Her face was beside a half-empty Coke can attracting flies at eye level. *Truck Driver Queen*—a compilation. I was flipping through the three dollar deals looking for something unknown. Every seedy record store had to have its shelves of used CD's raided, album covers inspected—*Country Hymns for the Red, White and Blue*—youth disillusioned by tradition. Descriptions, through rare to find, were invaluable in making a selection but often the song titles were all a CD needed to communicate a youthful cynicism, irony, humor—poetry if it was really special. The titles, broken up by the digits of song lengths, were often a little awkward, but you had to give artists a little understanding, a little patience to get past what they created to see what they meant.

The beginning of my relationship with Susan Sontag was marked by the opening of a book. At the time, I pressed leaves in a thick writing notebook Stravinsky had given me for the anniversary of the beginning of the Revolution—the scents of the leaves widening the ruled lines of the page, their concealed debris crackling in the binding. That was the situation for nearly a year. Then, the night Susan and I first kissed I began to remove my pressed leaves, one at a time, and to replace them with writing—not reminiscences, not diary entries, nothing so simple, but stories, fantasies like dreams in which I worked through my problems in fiction, and when these little stories were told I could move on and understand Susan and, once understood, her cheeks blushed with my love.

Roses kept us coming back. By the end of the month, we'd appropriated a seventy-five dollar fold-out polyester camping suite next to a shelf of canned beans. It was warm. We could sleep. It was to be our headquarters.

***To take away the cause of the paine in the Teeth.***

*Wash the mouth two or three times together in the morning every moneth, with White-wine wherein the root of Spurge hath been sodden, and you shall never have paine in your Teeth.*

I have always wanted to be a revolutionary. I have suffered the injustices of the American school system, the entrapment of modern suburbia, the inescapable miasma of popular culture with little more than the biting of the inside of my cheek, the grinding of my teeth. For nineteen years I've raged. My eyes have been open and my mouth may have been open, but my ears were as well. I *know* radical change has never worked, I have seen the poisonous afterimages of 1789, the sickening failures of 1848, the terrible mistakes of 1917. Marx, yesterday's fool, holds no sway over my thoughts. I bought what they sold in Econ 101, I recognize that gradualism really works, that incentivization and the moderate, tempered capitalism of the modern democratic nations has created a world of widespread prosperity unknown in any other time on earth, has delivered more than all the radical communists put together have ever been able to offer.

I recognize all that and I recognize the futility of revolution in the United States in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, I recognize all this, but the images of fire and destruction fill me with yearning, yet the words drive me mad, and I get shivers down my spine when I think of McKinley's

assassination by radical anarchists and all the discontented of the world and the soft, flabby provincialism of everyone around me.

How content, how complacent they are to ‘enjoy’ themselves, their music, their clothes, their taste so unremarkable and undifferentiated from anyone else’s in any meaningful way. As if all there were in life was pleasure! There *is* a higher Truth! And I’m not talking God. There is a truth to society that must be uncovered, the sand blown away, the sad ruins exposed, the layers of rotten supports revealed that let millions live their lives asleep—I hate them for it, I love to hate them for it—it excites me—it arouses me—and I want to fuck them over, I want to fuck them all!

But that’s no plan. This generation of revolutionaries, my generation has no plan, only passions and playlists—Mikhail Bakunins of the iPod age where the self exists in a post-ideological world defined not by philosophy, but by the music we listen to, the films we watch, the books we read or don’t. We are captains of a Cultural Revolution that exists and does not exist at the same time. It cannot exist in reality, on the steps of the Capitol or at the doors of the Federal Reserve, but it can in our heads and in our collective consciousness and in the Cultural Revolution, that’s all that matters.

This was what we concocted, our recipe for the delicious chaos of upheaval: vans in eleven cities across America: Philadelphia, Boston, Chicago, Miami, Austin, San Francisco, Denver, Portland, New Orleans, Washington D.C., and New York City. Attached to the roof of each unmarked vehicle: a loudspeaker, a three petaled plastic flower, the poison ivy of revolt. And our vans in twelve cities would drive up and down the streets from dawn till dusk on December 14<sup>th</sup>, blaring to all the dissatisfied and discontented of America’s urban wastes: *The Revolution Is Here!* And in the Cultural Revolution, to say it is here is to mean it is here.

You see, I am the one who cried while reading the first page of Isaiah Berlin’s *Russian Thinkers*, “...Nevertheless the year 1848 is a turning-point in the development of Russia as of Europe, not only because of the decisive part played in subsequent Russian history by revolutionary socialism, heralded by the Manifesto composed by Marx and Engels to celebrate its birth; but more immediately because of the effect which the failure of the European revolution was destined to have upon Russian public opinion, and in particular upon the Russian revolutionary movement.” This isn’t some story I’m reading, on page one, but actual history—this really happened! Can’t you feel that glorious weight of history pressing down on you like the weight of a lover? It’s enough to make one weep, not out of despair—history is not a nightmare, Stephen—but out of recognition, understanding, realization, massive involuntary apprehension that there is one great story to be written, greater than every novel—the story of history, and revolution is its build-up, climax and dénouement.

When I see the phrase “The Great French Revolution,” my entire body tingles, from the mold of my cheek to the arch of my breast to the summit of my skull. My eyes ring hot with tears and I gasp and say, “There it is!” So much meaning for so many people, least of all for me. I can feel power beyond any magic of fantasy coursing through me: this is my romance. And I’m brimming with sights: hordes of people, gunpowder, the great conflagrations of Europe and Asia, flags, freedom, bonnets rouges and the sweat of the brow—Liberty turns me on. Justice is my bitch. Abstractions are like people to me, they touch me and feel me, defile and degrade me, inflame and confuse me. I want to fuck the sky, the people, be carried bodily on the wave of a mob. I am both the birth and death of the intellect. I am philosophy’s whore.

***To make a sweet Cake, and with it a very sweet water.***

*Take Damask Rose leaves, Bay leaves, Lavinder tops, sweet Marjerome tops, Ireos powder,*

*Damask powder, and a little Musk first dissolved in sweet water, put the Rose leaves and hearbs into a Bason, and sprinkle a quarter of a pint of Rose-water among them, and stirring them all together, cover the Bason close with a dish, and let them stand so covered, all night, in the morning Distill them, so shall you have at once an excellent sweet water, and a very fine sweet Cake to lay among your finest linnen.*

Roses provided the hospitality dead to the modern world. It's still alive in underdeveloped, less civilized countries, where a traveler can walk in a day from one village to another and find a hot meal and a warm bed in the home of a stranger. But here only Roses took us in for the night. They gave the needy shelter, even if they were unaware of it.

In a kind of symmetry, by day we brought hospitality to the people by force—guerrilla chefs, we cooked them meals in their own kitchens; radical conversationalists, we made them talk to us, revived the dead art of conversation and evangelized the coming revolution. We did this in homes outside Philadelphia, all the way down to Maryland.

We met Picasso, one of the oldest to deal with us—and he stayed for a week, longer than anyone else. He was a lawyer from South Jersey with a shaven head and baggy jeans, one back pocket tie-dyed in three colors. Favorite meal: bow-ties with bolognaise. There he is—he's out cold right now, one big arm hanging out onto my sleeping bag, his shoulder leaning against a tiki torch providing some illumination after security has vacated the premises.

He has a young son, whom he'd stolen from his estranged wife (saw her wasted at a party, screaming for someone to fuck her) and conveyed down to Chesterton for his re-education. His son sleeps with Flo, enshrined in the magma of her dress. He follows her around religiously, showering kisses on her ankles and knees.

We talked on fold-out chairs earlier that night, his sandals falling off and his head bent over his black button-down. From time to time he would produce a camera from some decrepitude of a bag and snap a picture of me, humming approvingly at the screen.

"Why do you come here?" I asked him. He had a way of smiling without actually moving his mouth.

"Well, at a certain point you need things to do."

"But this is miles out of your way—"

"Right, man, but I don't want to lose touch with you guys. God, I remember you when you were six, dude, and if I stay at home, I sit around and feel old. You know, I like you all much more and Christopher needs a good influence. You know what I caught him doing the other day?"

"What?"

"He was waiting at the door, he wanted to go to Toys 'R Us."

"For what?"

"Nothing, he just wanted to go with some friend of his, to that giant monster of a store. Can you imagine all that plastic shit? And then Danielle took him, we go into the huge fight, it was brutal, man."

"I can't imagine anyone ever arguing with you."

"Is that so?"

"So what did you do?"

"I took Chris down here—took the batteries out of my cell phone."

"You just left?"

"No, dude," he said it like it was one word, "I left her a note, she thinks we came down to

fish. I couldn't do that to her.”

He went to talk to Pushkin and Botticelli, two old friends of mine, new recruits.

Then there was Proust and John Cage, Brecht and Joyce. Joyce was beautiful and carried around with him in a circle the pictures of his five beautiful children, like dreams. He wanted to save them from a life of servitude, he wanted to give them a taste of glory, so he came down here to Chesterton.

But in the end, they all left us, our plans dribbling out of their mouths, our pamphlets papering their kitchen floors. Then, it was just Stravinsky, Susan Sontag and I. And Flo—Flo was a compulsive baker. We found her smoking in a parking lot, surrounded by spilled boxes of fourth of July sparklers. She baked her grief into lemon squares and brownies, stuffing Acme baking supplies into oversized tote bags she'd lifted from thrift shops.

“Hi,” she said to us. Susan clutched my arm. Igor had to step back from the smell of rotten eggs and milk. We were on the bad side of the parking lot, lots of emptiness and ugly stares. Flo was wearing a black skirt and a limp white blouse. Her grey arms were bare and we could see thin scars from her wrists to her elbows in the shapes of pickup sticks and Greek decorations.

“You probably think I'm a big a loser, right?”

That was the first time I saw her.

The three of us, Susan, Stravinsky and I, conferred at the dinner table. As I watched my best friend and girlfriend talk, I tried to identify those aspects of myself which were attractive to her, because I really loved to see her smile and to see her smile for him made me shatter. I loved Stravinsky, we slept on each other's shoulders on bus rides, wrote songs together, polemics, learned to make pancakes on the same Sunday afternoon. But to see them get along so well, to like the same things—and for her to see how we adopted each other's mannerisms (Am I imagining things? Is my concept of her conception of me not nuanced enough?)—I wanted to hate her. He's so friendly, and I'm so weak. If only I could itemize, put down in bullet points exactly why she loves me. Then I could do those things forever and we'd never have to fall out of love.

### ***To Preserve Roses or any other Flowers.***

*Take one pound of Roses, three pound of Sugar, one pint of Rose water, or more, make your Syrupe first, and let it stand till it be cold, then take your Rose leaves, having first clipt off all the white, put them into the cold Syrupe, then cover them, and set them on a soft fire, that they may but simper for two or three hours, then while they are hot put them into pots or glasses for your use.*

Imagine, if you will, a perfectly white room. Now run black siding along the creases of the walls. Scoop out overhead lights, draw out white light and encircle their molding with black. Set down a bed frame in the center of the room against the wall and build a bed from the inside out: mattress, white sheets, a black bedspread lacerated by a design of six white squares. Fluff four pillows in two layers, the slips curling with black lace and race off-tone stripes across the bulge of their faces. Rear from the floor a black wood table, an ellipse, glimmering in the light, and spin a black office chair into one corner beside a silver crane light. Opposite that corner heave a bureau, pinch out silver knobs from its firmament. Topple off its face enough black wood for a bowed chair and generate silver-white fabric in strips separated by black for the seat. Insert whatever else you will into the room but leave all the furniture in place, and float above the bed

in its central location and behold the black and whiteness, the ink and possibility of this room, a brilliant cube floating through a television screen of darkness. Then take one pound of roses and array on the bed the pink and redness of their petals. Then take three pounds of sugar and place the sweetness in the mouths of two lovers and anoint their sweet, sticky bodies with one pint of rose-water. See one lingering phrase of color in a beach drained of life.

Isn't it a little program that we develop, a program we run each and every time? A collection of gestures and witticisms, calculated to make a girl laugh here, grow silent there, an algorithm that directs a kiss to the ear, a sip of wine, an *I love you*. The same jokes work on each new lover and the great paradox is that behind each stage of the program we run, we can have all sorts of feelings: a simple lust, disdain, curiosity, love? That we can hide the strongest emotions behind the most impersonal performances is a cause of both great consternation—to all women who catch sight of both an evening and matinee performance—and guilt, that one isn't being entirely earnest with one with whom one might want to spend the rest of one's life. Given all that, why do we do it? Because it *works*.

When the first night was over, Susan Sontag's hand was on my chest and I could smell the glow of her hair. Just above the scaffolding of the blanket I could see her nipples, two rose petals stranded in an expanse of soft white. Walking around the rest of the day, I would stare wonderingly at impassive strangers, marveling that they didn't come up and hug me or shout with me for how could they not know something so wonderful had just occurred.

Neither of us was ready, but I wanted to be inside her and to fill her up and see her belly grow, for what is a woman, but the promise of a child. I wondered if it were possible. I saw my friends, my family and acquaintances spread out before me like dishes on a table, in differently shaped bowls, squares, rectangles, circles, ellipses—filled with food of different tastes, textures, colors and smells. And I saw them all in relation to myself and Susan Sontag, plates, silverware, glasses and napkins set out by the conventions of etiquette.

***To make all kinde of turned works in fruitage, hollow.***

*Take the strongest bodyed Sugar you can get, boyle it to the height of Manus Christi, take your stone, or rather pewter moulds, being made in three pieces; tye the two great pieces together with Inkle, then poure in your Sugar being highly boyled, turne it round about your head apace, and so your fruitage will be hollow, whether it be Orange, or Lemmon, or whatsoever your Mould doth cast, after they be cast you must colour them after their naturall colours.*

There was a party on the green. It was by the old church yard—whitewashed Puritan churches and bed and breakfasts surrounded a lawn crisscrossed by sidewalks. I was walking from a plastic bowl of ice, carrying a drink through crowds of Massachusetts college students, when I beheld Lady Flo for the second time. She was wearing a loose-fitting quilt-like bag which left her arms and shins bare, and was lying on her back, breathing to the beat of the music. Her glasses, little ovals, reflected the outdoor strobe light and were all misted over from the wet curiosity of her eyes. Around her shoulders was an afghan woven from reeds like a hula skirt.

A girl stormed past me with others, the pimples of her buttocks visible below her jeans. Through the crowd, I saw Flo, the noise of people around me isolating her like the image in a picture frame.

I walked determinedly, but unsteadily towards her. I sat down on the granite and turned my neck to look at her when she disappeared. I closed my eyes. Stravinsky was trying to pick up girls, he said his old girlfriend taught him to dance and he did it disgustingly—girls told him he

was really something all the time. I was trying to ignore him, but then it was time to go and there he was, trailing listlessly behind me, when Flo leapt out of the shrubbery of a milling group and flung her arms against my chest.

“I want to make you clothes!” she said.

“What?”

“Let’s be friends, I’ll make clothes for you.”

I looked at her.

“What kind of clothes?”

“I don’t know—good clothes. Better than what you’re wearing. Just you have to wear whatever I give you.”

“Well, what kind of clothes do you make?” I asked, glancing at her skirt. “I can’t make any guarantees.”

Her eyes darkened.

“Whatever.”

It was as if she had unzipped a costume and fluttered out of it like a dove. I looked around me and ran after her winged form. I caught up and turned her around. She stood very straight and moved stiffly, recoiling from my touch.

“Okay. I’ll wear whatever you want. Make me clothes,” I said.

“Oh my god, yes!”

Flo took me by the hands and sat me down on the granite.

“Let’s talk—or not, I hate talking,” she offered

“So you cook, you make clothes...”

“Actually, I mostly cook, I cook everything I eat. I just do clothes when I’m bored.”

“What—why did you decide—“

“I got tired of like, seeing three people wearing the same shirt every day. You wear my stuff and you won’t look like anyone else—that’s what you want right?”

She pulled out a silver case filled with Kools. She lit one and blew the smoke at the moon and the echoes of music above us. It was very film noir.

“God, I fucking hate people,” she said, “See, I like you, we’re the same—we drink occasionally, but we hate being drunk. We smoke pot when we can’t deal with things and we want to forget. We use our walls as canvasses.”

I’d said nothing of the sort. She took another drag of her cigarette and pinched herself.

“What do you think about revolution?” I asked her, looking her in the eye because I thought, here was somebody. She looked down at her shoes. The laces had been removed.

“I don’t want to get hurt.”

We got hungry so we walked down a shady avenue where the houses came in rainbows and had New Orleans terraces. Flo lobbed a rock at one of the houses, breaking an old wavy glass window, and we clambered inside.

“I do this all the time—it’s best for lunch. There’s nothing more satisfying than a stolen sandwich,” she said, shutting the fridge door. She laid out the mayonnaise and turkey, then handed me a plate.

“How would you feel about wearing a turban?” she asked, licking mayo off her wrist—“You want chips?”

I said that I thought that would be cool.

“Can I talk to you about art? I never get to talk about art.”

I said I’d like that.

“My theory of art is that I want to make beautiful things ugly and ugly things beautiful.”

“Besides food and clothes what do you do?”

“Aren’t they art?” she asked, massaging her ears, “It’s just another thing. Life, art.”

She stood up and continued, as if she was reading off a cue card, “I want to destroy a beautiful landscape and create an antiworld of hellish beauty, leave it for everyone to see, for the sake of itself.”

I could feel my blood leaping like dying water droplets flung into a pan.

She opened up a drawer beneath the toaster and took out a knife. She raised it to her elbow and drew the blade down her arm. Her blood pulsated out of her wrist and flowed down the indentations of her dozens of scars, forming patterns like irrigation canals seen from the sky.

“I want to transform the heavenly into the terrible,” she said to me and sunk to the floor against the cabinet. I called an ambulance—the wonders of infrastructure—and since I had no idea where she lived—and she proved unwilling to tell me—the next day I dropped her off at the rainy spot in the parking lot in front of Roses where I had first seen her.

“I just wanted to introduce myself to you,” she explained, “but I didn’t know how.” She handed me a pair of tight jeans, cut periodically in strips and a green and burgundy trench coat.

“Just keep me making clothes or baking or something,” she said, her eyes dry of any irony. “It helps.”

So I put her in charge of the kitchen, where she was in charge of me, Susan and Stravinsky. She fit into the mold of a cook with ease and seeming to age in years, reigned over the stove like a full-blooded monarch from another stage of history.

I opened up a new chapter in my book of leaves.

## II

### *For a paine in the ears, or deafnesse.*

*Take a hot loafe, of the bignesse of a Bakers penny loaf, and pull or cut it in two in the midst, and lay the middle of the crummy side to the midst, or to the hole of the ear, or ears pained, as hot as they may be endured, and so bind them fast together on all night, and then if you find any pain in either or both ears, or any noyse, put into the pained ear or ears, a drop of Aqua vit, in each, and then againe binding more hot bread to them, walk a little while, and after goe to bed; this done three or four dayes together, hath taken away the paine, hearing noyse in the ears, and much eased the deafnesse, and dullnesse of and in many.*

## A

Fuck.

Fuck.

Fuck.

What am I doing?

What the fuck am I doing?

Why am I pushing her away?

Why am I seizing on our differences—the few I know, the big one, religion—and suddenly bringing them into the open—why? To hurt her, to see if I can hurt her? Why did it feel so good when I said, *I find it degrading*, when I knew that she, reading it, might cry? Is it payback for all those times she wasn’t mine? Is it for my fears, that I need to prove I can hurt her,

and that she'll still come back? To prove I can make her prove her love for me?

Why is it even a question?

Why can't I take a joke?

Sorry.

Sorry

Sorry.

Sorry.

Sorry.

Sorry.

## B

What makes her love me? Is there a list I can go through, a backlog of conversations? Can I find in an index somewhere what she's complimented me on? That's sick.

Can't anyone love me for who I am? Not that they don't, but I don't let them. Why do you need her to prove her love? Why test her?

Inhaling, her head floated from my chest to my ear to my neck and she said, "I love that boy smell. I don't know what it is, but it smells so good."

I told one of Stravinsky's jokes to her and she laughed and said, "I love you so much right now." And I made a list, a recipe splattered with philosophy, stained with a sick humor, bile, crumpled by kindness, my smile, my Mediterranean eyes: follow the recipe, adding to it a vial of rainwater under the full moon—for what are recipes but tamed spells—and you get a me, another me who can take away my girl from me. And that other me already exists, I see him everyday in everyone, in someone's grin, their blunders, their sunglasses, the way they take a joke, the way they spill the salt and pepper and crumbs, tomato sauce falls out of their sandwich, eyes glued to a book going through the former glass of an automatic door, his rage fills his shirt more violently than mine. I see ways my recipe might be improved and I see that others have already seen those ways. And I'm scared to death. And I want to hurt her.

Friend told me a story about a guy going out with this girl who saw a photograph of her former boyfriend who was so good looking that he broke up with the girl because he couldn't compete with that. And the girl didn't even talk to her ex anymore.

"I'm sorry but I don't understand how you could possibly know that, that history is a progression. And on a personal level, I find it degrading that you think my love for you is part of some plan, some destiny, rather than a free act of my own."

Thesis: Revolution is sexy.

Thesis: You gotta shake things up in a relationship—at some level.

## C

"Boo, it's not about knowing, it's just what I believe. And I don't understand why it's degrading because maybe you and me were meant to happen, but that doesn't take away from how much I love you or change anything. I don't think you can have a destiny and make choices. We probably shouldn't be arguing like this. We should wait until I were together."

"I feel like crying for some reason and I don't know why I'm putting you through this. When I kiss you, is it my love you feel, or god's?"

## D

God is a surrogate for all my envies and jealousies and everything I doubt in her—but

really doubt in myself because she is pure, I think.

I need the drama to write my stories for me. Look at me, I'm trying to find out what happens next, that's why I'm doing it! Now that I've set my mind to a story, I can do nothing but go forward.

## E

We met at a restaurant on Main Street and had our discussion in person.

### *To take away the Spots, or red Pimpels of the face.*

*Take halfe a pint of raine water, and halfe a pint of good Verjuice, seeth it till it be halfe consumed, then whilst it boils fill it up againe with juyce of Lemmon, and so let it seeth a pretty while; then take it from the fire, and when it is cold put to it the whites of four new laid Eggs, well beaten, and with this water annoynt the place often.*

I remember this one time Stravinsky and I were filming a movie in our school library and he was the star. I wanted to get a close up, but he waved me away because he didn't want the camera to pick up his acne.

I said, "Igor, every single day we sit here and stare at your acne and we don't care then, why should it suddenly matter now that it's on video? Look at my face, for god's sake."

Five years later, Stravinsky and I strode into the lobby of the Pierre Hotel in New York City. I was enjoying the sound of my boots against the marble, bouncing off the mirrors and gold. The long coated doorman had waved us into the revolving doors and we turned imperiously past the elevator operators, up the banister, around the corner, were seated in the frescoed Rotunda, served tea time snacks from a tall carousel. I slipped a folded paper into the hands of the waiter, asked him to transfer it to his manager. Stravinsky started to laugh.

My friend and I could talk so well together that I often forgot he was there. That summer I didn't have a car and before we all started using public transportation, he drove me up and down the route from Philadelphia to Chesterton, over the C/D Canal Bridge, like a sail in the wind, past gun shops and water ice. We imagined life in the places we passed, listened to music and ignored each other. He learned that from me—when I'm used to a person, it's as if I'm alone, they become disposable. I listened to him until I understood him and once I understood him, I became so used to him that to be with him—in that freedom—it was like a new silence. I'd saved him once by being there, now I was too much there to realize what was happening. Then I disappeared.

The manager came over and asked us to kindly leave the premises. I asked him why. He said he didn't like the look of us. Stravinsky was red, stifling his laughter. I apologized for the mud on my boots, but I said I really couldn't understand what his concern was. The manager pursed his lips and handed me a crumpled slip of paper. I took it in my hand and opened it up. Smudged black ink formed an exclamation: *The Revolution is Here!*

Frowning, I passed it to Stravinsky.

He frowned over it as well.

"Where'd you get this?" he asked the manager.

"Clark, over there, handed it to me, saying the two of you asked him to give it to me."

"Well, I'm sorry for the misunderstanding, but I think you should talk to him again: I can assure you I didn't give him any slip of paper, I gave him nothing, and that's exactly what he'll be getting for a tip as well," I proclaimed insufferably, reaching across the table for the

paper, and returning it to the manager.

He stared at us, at a loss for ideas.

“Well, I’m sorry to bother you.”

He started to walk away, signaling for poor Clark to follow. When he disappeared into the next room, Stravinsky high-fived me under the table. From his backpack he took out a brown paper bag and extracted from it two burgers from Wendy’s and fries. We drank the last of our tea, crumpled the burger wrappers on the table, then snuck up the curling staircase that overlooked one side of the Rotunda. Stravinsky held up the bag, while I emptied it over the railing: a sack of tiny papers, like raindrops bearing particles picked up across continents over lingering lengths of time, all of them reading: *The Revolution is Here!*

### ***An Almond Candle.***

*Blanch Jordan Almonds, beat them with a little small Ale, and strayne them out with as much more Ale as you minde to make your Caudle of, then boyle it as you doe an Egg Caudle, with a little Mace in it, and when it is off the fire sweeten it with Sugar.*

### 1

The little details of the day are those that create a sense of interconnectedness, of fantasy, that take the days of the week in strips, swipe paste on their backs and lay them against the walls of memory. Some people take great pleasure in creating little moments that transform a day into something extraordinary. On the most ordinary of days, these people will leave flowers on library shelves, in alleyways, on school buses. These are the people who cause minor uproars by leaving fresh milk in glass bottles on the doorsteps of entire streets on spring mornings unannounced. These people take the transformative aspect of the theater and transplant it into the coldness of modern life. Is modern life cold? A tired notion perhaps, too many counter examples to accept it unequivocally. But drive by a shopping center near you and consider the tangle of roads that leaves well-kept, untrodden fields unapproachable to anyone but eyes behind the cage walls of car windows.

On the first day of summer, Stravinsky, Dalí, Dürer and I had a picnic on the median of a highway near the local mall. We laid down a pink blanket, brought a wicker basket of cold cuts and picnic equipment, played guitar, I wore a dress and we filmed it. We had a sign: “Honk If You Like Hugs.” We waved, smiled and shouted to drivers for about three hours. Then we brought out musical instruments. A week before, Stravinsky and I, driving around, had discovered an old Wurlitzer piano on the side of the road. It was dusty, but surprisingly in tune and by its side was a padded piano bench bursting with old music books. We knocked on the owner’s door. She answered, a brunette in her early 30’s.

“We couldn’t help but notice you’re throwing out a piano? We were wondering if we could take it off your hands,” I said.

“Yeah, absolutely! We’re getting rid of it, it’s really old. Take it, it’s yours.”

She shut the door. A couple of friends and I hoisted it (barely) into the back of Stravinsky’s car and we deposited it on my lawn a few hours later. I played midnight keyboard (Goldberg Variations—2 AM—scattered yelling) for the next few days until the piano’s next adventure. The day of the picnic, we loaded the moldy piano into Stravinsky’s pickup and dropped it onto the median along with a snare drum, bass drum and ride cymbal. Dürer played guitar, I piano, Dali drums. We played for an afternoon and our numbers swelled. An Taiwanese violinist with luscious hair offered her services and frayed her bow with enthusiasm. A small

audience gathered on the side of the road.

I'd told Susan Sontag about our street theater aspirations the night before and called her that morning. We wanted her to sing and I kept checking my cell phone for her call. Finally it came: she said she drove past twice before parking in the Panera's lot. She said she opened the door, but didn't get out of the car. She was embarrassed. We were embarrassing ourselves, and I didn't need to make fun of myself by wearing a dress. I thought of a lot of justifications for that dress, but I kept them to myself.

I closed the phone and as the music reached its height, I leapt up and ran into the street, my arms outstretched, into the oncoming traffic. A mom in a Honda Civic, driving with her girlfriend, slammed on her brakes and I drove my hands against the hood of her car. It pushed me back a few feet. The woman had a horrified look on her face, and her friend was turned around, checking to see that the leftovers in the back seat hadn't spilled. Luckily, the cars behind her had enough room to stop themselves. Conscious of an entire highway of stopped traffic with their eyes on me, I strode up to the woman's window and knocked against it. She fumbled for the button.

"The Revolution is Here," I said to her.

She was speechless.

I turned to the next car.

"The Revolution is Here."

The next was a large family.

"What the fuck do you think you're doing?"

"The Revolution is Here."

I got high-fives, hand shakes, punches and spit. But most of all I got looks that said, *I'm unsure*. When I saw that they couldn't tell if I was serious, I knew that I had a chance.

"The Revolution is Here."

"What can I do?"

## 2

Susan Sontag and I went to a block party by her house a few nights later where guests helped themselves to wine. We lingered, underage, by the bottles.

"That pink stuff looks really good," I said.

"You can try it, but I'm not going to," she said as she walked away, checking to see if anyone had noticed her there. She did have to drive, but it was only a glass.

We walked outside and sat down beside a few of her neighbors, girls a couple of years younger than us.

"Hey, you'd think they'd notice if I went up and got a glass?" Susan asked them, leaning forward confidentially. I looked at her. Kaeley, sixteen, with the wispy blonde hair of someone who floats on the surface of the world, started to talk about how she had the key to her grandparent's apartment and could get all the alcohol she wanted. Her trunk was loaded right now.

"Yo girl, what you got? Hard stuff?" asked Susan Sontag.

"Aw yeah, mostly hard stuff," said Kaeley, "You want some—you wanna come over?"

"Girl, I would, but I got a curfew..."

I didn't know why I was there, but I couldn't be apart from her.

Susan wants to be an actress, she wants to be on television, she's been told she has a great personality for the screen. She bites her fingernails, worries about pooping and loves to make

farting noises on my skin. I return the favor with licks to her bellybutton. We call each other when we go to the bathroom.

Susan Sontag plays a different role every time I see her, a different role tailed to meet each person's expectations. She caters to everyone in the room. She's a terribly messy eater, she laughs at billboards and pedestrians with me, and we have done everything together for the past two months. She has freckles and loves to be loud and obnoxious, but she worries about kissing in public and confided in me that she doesn't know what to do at parties. Every time someone mentions drinking she either talks about

a) her wild New Years Eve party last year

or,

b) that time she threw up drinking vodka, adding on the subject a wise word of caution.

The first time I hung out with her we were both intimidated by what the other seemed to be. I wore glasses and she wore mesh shorts.

I spent two months trying to discover who she was because I fell in love with her and that was the most important thing to me, to discover who she was. But once I thought I knew something about her, she became someone new: she was one person alone with me, another person with a friend, another in a group. Each Susan was like beautiful flower on a dying tree, one pristine and healthy, another shriveled and desperate.

Could she make it show business, like she wanted to? She wrote, but infrequently; she acted, but I didn't know if she had the drive because both of us seemed more content to sit around and love.

I hated that she was going to try and make it in New York and Los Angeles and that I wouldn't be there. I hated show business for its crassness. I hated her because she didn't feel the revolution in her bones.

I love movies.

Film is both a litmus test and an instrument of the coming Cultural Revolution.

*A Medicine that hath recovered some from the Dropsie whome the Physitian hath given over. Take green Broome and burne it in some clean place, that you may save the ashes of it, take some ten or twelve spoonfulls of the same Ashes, and boyle them in a pint of White wine till the vertue of it be in the wine, then coole it, and drayne the wine from the dreggs, and make three draughts of the Wine, and drink one fasting in the morning, another at three in the afternoone, another late at night neer going to bed. Continue this, and by Gods grace it will cure you.*

α

Dream: There's some kind of practice, event at the school—a play we're all in, and we're rehearsing outside in the field, and everyone from our old school is there, including this girl Simone de Beauvoir, or maybe it was Flo, whom I met once for coffee and talked about literature. We'd promised to do it again, but never did and finally we saw each other here, in that awkward state of platonic guilt.

"Hey, Simone," I said.

"Oh, hi. How are you?"

She was taller than me, and was looking down at me.

The practice went well more or less (strange—dancing—feet—ouch) and then I was walking with friends (Stravinsky, Verlaine, Duchamp) through the woods, Stravinsky was talking

about some TV show: the play was at our old elementary school, in its secluded valley, and then we were walking up the road out of the valley. As we neared the top of the hill, a whole crowd of the smart girls with the insistent parents—Sappho, Woolf, and the rest—that whole crowd said hi, and I thought I saw a friend of mine, with long hair and an Indian disposition. I thought the girls were shouting at him so I ran up to him (Stravinsky was muttering to my friends, did they mutter back?) and hugged him bodily. But it wasn't my friend Alfred Jarry at all, but a large stocky Asian woman. My friends laughed, I was sick of them, I fell in line with the girls, who I hadn't seen in a while. I started talking to Woolf, pale and tall with a round face.

"You know that wasn't Alfred Jarry, right?" she asked me. I still shaking my head over it.

"Yeah, I know," I said, "Damn, we haven't seen each other in forever. Next thing you know, girl, you're gonna be sitting there, wanting for someone to talk to and then I'm comin ova."

"You've changed a lot you know."

"How?"

"Your voice. And you're tanner than I've seen you. And you're wearing mesh shorts."

"A little bit, a little bit, I've changed," I said, holding up my fingers.

I turned away from her and fell back in with my friends until we came to the Main Street of the old town where Simone de Beauvoir's wide old car was parked on the sidewalk. She was in the front and three guys were in the back, the one on the left was Sartre, a big drinker, large guy, who'd been dead for years, he was wearing eyeliner. I didn't acknowledge them, but turned to Simone and her full lips, skewed eyes and chest. She was talking to Gertrude Stein, a tall, lithe girl with glasses, who was there, so I fell into the backseat.

"What did you want to talk about?" Sartre asked me.

"I wanted to talk to Simone," I said but what he heard was, "I wanted to talk about Simone."

"That's good, I've been wanted to talk to you for a while now," he said to me.

"Okay, what about?" I asked, settling in.

"About you and Simone."

"Look, you know, we just discuss literature and talk," I said.

"But it can't go on like that. It's hard already for me to pay the rent and get her the things she wants. And I can't ever talk to her about poetry—you're outclassing me, you have to stop. I love her."

His face was remarkable, with the largeness of it and his eyeliner. But Verlaine and Duchamp were waving at me, so I said I'd be right back and hurried across the street to meet Stravinsky, standing with the other two.

"Hey," I said, running up.

"Dude, I can't give you a ride," he said, "I gotta go."

He was sorry, but his face was expressionless, and I wondered what drugs he was on, and what lay behind his tired, nova eyes. It had been four weeks since I'd hung out with him.

### 3

How do we live? Don't we have jobs? We live the college life far from college. My parents send me money, they buy me essentials and I ignore them and concentrate on the art of fighting the system they've got working in their favor. This is a learning experience for me.

Susan and I hitched back into New Jersey to see my parents, get some money for our big plan—only Flo and I knew about it, I hadn't told Stravinsky or Susan—and show my parents

pictures, take their money and alcohol. As we hitchhiked, I played Socrates and let the driver discover that their own beliefs had truly revolutionary implications. Susan laughed. On the long waits between rides, we talked about the films of Spike Lee, which I had seen, which she hadn't. They really spoke to me, represented an aesthetic ideal, a cultural touchstone, one that let me understand what black culture really was. I wondered if he were still making movies today, if the incendiary black movements whose pulse he felt could be enlisted in the larger Cultural Revolution. We could join hands the way the feminist and black movements had joined hands, the abolitionists with the chicks at Seneca Falls.

Susan and I went to Ocean City for a daytrip. She took her parent's car (I refused to drive, but chipped in for gas) and listened to Fela Kuti from the speakers in the back because her front speakers were blown. Tanning on the beach we conversed on several topics:

- tanning
- the writing we wished to write
- the acting we wished to act
- the education of our children
- how to start a revolution
- how she hated getting lost
- how she wanted to act, how she was going to give it a shot in New York or LA, but if it didn't work out...
- how to feed the hungry children
- how hungry we were

We walked along the boardwalk so hungry that eventually she broke down and we went into a suspiciously dim Italian restaurant and I ordered a crab cake sandwich with an abominable amount of tarter sauce at an exorbitant price. No cash for a real dinner after that. We played minigolf, shooting the ball over two holes at once, making out in the castle, and drove into Atlantic City for dinner, the grand light-lined highway waving us in, but she was nervous about driving in a city so we turned off the main road and parked at McDonalds. We were going to leave the car for an hour or so and she was okay with it until I mentioned the signs everywhere threatening fines and towing for unauthorized parking. I smiled at her. We ran into the shop next door. She raced through the sunglasses and handbags, then said she wanted to go.

“Already?”

Caesars, a marvelous multiple building compound, loomed in the distance and we made a halfhearted attempt to walk towards it, but Susan said she worried too much, all the time, about everything, and her car was back at McDonalds, why don't we just go back and blow our thirty dollars on burgers, she said laughing.

We went in, but I didn't want to. I didn't want to say that McDonalds made me physically ill—did it really?—because I thought it *was* funny to order that much, but another side of me said that it was disgusting to waste like that, and another side didn't want to say no to her ever, so I was silent, and then said I wasn't hungry. She said she was sorry and we pulled out of the McDonalds and drove off towards home. We met no one at all in Atlantic City.

A few weeks ago a friend of ours died. He was riding a bike, swerved into the road, and was hit by an old woman driving behind him. He was wearing his iPod when he was hit. Of all the men and women with whom we'd gone to school, Truffaut showed some of the most promise. He dressed impeccably, won Best Hair, wrote for paying publications and had friends in Philadelphia and New York, was reviewing concerts while the rest of us were worrying about acne. Susan and I attended a Quaker memorial service for him as friends and family stood, one

after another, and shared their memories of him. I wrote this, but never read it, because everyone there seemed to have known him far better than I:

When I'm at a loss for words, I look through my books. Because anything I could say wouldn't be good enough, I first turned to Marcel Proust because Truffaut and I were *this close* to being Proust-buddies for our independent reading project in English class last year. Of course, we both chickened out in the end, but I lent Truffaut a copy of *Swann's Way*, which he never returned, and which the his family may absolutely keep. And I'm sure somewhere in the three thousand page depth of *In Search of Lost Time*, there's the perfect passage to read to you about death, but I haven't read nearly enough Proust to know where to find it. So I turned to Richard Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*, his philosophical tract from 1621, because that has an excellent table of contents, and I looked under *A consolatory digression, containing remedies to all discontents and passions of the mind*, and further, for *Death of Friends, and Otherwise*. But nothing there really spoke to me as worth repeating because death is so completely unoriginal and there's very little left to say about it in empty generalities. And thus, we're left with specifics, and there are those who can impart to you thousands of shimmering memories of Truffaut, far more than I can possibly offer. So instead, I'm going to read to you a short poem by Jorge Luis Borges, more known for his short fiction than his poetry, but nonetheless, this is a very beautiful poem about how we can transcend those specifics and recognize the pattern of human experience and how in a thousand places every day, men and women and children can reflect to us, in some small way, something we remember of Truffaut.

When my mother found out that he had died, she who had not even known him except through pictures and stories, burst into tears: "He was so beautiful." I could not help but cry with her. Truffaut had always worn this pair of sunglasses, squarish, but rounded on the sides and bottom, with two silver beads on either side. Somehow I had the exact same pair and after he died I started wearing them because while I had spent years fuming over high school, he had fumed over high school and had, for all intents and purposes, escaped—had led a life beyond the pettiness of the classroom. I started listening to his music too.

That day at the beach with Susan Sontag, I was wearing those glasses and when we left Atlantic City having done nothing at all, having had no adventures of any sort—

"I think we should talk about our trip to New York, because you were afraid of getting lost in Atlantic City and my conception of our trip was that we could take a train up and take the subway around and get completely lost, find our way back, find secrets, have an adventure. And I feel like you would want to have a set of activities and..."

"No, that's fine, I just didn't want to drive around in a city, but if we take a train..."

I didn't know how to continue. I wanted to travel, I wanted to meet people, I wanted to break into people's houses just to get to know them. We grew silent and having hours of car ride ahead of us, having nothing to do except to read the signs saying *Stay Awake*, then the ones that said *Stay Alive*—which seemed so hard at that moment—something burst inside me and all that had festered in me burbled forth. I was silent the entire trip home.

As we turned into town, I felt the situation I had created all around me and I was disgusted. I wanted to say something, I knew I had to put a stop to this, but what?—so I let her

take me to a burger place, letting her know with as few words as possible because I was afraid of what I might say if I started to speak.

We went in and I ripped a paper straw and picked at half a burger. I couldn't think of how to begin, so I ran away to get a soda and came back. I thought of a way to begin:

"Where do you think you'll be in fifteen years?"

"Married, I guess, living with kids, maybe an actress if..."—and right there, I knew that I was right. What was she telling me? I took from my bag my book of leaves and passed it to her and showed her how I'd written these little vignettes of our time together, sketched these little images, never explanations, they didn't *mean* anything, but they were about her and us and the things she said and I said I thought she talked a lot of shit, but I didn't want to talk about it like this, it was just things I was thinking about. And she started to cry. We walked around the shopping center, over the medians, through the parking lots, by the unfinished storefronts. I almost cried too.

I told her that I wasn't annoyed, or angry. I was just uncomfortable and I didn't know what to make of all the faces she was showing me.

"I know I'm a fake, phony, flakey person, and I'm sorry I can't take you on an adventure," she cried, "but you knew we were two different people when we started."

"But at the most fundamental level, we are exactly the same."

I thought of holding her and blowing air in her face, she blowing back, her cheeks puffed out—about all the touching we did and all the talking, how we loved to be tired with each other, how we were both so shaky, so very shaky.

She talked about the stage, about how she could be embarrassed in real life, but how she could do anything on stage. She wished she could be a whole person and be able to be who she wanted to be all the time, but she couldn't and she was sorry. And I said the worst of it was that—and this was why I didn't want to have this conversation here, not now—the worst of it was that I was the exact same way. I was all talk and no action, but rather than try to fit in like her or deal with the problems head on, I just sat silently and pretended not to be there.

I tried to put more thoughts into words and we spoke some more. I told her I wished we'd skipped out on the bill to that terrible lunch and gone off the boardwalk and explored the underground Ocean City.

"You have to tell me that kind of thing then!"

I didn't say that I wanted to have told her that kind of thing, but that I hadn't thought of it then, same as her, and that's what I really regretted.

She stopped and faced me.

"I have to know. Do you love me for who I am, or do you just want to be in a relationship? Because it all happened so fast, and it's okay, but I want to know, because I really love you a lot..."

Her face was really red.

"And..." she said and she buried her face against my chest.

I bent my neck and kissed her freckly hot forehead.

"It did happen fast," I said and I wanted to say that it was a little bit of both, that I was curious about what a relationship was, what it meant, Ocean City has no underground, but more than anything, anything else I truly did love her.

"I love you, I love you so much and I would do anything for you," and it was not only what I had to say, but what I wanted to say, and was also true.

We kissed. In her car, by the lake, windows open, sweat drenched, we made love.

“It was really lame to do that in a hamburger place,” I said and I was crying a little. She laughed.

Later I learned that the sunglasses Truffaut had worn were Wayfarers. The internet told me that Ray-Ban Wayfarers are the best selling sunglasses in history. Audrey Hepburn wore them, as well as John Lennon, Bob Dylan, James Dean, Roy Orbison, JFK, Andy Warhol, Morrissey, Patti Smith, Elvis Costello, Jack Nicholson...

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Dream: I left Stravinsky. I walked back across the sidewalk to Simone de Beauvoir’s car. Sartre was gone from the back seat, so I got in where he’d been sitting. I was staring at Simone’s headrest and her long windshield. The other two guys in the car were half asleep. It smelled like cigarettes.

Simone and I talked for a bit, about how protective Sartre was and then a call came through: it was Sartre himself. She gestured for me to answer the phone, so I leaned over to the front seat where the phone was mounted and started talking into it about everything.

“Look, you don’t have to worry. I realize that it may seem like you can’t give her things she needs and you wonder if she thinks someone else would be better for her. And I know you love her, but there’s two kinds of love, two aspects to love. There’s the love for material things, the attractiveness of the person, the things they do, the faces they make, the things they provide. This is the love for the things they go out of the way to do for you. And then there’s the other kind of love—” I said, but I’d been going on for a while and didn’t even know if he was listening, there was no response on the other line, but I went on anyway, “—the ineffable love, the love that’s unreal, that makes no sense, that simply is there. It’s like unconditional love, and it’s something nothing I can do will take away, if it’s there. It doesn’t disappear because of the things that happen. And it’s rare and it’s wonderful and I hope you feel it. And I’ve only felt it once—twice in my life. And I don’t feel it for Simone.

“So, both of these two kinds of love combine to turn into true love, and that’s how it works. So I’m sorry I’ve been rambling so much, I don’t even know if you’re listening,” I said as my stomach gurgled and I heard the two guys in the back laughing, but I went on anyway, “but I know how hard it is to separate the two kinds of love, and how difficult it can be to tell if you both feel the same way about each other, and I’ve been that protective before, so I promise you there’s nothing between Simone and me. But you have to understand what I said about the kinds of love.”

As I was speaking, it was as if I were transported into a land of words where all that exists was what I had to say and what I was saying. I settled back into my seat. We were going down the highway. The two guys in the back were snoring. At a red light, Simone de Beauvoir looked at me.

“That was beautiful,” I wanted her to say. Instead, she looked at me and said, “Kiss me.”

I smiled.

“Okay.”

I unbuckled my seatbelt, leaned forward and cupped her head with my hands. I kissed her gently on her full lips, she gave me a little too much teeth and then she stopped when she heard a loud grunt from the back, her eyes opening.

The light turned green and I glanced at our two companions whose eyes may or may not have been open in slits.

***To strengthen the Back weak or diseased.***

*Take the pith of an Oxes back, wash it in Wine or Ale, and beating it very small straine it through a course cloath, and make a Caudle of it, with Muskadine or strong Ale boyling it therein a few Dates sliced, and the stones taken out, and drink it first and last as warm as you can, walking well, but temperately after it. Toasted dates often eaten are very good for the same.*

## 4

I wrote down in my notebook of leaves what had happened. And since she had seen it once before, I gave it to her again to read.

And we talked.

“Let’s talk to a homeless man about how he got where he is.”

“It’s going down.”

“And we should go in one of those cute little puppy shops if we see one. And it’s not planning ‘cause we don’t have to, and which one?— ‘cause there’s so many.”

“Exactly. And we should walk by those crazy expensive cookie shops. Just for the smell.”

“I’ve always wanted to go to one of those, or just see one!”

“And we should definitely go into Soho. There’s those streets where it’s just one little shop of awesomeness after another.”

“Your story was incredible and I am incredibly lucky that you love me for some reason. I just used incredibly twice,” she said.

“Repetition is delicious.”

“Let’s go to one of those fancy schmancy hotels and just ride the elevators. That’s probably impossible with the doormen. Whatever. We’ll take ‘em.”

“Well, the doormen might let us in, but the best is if the elevators have the little guys who press the buttons for you.”

“I’d like to go to all the prime numbered floors, thanks.”

“Like give him a page and be like, ‘This be our route.’”

“So obnoxious.”

“And then at the end, give him a fruit basket or something.”

“Aw, that’d be sweet. Bring your tux and I’ll bring my pink dress and we can ride around Central Park in a horse drawn carriage.”

“Yes! And I can lay my jacket down at your feet so you won’t step in a puddle. Or someone else’s jacket.”

“Yeah, steal that shit.”

“And be like, ‘tis for a *lady*, have you no *honah*, suh?”

“Then just shout stuff and spit on the ground for effect.”

“We’d fit in then. I wonder if we pretended to be homeless, how much money we could make. Not that we’d do that for any length of time, but out of curiosity, would people just give us change?”

“Yeah, I was going to say. If we got any we should give it to another homeless person. We should buy them sandwiches.”

“Take orders for an entire block.”

“They would really like us.”

“Then we could be the king and queen, monarchs of a hobo nation. We could conquer the city!”

“You’d have to protect me if they get grabby.”

“With my cane.”

“You’ll have to protect me in general if we get lost when we go up, and soothe my worries and shut me up by kissing me, I guess.”

“Will do. I don’t think it’ll be too bad, I mean, I wasn’t going to have us shut our eyes and get off at some random subway stop just to see if we could find our way back. It’s just that if you have only vague destinations, it’s just more fun to get their circuitously.”

“Hey, as long as we don’t sleep on the subway.”

“I *can* promise that.”

I was so excited.

### *To make Snow.*

*Take a quart of thick Creame, and five or six whites of Eggs, a sauser full of sugar finely beaten, and as much Rose water, beat them all together, and always as it riseth take it out with a spoon, then take a loaf of Bread, cut away the crust, set it in a platter, and a great Rosemary bush in the midst of it, then lay your Snow with a Spoon upon the Rosemary, and so serve it.*

I called her but she didn’t come. I left her a message saying it would be the most romantic thing of all, it would give our life and death meaning in both, but she didn’t respond. I left her a message in which I talked about Heinrich von Kleist and how he took Henriette Vogel with him to the shores of a lake in 1811, and two gunshots were heard shortly thereafter. I told her about how Kleist wrote to his sister,

[I]t is incomprehensible to me how a human being can live without a plan of life... [W]ithout a life-plan, without a fixed purpose, always wavering between uncertain desires, always at variance with my duties, a plaything of chance, a puppet on the string of destiny—this degrading state seems to me so contemptible, and would make me so unhappy, that death would be preferable to my by a long way.<sup>8</sup>

I left her a message saying an end like this would be a literary end. Kleist was a German Romantic, and he didn’t just write about *strum und drang*, he blew his brains out, he committed the most passionate, the most meaningful of love-acts: group suicide, an act that says, we’re better than this world and we know it—look at that *we*: the *we* means that it’s the ultimate knowledge that two people can share, that they will both die loving each other absolutely; I wanted her to see that, and to come with me, and to make a sensation with our deaths, because it really isn’t that hard to be remembered, there’s just a certain number of things to do, steps to follow, a recipe for remembrance. And like Kleist we could turn our lives into something other than empty, drained into words, pressed into a book like leaves, or wasted on beaches, shriveled by the sun. Our biographies would become part of history, and history would be our biography, our life story, because that’s what we want, for our lives to be historical, and history to be our lives.

For us, history comes to an end when we die.

I told her all that, even though I knew the voicemail had stopped recording minutes ago, and then I went with Flo out into the field, where the corn was cleared away into a circle and in the center was a banquet table of thick and beautiful wood. The sky was blue, the corn green and yellow and the table was covered with a pale blue and white design of leaves and flowers. It

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<sup>8</sup> Translation by Christopher Hamilton.

fluttered in the breeze. On the table were six candles in a row, with silvery bases and a two candelabras among them. Four places were set, in perfect order, with service plate, salad plate, soup bowl, napkin—fish fork, dinner fork, salad fork—dinner knife, fish knife, soup spoon, oyster fork—butter plate, butter knife—water goblet, champagne flute, red wine glass, white wine glass, sherry glass. The knife blades were placed with the cutting edge toward the plate, the places were at equal settings along the table and the utensils perfectly balanced. Everything was perfectly aligned, exquisitely accomplished.

And Flo made us mountains of food: glazed ham, roast turkey, scalloped potatoes in a luscious cream sauce, valleys filled with peas, tureens of gravy and sauces, boxcars of bread, corn soufflé, and soups: a French Onion soup, a lobster bisque, and fish: red snapper, salmon encrusted with brown sugar on a bed of lentils, basmati rice with coriander, a forest of salads, ripe tomatoes, sliced, stalks of fennel, heads of cabbage and a cool, green lemony dressing, onions, whole carrots, and hard-boiled eggs. And there was more than we could possibly enumerate, but she had made it. The food was in heaps, filling the table on silver platters and intricate bowls. The table was huge and only set for four, the rest was taken up by a feast in as many colors as come in an autumn morning.

We seated ourselves, Flo and I. But before I had a chance to lift the old cutting knife, with its blackened blade and worn handle, and slice off a piece of golden, crisp turkey, we heard a loud beep and a click, which told us the plan was working, but the next step was coming too soon, and before we had a chance to say a word, from the bulge of the nuclear reactor rising above the cornfield where we sat like a giant decadent grey beanstalk came a flash of white light, a ring of fire, and as it seared our faces, we knew that we had finally accomplished something, brought something out of our heads and into the world, translated something abstract into some material, something we'd never been able to do before in our lives. Flo had thrown herself onto the table, and the last thing I saw was she, naked, lying in a mess of her own food, completely crisscrossed with scars, a network of lines that enlaced her entire body, a pattern of strokes and crosshatchings, where, over a lifetime, she'd tried to skin herself alive. And then the light came down with one last shining blade and cut her breasts again.

But Susan Sontag was elsewhere. She was still alive. She was rosemary, under the weight of ash like snow.

I didn't want to be happy. I wanted something worth suffering for.

*FINIS.*

## WEDDING CAKE

2008

My Dad said, "Never marry the first woman you fall in love with."

She carried a ribbon around in her purse, as a flower for her hair. Sometimes it was a bookmark, dangling between her legs; other times it got tangled around my neck as I went down on her, sprawled out on the couch cushions. The first time we made love, what I wanted to know most of all was how she tasted.

"Are sperm visible to the naked eye?" she asked me over the phone.

I said no. But that question deserved an explanation.

She said that after I'd left, she'd peed and floating in the toilet bowl was some left over cum in the shape of a sperm, but bigger obviously. And it was oddly beautiful because it reminded her of babies and me, sex, love and marriage and all that stuff.

I kissed the phone receiver and could feel her thin little lips.

"It's such a strange feeling wanting to have kids with someone," I said, "because part of the feeling is sexual, but there's so much other stuff underneath that's hard to pick apart. When I think about it, I think first of what it feels like to finish inside you, then I think of your body and I think of us kissing, first in bed, then in a garden with sunlight; I feel myself kissing the golden hairs of your hairline, then the warmth of your belly with my arms around it, me in your body like a marshmallow in a microwave; then I see a kid in your arms, and I reach over and brush back his hair and then I think of what an amazing adventure it would be to raise a kid with you—how much we'd learn."

I thought of all I didn't know about her. She said she loved me.

"I love you too," and for the first time in a while I wasn't sure if I meant it. But I went along with it because I thought, I'm just afraid of commitment, and since I know that's silly, I can pre-empt the feeling and get on with my life.

We got married in a garden. At our wedding, she requested that the figurines on our cake be life-size replicas of the two of us. But it was her wedding and there was only enough cake for a figurine of her. I was okay with it: all I wanted to know was how she tasted, but a ribbon came loose from the decorations and wrapped itself around me, holding me down while she, drunk with champagne, lovingly kissed me. By the time I got to the dessert table, all of her had been eaten and there was nothing left to taste.

The rabbi came over to me and put a hand on my shoulder.

"Matzel tov, Moshe! How do you feel to be a married man?" he asked me.

"Hungry."

"Does she taste good at least?"

She was the first woman I'd fallen in love with and she tasted like wedding cake. She was so sweet.

She looked up at me from across the dessert table. I had nothing to say to her, so I took her into my arms and ate.

## RESPONSIBILITY TOWARDS LOVE

2008

*For the philosophers relationship = idea.*

-- Karl Marx,

in a marginal note

to *The German Ideology*.

Responsibility Towards Love

Gunter Gottlieb

First published in *Allgemeine Zeitschrift für Philosophie*, Jan. 1998, under the title *Einen Beitrag zur Erklärung der Verantwortung Gegenüber Liebe*. The article appeared in March of the same year in the *American Philosophical Quarterly* as it appears here under the English title *Responsibility Towards Love*.

Translated from the German by Matthew Weiss.

### Introduction

The concept of *duty* is a foreign one to modern philosophy. Indeed, Ascombe (1958) flatly rejects the idea of a modern moral philosophy in the traditional sense of a system of ethics. The claim that a thing, an object, a person, even a *feeling* could make absolute demands upon the individual is considered irrational, even presumptuous. The idea of duty or obligation--of *responsibility*--presupposes a kind of higher power; in contrast, true individualism, egoism to be less kind, is premised on the idea of a secular freedom--perhaps not a freedom of choice, but at the very least a *freedom of thought*. By these lights, *duty* is no more than an infringement on freedom, indeed freedom of thought, by something external to the self. It is therefore authoritarian, totalitarian, and backward.

Or so it would seem.

The aim of the present work is a scientific description of the ways in which a *certain thing*, by its very consequence to our lives, our minds, and ourselves, does indeed obligate us, that its effect on us is to make us "inhale and stretch our backs at the sound of its music in an involuntary, although conscious motion" (White 20). I use the words *effect* and *consequence*, hesitating to use the words *by essence* or *by nature*, for obligation following from *essence* has theological implications and the express purpose of the present work is to explicate responsibility by no other means than the dynamics of the human mind itself.

By way of further introduction, let me present a word about myself.

In the late nineteen sixties, I attended a lecture by holocaust survivor Viktor Frankl. At the time I had recently completed his book, *...trotzdem ja zum Leben sagen (Ein Psychologe erlebt das Konzentrationslager)*<sup>9</sup>, and had come to accept his thesis that there are three ways in which humans find meaning in their lives:

- 1) through doing a deed
- 2) through experiencing a value

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<sup>9</sup> Translated into English as *Man's Search for Meaning*. [Editor's note]

## 3) suffering

Students flourishing in cardigans and sweaters filled the meeting hall of the university at which I taught. Standing towards the back, I watched Dr. Frankl speak in their midst, sitting on an uncomfortable wooden chair, his wide brown pants hanging off his legs, trembling as he exhorted us with his finger--and if I may be forgiven a poetic turn of phrase, his thin Viennese voice was caught in the brambles of my brain for days afterward.

Dr. Frankl's philosophical music and the counterpoint of the doctor-patient relationship have both had a definite influence on my life and work. Frankl saw that in the modern world psychology would take the place of philosophy and that therefore a philosophy of life was necessary for effective psychotherapy. In response he developed his influential school of therapeutic thought, a combination of philosophy and psychology: logotherapy. Frankl's work shaped my view as a philosopher, that philosophy itself is therapeutic and that philosophy's essential goal is not obfuscation, but elucidation and consolation for all those who involve themselves in its pages. As abstract as philosophy may seem at times, and as necessary as that abstraction may be, the love of wisdom is nevertheless effective at the deepest, most personal level.

I hope you, the reader, find this to be the case as you work through this exposition of one aspect of the philosophy of love.

## I.

A statement about responsibility is an *ethical* statement, that is to say, a statement about *choices*. And although responsibility involves *reconciling* oneself, in one's mind, the nature of responsibility is in itself contradiction. The mind on which obligation makes demands is torn in two, disagrees with itself and its natural state is one of indefinite discontent and uncertainty. As Hegel dramatizes it in his *Phenomenology of Mind*:

The relation of both self-consciousnesses is in this way so constituted that they prove themselves and each other through a life-and-death struggle. They must enter into this struggle, for they must bring their certainty of themselves, the certainty of being for themselves, to the level of objective truth, and make this a fact both in the case of the other and in their own case as well... This trial by death, however, cancels both the truth which was to result from it, and therewith the certainty of self altogether... [But] the negation characteristic of consciousness... cancels in such a way that it preserves and maintains what is sublated (negated), and thereby survives its being sublated (negated) (Sec. 178-196).

Hegel has mystified the process of which I speak, but the essential description is accurate. One who feels responsibility's influence is naturally conflicted as each self-consciousness, each side of one's mind, tries to assert itself. Even as one side--particularly the side of duty--becomes dominant and that self-consciousness seems to dissolve the other side, nevertheless the defeated self-consciousness is not negated but lurks on, spreading doubt and creating an essential, but distressing part of the whole of one's mind. And indeed, we would not be whole if it were not for these conflicts.

Furthermore, uncertainty within one's mind arises because *unlike* the responsibilities imposed by religion, say, or patriotism, natural, human, *psychological* responsibility is at its heart *internal*, of no absolute epistemological nature, and although recognizable and indeed

unavoidable as a mental force, its implication, its practice, and its manifestation are constantly and continuously being worked out in an incessant dialectical process. Dealing with responsibility is a life-long process. And thus a statement about responsibility is a statement about choices, about our external face, because although we can never come to grips with the demands of responsibility within us, we are nevertheless, every day, called upon to make decisions, actions, choices based upon this responsibility. For responsibility is a table without legs--at the same time we are called to eat upon it, we also must try to keep it steady.

## II.

Of all things to have a responsibility towards, why love? And indeed, of all the things to place at the heart of responsibility, why love? *Can* we place love in an exalted place as an *obligator*, like an abstraction, like a god?

These questions are complicated because we are *embodied* creatures; it is not our thinking that confirms our existence, but feeling and sensing and then transforming the world with our bodies. Can we truly say that *passion*, love as a *feeling*--as opposed to love itself--is unchanging and eternal, a Romantic ideal? Feelings, thoughts, logical arguments can change with the content of one's dinner as with the content of one's heart. Life changing moments recede into the distance, brilliant conversations twitch twice and then die--we are not cold, reserved, antipathic on principle, but because we are blocked up below and no bathroom is nearby.

Can you truly say that if your loved one were transfigured in some accident that you and your feelings of love would be unaffected? But that is too obvious of a moral dilemma. What if one day they began to smell differently, or felt differently and strangely in your arms? Could things go on as before?

I am not denying that love--and at this point we can speak of *Love*--that *Love* has its origins in the deep mental connections that two people can share; my point is that the *physical connections* between two people are just as deep if not deeper, and that these connections go beyond mere attractiveness and lust--further I assert that those connections are far too often ignored.

And yet, to speak of abstractions of the mind is essential for understanding the responsibility to Love.

*In the mental sphere, to Love is to learn to be honest*--and I use the term the "mental sphere" to signify that which the body cannot do alone, a mainly cerebral phenomenon, but at the same time one *not disconnected* from the "physical sphere," for to learn to be honest is to overcome the roiling in one's stomach as much as the demons in one's head. Nevertheless, in the mental sphere, to Love is to learn to be honest, not in a negative, but in a *positive* sense: to communicate one's feelings actively, to say what one feels when one feels it, regardless of consequences, because if the feelings of Love are there, if the feelings extend through both of those involved, if the pairing by chance, or by fate, or by any other intention, is real and valid and beautiful, the truth, that is, the way one honestly feels as best can be expressed, can only make passion stronger when, in unearthing the deepest fears of one's soul, the doubts and insecurities, one finds that *one is not alone*, but matched at every step by the *other*.

Never in life are we so honest as then, and the ability in nearly everyone to be *actively* honest is so atrophied it often takes an eruption of emotion, a philosophical understanding, to bring true, active honesty and closeness into the *passionate relationship*, the relationship from which Love arises. This opening up is necessary for Love to exist, however impossible this step may feel.

*In the mental sphere, to Love is to have every faculty of the mind activated.*

*Furthermore, in the mental sphere, to Love is to be constantly wondering, to be constantly doubting.* It should be evident that the counterpart of honesty--not the opposite, but that which accompanies--is doubt. And I argue that a responsibility to Love provides the counterbalance to Love's ever present doubt, *for Love itself is unaffected by doubt.* Indeed, at a certain point we can distinguish between Love itself and the person loved, *Love itself* and the *passion*. And at that point, doubts become doubts about the person, doubts about, for instance, *their* honesty. Here we find questions of trust, here we find questions of personality. And although these things are that which create Love--for indeed, I am not denying the process of *coming to Love*--at a certain point Love rises above the mere circumstances of its creation and *becomes something in its own right.*

At this point, what Love *becomes* is the responsibility to Love. Love as an *abstraction*, a *metaphysical concept*, is Love's responsibility. Love *itself* becomes its responsibility and responsibility *itself* becomes Love. Whatever doubts arise, whatever questions creep up, Love and the responsibility to that Love accost one at every turn, whether one walks through the sunlight of a park alone, basking in the security of Love or whether one collapses on one's bed in agony, unable to stand for the doubts, the trust denied, and then one flees through the mind's corridors, only to find Love and the responsibility to Love behind every corner.

This is why long after couples have parted ways, the agony is preserved. For only the lovers themselves have parted, separated, become estranged, *not the Love itself.*

And when a decision *must be made*, the Love will not let one sleep, it is the self-consciousness which negates the rest, it is the one which conquers, it is the one which leaves the remains of destruction in the lumber rooms of the mind. It is thus the cause of the worst internal conflict, but once recognized as such, the decision to be made becomes simple, the answer single, unitary and clear.

Yes, yes I do.

*For you have a responsibility towards the Love itself*, and these are the terms we use to describe it. You have an *obligation* towards the Love you share, because these terms carry the force of impetus. You have a *duty* to the person you face, because your soul will never again be quiet if you fail to recognize that and neglect to act at your given moment.

### III.

But how does one distinguish Love from attraction, from passion, from all things which bring people together, which can make one happy, satisfied, changed for worse or better, but cannot impress themselves utterly on one's mind?

How does one know that one has made the step, the leap, into Love? And it *is* a leap in the sense that it creeps upon one gradually and one day it is recognized all at once.

To put it shortly, one knows when two are separated and the Love, experienced individually, is what keeps one alive; when the beloved is not present and the Love is contemplated in itself; and when the separation raises love as Love into the heavens as an abstraction, a metaphysical concept.

Separation allows one to contemplate the Love from a distance. And once separated from the passion, the infatuation, Love's influence, Love's demands can be recognized through the one's mental confusion, as the only valid method of reckoning. For what is there for meaning in life except to feel as if one was acting rightly. As much as some philosophers would have us discard moral terms like right or wrong, those ethical distinctions still have meaning for us.

Confusion and doubt will never evaporate, but one at least can feel justified. And if one lets Love detach itself from *the touching of one another*, let it rise into the world of dreams so that it hangs about one's ceiling at night, illuminating like the twinkling of indoor stars, then we can have a force of reckoning, a secular kind of god, a path, a way, a guidebook, a prayer, an ideal, an idea which can organize as well as destroy us, but which will never lead us astray. Acting responsibly towards Love may make us weep, but we will feel the decision's rightness like we feel a slap on the face, a sip of caffeine, a shot of liquor or a kiss on the lips. Then we are not simply touching one another, but *holding one another closely*.

I speak of the only ethics that matter, those that are inevitable from the dynamics of the human mind, those that are not separate from the world as it is, but those that let one decide the real, deep questions of the course of one's life, to paint the matter chiaroscuro, to sharpen the contours, to let ring two distinct tones. At a certain point, a level of trust must be attained, the question must be asked, *Is this a temporary, transient joining, or is this a meeting of two self-consciousnesses as in the domain of Hegel, of two who cannot exist independently, but who must exert themselves to gain utter knowledge of one another, and thus themselves?*

*Is this a confluence of passions, or something greater?*

And if you can see the break in the clouds, Love sitting on Zeus's throne, then the answer is burning, the doors of mystery thrown open, the deluge of light let to show that the answer is yes, yes I do.

And in that moment, you cease to care about ever seeing your beloved again. Your beloved asked of you and you responded. Eternal love is proven at last, the consequences be damned. As Kierkegaard writes in his *Fear and Trembling*, "even in loving another one should be sufficient unto oneself."

For then one does not have to worry anymore.

But what if the decision is not yours to be made, and your separation is made permanent? That your life together will never be becomes irrelevant, for one lives by the other's code, the code of Love ceaselessly, one experiences the lasting glow of the other's feelings without end, and suffers gloriously with a pain rich and varied with meaning. Kierkegaard, a great philosopher of love, went on to say:

His love... would take on for him the expression of an eternal love, would acquire a religious character, be transfigured into a love for the eternal being which, although it denied fulfillment, still reconciled him once more in the eternal consciousness of his love's validity in an eternal form that no reality can take away from him (*Fear and Trembling* 71).

But *Love* as *Love* need *not* be religious, that is my fundamental point. Ludwig Feuerbach, in applying his transformational criticism to Hegel, posited that while Hegel sees man as self-alienated God, the *truth* is that *God* is self-alienated *man*. The human species projects an idealized image of itself, of man, into the heavens to worship as a God for consolation. Feuerbach claims that this alienation, this falsity, this estrangement from our true nature must be overcome and religion cast from the ends of the earth. I, however, argue that if it is true that we create our own meaning in the world, as the Existentialists would have us accept, then *we can believe in our own fictions*. Thus we can make of Love what we will; we can cast Love into the mold of a higher being and in that way allow it to aid us in making the impossible decisions of life, the decisions which encompass the whole of the human life and so are, by all rights, impossible to answer within a single moment, but which must be continuously answered until

strength has given out at last. *Love* is our own ghostly companion and we know it is utterly *right* like we know the rightness of the day of the week or the month of the year.

#### IV.

Imagine that it is 1942. It is the height of the Second World War and you, a young man, are called off to war to defend your country. However complicated it becomes, that is as simple as it is. You are called away from your life, perhaps you even chose to leave your home, perhaps you now regret it, but now you face barracks and trenches and *the silence*, the lack of contact. I use the Second World War as an example because participation in that war, for both sides, was very little a matter of choice, and because both sides were able to feel justified in the crimes they committed. You are called away and you leave your beloved behind. You do not see her for many months and in both of your minds, it is not so much regrets, frantic thoughts which haunt you, but ideas. Although you did not call it such, you both, naturally, appeal to *philosophy* because, separated, you must treat one another as abstractions and that is what philosophy does best, treat the natural world abstractly so as to make distinctions within it.

Before you left, the two of you professed love. Now, in separation, this love becomes Love. In each of your minds, the beloved soon becomes an abstract concept: one must guess what the other is thinking, and soon, via the process I have described, the love itself is abstracted into *Love*, and when you lie in your cot at night, shivering, and asking questions into your pillow--*is she doing right by you?*--it is the Love that brushes the nape of your neck and makes you turn on your side and sleep, hugging the pillow and at peace.

Whatever you do during the day does not matter to you, because you know that you are loved. Whatever you feel during the night is washed away by the thought of Love's smile. And so you live, thinking nothing beyond day to day.

Then you receive a letter from your loved one. The sergeant hands it to you one afternoon, and you wipe the grease off your hands before you rip it open, the excitement shaking you, the doubt clenching in your stomach, the Love shaking its head.

And in your letter, your beloved asks you to marry her. Not in so many words, but she asks you if that is what you want, if marriage is possible between the two of you. She is asking to be joined. And you have to make a decision.

I chose this example carefully because, in this case, Love has had a chance to develop, a dilemma has been presented, and due to the separation, the poor soldier has both time to decide and to doubt. The fact is, the two lovers do not know each other anymore; all they know are the abstractions they have used as consolations.

How do you, the soldier, respond? What do you write back? Because now you truly doubt--is she the same person? More importantly, is she the *right* person? It did not seem so momentous then, to be in love with her, but now, isolated and alone, you wonder if anything has changed or if you had missed something about her before. Would to say *no* banish the Love that keeps you alive? You have been living day to day; now you must live for your life.

If you have been following my reasoning, you know that the answer is clear.

Yes, yes I do.

You have a responsibility towards your Love, and your soul will not be quiet, not for a while, but as you write to her with pen and paper, you will feel the rightness there. Do otherwise, the confusion will overwhelm you.

And when you say yes, weep because whatever you do, you can never be wrong again.

V.

At this point, I must come back and tie up two threads which I have opened up over the course of this short work, and which may seem to the careful reader to be contradictory. On one hand, I present myself as a materialist, a kind of psychologist; I investigate the mental dynamics that give rise to responsibility, or perhaps more clearly, I investigate the mental dynamics that give rise to the need for responsibility and attempt to provide a solution. But the responsibility of which I speak is responsibility towards one's beloved, or more generally, responsibility to the *Love* of the relationship. And therein seems to lie the flaw in my thinking: for what is this *Love* but an abstract, metaphysical, *ideal* phenomenon? To say it is eternal raises it to the level of religion. And to say it is eternal can barely be more than wishful thinking. Do people not fall out of Love? I myself have stated that the bent of our minds tends to fluctuate with our bowel movements. Indeed, within the span of hours one can run the full range of emotions from lust to loathing. How static could Love remain in this kind of world?

Imagine our poor soldier, let us say years later. Separation has ended, he has returned from war, he has married his beloved. And soon, his very beloved starts to crowd his mind, obscure the "virginal flame pure and clear" as Kierkegaard calls his Love. But if we have cast passion into the sky as Love, *then this confusion is nothing more than an overcast sky.*

The Love exists, dwells, in the back of the brain, in the gust which plays with one's hair, cuts through one's shirt and curls around one's eyes. Love is created mutually and Love as Love hinges on the mutual feelings of warmth and security that shared Love brings to every day. And if those feelings start to disintegrate, the Love yet exists! It will never not exist, the Love is eternal; it is like a sun whose rays are hidden, a diamond, uncut and unable to sparkle, and even when eyes grow dull and hair grows damp, you will never forget what the Love once was, although it ceases to enfold one in its embrace. To know that one was once loved is enough. Perhaps it is not enough to stop the weeping, but it is enough to make one smile. And that is enough to justify anything.

Again, the Love still shines, it is but hidden by a cloud.

*And you can see the light of the Love in others.* The one true love of your life, the one whom you loved and then hated when Love seemed to slink away like the sun, when clouds have set in, which hours later is gone when the clouds have dissipated and the dark night sky is all you can see--she has left you forever<sup>10</sup>. And only now, only too late, you come to Love again. Thus we can understand why the poor soldier cried when he saw a lovely old couple walking slowly through a vibrant city park. The old man wore a suit, the woman a dress and she, tall, still and proud walked ahead of him and he, under his hat, held her arm with one hand. By a lamp-post, they stopped, faced one another--what a look they shared! The old man leaned forward, whispered something in her ear and she gave a laugh. And then, hand on arm, *they walked forward*, leg matching leg. As they passed, the old man gestured at something with his cane and a flutter of half a dozen birds descended behind them.

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<sup>10</sup> Often taken to be a reference to Gottlieb's wife, Helen (1925-1996), also a writer of some note. [Editor's note]

## WANTON POEMS

2008

*As a Bee gathereth the sweetest and mildest honie from the bitterest flowers and sharpest thorns: so some profite may bee extracted out of obscene and wanton Poems and fables. – Plutarchus in Commentario, quomodo adolescens Poetas audire debet. (Francis Meres, Palladis Tamia, 1598)*

## Deafness

She couldn't have gone up to his fence in silence. Now it was the wind that barreled down the long street, through the windows of single-story rows, atop the surface of above-ground pools, and bristles of short, sick grass. She'd woken to the radio of the construction workers contracted to refinish the other side of her tilting building; then it was the roar of the wool pulled over her head and wrapped around her ear. The scratching of Baines against the sliding-glass door kept her busy in the kitchen, then the mid-air hiss and drip of the coffee machine blotted out the quiet closing of the liquor cabinet with all its contents intact. Walking around the kitchen, bundled up against the chill reaching in through her hole-ridden house, she felt *focused*, intact, aware of a pleasant hum all over her body, centering around her belly and her head. There were no ill-feelings in her, no contradictions, only hope and stasis. She was so happy to have him back.

She took out a fluorescent bundle of plastic bags from the drawer and set about filling them up, letting flour, sugar, eggs, creamed corn float down from their homes in the cabinetry onto the counter and into the bags. She considered taking him milk, but the carton in the fridge was nearly empty, and he was sure to have that.

She let Baines in and, taking two bags in hand, walked through the living room to the door. Her house was frosted with dust, the carpets were stiff and brown, the walls unfinished or stained with lifeless floral wallpaper, but the living room was where she let George experiment the summer after it seemed he'd come back from the dead, the way he appeared on her doorstep after being missing for so long; as if she, his mother, still had a doorstep; as if she, his mother, could always be a welcome mat. All enmity put aside, he begged her to let him come back home for a while. He had nothing to offer her.

She wanted the walls painted and he had offered to do it and she remembered him on the porch outside, leaning against the latticed divider which set off her half of the rented house, explaining why there was nothing interesting in monochrome walls. Why not have visible brushstrokes, hints of layering and blushes of other colors? He wanted to paint the walls so that they developed in color, in mood, from one entrance to the other, so that, walking through the room, one had a sense of change, of purpose, coming together.

She came back inside from the cold, feeling the distance in her knees, experiencing the faded colors of the walls in reverse, took in hand the last bag, along with two aluminum oven trays. Baines, spooked, slid on his nails across the linoleum in surprise.

The door-slam, the wind-chime, and then it was the grating of her sedan that occupied her, a continuous consumptive cough that kept her mind busy as she turned down street after street of neighborhood into neighborhood, collating through poorly defined aggregations of poorly-kept houses on adjacent streets.

His house was the last one before the highway, a chain link fence at the top of a short group of stairs. The drive was empty, the windows half-shuttered against the wind. She ignored

that; she couldn't carry everything at once, so she took in hand the two oven trays with their tops and, with effort, emerged from her car, wishing she had another hand to hold against the buttons of her thick red coat, wishing the ballet-flat shoes she'd squeezed into could have fit some kind of sock.

The gate was shut, but the wind buffeted her forward. She opened it and knocked on his door. Rang the bell.

"George? Can you help me carry in the stuff?"

She knocked again, then tried to look in the window, tried to peek past the cracked glass and chipped window sill. She shuffled back down the stairs and tried to lean over the fence into the driveway.

"George?"

She remembered when he was a kid, when it was more than just mother and son for Thanksgiving, she would break from her cooking to go look for him, when he hid from his cousins, when he wanted to be alone.

"George?"

She wanted to make something for him now, just the two of them, together in the kitchen, him leaning on the side of the table which divided the room.

"George?"

She tried walking around the house, looking through for some kind of opening, but everything was dark. The wind gave her limp hair one last toss from its grey roots, then died down.

"George?"

She told herself she wouldn't think this way.

"George?"

She was trying to ignore the pounding in her chest. This was it, wasn't it?

"George?"

This was the place, she thought, where you heard footsteps behind you, where you didn't have time to look before you went down. This was the place, she grasped, where you got threatened by spit gushing down onto rain-smashed duplexes, where you left on your own accord if you didn't live in a room under the wet mouth of the sky. She wanted to smash in a window with her purse, leap into the house, rouse him from bed, that's what it had to be.

"George?"

The wind was gone. There was silence all around her. And for the first time she could hear herself yelling at the top of her lungs.

"George?"

Again and again, she felt it rising in her throat.

"George?"

A few people walked past.

"George?"

She couldn't pause for a second, she couldn't stop.

"George?"

The name died away.

She stood there in front of her son's abandoned house, at last completely silent.

Twelve footsteps back to the curb. Every thought drained out of her head.

Then it was the groan of her car as she drove it up the street, her eyes blinded by the handkerchief that had engulfed her nose.

Then it was the rustle of her big red coat, the way her breath matched the car's respiration, involuntary and open-mouthed, as if she sat there with a needle hanging out of her arm.

I want to gather her in my arms and breathe hotly into her ears.

\*

### Shitting

Every time I walk into a bathroom, I think of Martha, hunched over, trapped in a stall, shitting. Her eyes are welded shut—she can feel the crusties in her eyes needling in the comfortable, wet nook under the frightened curves of her eyelids. Her hands are clamped around her stomach, her back arched, and she bends over, rocking back and forth a little, sweat beading on her back, under the scratchy middle part of her bra. She presses her fists into her lap, she presses them again, because now she just has to wait.

*Why?*

She asked the question in her mind, although she was not religious.

What had she eaten? It must have been something she ate.

*Why?*

Had there been dairy in anything she'd eaten?

*Why?*

She could feel gas burbling back and forth inside her, she could feel the dull cramping, the damp air rising out of her throat. She tried, she really did, she just wanted it to stop, she thought the blood vessels in her eyes would burst like she'd heard sometimes happened in medicated pregnancies; and then she felt the gas gurgle out of somewhere into something that felt huge inside her and slam against her rectum, then it came sputtering out.

Sometimes as a kid she imagined that, when the cramps came and nothing came out, she could cut herself open and let the gas escape. Just a straw would do, a pointed straw she could stab herself with and let the hot, hateful poison out.

And then the roar would subside, she would feel the sweat cooling, and she'd finish up and leave, her legs unsteady. She would tremble to the sink, she would open a window, she would stare into her eyes and inhale, hoping to bring something fresh and clean into her body.

I sometimes wonder what it would be like to *be* her. Always excusing oneself, blushing and wondering if anyone noticed the smell. I know the way it frustrated her to be like that, how she hated her body, how she hated that her body that exercised such control over her mind, how the two were inseparable, and she accepted that, but it made existence frustrating, that she could feel in her brain the amount of lactose she'd had, when her thoughts would come sluggishly and she would feel big and bloated and heavy.

It was times like these that she needed something sharp.

Two months to the day since Martha had moved in with George and she was still doing laundry at the Laundromat. She was in there now, hoping the detergent, fabric softeners and assorted sprays would cover the smell. Something in the sauce she'd had the night before, and the rosé wine had been so good, some part of her considered the possibility of cream only distantly and she hadn't taken a pill. Now, as she loaded the machine, she imagined that, one knee up, hand on cloak, her man was cutting through the waves to meet her, an American flag tugged at by the wind.

She remembered thinking, as a kid, that when her man came, she would have to stop him

on the shore, tell him to get back on the boat. Only then, surrounded by his men, could she board his vessel, she couldn't be alone with him, not until the smell died down and she was presentable. Sometimes she couldn't even go to the bathroom with other women in the room, the sounds were too embarrassing.

Something was wrong with the stain stick. She threw the sweats into the laundry machine and started it up, standing there for a minute. Feeling her hair tickling her face, she lay down on the wooden bench that divided the two sides of the Laundromat, working around the heaviness in her middle, ignoring the people around her. All she could hear was her breathing. Every time she exhaled, she thought she could feel the carbon dioxide spreading in her veins, soaking her.

I see her now in a different laundry room, many years ago, in the all-girls school she attended, hunched over, gathering up the unclaimed socks and placing them carefully in a basket. There they'd lie, beside neatly folded piles of discarded panties, blouses and bras, hoping to find their owner. Martha couldn't let them stay like that; she'd tighten the oversized bras around herself, sometimes two at a time, so they'd feel useful. It got to the point where her friends accused her of padding herself.

In the next room, it seemed eternal, her friends would be drinking, always a water bottle of vodka, and Martha would hear it thud against a table and roll onto the floor as she passed, basket held against her hip.

When she looked in, the girls would be leaning lifelessly against the bed, laughing about themselves, asking who was overweight, who had the wide forehead, making superheroes out of their faults. The girls would hear the creak of the door and Martha's footstep, Nicole's hand would dart up to the lamp cord, and in the darkness, she would hear Nicole whisper, "Clean it up!" and she would take it to mean herself.

But Martha would ignore her friends and sit down and talk about nothing but shit and shitting until they were rolling on the floor. She loved the feeling of power it gave her to talk about these things, to make these people double over, drunk inside and out. It was a feeling like jogging through a crowded hallway, seeing one comforting friend after another, smiling at each one, but being most excited to see *him* at the end of the hallway—she felt like that, as she shouted about going into the stall and shitting directly next to the toilet, taking a shit on the side of the road, feeling the wind of the cars going past on your rear end, making the loudest fart possible in the bathroom, the muttering of other ladies.

Then she would return to her room and paint her toenails. She would go to bed and the next day would be Sunday and although she was not religious, the music of Thomas Weelkes would make her cry in the pew. That's the image she felt most, as she lay with the small of her back on the wooden bench in the Laundromat. In that memory, she hummed, surrounded by warm polyphony, her soul lifted up under the shoulders by the strong arms of musical lines into the chamber over the gate. It's a dignified image. For what it's worth, I want to remember it for her.

When I think of her, when I think of all my characters, I want to gather them up in my arms, hold their tired heads, hers pale and freckled, black glossy strands of hair splayed on her forehead, his hair—the hair of Martha's George Washington—the warm color of mucus, a frame of wispy facial hair providing a halo to his dimples. I want to hold their heads against my chest and close their eyes and provide for them a consolation. I think of all the things I can do for them and I find those things in the feelings I can give them, the feeling in the cups of coffee, in the apple juice mixed with ginger ale, the feeling of wearing two pairs of pajama pants at once and the feeling, which starts in the legs, of knowing one another is beautiful.

When the laundry was finished, George met Martha for dinner at six in a French bistro with tiled floors. She didn't ask him how he could pay for it. The restaurant was equipped with fake, autumn-colored gas lights and a collection of newspapers draped over pale wood rods. In that light, she looked like she was in the midst of her twenties; he looked much older, the way the light brought out the separate chunks of his face.

And now let me give you to understand something about George.

\*

### Stretching

There are a number of feelings which are exactly alike:

(1) The warmth of snowpants tucked into boots, sweater in snowpants and scarf into coat when lying in a snow bank, feeling the snow packed around you, the snowflakes drifting down from the boughs of the pine tree which stood in your way as you slid down the hill that led to your mother's house, where you and she lived and where she waited in the room where she laid out your snowpants and boots and sweater and scarf in the shape and size of you on the floor of the kitchen.

(2) The feeling of being held in her arms, not your mothers, but another woman's arms, when you were trying to work and she climbed onto your chair and into your lap, encircled you, kissed you with her mouth and you kissed back, holding your head to the side, connecting with her so she had to breathe through her nose, face red, mouth open—her face needed you, something warm inside her presupposed a dependency, an everything which ascended in curls of smell from her neck, from the golden divide where the oils of her forehead ended and the oils of her hair began, exactly the curls of smell which confronted you when you unhooked her bra and she let it fall away and her breasts humbly offered a clean, warm, laundry bra smell; all these curls which latched onto your brain suggested that warmth, freshness and she were all contingent on you, that you could, later on, close your eyes and re-experience all of it, feel enclosed by the skin of your eyelids like she enclosed you.

(3) I can only imagine this, but what the cookie dough feels when one heavy, fluffy slab of it mixes against another in the metal bowl which you have to twist into the threads of its little altar and then lower the weighted head of the KitchenAid mixer into it, but you had to lock it before it would turn on, and your brother would never believe you when you said you had to lock it and you couldn't believe him, so you pushed him and elbowed him into the floor while the chocolate chips were melting from the warmth of the friction of the churning KitchenAid attachment, which is all part of the feeling, especially the part when the cookies come out of the oven and you bite into them at the table with your brother, breathless and sweaty after fighting, and in between gasps you devour the chewiness and the chocolate, and your eyes close, but you could feel your brother's eyes on you, mimicking your enjoyment, because it seemed like fresh baked cookies were the things to have, and you inhaled deeply and you drank cold milk.

(4) The warm tension resulting from having had two glasses of rosé wine, golden pink bleeding into red at the bottom of the glass, and feeling it like an anchor at the bottom of your belly, tying you to the shore of home, a private enclave, like a forested island in the middle of the Mississippi, which you saw in your head once when you were reading Huck Finn; and you imagine swimming ashore in bright sunlight to meet someone on the island, but that storm comes and the water is swift and the waves are high and you're in someone's living room, sitting back on their couch, your eyes are too dry and you're sleepy, but not tired and you can see all the

familiar people who are squished up against you on the couch, on the floor, coming in with hors d'oeuvres from the kitchen, all corpses tossed about in cold water, heads bobbing and breaking the surface of the water in intervals; you're not happy about it, but soon you've got ashore and the wine fills in the rest of the picture and you remember her saying *doesn't this feel good?* and smiling so happily, a little scarily, and rocking back and forth, and you realize that if only you'd let yourself, you'd be happy.

(5) The satisfaction after a well-sized meal and a moderate walk, an absorbing conversation, and you make it back home and head for the toilet and you sit down and you have a good, big poop and it comes out smoothly, but not too much, and then you feel evacuated and refreshed and ready to confront the world, with clean hands and empty bowels.

All these feelings are the feeling one gets after working intently at a desk for a long time, then standing up and stretching your arms and throwing back your neck and flexing your legs, so that the blood rushes to your head and you're imbued with oxygen and ready to confront the world as it exists, not sitting down, but at eye-level.

I think that gives you a fair picture of one side of George. But there are some other feelings which are also alike:

(1) The feeling of sweeping up an empty auditorium, feeling the grit that you're kicking up coat the broomstick and your desiccated hands, and feeling your back and your armpits and the crux of your thighs itch with your sweat as you move among the discarded, dusty papers and wait to get out, even though you chose this, you chose this so you could concentrate, get to the bottom of things, you're waiting to leave, but you realize there's nothing out there, you gave everything up so you could concentrate on yourself and you're inside this auditorium, and it gives you trouble moving, you can't rub your face enough, there's nothing you can possibly accomplish, nothing you'd dare to do, except escape and you lust and dread and you just wait to leave.

(2) The feeling after a large cup of cold tea, with an oversoaked teabag, it shakes your legs up and down and scratches your throat, feels like cold sewage in your stomach, and you try to pay attention to what she's saying to you, but you can't, and after ten minutes, realize it's because your bladder is full to bursting and painful and concentrating on that helps you concentrate, until you can't bare it anymore and you find some relief in the bathroom, but after you've come back into the room, it happens again and you can't sit right, and now the walk to the toilet is interminable, her face behind you, and you imagine yourself faraway, in a green field, streaked with flowers in the shape of a huge paisley yellow necktie, on a hill overlooking a town, standing by a large rock, illuminated from behind by the setting sun as you throw yourself back and piss, letting the glorious, pleasurable stream sparkle in the blazing sun behind it, but the only place given to you to let loose is a dark bathroom with earwigs steeping in the sink bowl, and when you return there's nothing you want to say, you only want to scratch your face across the bumpy, patterned pillow that's propped up against the couch, but she insists on having a conversation, which is just beyond you and you're sorry.

(3) The feeling of sitting straight up in a cold bedroom, picking at your fingernails until the dirt and skin under them is ripped away, and you can feel a dull pain in your cuticles and your wrists grow weak, but although you can see your fingers start to bleed, you can't stop because there's no thoughts to replace the movement of your hand, and so you get up and start to pace, you walk into the living room as the doorbell rings and your girlfriend comes in and sits down on the couch beside you, and she comments on the smell of your mother's cooking which is delicious, and your mother smiles at her from the kitchen, which opens into the living room,

and you hate your mother because she knows the truth about you, the truth that you're a flake, that she's seen you high and drunk, degenerate and defenseless, that you can never right yourself because she knows how wrong you've been; so you tell your girlfriend, leching at her lank and dirty hair, her face like a frying pan, *get up*, and she does and you both stand there in front of the green couch in your living room, and you grab her left breast as you reach around her back and force yourself against her mouth and moan so your mother can hear you, and she whispers *you're insane* in your ear as you lower her onto the couch and slide your hand down her body and you don't want to do it, but you keep coming back, and every release binds you further, as you bury your head against her, eyes shut, and breathe so heavily that you can forget who everyone is, as you hear your mother walk out of the room and take the stairs slowly.

(4) The feeling of waiting in a line to see a movie, just your little brother and your little sister and you in the blustery cold of the night outside the ticket office, and you look over and you see your mother and your father, her face overrun with liver spots, steaming with a brownish-red, wearing nothing of note except a huge, grimy fur coat, hair unwashed, vomiting to the world a far too vivid portion of herself, one out of her mind with your father and his ugly, scraggly beard and jeans behind her, staggering against her back, and you cringe as they try to join you in line, you can see each individual grey hair on your father's chin, each droplet of spit illuminated by the streetlight above him, as he towers above you in the cold, the smell is just like the smell of a cat's litter box, like you've just sniffed the plastic scoop when you didn't realize what it was, you think of that just as the man standing behind you in line says *you can't cut in line here*, and you want them all to go away, and someone says *fuck you* and your mother pushes someone and you get knocked against the wall of the movie theater and soon the manager comes out and carries your mother away shouting, your father has already wandered across the street, your mother shouting *thank you, thank you very much, thank you, thank you very much*, and she spits at the man in line behind her and your father tries to stop her, but he trips and falls against the street, and everyone in the line gasps because although he did it to himself, you feel as if some violence is brewing as your mother is shaking her finger and hands and arms, and your father tries to laugh it off saying *can't you see she's drunk* to everyone and your mother loathes him, she emits a noise that's not loud at all, she covers her heads *get away from me, get away* and your father runs after her *you're drunk, can't you see you're drunk* and she pushes him and he stumbles and he tries to take her in his arms and she is disgusted, and then they're gone, and you're left alone with just you and your little brother and your sister in the line outside the ticket office waiting to see a movie, and you wanted everyone to disappear before, you wanted to be alone, but now that they're gone and have utterly forgotten that you were ever there, all you want is to scrape your forehead against the brick wall behind you and die so they might find it in them to weep when they see your picture in the papers tomorrow, and you hate yourself because you'd even kill your brother and sister too.

(5) The feeling at dinner when your maybe wife accuses you of hating your mother, that it's her birthday, it's Thanksgiving, when she says *I'll organize a party for her if you won't*, you can't even bring yourself to take her seriously, because there's so much she has to understand if this is going to continue, things she must understand, and you can hear her arguing with you, you see the way her lips don't quite match up when she talks, the way she sits delicately forward on her chair because you know she hurts too, and you laugh it off, and you feel your chest tighten, and your throat close, and your lips cringe, your eyebrows knit, your lungs gasp for air, and you crack your neck, and look away, you massage your wrists, and wipe your hands on your pants, because you love your mother and you love the woman across the table from you, and the

position you're taking and the feelings you're feeling are destroying your body, and you remember it feeling something like this when the two of you talked about marriage in this very same French bistro, with the gas-lights and warm baguette, and you loved her and you didn't love her, nothing is ever that simple, and you can't even do what feels right, you can only close your eyes and vanish for a time.

I would cradle George in my arms, I would draw the stubble from his chin, I would lengthen him out and press him back into shape. Hand on his chest, I would fill out his uniform, and let him walk out of himself. I could make him feel good.

The two of them went back to George's house after dinner. Hand on her back, George walked up the cracked stairs, unlocked the door. Martha went in, refusing to see the things that filled up the house, that kept George and her alive. She heard the door close behind her. George had a moment alone as he hung up his coat. He stood there beside the wooden coat rack, cut into the shape of a forested island, and watched Martha walk into the kitchen, closing his eyes for a moment and wondering how to break the sudden silence which had imposed itself between them. He went up behind her and kissed her neck. She turned around and pushed against him, he brought her towards him, she laughed, a little stupidly, they kissed.

In the living room, they had a large bay window, with rough, thick, rose-colored curtains. Below the bay window was a seat for two, with flat, rounded cushions and pink throw-pillows in the corners. A light blue knitted blanket lay folded up on the seat, and below that, on the floor, where lay a blue and white delftware rug, George and Martha made love, he on top, holding her to him. Afterwards, she felt sick from all the rocking back and forth. He wrapped her naked shoulders in the knit blanket and they sat next to each other, leaning against the bay window seat, surveying the forest of unpacked boxes, trash and detritus that had followed him from house to house for so many years.

"It smells like shit in here," Martha tried to say, she said something like "I'm sick of this, George, I don't think I can stand it, it smells all the time, and I don't like it. I know you say it doesn't matter, it's so dirty here, because I've got you, you've got me, but I feel disgusting, we can deal with these disgusting people because we're not disgusting it's alright, well, I can't do it, I can't be who you want me to be, I'm not pure, I'm not good, I'm a stupid piece of shit, I'm a whore, a disgusting fucking whore like everyone else, I'm stupid, I'm a stupid little bitch, looking to get fucked, I'm not better than anyone else, and I can't live up to you, I can't live up to you, I can't be like you, sometimes I just want to get drunk, I want to let everything go, I'm sick of living here, I'm sick of you making me into someone I'm not, someone I can't be, some brilliant, genius, I can't do everything, I want you to hate me, why don't you hate me, you don't deserve me, what do you deserve in this shithole, nothing but a little whore, you can't have me, I won't let you, you should be disgusted by me, I'm nothing better than the people who come here, I'm too stupid for you, I'm stupid."

George turned to her and laughed.

"What do you want? You want to get fucked?" he asked her.

"Yeah, call me a stupid whore," she said.

"I'm going to fuck you, you stupid whore."

"Why?"

"Because you deserve to get fucked, you're made for nothing better, you're just a stupid, stupid piece of shit," George said as Martha grabbed his shirt, "but first, I have to go to the bathroom real quick."

"Noo!" she said, "Don't go."

He laughed again, "I'll be back in a second."

"I said don't go!"

"Just a minute, sexy," he said, kissing her on the cheek.

George got up and walked out, a little bent over because he was naked and it was cold. As soon as he left the room, Martha rested her head in George's shirt, which was balled up against her knees. In the bathroom, George sat down to pee because he was tired out and he rested his head on his hands, his elbows resting on his knees. *I really don't want to do this.*

"I'm going to fuck you now," he said to her.

"Good, I want to feel you inside me."

He touched her hair and tried to lay her down on the floor again.

"I love you," he said.

"I want you to knock me down onto the floor."

"I don't want to do that."

"Don't tell me you love me," she said.

"Look—"

"What?"

"Look, I really don't want to do this, maybe I'm an idiot, but I want you to stop, I know it's not true, but if it's true, I can't stand it, sometimes when you say that I get so sad," he said to her, sitting down.

"I want you to slap me really hard, right across the face."

"No."

"Slap me! I want you to slap me!"

"Look, I don't think it's right—Why? Can you tell me why? I can't do it until I understand."

"I don't care, I don't care, I want you to slap me," she said.

George started to get dressed, he reached for the shirt which was in her hands.

"No!" she shouted and slapped him across the face. She lifted her hand to do it again, but he caught her arm and a shiver ran through her entire body. Her breathing came out in gasps.

"This isn't right," he said, "Please stop. Can you stop now?"

She was touching him now, he had to get out, he turned away from her, started pacing and she grunted, she stumbled against his back.

"Are you alright?"

"Don't fucking ask me that, why do you care about me! Why?" she screamed and knocked one of the cardboard boxes from its leaning tower. It crashed to the floor, spilling old children's toys, train engines, plastic lawnmower, dolls with miniature dresses, that's all she saw. She held her hands against her stomach and moaned.

"You must be sick of me," she screamed, "You want to know the truth, you must be sick of everything."

She picked up a HotWheels car and threw it at him, it hit him near his temple.

"What—"

She screamed again and flung another little car at him. George was backing out of the room, yelling, "Stop, stop it!" He ran to the door and slammed it behind him and leaned against it so she couldn't get out. She tried the door once, then he heard a scream and a crash, then another crash and he couldn't listen any more. He could barely breathe.

"Hi, Liz? Can you do me a favor, Martha had a little too much to drink tonight and she's not feeling good—what? No, look, we're having some problems, and I don't know what to do,

and I really just want someone to be with her tonight, I can't stay here. I'm sorry I can't. Thank you so much."

He waited outside his door for as long as he could stand it. He stood outside on the porch, in the cold, but eventually he had to leave.

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### Soreness

One time, when George had taken up photography for a day, he took a series of black and white photographs of Martha. Four of them they liked, and George went to the mall to get some cheap frames. He expected to spend more than he was willing to, but he found a deal at Bed, Bath & Beyond, four 8x10 black frames, twenty dollars. Overjoyed, he took it up to the cashier — had a moment of indecision, when he realized it was sized for 5x7 pictures and a mat, but the cashier assured him that 8x10 photographs would fit in the frame alright — and soon he was swinging his plastic bag back and forth against his knee as he mounted escalator after escalator, in comparable peace. He called Martha to tell her the good news.

He remembered hanging up after talking to her and standing very still, staring up at the church steeple that rose into the sky at one corner of the intersection. Everything seemed very quiet, very peaceful, as if he were hovering above something warm, as if he were suspended above a great bowl of soup and the possibility of falling didn't appear likely to him, but he imagined that when he did fall into the bowl of soup, it would feel wonderful and warm; soup seemed to illuminate his body from within, it would do the same from without, and he would float in broth, let the tangle of noodles caress him, he would dunk his head in and see peas and pieces of carrots and onions flash before his eyes. Submerged in a broth heavy with oil, he found it was very, very silent. Underneath the surface, it was quiet.

As he walked up the stairs to his porch the next morning, the air was frigid, and he felt very self-contained, bundled up in his borrowed coat. He could hear very distinctly each step he took; the crack of his shoes on the wood was clear and resonant. He stood before the door and ran his fingers through his hair.

She was there, in the darkness, lying in the midst of broken boxes, half of them lying in tatters, her arm concealed by what she had to think were scarves, her legs bent over books, pickup sticks between her toes, her body barely covered by cloth tablemats spilling from the black fabric bag beside her. She was shivering, and as he watched from the hallway, afraid to enter the room, she awoke, slowly righted herself until she was sitting half cross-legged, her arms around herself, and it took his breath away to see her like this, weeping softly.

"George, is that you, what was going on yesterday? There was a woman here to see you."

George turned around and saw the undergrad who owned the house next door standing in the open doorway.

"Nothing, I'm sorry about last night, can you leave us alone for a second?"

George shut the door swiftly and locked it. He knew she was looking at him, as he turned around, but when he entered the room again, she was gone; the light was on in the bathroom and he knocked on the door.

"Go away." He heard her voice muffled by the door, but he entered anyway, and in the golden light of the cramped bathroom, past the sink glistening with a stagnant layer of toothbrush water, past the towels half-hanging on their rack, Martha was sitting, legs clamped together, on the toilet.

“I can’t go to the bathroom, I can’t do it, mmmrgg, no, don’t come in here, I don’t want you in here,” she moaned, leaning all the way forward, her hands locked against her middle. George brought his hands up to her head and lifted her face, saw her hair pressed against the sweat of her forehead.

“Are you okay?”

“Get out, I don’t feel good.”

“What’s wrong?”

“I can’t go, I—”

She was interrupted by a loud fart, and she groaned, pushing herself forward. George stood right in front of her.

“Why are you in here, why do you want to see me like this?” she said, on the verge of tears.

“I don’t care,” George said as another fart came wheezing out, “I love you.”

They both could smell it, and Martha started to cry, and buried her face into him. He held her head there, stroking her hair, feeling her snuffle against his bellybutton.

“What?” she croaked, looking up, resting her chin against him.

“You’re really sexy when you poop.”

“But it’s disgusting.”

“Shut the fuck up.”

“Why?” she whined.

“I love you,” George said, as he lowered himself to the floor, onto the white fuzzy rug that lay in the tiny space between the toilet and the wall. He leaned his back against the wall, laid his legs out, one leg on either side of the toilet and placed his hands on her knees.

“I want you to make a huge mess in the toilet, right now,” he said, “and I love the smell of your farts, and I love you and everything about you, and when you finish up here, we’re going to go out and get some MiraLax or BeneFiber or whatever it is and you’re going to feel better.”

“But I won’t, I’m always going to be like this, I hate it, I hate it so much.”

“Shut up. And you know what we’re going to do when we’re done this, because you were absolutely right, we’re going to go to my mother’s house and we’re going to throw her a huge surprise birthday party, and help her cook a huge Thanksgiving dinner, because I’m a terrible ungrateful son because I still love my mother, notwithstanding everything I’ve done to you.”

“You’re really amazing,” she said to him.

“No, you’re amazing. Do you think I’d be doing any of this without you?”

This was the most comfortable feeling he’d ever felt, feeling the indentations of the white painted boards of the wall against his back, the warmth of his pants as they hugged the toilet bowl, her hands in his, and that look of hers that bound them together as surely as they are bound to me.

I want someone to be there forever as she sits on the toilet, someone to sit or stand before her, to kiss her head, kneel before her, look her in the eye, cross-legged before her, back against the wall, the stall door, looking up at her, and talking, taking her mind off the pain. Someone to keep the other parts of her warm.

I always knew it was George, ever since I first imagined him in his mother’s living room, winter, years ago, when the windows were cracked, the air whistling in, when the room was finished in wood and George was on his back, his coat streaked with ash from the fireplace, his eyes looking up into the darkness of the chimney, watching the smoke from his cigarette rise into the air.

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Food

It was one thing when George's mother was speeding up the street, in midst of all the motion, it was another thing when she was stopped at the light—then she was just seated, a wet handkerchief crumpled in her hand, her grey sedan idling between strangers. She was trying to figure out where to go, which turn she should make. The feeling that she had, of being overstuffed, pushed into her big red coat, feeling her eyelashes caught in the corners of her eyes, her bones like cold needles threaded with flesh, it was like being alone under the covers in a king-sized bed, with the blankets pulled up to your neck, content and comfortable, if it weren't only for the strangeness you felt on either side of you.

She turned into the parking lot of the Acme, running over the curb, and heaved herself out of the car into a pile of sodden, crimson leaves. She floated through the doors which parted like wisps of clouds, she slipped from aisle to aisle, taking in the bread, the milk, the peanut butter. She had to move out of the way for a father and his child pushing a shopping cart and she pressed herself against the wall of soup to make room and even after they had turned the corner, she leaned there, hugging cans of Campbell's soup; she would have done anything to see him, would have forgiven every sin he'd committed, every person he'd hurt, so he wouldn't have to keep disappearing, so he wouldn't have to vanish and disintegrate, she was leaning against the frozen chicken cutlets, she was holding tight to the orange juice, if she was good at anything, she was good at recognizing the problems in people, she wasn't without problems, she knew his problem, and it was that he felt too much, he just lolled his head back and felt.

The carton of milk back home was more than half empty and the only thing she could think of to do was get some more. She took two cartons of 2%, paid for them, and left.

She crunched up her driveway and gathered up her plastic bags, holding them to her breast as she drew the screen door open and unlocked the house. She could hear Baines barking inside, a leafblower exhuming leaves from mounds across the street, the clicking of a bicycle behind her, the faint exhalation of the wind through nearly bare trees. It smelled like her neighbor's pool. The key turned in the lock and she tried to step into the room, into the room painted in a series of impressions from door to door.

"Surprise!"

George's mom stumbled back, the screen door slamming shut in front of her. George reached forward and caught the door as it rebounded. He was smiling at her, Martha was beside him holding balloons and a paper bag, flour and sugar and Crisco peeking out from the top. George pulled his mother into the room and gave her a huge hug, pressing his bony cheeks against her flushed, ruddy face.

"What are you doing here?" she asked, crying, "I was just at your house."

"It's a surprise party, mom. Happy birthday—"

"Happy Thanksgiving," Martha chimed in.

"We already put the turkey in the oven," George continued, "What's wrong?"

"Are you okay?" asked Martha.

George's mom sat down quietly on the sofa. The cushions, entwined with patterns of vines and pink roses, creaked as she brought herself down.

"No, no, no," she moaned, almost inaudibly. She could feel relief flood out of her from top to bottom. "I'm just glad you're alive," she whispered to him, shakily.

With a noise like tears, George embraced his mother and Martha embraced them both. She wrapped her arms around them, and they all leaned their heads on one another's shoulders. The house was warm with the steam of cooking and the smell of roasting turkey pervaded the room.

## CHOPIN'S MOON

2008

### I. Introduction

One of the obsessions of the later nineteenth century was identifying and investigating the forces that act on people's minds. This is part of what captured the imagination of Karl Marx and later on, in a comprehensive psychology, Sigmund Freud. Both writers use the term *fetish* in different, but similar ways. Marx uses *fetish* to describe how a commodity can seem to have objective properties, such as price or value, when actually such properties are only a product of social relations. One of Marx's influences in this regard was the philosopher Ludwig Feuerbach. In *The Essence of Christianity*, Feuerbach asserts that while God may appear to have an objective character, in reality, Man has simply cast an ideal notion of himself into the sky to worship. The essence of the argument is that this original relationship has long since become obfuscated and God has taken on the character of something real—a real relationship between man and himself has become transformed into a relationship between man and his illusion. In contrast, a *fetish*, for Freud, denotes a condition in which a certain object or part of the body becomes the object of displaced affection; sexual attraction is divorced from its natural object and concentrated in another. Both notions of fetish carry the sense of a relationship in reality becoming a different relationship in one's mind—one, however, that seems just as real.

This essay will investigate the way in which a past populated by figures—historical figures, painters, composers, writers and their works and characters—becomes a manifest part of one's life and how such figures stand in for parts of oneself. This process I call historical fetishism. For a certain person of person, the figures of literature, art and music are all parts of one's psyche—they are how one gains knowledge of history in the first place and it is through them that one sees the world. The text of a book, say, its characters and above all its author, make up a real presence for this kind of person. In this way, a story can become an almost physical weight on one's mind. Great authors of the past, great artists, composers, kings and queens fill up this person's field of vision, as if those figures were sitting beside one; or, as if their work were a ghost only through which one could see the world. Even against one's will, stories and books exist both on the page and in one's reality, exerting their influence and speaking. History is written in both the volumes on one's bookshelf and in the sky above, arcing above one's head in a great abstraction, like the stars in the sky.

Through reading literature, through viewing paintings or hearing music, often those of canon, a fetishized relationship develops between the "reader" and the "text." The text becomes a part of the reader; the reader and text, in fact, come to know each other personally. This relationship takes two forms. On one hand, an author might become one's friend, one's acquaintance. One would feel the gentle push of a whole past artistic community. The relationship between the text and reader becomes one of companionship, empathy and understanding. In a familiar way, the reader identifies with the author; in another way, the reader unknowingly becomes a bit of the author.

On the other hand, an author, text, story, even literature as a whole, might weigh on one's mind, challenging, mocking, driving one to action, to new thought, to new works. These two aspects of the scholarly relationship compliment one another and are present in the same reader. For such a reader—and indeed, it takes a certain type of reader for this to be true—the literary, the historical become the real. They become nearly physical parts of one's life, like one's parents, like one's furniture, like one's friends. One begins to call those things within oneself by the

names proscribed by the text. Indeed, the figures painted by the text come to stand in for aspects of one's mind.

In different ways, both Søren Kierkegaard's philosophical work *Fear and Trembling* and Hjalmar Söderberg's novel *Doctor Glas* investigate this notion; the life and painting of Ernst Josephson epitomizes it.

## II. Kierkegaard's Obsession

The first section of *Fear and Trembling* is titled "Attunement." In it, Kierkegaard describes in the third person how a man, whom we understand to be Kierkegaard himself under the pseudonym Johannes de silentio, learns the story of Abraham and Isaac as a child. The story seems simple in the man's youth, but, Kierkegaard writes, "the older he became the more often his thoughts turned to the tale...and yet less and less could he understand it" (Kierkegaard 44). The story of how Abraham was called to sacrifice his son becomes more and more incomprehensible to the man until "finally it put everything else out of his mind" (44). The man comes to want nothing more than to have gone along with Abraham on his three day journey to the mountain Moriah, and so to have understood him.

This is the basis for the whole of Kierkegaard's work. It is not simply the figure of Abraham that occupies him but "the shudder of thought" (44), that is, the meaning of the story: how Abraham could have had such absurd faith in God that he could both believe that Isaac would be saved from his hand at the same time that he was completely ready to give Isaac up, to *sacrifice* him with all the accompanying anguish and guilt implied by that word. For Kierkegaard, the figures and stories of the past are not simply obsolete relics of an earlier epoch, authority figures to pay lip service to, but testaments to the existence of questions that every generation must ask itself. In a work in the Christian tradition of devotional literature, Kierkegaard teaches us that we must *actively* deal with the past. But crucially, Kierkegaard asks these questions first *of himself*, because the story, however old and tired it may seem, weighs on his mind as if it happened yesterday. The story of Abraham and Isaac has become a waking part of his existence and the figure of Abraham comes to represent Kierkegaard's mental confusion in the face of absurdity. For Kierkegaard's part, he deals with the figure who haunts him through philosophy.

Indeed, as Kierkegaard writes, "I can only refer to my own experience" (146). The whole of *Fear and Trembling* can be read as a way of *coming to grips* with the past and the figures from the past which invade the present. It is no accident, then, that the central idea of Kierkegaard's philosophy is one of action, that in the world of the mind, "only one who works gets bread" (57). One has to work hard to gain an understanding of life, oneself and one's time. One has to actively engage with the enigmatic figures of the past in order to deal with the present. Kierkegaard's own philosophical method reflects this.

On one level, *Fear and Trembling* is about trying to understand the "monstrous paradox which is the significance of [Abraham]'s life" (81) and to turn that understanding into part of oneself, to realize that the ability to have faith is granted to everyone, that "no human being is excluded from it" (95). Kierkegaard writes in the Epilogue that,

Whatever one generation learns from another, it can never learn from a predecessor the genuinely human factor. In this respect every generation begins afresh, has no task other than that of any previous generation, and comes no further, provided the latter didn't shirk its task and deceive itself. This authentically human favor is passion, in which the one generation also fully understands the other and understands itself. (145)

Here, Kierkegaard sees a continuity between generations, but not a progression. It is no use “being born into the most enlightened age” (75) if one is not willing to take seriously the wisdom of generations past. Often Kierkegaard talks about those who “feel their lives unrelated in even the remotest manner to those of the great” (92), giving the example of a minister who retells the story of Abraham, without ever exploring the real implications to the nature of faith that it implies. When a man in the audience takes the minister’s sermon to heart and murders his own son, the priest takes great pleasure condemning him. “Is it because Abraham has acquired proprietary rights to the title of great man, so that whatever he does is great, and if anyone else does the same it is a sin, a crying sin?” (60) Kierkegaard asks. The problem, in Kierkegaard’s eyes, is that too often the past is treated as a given. We, in the present, can fall too easily into the trap of thinking we stand at the pinnacle of history and need not look down. But Kierkegaard tells us that the members of each generation must relearn the lessons of past generations, must understand stories like Abraham’s on their own terms and understand it in relation to themselves.

But on another level, however, Kierkegaard’s work draws our attention to the fact that while some can take paradoxical figures like Abraham for granted, others are obsessed by him. Indeed, if each generation comes no further than the previous, then the figures of the past sit right beside us. And clearly, while there are those who ignore the past, there are those who cannot forget it, like Kierkegaard himself who addresses Abraham directly, reverently: “[I] will never forget that you needed a hundred years to get the son of your old age, against every expectation, that you had to draw the knife before keeping Isaac; he will never forget that in one hundred and thirty years you got no further than faith” (56). Although Kierkegaard frames *Fear and Trembling* as a work in the tradition of devotional literature and draws out lessons about the past and faith that apply to everyone, Abraham, for Kierkegaard, is more than just an example, a model to illustrate a lesson, however profound or demanding that lesson may be. Kierkegaard exhorts the reader to deal actively with the past because that is what *he* has found to be his experience: the basis for his work is personal. In fact, his work is a way to deal with his obsession. Abraham, then, is not an intellectual abstraction for Kierkegaard. When he thinks about Abraham, in fact, he tells us that he, personally, is “virtually annihilated” (62). For Kierkegaard, the past is tangible. It presses on his back and harries him because “not just the memory of the chosen lives on but the chosen themselves” (93). Figures passed down through stories do not remain locked in the confines of books; they become living presences that take lifetimes to understand.

Why?

They are inescapable because they are the faces of parts of ourselves that demand explanation.

Abraham becomes the symbol for the absurd level of faith that Kierkegaard claims he can never attain. “The hero I can *think myself into*, but not Abraham; when I reach that height I fall down since what I’m offered is a paradox.” (63) Through the process of historical fetishization, Abraham, the historical-literary figure stands in place of all the mental confusion and “holy terror” (90) Kierkegaard experiences. In this way, Abraham appears not so far off; in fact, Abraham is as close to Kierkegaard as the psychological processes which grant him such power over the philosopher’s mind.

Kierkegaard writes that “it is against my nature to do what people so often do, talk inhumanly about the great as though some thousands of years were a huge distance; I prefer to talk about it humanly as though it happened yesterday...” (64). The dichotomy implicated here is that there are two kinds of people: those who feel the past right beside them and those who do not. Kierkegaard certainly wishes there were more of the former and while the process of

historical fetishization happens, to some degree, to everyone, for a certain type of person, historical influence is inescapable. Applying this psychological analysis to *Fear and Trembling*, Kierkegaard is one of them.

One can tell by the language he uses. He describes the tragic hero:

The tragic hero...seeks out the one whose soul is beset with sorrow, whose breast cannot draw air for its stifled sighs, whose thoughts weighed down with tears, hang heavy upon him; he appears before him, he breaks the spell of grief, loosens the corset, coaxes forth the tear by making the sufferer forget his own suffering in his. (89-90)

Although he contrasts the tragic hero with Abraham, the knight of faith, whom “one cannot weep over,” the essential idea is the same. Heroes, tragic or otherwise, from the past can have direct influence over one in the present. Nor does Kierkegaard limit himself to heroes alone. In fact, he addresses the authors themselves as if they were beside him:

Thanks! And thanks again, to whoever holds out to one who has been assaulted and left naked by life's sorrows, holds out to him the leaf of the word with which to hide his misery. Thanks to you, great Shakespeare!, you who can say everything, everything, everything exactly as it is—and yet why was this torment one you never gave voice to? Was it perhaps that you kept it to yourself, like the beloved whose name one still cannot bear the world to mention? (90)

Kierkegaard uses apostrophe for rhetorical effect, but the degree of familiarity that he uses in speaking to Shakespeare leaves one with the inescapable suggestion that Kierkegaard is personally close to the bard. The words he uses—“you who can say everything, everything, everything”—suggest great love and respect, suggest that Kierkegaard has spent time with Shakespeare. It suggests that one can gain friends, not just outside, but inside, in the privacy of one's own study. Although Kierkegaard brings up the tragic hero, whom he can *relate* to, in contrast to Abraham, the incomprehensible, that basic phenomenon that Kierkegaard hints to is the same. Whether one can understand them or not, for someone like Kierkegaard, the figures of the past speak and cannot be ignored. Thoughts are manifest: Kierkegaard writes at the end of his Epilogue about Heraclitus ‘the obscure’ whose “thoughts had been his armor in life, which he therefore hung up in the temple of the goddess” (147). Thoughts, ghosts have weight, they can be seen, heard and above all, touched.

## II. Doctor Glas and the “Ensemble of Social Forces”

At the very beginning of Hjalmar Söderberg's *Doctor Glas*, in order to describe his feelings for the Reverend Gregorius, the novel's eponymous anti-hero, Tyko Gabriel Glas, retells an anecdote about Schopenhauer: the philosopher was sitting alone at a café when a “person of disagreeable mien” (Söderberg 13) enters the room. Schopenhauer “leaps up” (13) and beats the man with a stick. Glas concludes, “Well, I'm not Schopenhauer” (13). The irony is evident; by the end of the novel, the disagreeable Rev. Gregorius is dead and Glas, very nearly, has become Schopenhauer. It is no accident that the arc of the novel follows the path laid out by the anecdote on its very first page. The novel's format is a diary in which Glas attempts to record his thought processes which, eventually, lead to murder. As the novel progresses, it becomes clear that Glas's aim is to dissect his own identity. He sees himself as an “ensemble of social forces” (Tucker 145), to use a phrase from Marx, a symposium of conflicting and contradictory inner voices deriving from the world around him. Through a kind of literary psychoanalysis, Glas attempts to find the sources of each of the voices that speak discordantly inside his head, the sources of his neuroses, his persona. The forces that make him up are many: social forces, indeed, play a great role, including the influence of events in his youth. But above all, the force of historical figures in

art, music and especially literature shapes Glas's identity. Indeed, throughout the novel we see the pervasive influence of historical fetishism. For Glas, quotations and allusions are the terms by which he describes the world; they symbolize aspects of himself. Indeed, without recourse to them, his identity is unstable. At one point in the novel, he finds an old piece of paper with a note jotted down on it and wonders, "When did I write that? Is it some reflection of my own, or a quotation I jotted down?" (Söderberg 70). He cannot remember. For the solitary Glas, literature provides him with his friends; it also mocks him for his cowardice, his inaction and his passivity. Historical and literary influence build up in Glas's mind, clogging his psyche, until eventually, at the novel's end, he abandons his self-dissection as futile. Understanding does not bring him any closer to denying influence its power and before he can hope to leave behind the voices which harrow him, he must first accept his own identity.

Doctor Glas, despite his one great action in the form of the Reverend's murder, is ultimately a passive character. He describes himself as having "the solitary person's constant desire to see people around me—*note bene*, people I do not know and so do not have to speak to" (54). Not only does he not act, but he lacks the ability to see himself acting. Even in his imagination, he is absent. As he writes: "And even if from time to time I lay awake at nights, indulging myself in hot fantasies, yet it always seemed to me unthinkable that I should find satisfaction with the women my comrades visited..." (29). Further, because he cannot imagine himself, he must use others to see the world for him. Principally, literary and historical figures provide the language that Glas uses to describe the world.

In one lengthy passage, he makes his debt to literature and art explicit:

I often wonder, too, what character I should prefer for myself had I never read a book or seen a work of art. In that event perhaps it would not even occur to me to choose—perhaps the archipelago, with its rocks, would do for me. All my thoughts and dreams about Nature are most probably based on impressions drawn from poetry and art. From art I have acquired my longing to wander at east in the ancient Florentine's flowery meadow and nod on Homer's seas and bend the knee in Böcklin's sacred grove. (58)

The chief problem in any kind of analysis of humans is separating what is primary and what is secondary, what naturally arises from the human mind and what is conditioned by the various forces that act on us—forces that, natural forces aside, ultimately derive from other people, past and present. But whether or not Glas would be the same person without his exposure to literature, to art or music is irrelevant; that we cannot know. For us the relevant fact is that he employs the language of culture, of literature, music and art as terms of expression to describe the world. Further, it is not as impersonal symbols that he treats Homer and Böcklin; they do not simply signify the way words do. For Glas, Homer and Böcklin are alive; the whispers of multiple generations explain to him everything he encounters in the world:

Alas, what would by own poor eyes see of this world, left to themselves without all these hundreds and thousands of teachers and friends among those who have sung and thought and seen on behalf of the rest of us? (58-59)

Above all, when literature, when great historical figures, when the *past* is fetishized, it is never an impersonal, intellectual process. Even if the voices of the past are harrowing, as Glas discovers as he becomes mired in deliberations over Gregorius's murder, nevertheless the voices are *our own*; they are our "teachers" and, especially, our "friends." This is more than simply relating to or identifying with other people, past or present; when the past is fetishized, our favorite authors become a part of our everyday

life, sitting with us when we dine alone, walking with us down the streets at night. They show us parts of ourselves, they give us our eyes:

And what am I? ... I have no eyes of my own. I can hardly see the drinks and radishes on the table, over there, with my own eyes; I see them with Strindberg's and think of a supper he ate in his youth at Stallmastaregarden. And when the canoeists flew past on the canal, just now, in their striped vests, it seemed to me for a moment as if the shade of Maupassant fled on before them.

And now, as I sit at my open window, writing this by a flickering candle...now, as the candleflame flutters in the draught and my shadow shivers and flutters like the flame on the wallpaper, as if trying to come to life—now I think of Hans Anderson and his tale of the shadow. And it seems to me I am the shadow who wished to become a man. (60)

When Kierkegaard dealt with the weight of Abraham on his mind, the philosophy he expounded was primarily an active one: he taught us that one should take one's ghosts in hand and treat them seriously, to understand them on their own terms, and see how those terms are not so different from one's own. Glas's analysis, in contrast, is primarily passive. Instead of treating his ghosts as separate, he allows them to make up his identity. He lives vicariously through the characters he reads, through the lives of authors, or painters. He leeches off their experience and makes it his own. He has no independent, active identity: indeed, he is "the shadow who wished to become a man" (60). His own life, then, is a shadow cast by the forces which went into his being, forces whose faces are of the historical figures themselves. And if he sees the world, necessarily, through the lens of literature, the world takes on the form of literature. He writes that "I ... am a born looker-on, [I] want to sit comfortably in my box and see how people on a stage murder each other, while I myself have no business there" (99). But however much he "want[s] to sit comfortably," the very figures whose eyes he sees through call him, frustratingly, to action.

He hates himself for that contradiction. While he vacillates over Gregorius's murder, the people he idolizes, those who act—"I've read Raskolnikov, I've read Thérèse Raquin" (100)—tell him via his own thoughts, "Trash! You're just trash!" (99). And when he does act, the impulse to murder is shaped by the voices in his own head, voices bearing the examples of the past, voices which eventually, after he kills Rev. Gregorius, go wild: "I sense the enormous atmospheric pressure of others' opinions; the living, the dead, and the still unborn, gathering out there, threatening to blow down the door and crush me, pulverize me..." (124). Glas thinks he cannot be rid of them; instead, he works at identifying them. "I want to (murder Gregorius); and I don't want to. I hear conflicting voices. I must interrogate them; I must know *why* the one says: I want to, and the other: I don't want to" (93). The whole novel is the process by which Glas attempts to understand the forces that make him up. His difficulty lies in that he assumes his development is over, that all he can do is to pick apart what has already been created. His path, then, is self-determined. He, passive, allows the souls of generations past to flow through him, allows them to justify his murder.

As Glas deals with his conflicting feelings after murdering the Reverend, the influence of his "friends" overtakes him yet again:

There's something wrong with my brain. I don't know whether it's too bad, or too good; but certainly, it isn't what it ought to be... Why are the two little trees by Bellman's grave so thin and wretched?... He should be sleeping beneath great sighing trees, old Carl Michael. Sleep, yes—are we allowed to sleep? Soundly? If one only knew—two lines from a famous poem come into my head: 'The shade of an old poet wanders in the roof-gutters, its voice sad as a frozen ghost's.' Luckily for Baudelaire, he never had to hear what it sounds like in Swedish. (131-132)

As he writes, Glas visually places Bellman's grave in his room, his physical location. For him,

“old Carl Michael” is as real as Kristin, his maid. His brain is both “too bad” and “too good,” in the sense that it is too rational. Glas’s overthinking of his own influences is what denies him sleep and, indeed, he comes to this conclusion himself, towards the end of the novel: “Perhaps we aren’t intended to understand life? All this rage to explain and understand, all this chasing after truth, perhaps it’s a wrong turning?” (147). As Glas goes after the truth behind the forces that constitute his psyche, he is ultimately frustrated. Although he come to know the faces of the forces that make up his being, he cannot let them go; they are as part of himself as he is. Indeed, they are him. For that matter, whether he chases after truth or not, he remains the kind of person who immerses himself in others. The very idea of keeping truth at a distance is a restatement of an idea put in his mind pages earlier by his friend Markel who says that one must “preserve a correct and satisfactory distance from the truth” (138).

Doctor Glas is another example of the type of person we first encountered in Kierkegaard. He is someone who sees and interprets the world via the figures of ages past. He, like Kierkegaard, is the type of person who hears poets wandering above him, their “voice[s] sad as a frozen ghost’s,” haunting and driving him forward. Glas’s friend Markel tells him that “it would be difficult to find a more striking instance of the toughness of tradition than the fact that the most popular almanacks are full of detailed information which no living person any longer cares a fig for” (76). As in Kierkegaard, a dichotomy is erected between those who remember and those who forget, between those who cannot let the past go and cannot escape it and those who ignore it. Glas, and Kierkegaard, for that matter, are trapped with the past.

Glas references Nietzsche to justify his interpretation of Eva Martens, the woman whose affection he constantly ignores: “Here go many virgins, whom no man has yet touched, and who do not thrive by sleeping alone. Thus, more or less, spake Zarathustra...” (84); he references Marx to describe Mrs. Gregorius as “a woman from primitive folk, or one that never existed, where class distinctions had not yet become, where ‘the people’ still had not become the lower classes.” (110) He reflects on the first woman he denied an abortion to: “...a big, dark-haired, rather vulgar young beauty, the sort, you could see at a glance, which must have filled the earth in Luther’s day...” (17). Later on he compares a portrait of Rev. Gregorius’s wife to “good Catharine of Bora” (27). Indeed, these and other’s voices make up the tools he uses in his attempted analysis of the forces that make him up; these are the origins of the arguing voices who deliberate on the pages of his diary. The voices of Nietzsche, of Marx, and those of Raphael, Steinlin (20), of Demosthenes (102), of Pascal, Fénelon, Queen Margot of Navarre (131), King Herod (146), Oedipus (147) and myriads more make up the faces of the historical-literary forces at work inside Doctor Glas, the forces that make him up, the forces he can often identify, but, ultimately, do nothing about.

Indeed, Glas understands this phenomenon, indeed, the phenomenon of historical fetishism in general and, in one passage, he describes it with grace and poetry. He shows us how the forces of things we have read, of what people have said, and what we have experienced can become disconnected from the experience of reading or listening and become associated with, that is, fetishized into, concrete figures and forms that haunt the imagination. He shows us how one thing can stand in place of many things, how one shape can contain an entire mingling chorus from the experiences of one’s life.

He shows it to us in his discussion of “Chopin’s moon” (86). Glas, sitting at his writing desk, as usual, looks out his window at the moon. He tells us,

I remember so many moons. Oldest of them all is the one that perched behind the windowpanes in my childhood’s earliest winter evenings...Once my mother read Viktor Rydberg’s *The Christmas*

*Goblin* aloud to us children; I recognized it at once. But it still had none of the characteristics it was later to possess. It was neither wild nor sentimental, nor cold and horrible. It was just big and shiny... (86)

He remembers how he took piano lessons as a child and writes that “One night, I was about twelve then, I remember lying awake, unable to sleep because I had Chopin’s Twelfth Nocturne running through my head, and because of the moonlight” (86). As Glas will show us, all of his experiences with the moon, all that those experiences represent, become fetishized in the form of the moon. The moon, as he says, comes to take on “characteristics” like “wild or sentimental,” characteristics that lie outside the realm of physical description and imply that some other things have gotten caught up with the moon in Glas’s mind. The music of Chopin, Chopin the composer, the shining moonlight, childhood and sleeplessness are all bound tightly together in the form of the moon, as if the moon itself possessed those characteristics. Such things are beyond conscious control; Glas writes that “I sat upright in bed and sang. I had to sing that wonderful wordless melody that I couldn’t get away from. It melted into moonlight and in both lay a promise of something tremendous, something to be my lot one day...” (86). The process of music melting “into moonlight” is an involuntary part of the mind; Glas, through analysis, seeks to draw it out. Although he identifies it, he is unable, nevertheless, to move beyond it. Indeed, forever, “that was Chopin’s moon” (86).

Throughout the course of Glas’s life, the moon takes on more and more characteristics, which build up and clog his memory. “And it was the same moon which afterwards shivered and burned over the water on August evenings when Alice sang. I loved her. Then, too, I remember my Uppsala moon...” (86-87). Glas describes walking in Uppsala with “an older friend” (87). They “[talk] philosophy” (87) and Glas is disgusted with his friend’s Darwinism, which, Glas says, makes things out to be “meaningless, stupid and squalid” (87). For Glas, the influence of his dealings with Darwin provide the front for all his feelings about sex, a rationalization and a figurehead for his shyness and passivity. Early in the novel, Glas crosses a churchyard and is disgusted when he sees “one of those scenes of which letters to the newspaper are in the habit of saying they ‘defy description’” (28), that is, two people having sex. His refusal to be intimate with anyone, his disgust for his own body (“...I felt as ugly as the devil...” (35)), get tied up in literature, in writing: in the former case, in Darwin, in the latter, in the newspapers.

In Uppsala, Glas describes how he *thought to Darwin*, in the same way that Kierkegaard thinks to Shakespeare: “You’re wrong, but I still haven’t studied or thought enough to be able to refute you. But wait—wait just one year, and I’ll come back to this same spot with you, in the moonlight, just like it is now, and I’ll prove how wrong and stupid you are” (87). His friend waves the German volume “out of which he got his arguments” in Glas’s face, and in an act which is surely as allegorical as it is literal, he shows Glas an illustration and a text. Glas writes, “The moon shone so brightly I could both see what it represented and read what was written beneath. It was a picture of three craniums, rather similar: the skulls of an orangutan, an Australian aborigine, and of Immanuel Kant. Seized with loathing, I flung the book away from me” (87-88). The German book, on one hand, imparts to Glas its literal meaning, that is, what it says. But at the same time, the German book, the illustration, the moonlight illuminating them, all carry along a depth of emotion, carry and come to stand in for Glas’s feelings about physicality and sex. Indeed, he flings the book away from him because Kant, the great idealist, and Glas’s “friend” is being materialized, soiled and cast into squalor. Thus the moon gains another dimension.

Glas goes on:

And many moons I have seen since then. A mild and sentimental moon between silver-birches by the lakeside...The moon scurrying through sea-mists...the moon fleeing away through ragged autumn clouds...the lovers' moon which shone on Gretchen's garden window and Juliet's balcony... A girl no longer young enough who wanted to get married told me once that she could not help crying whenever she saw the moon shining over a little wooden cottage in the forest...the moon is passionate and desirous, says the poet. Another tries to find a tendentious ethical-religious meaning in moonbeams, likening them to threads the dear departed spin into a web to catch errant souls in. For youth the moon is a promise of all those tremendous things which await it, for older people a memento that the promise was never kept, a reminder of all that broke and went to pieces... (88)

For everyone, the process of fetishization works differently. The physical world is not a collection of disconnected, impersonal objects. Everything is imbued with feeling by human being, carries with it emotional power and provides a face and a name for the forces that make up our being. Not only can one fetishize world history, but also personal history. Glas's description of the philosopher could have described Kierkegaard. In both cases, the philosopher starts with a difficulty, a weight on one's own mind, and then rationalizes it, turns it into a theory, a philosophy and an explanation. Glas's diary works in a similar way. Both Glas and Kierkegaard use analysis, use philosophy and literature to deal with their obsessions. What Glas describes in the passage above are all different ways of dealing with the past via an object, via a figure, via an author or a novel. The difficulty in dealing with the past using figures is that we try to understand and explain the object of our obsession, but miss seeing the *reason* the object inspires such feeling. This is what Glas is hinting to in the passage; that is the reason for his catalogue of moons. Glas, in fact, sees both: he sees what the moon is and has come to represent and why. And yet, ultimately, such a catalogue comes no closer to healing his tortured mind. Passive intellectualizing gives him nothing. One can identify one's fetishes, but one can't escape them. Indeed, they make up one's being. The moon remains a fetish, no matter how much Glas understands why. As he concludes:

And what *is* moonshine?  
Secondhand sunshine. Diluted, counterfeit. (87-88)

### III. Ernst Josephson's Historical Insanity

In the case of Kierkegaard and Doctor Glas, to say that historical figures are manifest in their lives is to speak metaphorically; the metaphor of the physical world aptly describes the occupation of their minds by figures like Abraham or Nietzsche as placeholders for their own inner obsessions. But in the case of Ernst Josephson, who, in 1888, on the island of Bréhat off the coast of Brittany in France, succumbed to schizophrenia, historical figures truly became a physical presence in his life. In fact, that summer, the Swedish painter became "obsessed with the idea that he was St. Peter, keeper of the gates of heaven, chosen by God to hear the confessions of the spirits before they were permitted to pass on to eternal salvation" (Blomberg 12). Alone in a cottage, abandoned by all but one friend who traveled to Brittany with him, and denied the critical acclaim he thought he deserved, Josephson came to believe that "kings, artists, poets and prophets alike...heralded his new state of divine authority, while through the medium of his hand their confessions and messages were recorded, often accompanied by schematic profiles of the spirits themselves" (12). He compiled a collection of drawings known as the "Spirit Protocol" (Weinstein 380), a record of the souls who came to seek his approval. In addition, he completed a set of drawings and paintings signed with the names of old masters like Rembrandt, Raphael or Velasquez. Here, what was implicit in the voices in Doctor Glas's mind,

that one is made up of a collection of influences, influences with faces and names that one can talk to, listen to and think of as friends or enemies, is here, in Ernst Josephson's mania, made painfully explicit. Josephson's training, his megalomania, his fragile cohesion of self are laid bare for all to see.

Josephson, like Glas, like Kierkegaard is well educated. As a child, he "sang, sketched, acted in amateur theatricals of various kinds, and wrote romantic verse" (Blomberg 9). He enters Sweden's Royal Academy of Art in 1868 (9) and wins an Academy award, allowing him the resources to travel to Holland and Italy to, in his words, "drink from the inexhaustible springs of the old masters" (10). Indeed, he spends much of his early career immersing himself and copying the great painters of the past. In Amsterdam, he copies Rembrandt's *The Night Watch* and *The Five Syndics* and in Florence and Rome, imbibes the styles of Raphael and Titian. He himself in 1881 is compared to Velasquez and Manet: "For Josephson this was not simply imitation but careful preparation for the



purpose of creating works with the same rich, full-toned spirit of humanity as the classical masters themselves" (10). His stated goal is to "become Sweden's Rembrandt or die" (10). Just as Abraham stands in for Kierkegaard's metal confusion over the absurd nature of faith, just as Glas



cannot not see the drink in front of him because Strindberg's is getting in the way, Rembrandt and the rest of the old masters, in fact, stand in and become the fetishized faces for Josephson's ambition. Josephson comes to believe that the key to his success as a painter does not lie within himself, but

rather is something external, something removed from him in the form of artistic canon.

Both Kierkegaard and Glas find difficulty in dealing with their fetishes, which provide both a sense of comfort, as well as a sense of inadequacy and, accompanying that, anxiety. Kierkegaard explicitly advocates actively dealing with the past; if Glas had taken active control over his own influences and accepted them, perhaps he would have met with less frustration. Once Josephson's schizophrenia, which was "hereditary in his family" (12), overwhelms him in 1888, he is literally haunted by the masters of the past: no longer bound by the chains of sanity, the feelings of smallness and awe that accompanies the viewing great works is let loose, and as the faces of all those whom Josephson came to know, love, respect and venerate swirl around

him. He, like Glas, like Kierkegaard, has to find some way to reign them in, assert control over them, deal with them *actively*. The result is the *Spirit Protocol*.

Indeed, it was not simply artists who visited Josephson, but all the figures of the past who exerted control over him. To the right is Josephson's record of the poet Homer's arrival in his cottage. The text in Swedish reads, "Be freed through you. I have stolen the manuscripts of others and have allowed them to go to posterity under my own name. A bad poet who envied my brothers" (Weinstein 381). In the figure of St. Peter, Josephson is able to actively master his fetishes, able to work through the influences that make him up. Homer is depicted with a minimum of lines. He is upside down, bald, defenseless. He is stripped of the signs of his office; there is nothing to differentiate the spirit of Homer from the spirit of any other, no sign of the poet's mastery of words, no symbolism of the grace and humanity that makes Homer, well, Homer. Further, as in all the drawings of the *Spirit Protocol*, in the upper-left corner is the signature of the Swedish theologian Swedenborg (381). Josephson, it seems, again needs to derive his authority from some source outside himself. His dependence on the past, his own feelings of smallness in the face of the great works of history, is cast into vivid light: even gripped by delusions of grandeur, believing he is chosen by God himself, Josephson *still* needs a cultural authority figure to justify his judgment over Homer.

Further, the confessions of the spirits who visit Josephson are "confessions often of sexual taboos such as incest and homosexuality and pedophilia, confessions interpreted by the critics as so many projects of the artist's own repressed desires onto the creatures of his fantasized courtroom" (380). Again, as in the cases of Kierkegaard and Doctor Glas, the faces of influence become the symbols of one's own problems, obsessions, difficulties. In such cases, the temptation is to treat the symbol as the thing itself; to condemn Homer for stealing "the manuscripts of others" and envying his "brothers" when what one is really worried about is one's own inadequacy in the face of the great weight of past achievement.

In the same fashion, we find, along with Homer, artists like Michelangelo, above, and Hans Holbein, to the right (Hill 132). Others include



"Dante, Walter Scott and Byron" (Weinstein 384).

Again, the artists are denied any distinction, no weight is given to their accomplishments. Josephson has not only become "Sweden's Rembrandt," but surpassed him. In a different way, in his depiction of the Danish novelist J. P. Jacobsen, right, (Weinstein 388), we see this power relationship explicit. The novelist is sitting at his desk, a look of concentration, anxiety perhaps, on his face. In the



background, in a painting hanging on the wall, or perhaps in a mirror, is the face of Josephson himself. Jacobsen, the ostensible subject of the work, is drawn with a minimum of lines; Josephson, on the other hand, is completed in great and intricate detail. He stares down at Jacobsen from the wall, passing his judgment on the writer's work. Whereas in reality, Josephson is in the powerless position, at the mercy of Jacobsen's successful example, in the drawing, Josephson accompanies Jacobsen at every turn, is present as each word is written, and only then, allows the work to come to fruition.

Another manifestation of this same phenomenon is in the "Trance Drawings," (Blomberg 36) which are done in the names of the great masters. Josephson completed works signed with the names of Hans Holbein, Rembrandt, Michelangelo, Raphael (below, right) and Velasquez (below, left).



431C. Ernst Josephson, self-portrait signed Velasquez 1888. Kierkegaard Museum, Copenhagen. Photo: Stefan Rasmussen



Josephson, we know, spent much of his life copying these great masters. Now he not only imitates them, but becomes them, because for him, they are the fetishized figures of success. He, like Homer, envies "his brothers." Indeed, the use of the word "brothers" suggests the same kinds of feelings that Glas describes when he talks about his "teachers and friends." Josephson signs a portrait of himself in the name of Velasquez (above, left). To do this, he must have sat for Velasquez, the great painter, been in the same room at the same time. Like Kierkegaard, who yearns only "to accompany [Abraham and Isaac] on the three-day journey, when Abraham rode with grief before him and Isaac by his side" (Kierkegaard 44) and like Glas, who, writing about his friends and teachers, says that "in [his] youth...[he] thought: To have been there! To have had the chance! To be allowed to give, for once, and not always receive" (Söderberg 59), Josephson, in his schizophrenia, brings to pass what Kierkegaard and Glas could only dream of. Josephson, alone in his cottage, is accompanied by a whole history's worth of friends and teachers, who pass in and out of him, take control of his hands and arms, give him the semblance of power and

control over the forces that harrow his mind.

#### IV. Conclusion

Hjalmar Söderberg's *Doctor Glas*, Søren Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling*, and the life and art of Ernst Josephson, in different ways, all portray in some fashion the process of "historical fetishization," in which historical, literary, artistic figures of the past become "physical" presences in one's life. In Kierkegaard's case, the figure of Abraham weighs on his mind as the symbol of the absurdity of faith, as a man whose irreducible human experience is one of utter trust in God to make him the father of his faith, at the same time as he truly means to *sacrifice* Isaac with no expectation that his son will be saved at the last moment. In order to deal with his mental confusion, whose face is that of Abraham, Kierkegaard writes philosophy. He portrays his work as one exhorting everyone to deal actively with the past, to take it on its own terms. And yet, first and foremost, Kierkegaard must deal actively with the past *himself*. His work represents the personal process of coming to terms with the doubts in his own mind.

*Doctor Glas*, in a similar fashion, is written in the form of a diary in which Glas attempts to dissect his own mind, to pick apart and distinguish the cacophony of voices that make up his being. Those voices all take the form of influence, of social forces, of books, of authors, of painters of the past, seen through scholarly eyes. The solitary Glas, in fact, tells us that he cannot perceive anything without the eyes of his friends and teachers, the great masters of the past. These various influences, aspects of Glas's mind disguised by names like Nietzsche and Chopin, are interrogated by Glas, but as he gets closer and closer to murdering the Reverend Gregorius and as he deals with the implications of the murder once it is completed, the influential voices clog up his mind, harrowing him, until he realizes that no matter how clearly one can understand one's fetishes, how they are derived, and what they mean, such passive understanding moves one no closer to working beyond them or taking control of them. Although one can catalogue one's fetishes, one cannot escape them.

Lastly, the painter Ernst Josephson was confronted with the same problem that faced Kierkegaard and Glas, but on a larger scale. In his insanity, Josephson experienced the physical manifestation of his historical influences. He felt literally as if Homer, as if Velasquez, were sitting beside him in his cottage on the island of Bréhat. What Kierkegaard could only hope, what Glas imagined was the mechanism of his mind, Josephson found to be his reality. A painter with great ambition, with great admiration for the masters, came to be at the mercy of his influences, such that, in order to take active control over them, to make them his own, he held court: in the figure of St. Peter, Josephson was visited by the great masters of the past and he passed judgment on them with the help of the theologian Swedenborg. This process is depicted in the body of drawings known as the *Spirit Protocols*. In addition, whereas before his schizophrenia presented itself, Josephson copies the paintings of artistic canon to learn from them, afterwards, Josephson completes works signed by those great painters themselves, as if they were in his room, guiding his hand. In this way, the fetishized relationship between Josephson and his ambition and his anxiety and the historical figures of the past to whom he feels dependant on and indebted to, is made manifest; Josephson sees the workings of his own mind in the faces of the ghosts which surround him.

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2009

## A CLIFF DRAWN IN SAND

2009

A cliff drawn in sand  
Geometrically:  
Pythagoras on  
The shore where he died,  
Six years since his soul  
Fell softly from his  
Body, joining the numbers  
In the sky, leaping  
Up a waterfall  
Of molten gold which  
Slides down into a  
Soft river, frozen river  
Where gold carbonates  
Underneath the surface  
Fermented in the  
Pot of the earth waiting  
To explode into  
Antinomies which  
Dive from the surface,  
Break the surface as  
Some plastic ice trays,  
Big blocks of ice the  
Size of a woman  
Or a man or man,  
Pythagoras speaks  
Another language  
One comprised first of  
Waters and rapids  
Waves and breakers  
White salts and grey bed.  
Reed pens mark the air,  
blank silt undertoe.

## THESE THINGS ARE INTERESTING

2009

This is interesting;--

For weeks I've been imagining you near me.

Not just near me, hand in my hand or legs around my waist,  
but lying on a bed, wearing nothing.

I am imagining you sleeping.

I feel the weight of your body as if I inhabited it myself, the pressing of your arms on  
the blanket, the suction of your butt, the trickle of sweat that develops in the  
crease of your inner thigh, the cushion of your cheek...

Then, I'm myself, lying against you,  
myself, pressed against your skin, and I am enervated, reduced to a nose that skids along  
your warm body, a mouth that leaves your nipples, letting them tremble as my lips let  
them go.

Then, I am kissing you with something of a forward motion, implacable as the two of  
us, attempting to colonize you,--

All these things, these things are interesting.

I've been wondering what it means to float into the smell that solidifies around you,  
like water droplets of womankind, arranged in mid-air, in stasis, like the  
indentations in paper that canyonize each written word, like furrows in the earth, or foot-  
holes in the middle of a sandbox, dug under by means of a certain red shovel.

I'm writing on the back of the page now, filling in holes by digging in new ones.

And, as I said earlier, I am kissing you and like the heat in a baking car in sunlight, I  
am naked with you, sweating in a morass of sweat and shampoo.

All good, but that said, if there was not a recess of hesitation, a kind of alcove  
made to hide in, this would not be a poem; this would be a posy, an affirmation around a  
wedding band.

For invariably in the slump of hunger, there is a doorbell ringing, a tapping on the shutter of the  
dormitory, and it's you who's found me again, as if to say,

You know, we've grown old together.

It's true, you know. We have white hair and skin dotted like the sun.

Remember last year?

It's as if you are saying, we grew old together and like the spring, which bloomed,  
learned something of the world, died in winter, and was reborn for us, you seem to be saying,

Die with me,

I promise you another world. But like any materialist, I only believe in this  
one.

In any case, it's obvious we can never forgive each other for who we are. The  
excavation is over, but the methodological focus of the study was misguided. I have a  
new algorithm, indeed, an entirely new system of organization.

Let me tell you about it.

In fact, you can learn all about it in a forthcoming dissertation entitled,

HOW I LOVE YOU,

A Program of Study, Bringing Scholarship Up-To-Date For the Next Year,  
including a

A RIGOROUS INVESTIGATION

On The Choice, Having Considered All Other Options, To Become,  
Officially, a Human Being,

and to like it too.

For on the syllabus of Being Human is listed loving you from the alcoves of my mind  
to the recesses of my shoes pounding on the ground beside you.

For an anniversary is a reminder that after an entire life

ensconced in a single year, a year which is a structure we've built for ourselves in the  
blindness of love, self and unconsciousness, in which the light-fixtures of months line the  
hallways, that is,

an anniversary is a reminder that we can blow the roof off of ourselves and let the  
sunlight stream in. I can say to your eyes that *I love you*, walking around you in a tight  
circle, *I love you*.

The blowing in my stomach makes it clear to me that there is something to this,  
some historical accuracy, some richness of interpretation, something very interesting,  
indeed.

I not only want to be with you, I choose to be with you. That's what I've decided.

I'm done imagining you near me.

It's not really necessary any more.

## THE VIRTUAL COFFEEHOUSE:

*John Dunton's Athenian Mercury as a Microcosm of Late-Stuart England*

2009

### I. The *Athenian Mercury*, a Brief Overview

From 1691 to 1697, the city of London was afflicted with the “Athenian Itch.” The source of the enthusiasm was bookseller and incorrigible scribbler John Dunton, who for seven years stuffed the coffee-houses of London with the *Athenian Mercury*, a bi-weekly periodical of questions and answers. He stirred up a veritable phenomenon, placing advert after advert for his project in the *London Gazette*<sup>11</sup> and printing page after page for an awaiting audience. As he himself wrote, characteristically speaking for all the world in his own two lines:

*We all are seized with the Athenian itch,  
News, and New Things do the whole World bewitch.*<sup>12</sup>

Dunton today is also known for his autobiography, *The Life and Errors of John Dunton*, a garrulous and wide-ranging precursor to the modern day’s public exhibition of private lives.<sup>13</sup> It is in this memoir that Dunton recounts the origin of his “Question Project.”<sup>14</sup> He tells his readers that one day he happened to be walking in the company of some friends when he was struck by an absolutely novel idea, such that he burst out, “Well, Sirs, I have a thought I will not exchange for fifty guineas.” The thought, as he proceeds to tell the reader, was of “concealing the Querist, and answering his Question.”<sup>15</sup> The result was the first ever question-and-answer periodical. The inaugural issue flew off the press on Tuesday, March 17<sup>th</sup>, 1691.<sup>16</sup>

Dunton exhorted readers to send their queries via the penny post to Smith’s Coffee-house in the Poultry, where they would be stored until answered and printed in an upcoming issue. The periodicals themselves were published biweekly on half-folio sheets at Dunton’s shop “at the *Raven* in the *Poultry*.”<sup>17</sup> They were distributed in subscribing coffee houses, hawked by “mercury women” on the streets of London, and ferried as far as Cambridge.<sup>18</sup> In addition, the

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<sup>11</sup> *London Gazette*, consult issues for November 1691.

<sup>12</sup> Dunton, *Life and Errors*, xxxii.

<sup>13</sup> Hunter, “The Insistent I.”

<sup>14</sup> Dunton, 188.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> McEwen, *The Oracle of the Coffeeshouse*, 3.

<sup>17</sup> See the *Athenian Gazette*, Vol. 1. Later on, Dunton moved his shop to Jewen Street. The later mercuries attest to this fact.

<sup>18</sup> Berry, *Gender, Society and Print Culture*, 41.

*Mercuries* were gathered in volumes of thirty, called *Athenian Gazettes* and sold with tables of contents and the occasionally supplement. By the *Athenian Mercury's* end in 1697, some nineteen full volumes had been compiled, complete with prefaces, with a twentieth left uncompleted.<sup>19</sup> By that time, Dunton and his crew had answered nearly six thousand questions.<sup>20</sup>

The Athenian Society, as John Dunton and his fellows came to be known, generally consisted of Dunton himself and a few associates: his brother-in-law Richard Sault, a “mathematician, small poet, and translator” and the divine Samuel Wesley, an ordained priest, polymath, and poet of doggerel verse.<sup>21</sup> Wesley generally handled history, theology, and literature; Sault handled math and science.<sup>22</sup> To give a sense of the character of these men, it is perhaps worth noting that Wesley had an early hit with the publication 1685’s *Maggots*, which included such poems as a “Pindarick on the Grunting of a Hog.”<sup>23</sup> In addition, later in life, Samuel Wesley would become the father of John Wesley, the founder of Methodism. Besides the three aforementioned official members, the Society was often graced by the presence of Oxford Platonist John Norris, who offered his “Assistance *gratis*.”<sup>24</sup>

Dunton launched the *Athenian Mercury* anonymously at first; each issue was reportedly published by one, “P. Smart.”<sup>25</sup> But soon the Society revealed itself; the young Jonathan Swift had read the *Mercury* in bound form, and brought forth to the world his very first published poem, “An Ode To the Athenian Society.” With the publication of 1692’s *A History of the Athenian Society*, compiled by the sympathetic Charles Gildon and modeled on Thomas Sprat’s glowing *History of the Royal Society*, the cat, so to speak, was out of the bag.

Gildon’s work implied a sizeable and trustworthy club of virtuosi, drawing on all types of learning to answer readers’ questions. This was clearly a confabulation. And yet, like the Royal Society of Spat’s history, the Athenian Society was more-or-less dedicated to the advancement of learning. The difference perhaps, as we shall see, was that while the *Philosophical Transactions*

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19 *Ibid*, 21, 50-51.

20 McEwen, 3.

21 *Ibid*, 23-24.

22 Sommerville, *News Revolution*, 103.

23 Hill, *Two Augustan Booksellers*.

24 Dunton, 256.

25 *Athenian Mercury*, Vol. 1, No. 2.

was “popularizing,” but never really “popular,”<sup>26</sup> the *Mercury* was read, in fact, by all types. As Gilbert McEwen puts it, in his study of the publication *The Oracle of the Coffee-house*, “The reports in the *Philosophical Transactions*...were meant to be read by scientists, while the *Mercury* purveyed rudimentary information to those who knew relatively little about science.”<sup>27</sup> One finds a similar note in Daniel Defoe’s *Review*, for instance, but in this case, the reference is derogatory: in Defoe’s third Supplement, we find one “[asking] Pardon of all the Gentlemen of the Pulpit, for invading their Province; he was once of the Mind to have pretended with the *Athenian Mercury*, that we had a Master of the Text among us...”<sup>28</sup> The implication here is that the Athenians were known for pretending to more knowledge than they actually possessed. We shall see that this state of affairs was not simply a function of the Athenian’s ego; the *Mercury*’s answers, and indeed, its mistakes, especially those of a scientific nature, can be shown to have been conditioned by the transitional state of popular natural philosophy in the decade of the 1690’s.

Despite the *Athenian Mercury*’s faults, John Dunton created a public discourse unlike any that had come before. He invited the highest and the lowest, male and female, to send in their questions on diverse matters from courtship advice, moral quandaries, philosophical paradoxes, mathematical crunchers, indeed, all nature of queries from commonplaces about men and women to the very latest scientific advances. Indeed, each issue contained eight to fifteen questions on “Divinity, Poetry, Metaphysicks, Physics, Mathematicks, History, Love, Politicks, Oeconomicks... Visions and Revelations” as characterized in the issue from April 22, 1693. All was fair game as far as the Athenians were concerned. As C. John Sommerville has remarked in his brief treatment of the *Mercury*, “No sample of the questions addressed could do justice to the diversity of this publication.”<sup>29</sup> Nevertheless, by looking at some of the types of questions asked of the Athenians, we can gain valuable insight into the state of the culture in which the questioner’s lived.

Before, however, we can attempt to characterize the kinds of questions asked by the readers of the *Athenian Mercury*, we must first establish the status of the knowledge propagated by the Athenians. Adrian Johns, in his lengthy study, *The Nature of the Book: Print and Knowledge in the Making*, puts forward a convincing case for a book trade largely founded on issues of credit. The trustworthiness of a given text in a world in which the printed word did not guarantee authenticity either in authorship, origin, or even in textual accuracy itself, would have

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<sup>26</sup> In Johns’ words, journals like the *Philosophical Transactions*, “both secure the shared values of a scientific community and certify what the community takes to be licensed knowledge,” Johns, *Miscellaneous methods*. That is to say, popularization for the lay public was not necessarily one of the publication’s primary goals. Johns’ article also provides a useful discussion of the benefits of periodical publishing in a world of questionable accreditation. Although Johns has a relatively one sided view of the *Athenian Mercury* (he sees it mainly as a lesser instantiation of the ideal *Philosophical Transactions*), he makes the point that the Athenian Society, “existed only in print, but to its readers it seemed more real than the real thing (the Royal Society). Its journal was more reliably regular, and at least eight appeared for every issue of the *Transaction* to grace the bookshops.”

<sup>27</sup> McEwen, 113.

<sup>28</sup> Defoe, *Review*, Facsimile Book 3, 10.

<sup>29</sup> Sommerville, 105.

be resolved primarily through knowledge about, for example, the character of a booktrader: if they kept a good home, if they had been licensed according to order, or if they had published trustworthy books in the past.

The Athenian Society complicates, but does not entirely subvert, many of these methods of accreditation. The society was initially anonymous; there was only the aura of mystery and concealed authority, it would seem, to give any weight to what the Athenians had to say on a given topic. Then, in 1693, the playwright Elkanah Settle published his play *The New Athenian Comedy*, “exposing” the Athenian Society as a small group of untrustworthy, self-important hack writers.<sup>30</sup> And well before the distribution of the play, the *Mercury* was clearly connected with bookseller John Dunton. In one issue, a questioner writes in inquiring “*Whether the Athenian Mercury be written by one man; if so, whether of any profession, and of what Age, if by more, how many, and of what professions?*” The Athenians in answer simply write, “There are several, but their Names, Ages, Qualities, &c. are Anonimous, and desire to remain so.”<sup>31</sup> And yet, despite the claims to anonymity, on the very same page, in large type, reads “Printed for John Dunton.” The Athenians were connected to a specific bookseller and to a specific coffeehouse (Smith’s), and yet the society itself remained cloaked in shadow, mostly in order to give the impression of a great interconnected mass of virtuosi, as the publication of *The History of the Athenian Society* makes clear.<sup>32</sup> Indeed, it was within a short time that “P. Smart” disappeared and was replaced with a bold, gothic “John Dunton” at the bottom of each *Mercury*.

Further, one finds examples in the text of the *Mercury* which fit well into Johns characterization of the London book trade. We read in one advertisement that,

*If any Person whatever will send in any New Experiment, or curious Instance, which they know to be the truth, and matter of fact, circumstantiated with Time and Place, we will insert it in our Mercury.*<sup>33</sup>

The focus on evidence in a given time and place, able to be confirmed later is something that speaks to both the experimental natural philosophy at the time, but also to the common reader who was asked, every time he or she was confronted with a book, to determine the authenticity of the author’s statements. Indeed, the *Mercury*, for example, would often provide ways of authentication via face-to-face encounters. One question begins, “*Notwithstanding you have convinc’d such as had the Curiosity to examine the Original Copy left at your Booksellers...*”<sup>34</sup> The reference implies that in cases of doubtful authenticity, time and place were invoked as ways to insure the trustworthiness of a statement. Indeed, whether such offers to come down to Dunton’s bookshop were ever taken up is irrelevant; the possibility itself created the aura of

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<sup>30</sup> McEwen, 77.

<sup>31</sup> *A. M.* Vol. 5 No. 7 Query. 12.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid*, 76-84.

<sup>33</sup> *A. M.*, Vol. 1, No. 14.

<sup>34</sup> *A. M.*, Vol. 7, No. 18, Quest. 4.

authenticity.

In addition, one might ask if the *Mercury's* questions were planted by Dunton and his crew. Admittedly, that conclusion is inescapable, at least some of the time. In Vol. 8, No. 11 of the *Athenian Mercury*, Dunton entertains a question on a recently published book entitled, *The Post-Boy Robb'd of his Mail*, in which a reader desires the Athenians' "Judgment of that Book." It seems innocuous enough, perhaps, until one realizes that Dunton himself prepared and published the volume<sup>35</sup>. At times, the Athenians are directly confronted by readers questioning their authority. One questioner demands to know directly "whether you only answer Questions of your own propounding as 'tis generally thought."<sup>36</sup> Indeed, "generally thought" implies not only a readership but a critical readership. It brings to mind the situation which must have occurred in the London coffeehouses, of regulars and strangers sipping bowls of coffee, discussing the latest news around a table cluttered with mercuries of all types, in a scene like that described in John Phillips' *A Pleasant Conference Upon the Observator, and Heraclitus*: "You may go into a Coffee-house and see a Table of an Acre long covered with nothing but Tobacco-pipes and Pamphlets, and all the seats full of Mortals leaning upon their Elbowes, licking in Tobacco, Lues and Lac'd Coffee, and studying for Arguments to revile one another."<sup>37</sup> Despite their doubts about the Athenians, readers, by even asking such questions, were clearly reading Dunton's publication.

Further, the relationship between the coffeehouse readers and the bookshop writers was clearly symbiotic: each relied on what the other provided, answers and questions respectively. This relationship was cemented by the fact that each could see clear effects of each other's handiwork: each question and answer was visible, however anonymous, to all. We can see this mutual acknowledgement in pronouncements by the Athenians: in the preface to the fourth volume of *Mercury*, the Athenian Society describes the "CARTLOADS of Questions which are yet upon the File, and are likely to press us to death under their weight."<sup>38</sup> One was clearly participating, whether author or reader, in a group affair.

It was perhaps the very dialogue itself between readers and writers that continued Dunton's success. In "Towards a material history of reading," Heidi Brayman Hackel writes that "for the early modern period at least, the acknowledged reciprocity between authors and publishers and readers shaped the ways in which texts were presented and read."<sup>39</sup> This certainly holds for the *Athenian Mercury*. As Sommerville describes it in *The News Revolution*,

...the *Athenian Mercury* let the English public speak for itself... Dunton pretended to hold a mirror up to the public. The interests of his correspondents proved wonderfully diverse. Readers, who were used to being addressed from above, now heard each others' voices... The public took

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35 Parks, *John Dunton and the English Book Trade*, bibliography.

36 *A. M.*, Vol. 5, No. 18, Quest. 8.

37 Phillips, *A Pleasant Conference Upon the Observator, and Heraclitus*, 4f.

38 *A. M.* Vol. 4, Preface.

39 Hackel, *Reading Material in Early Modern England*, 9.

on a more substantial form in its own imagination.<sup>40</sup>

And this public was no figment of Dunton's imagination. Helen Berry has shown in her recent study of the publication *Gender, Society and Print Culture in Late-Stuart England*<sup>41</sup> that the audience of the *Athenian Mercury* most likely did in fact exist, that the questions posed to the Society were mostly real, and that the publication's readership consisted mainly of the "middling sort," both men and women.<sup>42</sup> Notably, she determined that turn-around could be as little as one month:<sup>43</sup> a contemporary diary records the sending in of a question to the *Athenian Mercury* and, about a month later, the same question appears in the periodical.<sup>44</sup> Further, the *Athenian Mercury*'s relative frequency of publication allowed readers not only to see their own effects on the publication, but also to experience references to contemporary events, which no doubt established an aura of veracity about the text. Questions like, "*Whether there were any Reason for the Clamor against a Sermon preached before Her Majesty, March the 7<sup>th</sup>, 1689, on Matth. 25. 46.*," suggest that a contemporary reader of the *Mercury* would have seen the world around them reflected in real time.

Further, in approaching an understanding of what it was about the *Athenian Mercury* that drew in its readers, we must acknowledge a certain natural interest inhering in the topics at hand; few indeed would be unable to resist questions which run nearly a page, describing a certain apprentice had happened upon his master in bed with an "*amour*" and who desires advice on how to proceed.<sup>45</sup> There is a natural human interest in stories like these. Further, the multitude of questions of sin, the soul and the role of religion reflect a time of changing religious and scientific attitudes, of London's "Reformation" of manners, and of the Restoration. Indeed, simply reading the *Athenian Mercury* suggests that such issues were dear to the public's heart.<sup>46</sup> In referencing contemporary events and concerns and engaging in a back-and-forth exchange between the relative knowledgeability of the authors and the curiosity of the readers, the

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<sup>40</sup> Sommerville, 103.

<sup>41</sup> In this exhaustive and highly-readable study, Berry investigates what the *Athenian Mercury* can reveal about historical gender relationships by looking at questions on love, marriage, courtship and the like. The methodology of this study owes much to her work.

<sup>42</sup> Berry, ch. 4.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid*, 51.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid*, 43.

<sup>45</sup> *A. M.*, Vol. 8, No. 11, Quest. 5.

<sup>46</sup> Sharpe, *Early Modern England*.

*Athenian Mercury* created a unique discourse in the world of print culture.<sup>47</sup>

So what exactly does the “mirror” of the *Athenian Mercury* reflect back to us about England in the 1690s? In the text of the periodical, one finds questions like “In what part of the Body is the Soul?”<sup>48</sup> which brings to mind the English peasant described in Carlo Ginzburg’s *The Cheese and the Worms*, who was convinced the soul was simply a large bone in one’s body. The question “Is the Light a Body?” which seems to have its finger on the pulse of both the curiosity exhibited by laypeople about the world around them, and the rigorous experimental investigations of the Royal Society, begun only a few decades before the *Athenian Mercury* arrived on the scene. Every issue has any number of questions on popular metaphysics, about the nature of the soul, of sin, of vows and oaths and “how far binding”<sup>49</sup> they are. Questions about America are found next to questions about the Amazons and Prester John, and these right beside, “Religion, what is it?” or “Religion, which best to choose?”<sup>50</sup> Indeed, some questions reveal how strikingly times have changed: “I hang’d a *Cat* lately in my *Garden* full of *Kittens*, and when she was a *dying* the *Kittens* cry’d within her. I demand whence they had *Air* to make that *Sound*?”<sup>51</sup>

Although we find questions about experiments, about lodestones and anatomy, we also find questions treating superstitions very seriously. Indeed, Vol. 4, No. 10 was entirely devoted to relations of “apparitions.” The question “Whether there be Witches? and what good Books have been written on that Subject?” is seriously entertained<sup>52</sup>, as is a questions about “astral spirits”<sup>53</sup> and “What is a Spell, and why not lawful?”<sup>54</sup>. Questions abound about the passions, about melancholy, about the political situation in England. There are explanations of biblical texts, about the nature of time, eternity, love and the moon. Indeed, it is on the *Athenian Mercury*’s

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<sup>47</sup> A note on authority: in one striking instance, in Vol. 5, No. 3, Query 1, the Athenians are requested, in an issue devoted to ladies’ questions, to suggest a course of study for young children. In the words of the question, “*A Lady not Learned, but having Children, and being desirous her self to enter ‘em early into the knowledge of things, desires the Athenians Society to answer these following Queries...*” If real, this questions speaks to the authority already attained by the Athenians; if not real, then the question’s very appearance would create an aura of authority for later readers. Further, in regard to the objectivity of the *Athenian Mercury*’s popularity, McEwen records that when Tom Brown’s *Moderator* attempted a criticism of the Athenians’ poetry, he anticipated somewhat of an uproar. McEwen writes that Brown “provides evidence of the popularity of the *Athenian Mercury* with a certain class of reader, those who ‘have bought more of their *Athenian Gazettes* than would lie under all the Pies at my Lord Mayor’s *Christmas*.’ These are the same ones who, when the *Mercury* first came out, could be seen ‘reading ‘em in the midst of Change-time; nay, so vehement were they at it, that they lost their bargain by the Candle’s end.’” McEwen, 45.

<sup>48</sup> *A. M.*, Vol. 2, No. 1, Quest. 13.

<sup>49</sup> *A. M.*, Vol. 10, No. 30, Quest. 4.

<sup>50</sup> *A. M.*, Vol. 10, No. 2, Quest. 5.

<sup>51</sup> *A. M.*, Vol. 2, No. 20, Quest. 8.

<sup>52</sup> *A. M.*, Vol. 1, No. 3, Quest. 5.

<sup>53</sup> *A. M.*, Vol. 2, No. 12.

<sup>54</sup> *A. M.*, Vol. 2, No. 6, Quest. 2.

level playing field that one finds juxtaposed all manner of questions: “Whether all Souls are like?”<sup>55</sup>, “Whether the Light is a Body?”<sup>56</sup>, “If the Ostrich digest Iron?”<sup>57</sup>, “What is the Cause of Bashfulness?”<sup>58</sup> and “Why a Horse with a round Fundament emits a square Excrement?”<sup>59</sup> Widely read and discussed by the largely literate population of London, it was perhaps the most successful periodical of its time.<sup>60</sup>

Clearly, one could go on for quite some time about the rich and varied set of interests the *Athenian Mercury’s* readership presents to posterity. A casual perusal of the *Mercuries* is enough to lead one with the distinct impression of a culture not quite like one’s own. The conclusion to draw from this vast array of questions, I would argue, is that, in this early stage of print culture, readers had a relative optimism or idealism. The questioners in the *Athenian Mercury* were generally curious about the world; they were relatively literate, but many of them had nothing like a systematic education. On every topic from the nature of God, to the movement of the clouds, to the status of their souls, the early modern man was left with uncertainties; what certainties he or she perhaps had possessed were radically forced to be revised, through the Reformation, the Scientific Revolution, the discovery of the Americas, and so many other developments of world historical significance. The making of these private uncertainties public, however anonymous, for the first time in the *Athenian Mercury*, reveals a readership with a remarkable level of curiosity and eagerness to learn about the world. This conclusion still holds even if some of the questions were posed facetiously or not even real; despite these questions, the publication was still read and still acted as a vector for knowledge about the world. This unique phenomenon was allowed to flower by the distinctive level of discourse opened up by John Dunton.

Urmi Bhomik tries to pin down this very level of discourse in her article, *Facts and Norms in the Marketplace of Print*. She writes that,

Dunton's moment of inspiration related to a new and paradoxical use of print: to use a public medium for the resolution of private dilemmas, as a vehicle of abstraction rather than in the documentation of specificity. This marks a decisive shift away from the earlier conception of print as an extension of the realm of face-to-face discourse or from that of interpersonal correspondence. Dunton found in the impersonality of print the perfect medium for the kind of

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55 *A. M.*, Vol. 1, No. 1, Quest. 5.

56 *A. M.*, Vol. 1, No. 11, Quest. 8.

57 *A. M.*, Vol. 1, No. 25, Quest. 8.

58 *A. M.*, Vol. 2, No. 16, Quest. 3.

59 *A. M.*, Vol. 1, No. 23, Quest. 5.

60 Johns writes of London: “The city enjoyed a relatively large literate population, and their everyday experience of newspapers and pamphlets being read aloud in coffeehouses and taverns meant that even illiterate citizens had become acutely aware of the importance of print in creating the social world in which they lived” Johns, 62; General reference works on the *Athenian Mercury* include Hill, *Two Augustan Booksellers*; McEwen, *The Oracle of the Coffee House*; Berry, *Gender, Society and Print Culture in Late-Stuart England*; Parks, *John Dunton and the English Book Trade*; and Ames, *The English Literary Periodical of Morals and Manners*.

exchange he wished to foster; an exchange in which both parties remain, by their own desire, ignorant of each other. In pursuing this project both readers and writers gained a new kind of self-understanding; they were made aware of the possibility of new kinds of community based in new modes of communication. The Mercury opened the way to the marketplace of print as it became coextensive with the public sphere, where participation in a social collectivity did not need to be reinforced by the sphere of face-to-face relations.<sup>61</sup>

The *Athenian Mercury* had the effect of making the private suddenly public but in an impersonal form, one which hinted to a collective, but only through the reader's engagement with print. I would suggest, from my above characterization of the *Mercury*, that the publication probably still appealed to the "realm of face-to-face discourse," but Bhomik's main point, which still holds, is that the very unknowns which characterize the *Athenian Mercury*, the anonymity of the questions, the questionable authority of the authors, were a perfect match for the "impersonality of print." Indeed, Kathryn Shevelow, in her study *Women and Print Culture*, makes the case, similar to mine, that

the audience assumed an actual, constitutive existence upon the page, engaged in a dynamic relationship with the Society...Despite the periodical's clear positioning of the Athenian Society as the dominant party in the epistolary pact they established with their readers, a horizontal relationship emerged from both the periodical's acknowledged dependence upon readers for economic and textual sustenance and the 'egalitarianism of print' created by the extensive representation of readers on the page.<sup>62</sup>

As Shevelow sums up, "The *Athenian Mercury* extended to its readers and writers both the expressive possibilities represented by print and the institution of the authority structure that contained and regulated that expression."<sup>63</sup> In order to make more concrete what exactly this authority structure entailed and what a close study of the *Athenian Mercury* can tell us about the London book trade and the state of its readership, we will now proceed to discussion of the evolution of a single question, one about the existence of a vacuum.

I will attempt in the rest of this study to argue more specifically that the *Athenian Mercury* provides us with a cross-section of English culture in the 1690s. In particular, I will look at the Mercury's treatment of the question of "Whether or no there's a Vacuum?" and how the answer to that question changed in the course of a single year. This change hints to the uncertainties and changing foundations of a culture transitioning from medieval cosmologies and Aristotelian learning to the conceptions and axioms of modern science. We will see qualitatively that such a transition was heavily influenced by the dynamics of the book trade.

## II. The Vacuum Question

To begin with, the intellectual stage of the late 17<sup>th</sup> century must be set.

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<sup>61</sup> Bhomik, *Facts and Norms in the Marketplace of Print*. Included in *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, Vol. 36, No. 3, 349-350.

<sup>62</sup> Shevelow, *Women and Print Culture*, 79.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid*, 90.

In 1660, Robert Boyle entered the world of experimental natural philosophy with the publication of *The Spring and Weight of the Air*.<sup>64</sup> In the ensuing years he would perform countless experiments on air and its opposite, the vacuum. Using the air-pumps built for him by Robert Hooke, he would investigate the nature of what appeared to be empty space and its effect on, for example, the animals within in them or the light shined through them.<sup>65</sup> Through the 1660's, 70's, and 80's, Boyle himself published a multitude of scientific works. In addition, the *Philosophical Transactions* publicized many accounts of new pneumatical experiments, accomplished by Boyle himself and others.<sup>66</sup> It was during these years that the vacuum controversy was at its height.

Despite the experiments performed by Toricelli, Boyle, and others, the question of the vacuum remained philosophically up in the air. Nor was the controversy an isolated issue; the question of the vacuum was inextricably tied up with atomistic philosophy. Louis Trenchard, in his study, *The Life and Works of the Honourable Robert Boyle*, provides an overview of the philosophical groups at work during the time period:

The principle natural philosophies then in vogue were: the Peripatetic, based on the metaphysics of Aristotle; according to which all bodies were a mixture of four essential *elements*—earth, water, air, and fire. They were mutually transmutable by the active agents of heat and cold, dryness and moisture. To these, the Alchemists had added an essential mercury as a prima material for metals. In the sixteenth century, the school of the Chemists, or Spagyrist, had been founded by Paracelsus; according to which all bodies were compounds of three hydrostatic principles—salt, sulfur, and mercury—and the reduction of a compound body to its principles was by fire alone... Of late, the atomic hypothesis of Democritus, as developed by the Epicureans, had been revived by Gassendi and Boyle, as a corollary of Cartesianism; and, to indicate that the taint of atheistic chance had been removed, the atom was changed to the vaguer corpuscle.<sup>67</sup>

As a consequence of their philosophies, Aristotle denied the vacuum, as did Descartes, but for different reasons; although Descartes denied the vacuum, he nevertheless believed in the corpuscularian hypothesis. Boyle was a corpuscularian, but, as we shall see, was more-or-less publicly agnostic on the vacuum question.

Trenchard describes the dilemma faced by the natural philosophers at the time: “They could no longer accept the naïve belief of the Middle Ages regarding the nature of the soul and the actual re-assembling of the material elements of the body; nor could they subscribe to the doctrine of the Epicureans, revived by Hobbes and regarded by them with horror as atheistic, which denied the reality of anything but bodies perceptible by the sense, and ascribe all phenomena to chance.”<sup>68</sup> Boyle and his colleagues were stuck between the atheism of Hobbes

<sup>64</sup> Fulton, *A Bibliography of the Honourable Robert Boyle*.

<sup>65</sup> Trenchard, *The Life and Works of the Honourable Robert Boyle*.

<sup>66</sup> For example, a few chosen at random: *The Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society*, No. 62, No. 63, No. 119. No. 63, in fact, references the Vacuum Boylianum and No. 199 contains experiments performed by Monsieur Papin in Paris.

<sup>67</sup> Trenchard, 246n.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid*, 172.

and the belief of the scholastics, which was long entrenched: “it is difficult to appreciate the horror of a vacuum which obsessed the mediaeval mind.”<sup>69</sup>

It was under these complex and often confusing intellectual conditions that Boyle performed his famous air-pump experiments. In their study of the period, the *Leviathan and the Air-Pump*, Steven Shapin and Simon Schaffer expose the social conditions and controversies under which Boyle undertook his experimentation on the air. They show how the legitimacy of the experiment as a means of knowledge was challenged, but ultimately constructed by the work of Boyle and others in to an authoritative form of knowledge, with certain aims and limitations. On the point of the vacuum question, Shapin and Schaffer offer an important piece of narrative:

Boyle professed himself reluctant to enter “so nice a question” (of vacuums) and he did not “dare” to “take upon me to determine so difficult a controversy.” To settle the question of a vacuum was not what this experiment was about, nor could questions like these be any part of the experimental programme. They could *not* be settled experimentally, and, because they could not, they were illegitimate questions...Boyle was not “a vacuist” nor did he undertake his *New Experiments* to prove a vacuum. Nor was he “a plenist”...What he was endeavoring to create was a natural philosophical discourse in which such questions were inadmissible.<sup>70</sup>

Essentially, whether the space created in the Toricellian experiment, or in Boyle’s own experiments, was truly devoid of all matter, was not a question that experimental philosophy could answer. One hypothesis was that the space was not empty at all; as the gas was removed, the space was filled in immediately by aether. Responding to this Boyle held the view that “if there was an aether, if it was “really so subtle and yielding a matter” that could penetrate wood, leather and glass...then it was not “sensible.” It had no physical properties relevant to the program of the air-pump experiments.”<sup>71</sup> As a natural philosopher, Boyle declared that he could only draw what conclusions were possible from his experimental work. Indeed, the *Spring and Weight of the Air* reflects these concerns. As Trenchard writes, “...instead of the customary long and obscure narrations, [Boyle] merely described his apparatus, the new air-pump, and then followed with the results of forty-three experiments, arranged in sequences according to topic and expressed as simply and clearly as he could.”<sup>72</sup> The most he would offer was that perhaps nature did really abhor a vacuum, “[however], without having recourse to any such disputable principle, a fair account may be given of the proposed phaenomenon, by the pressure or weight of the air.”<sup>73</sup>

Taken together, the situation in natural science at the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century was one rife with confusion and subtlety, over the existence of vacuums, of atoms, of the purview of natural philosophy, and possibility of reconciling science (associated with atheism) and faith. The

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<sup>69</sup> *Ibid*, 239.

<sup>70</sup> Shapin and Schaffer, *Leviathan and the Air-Pump*, 45-6.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid*, 184.

<sup>72</sup> Trenchard, 238-9.

<sup>73</sup> Shapin and Schaffer, 188.

common Londoner of the 1690's could not be expected to understand the finer points of this tangled web of natural philosophy. For those curious about the new science, the controversies at the time must have left the layman with more uncertainties than facts.

The questions and answers of the *Athenian Mercury* reflect this contemporary confusion over natural philosophy. More than a fifth of all questions sent into the periodical were science-related questions.<sup>74</sup> Indeed, on science, like so many other subjects, the *Athenian Mercury* provides a valuable glimpse into the social context of the time. This context was not simply a function of the opinions of elite scientists trickling down to the public; the state of knowledge propagated by the *Athenian Mercury* was ultimately affected by both the intellectual climate as well as the conditions of the book trade.

On Saturday, April 4<sup>th</sup>, 1691 in Vol. 1, No. 4, Query 8 of the *Athenian Mercury*, the question appears, “*Whether there is a Vacuum?*” The answer has been reproduced in full.

*Ans.* In admitting a *Vacuum*, we run into very great Absurdities by offering false Conclusions from false Premises. I would ask our *Vacuum* Maintainers whether God or Nature ever did any thing in vain, either immediately or by accidental Consequence? they will answer in the Negative, or run into deeper Absurdities: Wherefore taking it for granted, I ask of what use is a *Vacuum*? or what produces it? their ignorance in the first we'll pass over, and if to the last they say, ‘tis a *privation of matter form'd by the separation of bodies*; that also is an Error, for materiality can never be the Efficient cause of its Contrariety, *viz. Nothing*. We admit matter to be divisible and subdivisible, and so on *ad infinitum*; if an Instrument could be made fine enough for separation, and the Eye strengthened to guide that Instrument to operate on such sub-divided Particles, but the Motion of none of them, nor any thing else, can produce a *Vacuum*; for as the Air is driven forward by one body's motion, so that body is pursu'd by the Air behind: This is evident by the motion of the Feather or any light matter, which will follow your hand if you strike the Air near it. Also, if you move a stick in the water, you will see the water pursue it as if Nature abhorr'd a *Vacuum*. Now we argue a *Majort (?)*, if thick water (or Air condens'd) admits not a *Vacuum*, the Air being much more subtle and refined cannot; and the Argument is yet the stronger, if we consider that Air may be contracted or dilated, as appears from several Inventions of Engines, Air Guns, &c.

It is significant that the question was even asked. It may have been brought up in jest as a way of testing the knowledge of the Athenians; or perhaps the questioner was seeking a definite unraveling of the historical confusion around the question of vacua. Either way, the question was asked specifically and directly, with the implication, which was understood by the Athenians, that a vacuum was something to be questioned.

So, what does their answer tell us?

Obviously, the Athenians vehemently deny the existence of a vacuum. Indeed, they claim that such an idea is absurd; it would cause contradictions in God's natural system. When they write, “‘tis a *privation of matter form'd by the separation of bodies*,” the Athenians are referring to the idea of a vacuum specifically as the empty space between masses. These masses, of course, could be atoms. But the Athenians do not subscribe to that view; it seems they are firmly in the camp of the Aristotelians.

In saying, “for materiality can never be the Efficient cause of its Contrariety, *viz. Nothing*,” they are employing the various rules, categories, and terminology devised by Aristotle in order to describe the properties and nature of things in the world. The application of Aristotle's

system manifests itself as the logical reasoning through problems with which one is confronted, using the various properties of the things in question as a starting point. Such is the basis of scholasticism. Empirical evidence is less important than logical, syllogistic consistency. As Michael Hunter writes in “A New Theory of Intellectual Change,” philosophers in the traditional view employed “rhetorical approaches, and with...higher value on more deductive skills...”<sup>75</sup> Thus, despite the air-pump, the Aristotelian says that, logically, something cannot create nothing. Further, like Aristotle, the Athenians believe in the continuity of matter, which is divisible “*ad infinitum*.” No empty space can be created, because the substance in question will fill in the gap created immediately. Interestingly, they cite the “several Inventions of Engines, Air Guns &c,” Boyle’s very experimental tools, for the reader’s edification. All in all, the Athenian’s answer relies on a very medieval, scholastic conception of nature; indeed, they quote Aristotle himself directly: “as if Nature abhorr’d a *Vacuum*.” The issue, however, is far from clear, as evidenced by the mention of “Air Guns.” There is perhaps an undercurrent of Boyle’s experiments running through their answer.

Lest one think that curiosity about vacua was a one time affair, on July 28<sup>th</sup> of 1691, in Vol. 3, No. 1 of the *Athenian Mercury*, the very same question and a similar answer is given. Further, and more significantly, in the next month, on July 4<sup>th</sup>, in Volume 2, No. 2, the question is asked “*How can we understand a closer or looser Connection in the parts of matter, without admitting a Mixture of Vacuities?*” The wording implies that the questioner, to begin with, was doubtful of the philosophical existence of vacua. The Athenians were happy to indulge him in that view. Their answer rehashes much of the same material, but they notably end with a citation: “See the Experiments among the Philosophical Transactions.” Knowing the way that Athenians play with the truth at times, it is difficult to ascertain exactly how familiar they were with the publication of the Royal Society from this reference. Nevertheless, when this evidence is taken together with Boyle’s insistence on laying out his experiments without a particular philosophical leaning, it is no great leap to speculate that the public could have easily misinterpreted the language of the experiments. The program, as it had been formed in Boyle’s publications and in the *Philosophical Transactions* was philosophically ambiguous and open to interpretation. For Boyle, setting out the extents and limits of natural philosophy, this was a strength; nevertheless, it is certainly possible that the finer points of his epistemological move were lost on the public. Without the link provided by a more clear citation of Boyle’s work, this is the most one can conclude.

In Vol. 2, No. 28, we find another reference to the *Philosophical Transactions*. In answer to query 2 of the issue, the Athenians write: “...the *weight of the Water* for [two objects], which, as in *Buckets* let down to the *bottom of the Sea*, (concerning which, see the Transactions of the Royal Society,) the *Covers* whereof are *press’d down* by the *Ponderosity* of the *Water*...” Again, the *Transactions* are mentioned. As detailed previously, the audience for the *Philosophical Transactions* was mainly a learned, scientific one. The Athenians’ offhand references to it, as seen here, however, show that the *Transactions* were part of the common parlance as a way of invoking authority. In this way, the *Athenian Mercury* can perhaps be seen as a kind of layman’s conduit, however imperfect, for natural philosophy, a middle man between the Royal Society and

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Barrow, *The Book of Nothing*; Hunter, *Science and the Shape of Orthodoxy*, 11.

the rest of the public. We will return to this idea later.

Further clarification of the issue of vacua comes in Vol. 2, No. 22 of the *Athenian Mercury*, a few weeks later. In answer to the question, “*Why a Pump may not be made to draw Water an hundred Feet deep as well as twenty four, &c?*,” the Athenians make no mention of Boyle or of atmosphere pressure. Instead, we are told that, for instance, a cork is forced into a bottle under water because

that little quantity of Air having gone too far in a *contrary Element*, and finding it self oppress’d by the *other’s* opposite Power, and being beyond a possibility of further relief from its own, began to gather Strength, as all other *Natures do*, by *Contraction and Union*, till the *general Frame of Nature* was forced either to suffer a *Vacuum* in the rest of the Bottle, or else to send in the Water into it, to supply its place, by driving in the Cork to come at it,

all of which speaks to the kind of logical reasoning that made the Aristotelian world-view distinctive. Air is not a subject of experimental study, but rather something possessing Aristotelian properties such as elasticity, “that natural buoying quality of Air [which] cannot assimilate itself to the *declining Centre of Gravity*”, and further has a “contrary”; the Athenians go on to describe the situation of the air in the submerged bottle as being driven further into its “Enemies Quarters,” away from its kind, the great mass of air, “*loose, and expanded upon the Surface of the Earth or Waters.*” The personification of the elements, known as “vitalism,” was a common way of conceiving of the properties of an element.<sup>76</sup>

A similar answer had been given back in May of 1691, in Vol. 1, No. 26, which employed much of the same language. In their answer, the Athenians remarked that “Nature abhors a *Vacuum*” and that the elements work “to hinder Vacuities.” Again the “power” of elements is brought up, along with phrases like “’Tis not only the nature of *animate* but *inanimate Bodies* (such as the Elements) to act as independently as they can.” Further, by autumn, in Vol. 3, No. 24, in answer to the question, “*What is Solidity?*”, the Athenians emphasize the “*Continuity of Matter*” as the put it. To clinch the matter, in Vol. 2, No. 24, there had been a question, “Whether or no is matter Divisible into infinite parts?” In their answer, a distinction was made between affirming yes, after the fashion of the Atomists, and yes, “*potentially* but not *Actually.*” The Athenians side with latter.

This lengthy reconstruction of the Athenians’ beliefs should confirm the fact that the Athenians were committed Aristotelians. Where might they have obtained this view? McEwen writes that “...Sault was most probably and Wesley certainly had instruction in the sciences in Dissenting academies, which prepared them to answer many questions on the physical and biological sciences.” Indeed, Wesley would have read Charles Morton’s textbook *Compendium Physicae* during the years he attended one of the best known academies at Newington Green. If he had not, Sault too would most likely have been familiar with the book as well, despite being self-taught.<sup>77</sup>

Morton’s book, which was published in 1687, contains a chapter 8, “Of Air,” notable in

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<sup>76</sup> Barrow, ch 2-3.

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McEwen, 122.

this relation for two reasons. First, as Theodore Hornberger puts out in his notes to the *Compendium*, republished in 1940, “Although there are hints of the *De Generatione et Corruptione* [of Aristotle] in Morton’s treatment of air, he is more largely indebted to Boyle’s *The Spring and Weight of Air* (Oxford, 1660).” Morton references many of the discussions in Boyle’s text and goes so far as to make use of his same examples. Morton considers the “air-pump experiments and of what happens in rarefaction,” which, however, is “not accepted by Morton, who will not give up ‘nature abhors a vacuum.’” Indeed, as Hornberger goes on to say, the “whole chapter is saturated with Boyle’s ideas,” although Morton seems to pick and choose from Boyle’s work in order to make them fit into his Aristotelian philosophy.<sup>78</sup>

Second, Morton’s chapter “Of Air” is crucial because his *Compedium Physicae* is most likely the source of the *Athenian Mercury*’s answer to the question of vacuums. Consider this passage, quoted at length:

[the] compression of air is call’d condensation, because then it has more of matter in less space; and its contrary distension, is cal’d Rarefaction because it has less of the matter in a greater space; But what fills the Vacuity[es] between the parts in Rarefaction, in such cases where no sensible supply is to be perceived is a great Question...

Notably, he uses Boyle’s word here, “sensible.” Morton then describes an experiment in which a glass tube, sealed at one end, is alternately heated and cooled in order to change the water level within. When the water level recedes, the space opened up “must be either a vacuum, or it is Aetherial, [or] fiery matter, that can Easily permeate the pores, of the Glass to avoid a Vacuum.” Morton decides in favor of “the permeating Matter, because nature abhors a Vacuum.” Significantly, Morton ends with

The force of this sp[r]ing of the Air is great, as appears in Wind Guns, and Artificial fountains, formed on this foundation; as also the lifting of weights by an half blown bladder in the Evacuated vessell of the Air pump.<sup>79</sup>

Indeed, these very experiments filled the pages of Boyle’s *The Spring and Weight of Air*. Taken all together, no doubt, here we can see the origin of the Athenian’s belief, in which they combine casual references to modern natural philosophy—of which we shall see more later—even as they espouse a fundamentally Aristotelian viewpoint.

It is worth considering that the Philosophical Transactions had been more or less suspended since 1687.<sup>80</sup> This no doubt led to the question on November 24<sup>th</sup>, 1691 in Vol. 4, No. 17 of the *Athenian Mercury*, “What are the Royal Society now a doing, and what have they done for these several Years last past? and the Reason that we hear so little to nothing from ‘em?” The answer is significant for making mention of Robert Boyle, “...there being in the last Weeks Thursdays Gazet an account of two Books publish’d by two persons, who were the great Ornaments of that Society, the Ingenious Mr. E. and the *Honorable Mr. Boyle*, whom all the

<sup>78</sup> Morton, *Compendium Physicae*, 47-8.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid*, 50.

<sup>80</sup> Hunter, 154.

World admire...” Boyle’s book in question was no doubt 1691’s *Experimenta Et Observationes Physicae* published by John Taylor and John Wyat.<sup>81</sup>

In this same vein, the Athenians often invoked Boyle on various subjects, often in veneration. On December 5<sup>th</sup> of 1691, in Vol. 5, No. 2, readers were exhorted: “Let anyone who wou’d have further satisfaction consult Mr. *Boyl* of the effects of Motion.” And in Vol. 5, No. 11, Boyle is mentioned in a poetic answer as an expert on color, that “which none but *Boyl* himself and *Phoebus* know...” Boyle was one of the most well-known members of the Royal Society, and also one of the most popular, perhaps because of his ability to reconcile modern science and religion<sup>82</sup>. Indeed, a casual perusal of his bibliography cements this notion as one sees religious tracts sitting right beside experimental ones.<sup>83</sup>

The Athenians, then, whose publication also placed questions of science beside matters of the soul were a perfect match for the “Honourable Robert Boyle.” Indeed, McEwen goes so far as to describe Boyle as the Athenians’ “patron saint.”<sup>84</sup> The Athenians could invoke him with impunity in order to prove their learning, whether they had read him or not, or, in the Athenians’ specific case, if they had only assimilated his findings through secondary sources.

Indeed, simply because Boyle had published works on certain topics obviously did not mean that such knowledge was instantly diffused. Knowledge, especially scientific knowledge, could take rather circuitous paths as it made its way through the general populous. Whether the Athenians had actually read Boyle’s work is impossible to say; it is, however, notable that at this point they never quote anything specific from it: the reader is only exhorted to consult Boyle at the end of an explanation. Other times his name is merely invoked. Nevertheless, Wesley’s (or Sault’s) experience with Morton shows the Athenians to be relatively familiar with his findings, although only through the ideological lens of Morton’s Aristotelianism. This was all to change.

On Sunday, December 30<sup>th</sup>, 1691, Robert Boyle died.<sup>85</sup> This was to have great repercussions for the rest of that year. The following graph shows the number of results for a search for “Boyle” in the English Short Title Catalogue, each year from 1659 to 1697.

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81 Fulton, 132.

82 Trenchard, 132.

83 Fulton, xix.

84 McEwen, 137.

85 Trenchard, 133.

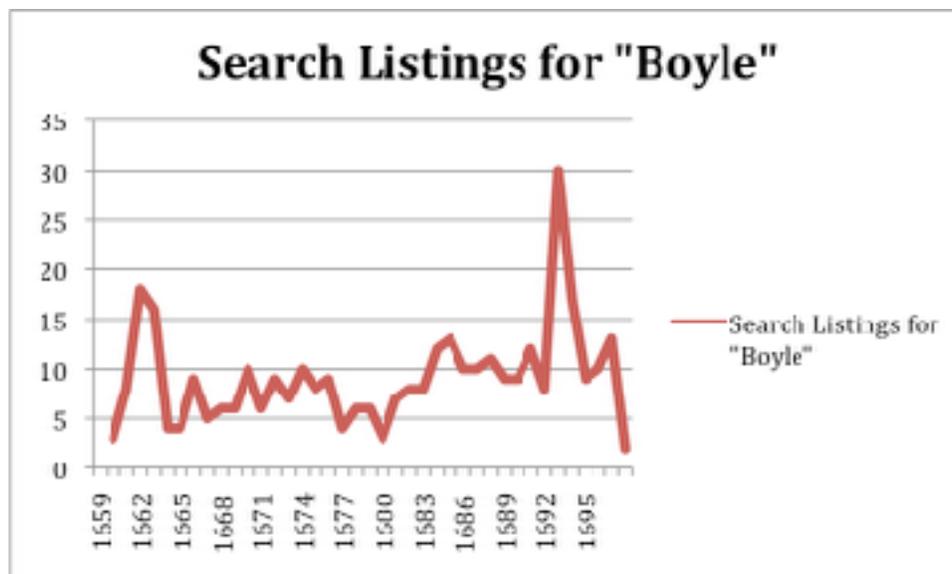


Figure 1 - Number of Listings for "Boyle" in the ESTC, 1659-1697<sup>86</sup>

This is a rough, but demonstrative metric. There are two spikes in the data: one in the early 1660's, when Boyle was first beginning to experiment and publish,— and one exactly in 1692, at the time of Boyle's death. On January 7<sup>th</sup> of the new year, the "Right Reverend Father in God, GILBERT Lord Bishop of SARUM" preached a funeral sermon for Robert Boyle at "St. MARTINS in the Fields."<sup>87</sup> The next week (January 14<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup>), the *London Gazette* made notice of the publication of Gilbert's funeral sermon.<sup>88</sup> On February 6<sup>th</sup>, 1692, in Vol. 6, No. 2 of the *Athenian Mercury*, the question appears:

*We wonder that since your Society obliges the World with all sorts of Learning, and since you have Poets amongst you that you have not many an Elegy upon Mr. Boyle, of whom you have so often made honourable mention, and who has deserv'd so well of the Learned World, Pray try your hands, and let him be redeem'd from the Common Fate of all such Great person has have dy'd lately, viz. to be murder'd afterwards with some Bellmans persecuting Ditty equally nauseous for Folly and Nonsense.*

True to form, the Athenians follow the question with "An ELEGY On the Death of the Honourable ROBERT BOYLE, Esq; Fellow of the Royal Society." In the course of the "*Pindarick*," the Athenians include the line "...what strange Elastic power the Air contains..." Again, this basic familiarity with Boyle's work no doubt derives from Morton and the popular conception of Boyle, the well-known figure of learning. On June 29<sup>th</sup> of 1692, Awnsham and John Churchill publish "The General History of the AIR, Designed and Begun by the Hon<sup>ble</sup> ROBERT BOYLE Esq." It was prepared for publication before Boyle's death; it was his last

<sup>86</sup> *English Short Title Catalogue*, online.

<sup>87</sup> Fulton, 171.

<sup>88</sup> *London Gazette*, No. 2732.

work.<sup>89</sup>

In fact, all throughout 1692, the year after Boyle's death, the philosopher's books were republished multiple times in various sizes to fit all tastes, and so hurriedly that one imprint bears an incorrect date.<sup>90</sup> Indeed, the popular "Some motives and incentives to the love of God" was published multiple times in quarto and octavo. Not only were sermons and elegies printed<sup>91</sup>, but also Boyle's books on medicine, his experimental works, his famous "Chymicus Rationalis," and a full catalogue of his works. Many were republished multiple times, in varying formats, and by many of the same printers (Sam Smith, John Taylor, for example) no doubt capitalizing on the success of the recently deceased philosopher. Further, one would imagine that the periodical press was at work publishing all nature of Boyle-related paraphernalia, just as the *Athenian Mercury* had, and the number of pirated editions of his work would be impossible to assert with any certainty.<sup>92</sup> Robert Hooke himself, in his diaries, records that shortly after Boyle's death, he came upon "neer 100 of Mr Boyles high Dutch Chymicall books ly[ing] exposed in Moofeilds on the railes."<sup>93</sup> Clearly, Dunton and his associates would have been especially likely to have picked up one of Boyle's works that particular year. Further, it must not be forgotten that Dunton himself was a particularly successful and well-connected bookseller himself.<sup>94</sup> He would have been in touch with much that saw its way into print.

In short, the environment was transformative. By the time autumn fell on 1692, on Saturday, October 29<sup>th</sup>, in Vol. 8, No. 18 of the *Athenian Mercury*, the question appears again: "Whether or no there's a Vacuum?" And again, the answer is worth reproducing in full.

What some few of our Members may have said of this Subject, whom we are satisfied retain a little too much of the *Peripatetick Philosophy*, we have not here leisure to examine; but we shall now give you what the more *Modern Learned* generally conclude upon at this time; *There are many small Vacuities throughout the Universe, dispers'd amongst Bodies, and parts of Bodies.* We must either admit this, or the penetration of Bodies, or deny all Motion, none of which we can do; for suppose a Bottle contain'd a hundred thousand Atoms, and wou'd receive no more, its certain that none of these Atoms cou'd be mov'd without penetration, because there's no room for one Atom to give place to another. 'Tis the property of Bodies to resist Motion; if therefore the Universe was full of Atoms, or Bodies, it wou'd resist Motion on every side, and throughout the whole. The most plausible thing that we find objected, is, That Water is a Continuous Body, close, and without any *Vacuum intersparsum*; as also the Air is continuous, and yet Fish move in the first without leaving any Vacuum behind them, and Birds in the last with the same Effect. To this we Answer, That tho it may appear so to the Eye, those particles of water closing so fast after the Fish,

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<sup>89</sup> Fulton, 133.

<sup>90</sup> *English Short Title Catalogue*, entry for *Medicinal Experiments*, 1692.

<sup>91</sup> Fulton, 170.

<sup>92</sup> Johns, *Nature of the Book*, 30.

<sup>93</sup> Hooke, *Diary*, 223.

<sup>94</sup> McEwen, 11, 209. McEwen writes "He was one of the best known and most experienced members of the London book trade...At thirty four he had assumed the livery of the Stationers Company. He had a wide acquaintance...He was on good terms with numbers of booksellers, printers, engravers, and bookbinders and took part in congers with some of the most astute among his colleagues."

that they are not discernable, yet there's no dispute against the matter of Fact, which many Experiments, both as to Water and Air, do fully evince. Suppose then that in a Tube of Glass, hermetically seal'd, the Air be forc'd into the room of six Fingers breadth, and the particles of Air to be two Millions, which take up these six Fingers breadth of the Tube: Suppose also that the Air be farther compress'd in this Tube to three Fingers breadth, as its plain it may by the Action of Air Guns; either it will be, that two particles of Air fill'd up one space in the Tube, or else that one particle was in two spaces: the first can't be without penetration, nor the last without an Absurdity, therefore we must have recourse to a Vacuum, into which these particles were compress'd; if in Air, much more in Water, for the many Experiments that have been made in *Freezing*, assure us of a vast quantity of Air in Water, and consequently of Vacuum's, for if Air which is more subtle and thin, has Vacuum's in it, it follows doubly that Water may, because 'tis compos'd of grosser particles, and even contains that which contains Vacuums as above.

In short, this represents a completely turnaround. The Athenians have abandoned their previous Aristotelian or "*Peripatetick Philosophy*" and aligned their opinions with the "more *Modern Learned*." They both admit the existence of vacuities, as well as espouse an atomistic view of the world. The Athenians, previously, had shied away from the use of "atoms" entirely. Now, they hold a logically consistent philosophy of bodies composed of atoms in a vacuum. More than that, the Athenians attempt rhetorically to prove the necessity of this view, "We must either admit this, or the penetration of Bodies, or deny all Motion, none of which we can do," almost as if they were directly refuting their own previous position. It is also significant that the Athenians mention "many Experiments." In fact, they describe one such experiment with a "Tube of Glass," "hermetically sealed." The air is later compressed with "Air Guns." One would imagine that these experiments, so specifically described, would have at least had their inspiration in something that "some few of our Members" had read in the intervening year.<sup>95</sup> Indeed, considering the often inflated view that the Athenians had of their membership, "some few of our Members" most likely means some one of them, perhaps Wesley himself.

Without a piece of evidence to show directly the origin of the Athenians' new belief, one can only remain in the realm of the probable.<sup>96</sup> It is probable, however, that because of the influx of Boyle's publications, after his death, at least one of the Athenians came to finally read the philosopher himself. Without a doubt, soon enough, they did. On Tuesday, May 16<sup>th</sup>, 1693 in Vol. 10, No. 15 of the *Athenian Mercury*, the Athenians published an issue largely devoted to questions relating to the air. The answers show an understanding of Boyle's experiments to a surprising technical degree. Further, the vague references to the *Philosophical Transactions* or

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<sup>95</sup> This seems especially likely considering the Athenians' reputation for plagiarism. See footnote 86 for contemporary accusations thereof.

<sup>96</sup> Considering the Athenians' references to the *Philosophical Transactions*, that publication would be a good place to begin to look for similar experiments; the same applies to Boyle related books of 1692. Broadly speaking, the task remains to make more specific this transition; exactly how it took place, and through which means: lectures, books, etc. In this relation, there is one particular clue: Adrian Johns in his article, "Miscellaneous Methods," records the rivalry between Dunton and a rival publication the *London, or Lacedemonian Mercury*, in which the Lacedemonians "accused the Athenians of foolishness, pedantry and plagiarism, of having monopolizing ambitions, of citing 'spurious authors,' of incompetence in mathematics and natural philosophy and—worst of all—of insults to the memory of Robert Boyle." This rivalry would have occurred in 1692, and may have influenced the Athenians' reversal on the issue of the vacuum. Unfortunately, this author was unable to consult the *Lacedemonian Mercury* to verify this hypothesis. If true, it would only reinforce the point that the diffusion of scientific knowledge was heavily influenced by the material conditions within the book trade and the contingent events within the print sphere.

the Hon. Mr. Boyle have been replaced with citations of specificity: in answer to the question, “*Pray what is the Reason for the Difficulty of determining the height of the Atmosphere...the proportion of Air to Quicksilver being known by Mr. Boyle’s Experiments to be as 1 to 14000 very near?*,” the Athenians include in their response, “...because the Air when destitute of its pressure, has by Mr. *Boyle’s Experiments* dilated it self so as to take up above 150 times its former place.” To clinch the matter, query 5 of the issue is again the question of a cork, found to have been forced into the bottle it was plugging, after being plunged under water. The Athenians admit to having answered the question once before, and recognize the necessity for answering it again. Their answer is elaborate and they authenticate themselves by appealing again to Mr. Boyle: “as such as have read in Mr. *Boyl’s Experiments upon the Weight and Spring of the Air...*” Their answers, with frequent specific references to the experiments in the above mentioned text, show a new familiarity with the work of Boyle.<sup>97</sup> Ultimately, it seems that fact that the Athenians had become up-to-date with the current science is not a function of the efforts of the natural philosophers; rather it stems from the commerical leanings of the London book trade.<sup>98</sup>

Further, this shift to an acceptance of vacua and atomistic philosophy, divorced from atheism, was “in the air,” so to speak. At his death, Boyle established an annual lectureship. Eight sermons were to be given each year, in Boyle’s words, “for proving the Christian religion against notorious Infidels, viz. Atheists.” As Trenchard writes, “Boyle’s specific purpose was to counteract the fashionable atheism widely spread through England by the philosophy of Spinoza and Hobbes, and to demonstrate that his own corpuscularian hypothesis, when rightly understood, a powerful support to the Christian religion. The executors chose for their first preacher, in 1692, Mr. Richard Bentley, then chaplain to Bishop Stillingfleet and later the Master of Trinity College, Cambridge.” The first sermon was given in St. Martin’s, where Boyle had been recently buried, on March 7<sup>th</sup>. The latter seven were given at St. Mary-le-Bow’s. They were entitled “A Confutation of Atheism.”<sup>99</sup>

These lectures, popular and widely printed soon after they were delivered<sup>100</sup>, represents a refutation of *atheistical* atomistic philosophy, but an affirmation that atomism could coexist with a belief in God. In the sixth sermon, just a month before the Athenians publicly reversed their position on vacua, Bentley had preached, “though Universal Matter should have endured from everlasting, divided into infinite Particles in the Epicurean way, and though Motion should have

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<sup>97</sup> Further references of this type and questions relating to the air can be found in the *Athenian Mercury*, Vol. 12, No. 12 and Vol. 18, No. 20. The latter is notable for containing an explanation of the “affectations of air” which include almost verbatim references to Morton’s work: “...but whether there is only a vacuum between these little parts, or that the distance is supplied with an Etherial, or fiery matter, that can easily permeate the Glass to avoid a vacuum, has not yet been determined, but only that ‘tis probably one of these.” They, however, now display a more agnostic view than Morton’s. One may compare the references in the *Athenian Mercury* to Boyle’s work in *A Continuation of New Experiments Physico-Mechanical, Touching the Spring and Weight of the Air, and their Effects*.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid*, see entries for 1692.

<sup>99</sup> Trenchard, 132.

<sup>100</sup> *English Short Title Catalogue*, listings for 1692.

been coeval and coeternal with it: yet those Particles or Atoms could never of themselves by omnifarious kinds of Motion, whether Fortuitous or Mechanical, have fallen or been disposed into this or a like visible System.”<sup>101</sup> In the same sermon, he claims, “it is a thing possible, that Matter may have been produced out of Nothing. It is urged as an Universal Maxim; that Nothing can proceed from Nothing. Now this we readily allow; and yet it will prove nothing against the Possibility of Creation. For when they say, Nothing from Nothing; they must so understand it, as excluding all Causes, both material and efficient,” which is an effective refutation of one of the *Athenian Mercury*’s direct claims, back in 1691: “for materiality can never be the Efficient cause of its Contrariety, viz. *Nothing*.”<sup>102</sup>

In the fourth sermon, preached June 6, 1692, Bentley directly brings Boyle into the picture.

The Mechanical or Corpuscular Philosophy, though peradventure the oldest, as well as the best in the world, had lain buried for many Ages in contempt and oblivion; till it was happily restor'd and cultivated anew by some excellent Wits of the present Age. But it principally owes its re-establishment and lustre, to Mr. Boyle that Honourable Person of ever Blessed Memory, who hath not only shewn its usefulness in Physiology above the vulgar Doctrines of Real Qualities and Substantial Forms; but likewise its great serviceableness to Religion it self.

Further, and conclusively, just over a week since the Athenians themselves reversed their position, on November 7<sup>th</sup>, 1692, in the seventh of Bentley’s sermons, he declaimed, “Now since Gravity is found proportional to the Quantity of Matter, there is a manifest Necessity of admitting a Vacuum, another principal Doctrine of the Atomical Philosophy.”

Clearly, by this time, in the aftermath of Boyle’s death, Boyle’s works were being presented to the public in a more systematic form, for various reasons, both ideal and commercial. Whereas Boyle himself had left the ultimate question of the vacuum unanswered, occupying himself with experimental questions alone, his work, for many, spoke for itself: vacuities were a natural consequence of atomic philosophy. As we have seen, through its own about-face, the *Athenian Mercury* both reflected and continued that process of popularization. As Hunter puts it, “the way in which a hand-me-down version of the new philosophy was now widely propagated is well illustrated by the *Athenian Mercury*.”<sup>103</sup>

The significance of the shift in the *Athenian Mercury*’s position on vacua is considerable. It was part of a larger change in the relationship between science and society in the 1690s. Indeed, as Hunter writes, “What one finds in the 1690s was a distinctive, formative stage in the new science’s rise to widespread acceptance.”<sup>104</sup> The Athenians’ various answers show both the influence of earlier, Aristotelian philosophies in both the curiosity of the questioner (to ask the question at all, and multiple times) and the learning of the questioned. In addition, it emphasizes

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<sup>101</sup> Bentley, *A Confutation of Atheism*. I consulted the collected Boyle lectures of Bentley, published in 1699.

<sup>102</sup> *A. M.*, Vol. 1, No. 4, Query 8.

<sup>103</sup> Hunter, 156.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid*, 151.

the fact that the state of the book trade was both actively influencing events, even as it was influenced by the contemporary situation. At a time when book runs were relatively small<sup>105</sup>, it is notable that the writers of the Athenian Society could be influenced within a distinct period of time by the diffusion of Boyle's knowledge after his death.

So, the *Athenian Mercury's* differing answers on the vacuum question mirror the larger reality of the popular culture of the period, in which traditional metaphysics co-existed with modern natural philosophies, and curiosity abounded in both the learned and the lay. Hunter characterizes it succinctly below:

...the 1690s are to be seen as a transitional period. The new science had 'arrived' in terms of a growing public acceptance of its essential correctness as a means of understanding the natural world and of its utility in proving God's beneficial design in the universe... But, even so, much had yet to be done in terms of disseminating specific natural philosophical theories as against a generalized sense that the new philosophy was preferable to the old.<sup>106</sup>

The shift in the *Athenian Mercury* is a missing link. In the aftermath of Boyle's death, his books were republished and read by the Athenians. The Athenians, in turn, brought that knowledge to a large and diverse number of readers. This is a specific example of the path of diffusion of scientific information and the conditions under which it occurred. This link is significant not only for the history of science but also the history of the book and the early periodical.

Through the impersonal means of print, the readers of the *Athenian Mercury* made their private questions and curiosities public, in an anonymous form which freed them from fear of their own ignorance. The very fact that such a dialogue was occurring in real time between the writers and readers of the *Mercury* created a situation in which the *Athenian Mercury* was widely read despite questionable credentials. Through this means, the publication proved to be an important conduit of knowledge to the public, although sometimes imperfect.<sup>107</sup> As McEwen gently characterizes it:

Like many of the virtuosi, who were after all seeking knowledge even though sometimes in ridiculous ways, the Athenians sometimes made wrong conclusions based upon incomplete investigation, influence, as the entire age was, by the open conflict between orthodox religious

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<sup>105</sup> The size of the London book trade is notoriously difficult to pin down. Gaskell writes that "even as late as 1738-85 more than 90 percent of the 514 books printed at Strahan's large London printing-house were in editions of less than 2,000 copies" Gaskell, *A New Introduction to Bibliography*, 161. Johns writes that there were approximately 150 bookshops in London by 1695 and further, than there were innumerable "temporary and mobile stalls" Johns, 66. Despite the impossibility of affixing an accurate size to the book trade, one can say with certainty that while London was "strikingly conversant with the printed word" (Johns, 62), the book production of the time was magnitudes smaller than the production we experience today.

<sup>106</sup> Hunter, 166.

<sup>107</sup> For a discussion on how "Dunton and his team of literary professionals [defined] the polite sphere and [shaped] its inhabitants' reading habits," see Hammond, *Professional Imaginative Writing in England, 1670-1740*, 157. The Athenians in referencing certain works in their answers would have created expectations as to what one should have read and been familiar with. Hammond applies this to literary references, but the same idea could be equally applies in reference to natural philosophy.

belief and the emerging concepts of natural philosophy leading to natural religion.<sup>108</sup>

But despite its failings, the *Athenian Mercury* provided to the readers of its day an entertaining and informative read. It had its pulse on the issues of the era and reflected back at its readers their cultural situation. It mirrored the tensions of an early modern England in flux. The Athenians' boundless enthusiasm resulted in a successful project of questions and answers the like of which the world had never seen. In Vol. 8, No. 1, the Athenians' are given the chance to judge their handiwork in response to the question, "*Can you tell me what good was ever yet done by your Athenian Mercury?*" Their answer is characteristic, half serious, half tongue-in-cheek:

...to say nothing of how helpful we have been to *Pastry-Cooks, &c.* we think we may in earnest, and without *vanity* pretend that our Paper has been of some real *use* both to the *publick*, and in many particular cases of high moment:...none can deny but we have rais'd a kind of *Learned Ferment* in the Nation...for *particular persons*, tho' 'tis impossible to satisfy all, nor were we ever so vain to hope it, yet we find we have done so to great many, in cases of the *highest Concern*, and which may have a much larger influence by being thus publick. And for the rest, had we only innocently *diverted* the World, 'twou'd be no unacceptable *piece of Service*...

Surely Dunton's "Question-Project," lives up to its full, original title, the *Athenian Gazette, or Casuistical Mercury, Resolving all the most Nice and Curious Questions proposed by the Ingenious*.

Ingenious, indeed.

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McEwen, 117.

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THE BOOK OF HOURS  
2009

THE BOOK OF HOURS

by Matthew Weiss

### A Note on the Text

The manuscript for Baruch ben Moshe's strange, winding narrative was discovered in 1957 in a small cupboard in the kitchen of Maria Rosario Sevilla, who lived at the time in a modest one storey home in Salamanca, close to the university. For years, in her ignorance, she had been using the pages of the manuscript as papering for the underbellies of pots, pans, and colanders. Her son Ruben, the graduate student, home for the holidays, eventually liberated the manuscript, and brought it to the attention of an eager coven of Salamancan librarians. He recalled years later how he had left the bundle of papers, tied with a red ribbon, at the reference desk of the *General Histórica*, how it had been snatched up and paged through and fingered over, and how, despite these attentions, the manuscript vanished yet again during the course of the library's 1958 renovations, and that, despite his, and his mother's, many inquiries as to the text's status.

Indeed, over the next few decades, the text would change hands a considerable number of times, appearing on the desks of not a few experts and many more amateurs, until at last it came to rest in the office of Solomon Krupnik, professor of Jewish Studies at the City College of New York, having, evidently, crossed the Atlantic. From 1981-1989, Krupnik worked closely with members of the Spanish Language department, particularly Javier Sobral, a joint professor in History, to produce a translation of the work. The difficulties, of course, were manifold: the text was written in an archaic Spanish shot through and through with provincialisms; its orthography was makeshift, idiosyncratic, and obscured by food stains and water damage; and much of the ordering of the manuscript pages was uncertain. As one can imagine, the process dragged on for many years. Although excerpts were to appear in various, scattered journals, notably in a special

edition of *Speculum*, the journal of the Medieval Academy of America, a full treatment of the text was left among Krupnik's papers at the time of his death. In 1992, when Sobral left CCNY to join the faculty of the John Carter Brown Library, he arranged for Krupnik's papers to be transferred to their holdings, but despite this measure, Sobral was unable to continue work on the project, perhaps due to the birth of his first son.

This is where the matter stood until just a number of years ago, when the manuscript came to the attention of Jonah Peltz, Krupnik's nephew, and the author of several novels as well as a collection of short stories, *Time, Memory, Witness*, which won the National Jewish Book Award in 1994. Peltz, with Sobral's permission, undertook to organize his uncle's papers and revise the translation of Baruch ben Moshe's text, utilizing his (Peltz's) sensibility as a novelist to, as he has said, "work over ben Moshe's language, imparting to his conversational style the modern idiom so that his text might better speak to the modern Jewish reader."

The translation which appears here under the title, *The Book of Hours*, represents the fruit of Peltz's labor. Its sensitive and deeply poetic rendering attests to Peltz's skill as both a literary excavator and architect. Indeed, one hopes that this translation will bring both historical and literary recognition to its obscure originator, and place him in continuity with the same spirit that animated the freewheeling Cervantes as well as the stern, studious Moses Maimonides. It is dedicated to Maria Rosario and her son Ruben, who survives her, as two key links in the long chain of people whose lives have provided the stepping stones by which Baruch ben Moshe's magnificent narrative emerges to us from the past

For this English edition, all quotations from Maimonides have been regularized to M.

Friedländer's translation of *The Guide for the Perplexed*, first published in 1881. This has been done, at some cost to flow, so that Baruch's quotations may be more easily contextualized. For those who wish to follow along, Peltz and Sobral have surmised that the text Baruch had at hand consisted of the end of chapter 57, the whole of chapters 58 and 59, and a short, initial portion of chapter 60.

A more scholarly edition of ben Moshe's text, accompanied by an analysis of Baruch ben Moshe as a historical and literary figure, is forthcoming from Oxford University Press, 2013.

-- M. B. White, Assistant Series Editor, Routledge Jewish Studies Series

## THE BOOK OF HOURS

My son, it is not a good time to be a Jew. Oh, but were one Maimonides of Cordoba and at least to have a name! No one cares what I say except you, my son, and you are nothing. In a thousand years, no one will lift a finger to save you from oblivion. Never forget that, my son, you are nothing, nothing like me. Indeed, let me tell you. A man came to our house yesterday; I was sitting in quiet contemplation of your mother, and I saw him through the window. He identified himself as Miguel or Juan or some other name; he was tall, thin, and had a little red goatee, and presented an all around disagreeable physiognomy. Baruch! he said. Do I know you? I asked him. Baruch, of course you know me, it is your old friend Juan. I leveled my gaze at him; I am sure I had not much of an expression on my face, for I was still distraught from reflection and study. I find that after reflection on the body of the world I am more likely than not to open the door when I mean the cupboard and the cupboard when I mean the door—what forgetfulness! Indeed, says Maimonides, *in the examination of His Works, our knowledge proves to be ignorance*. What wisdom in those lines! After reflection and study, I can barely remember my own name, let alone the name of some gentile. But forgive my digression, my son—this is the most important thing: Maimonides, he was a Jew who knew how to write! If they were not so precious to me, I would explain his words to you, my son; I would copy them out for you, carefully recreating the contours of each word, but I am sure you would fail to understand them. Did you not ask me once, my son, if the Lord, our God, could smile? I quote Maimonides: *Superficial thinkers, he says, will doubtfully ask, Is that thing existing in the Creator, or not?* Superficial! The words give me a picture of you. My son, you are a fool. I have known it all your life. Indeed, ever since I first saw you fall from the window of your room, I have known it; when

you were twelve years old, I knew it as you fell to the ground like a rock, moving not a limb, putting up no fight. You fell and I could have sworn you were going to slip right through the earth, so limply, so willingly did you plummet, as if you expected the air to push you back up, as if you could let the air itself work for you. And then, when I picked you up from the ground and ordered you to explain yourself, you had the audacity to tell me you wanted to meet the Lord, our God, Ruler of the Universe—as if he would want to meet you! Oh, my son, if you had come to me, I would have explained to you what I knew; instead, you spoke blasphemy and took an apprenticeship to the bookbinder, Pedro. How much of my money will you return to me? Your mother gave you everything we had and you left us for Frankfurt, Cologne? What, was there not enough drink in Avignon? But there is time enough for that, and I was saying—

I said: this Miguel came to me at my door and said, Baruch, we need a scholar. I said, Miguel, you want my son, of course, the scholar. See how I flatter you, my son, even when you are not nearby. Miguel said to me, Baruch, we need a scholar of Hebrew. In town, a man, Ezequiel, has arrived, a learned man from Genoa, in Italy, he wishes to question you on some matters relating to the Bible in Hebrew for a gentleman of note—did you know this Ezequiel says he knows you?—moreover, he says he will pay you very well for your work. He finished. I confess, I was unable to stop myself watching Miguel's red goatee buck up and down as he talked—but what significance his words had, like the soft shouts that greet a city at dawn! But unaware of their meaning then, I said, Oh, Miguel, if only you knew how busy I am! For I am given over to contemplation of the Lord. Ah! my son, if he had known what I meant by that term; if that Miguel had seen me curled in the corner, lashing together my bundles of grass, which I bound with mud to form the shapes of houses and even people, whose form I tried to fix against

the backdrop of the world I perceived outside; if Miguel had seen me working with those false letters on the floor, he would have stared, and would have stared half again as awed if he had realized I intended the sky outside to mirror the form of my shapes. I could not explain it to Miguel at that time; for I know now wherein lay my error, I know indeed that knowledge of the Lord is fit only for the few—the few who spend their time reflecting on that which is deserving. I follow the scholar Maimonides in this. But at that time, I could only say, You see, the burden of knowledge is great, Miguel. Just ask my son. He comes down with splitting headaches and staggers like a fool after too much thinking. For all his learning, a knock on the head is enough to set him drooling. Oh, my son, I said to Miguel, if only you could meet him, if only you were the physician Maimonides of whom I've only heard, praise be to him and the Lord God, then, Miguel, you could to heal my son from his painful stupidity. Ah, pity me, what a wish!

For what a time it is for Jews, lovers of wisdom! I ask: since when has the knowledge of the Lord our God been fit for the multitude? Such a time is never a good time, my son, for you or for me. But enough of my complaints. Let me turn to your letter at last. You must still be in Frankfurt, now, as I write this. With God's help, I can hire a courier to meet you there. I will pay all that he requires, indeed, as you should have! How should it make a father feel to find a courier at his door, carrying a dog-eared letter, written in a language incomprehensible to him—did you write it while carousing?—a courier, who needs a place to spend the night and reimbursement for costs, when all a poor father wants to do is be in peace to read the letter of his son and get some idea of the world! And of course even that pleasure was inaccessible; you can imagine the humiliation I suffered as I begged the courier himself to read your letter to me in order that I might understand you. The fact is, I waved him away early the next morning and, I

tell you, as the sun rose in the sky and the room, so often dark and dusty, was cast in the reddish light of dawn, a color not unlike the color of your cheeks as you hunched over your books, grunting and humming so much that I thought if I brushed your forehead the insides would catch my hand on fire; as the sky lit up and I was thinking of you, my son, I brought all your letters out; I keep them all, the few you have deigned to write. I keep them around me, in the house, in various places. For example, some are nailed to the walls, above the grasses that line the corners of the house. Perhaps they do not smell where you are living now. If the following list will turn your thoughts to home, then here, I will write: we tread on rosemary, penny royal, oregano, marjoram, lavender, and sage—they line the walls, smolder on the coals, and adorn your mother's rug where she sits alongside certain flowers, kneading dough in her smock. Your mother, of course, thinks she sees you in your handwriting and I have learned too as well after many years. Today, indeed, I read your letters to myself alone, over and over. You should see me! You would laugh, my son, at how seriously I take you. I read them over and over and I still cannot understand what you say. All I can think is that indeed the world outside my house is truly nothing like the inside. As Maimonides says, *If you see an object from a distance, and on enquiring what it is, are told that it is a living being, you have certainly learned an attribute of the object seen, and although that attribute does not exclusively belong to the object perceived, it expresses that the object is not a plant or a mineral.* It is sometimes as if, my son, I've never seen a living being. For my part, I am sure that for all of my life, with one great exception, of which I shall tell you more, I have never seen a living being and never will, for a living being is most certainly the opposite of anything I have ever perceived here in this house, where I can only perceive plants or minerals. I indeed keep a flower on the counter; I do not yet know what a

mineral is, in Maimonides's usage—if you know, my son, write. Oh, what wonders there are in the world! And what lesser wonders I will never see. To conclude this lesson from Maimonides, my son, to me the world you inhabit is like the Lord our God, something I may never know, but only try to *circumscribe*. As to his meaning in this connection, I have only a guess.

So you are living in Frankfurt now. This too I only guess, having no other knowledge, for your last letter came to us a very long time ago indeed. I hope you have not lost faith in us; for you must have suspected we would be unable to write back so easily. Oh, my son, I sensed such anger behind your words then. Leaving home had made you vindictive. You say that in the world abroad you have met scholars and even painters; you tell me you have eaten with merchants wearing gold chains that coil on their fat bellies—their names tell me nothing about them. You told me what it is like to talk to a learned man, walking through a city where you can enter any tavern and drink, Christian women with sweat on their bare arms and shoulders—what shame should brighten on your face! You say the men who work in the bindery, the ones who set the leather for the monks, they dust you off, wash the paste from your hands and take you to see sights; you chipped marble off Saint Bartholomeus's Cathedral as if you had no respect at all for the works of others. What of humility, my son? Is there really nothing for which you have any feeling at all? Does nothing your mother or I have ever said to you matter at all? It is as if all your life you were waiting to escape, to negate all the ways of our life, to set the world on its head. So you confer with gentiles, work in filth, and abandon contemplation of the Lord! Did you mention the Lord, our God, once in your letter? Perhaps I have misread you; in any case, I am only trying to understand, my son, for I think we are quite similar. Maimonides divides his work into chapters, just as God has divided the lives of men into chapters. He begins his fifty-

eighth chapter saying, *This chapter is even more recondite than the preceding*, by which he means our knowledge will always be unwhole; that which comes after is always more obscure; indeed, one must read life backwards. Things have changed at our house since you left, my son. Let me tell you about our house now, and remind you of it.

Your mother still sits on her rug beside the hearth; the candelabra, inherited from my own father through my uncle—woe to you, my son, for you will never see sit again I fear, though I am sure you remember it—sits on our table every Sabbath, though this table is not much; it is a barrel with a board across its top, I am sure you have seen the like. On the table, sits the candelabra. It is made of wide, curving bronze, given to me by my uncle after my father's death when I was very young. I know very little about its origins, even as I stare at it now. If only you could have seen my father's face as you had the chance to look upon mine! Beside the candelabra we place on cloth fruit and vegetables which your mother brings from town. Beyond it, one can see the window above our bed beside which are your letters, tacked to the wall so that the breeze, somewhat fresh, might make the pages flutter and, hearing them move, we might think of you. Beside the fireplace are rugs and blankets where your mother and I lie; there we throw old scraps of clothing to sit on and we lean against the flour sacks near the brazier. What we would do for your strong back! After carrying flour sacks I am forced to lie in the wool of our bed and smell nothing but the flour and straw in my pillow for days. But if I direct my head upward, I find a delight; I have taken the liberty of cutting out your illustrations and have placed them in a row along the wall, above the pillows. At dawn, they are illuminated by the light through the window and sometimes, in the moonlight that seeps through the thatch, I can make out your writing. Many times in the past, I would tumble down the ladder from the bed and storm

out the house into the night in frustration. On such nights, it was best to keep the shutters closed, to keep the letters safely in the dark. Now, principally, I want to draw your attention to a small box, which I've placed under the window, being, small as it is, the most significant new addition to our house, despite the overall vast upheaval in our lives—for very little ever changes in this world; in fact, it seems that what changes occur are only new discoveries. In any case, we have had to spend a great deal more of our time baking for very little is left for us, especially since for some time now I have had my mind elsewhere than on my livelihood. Indeed, my mind has been in this box, pride of place, for it is that thing which has led me to the point at which I now stand—for in this small box, surrounded by blue mountain flowers, I store two chapters of the physician Maimonides. Indeed, my son, his words affect the course of my thought and dictate the course of my story.

Perhaps I am explaining myself unnecessarily; perhaps the memory of that Juan who came to my door has put me at unease; perhaps, indeed, you are already well aware of what I am going to tell you. In your letter, you asked me for advice in translation, much the same way that Juan asked me to advise Ezequiel, a man about whom I have much more to say. In any case, you tell me that scholars place great store in our holy books and you want my advice as an expert in Hebrew lore. Ah, my son, what a fool you are!—and all this time I thought you had been fooling me! I will tell you this now, in the form of a story, because this is my feeling on the matter. I am not a very smart man; I am a man of exceeding dullness and stupidity, and if you have either thought me more than a desperate, ignorant fool, then likewise you are easily deceived.

Maimonides tells us that God gives the world *duration and preserves its necessary arrangement*.

I think of these words sometimes as I imagine what I must look like to God, of whom we know,

from Maimonides, that there is *no other being like him*, who must therefore see things not as we see them, but in any way other than ours. I imagine that perhaps, if he so wished, he could watch the world as if it existed with a shorter duration, indeed, in an instant, such that if I were to walk back and forth around the room, deep in thought, from the brazier, to the table, to the manuscript box, when I converse with your mother, and sit with her as we once sat with you beside the fire, that it must appear repetitive and simple to him, who can see so many paths in the blink of an eye. If God truly has arranged the world as it must be, I must accept that the house you grew up in is as different from the world outside as you are to the Lord, our God, and for that matter, from me. For surely, it was only he who made you so entirely and wholly ill-fitted to the world I raised you in and further, so happy away from everything you once knew. Sometimes I think I am committing a blasphemy in contemplating you in the same way one should contemplate God, that is to say, in the terms of what you are not or could have been, in terms of what you are only by the shadows cast around you and not by the brightly lit parts. Maimonides warns us against *treating the Creator as a familiar object*, and yet I cannot change the fact that the direction of my thoughts goes not towards God alone, but also his creations, that is, you. And my thoughts lead me to the following: as far as man is concerned, God's creation requires explorations because the world is incomprehensible to the eye and it takes a mind gifted in reason, logic and in the revelations to understand why the world has its necessary arrangement, and even then, there is nothing obvious. Understanding God is not nearly so natural as understanding why one sleeps with a pillow under the head and not under the feet. God has no obviousness in him. All men are driven to wonder why God has created the world as it is, to discover its justifications hidden like eggs within a hen. In the same way, I think it must have seemed to you that the ways of our

house in your youth were a kind of impossible, but necessary arrangement, with as little thought or intelligence behind it, as sometimes the world appears to that man who is blind. Indeed, that may have been exactly the case. So, with you gone, I suspect, forever, I want to confess to you some matters which weigh heavily on me, as a kind of explanation, because your asking me for scholarly advice embarrasses me, for reasons which you will soon understand. And so, having written much and said little, I come to the true beginning of my story, in regard to which you will be my only confidant. For to truly understand men, we must undress them, garment by garment if we are ever to learn anything; and if I am to tell you anything, you must trust me, and there is no greater authority than the example of a life.

So, as I said, I will tell you a story, so that you might learn something of me and the world as I see it. To begin in the present, your mother for some time has been very ill; she had a habit of controlling the passions that moved her by means of her face; indeed, I often saw underneath her beauty the suffering that she hid concerning her life, and also you and your disappearance long ago; I saw it in her face, in her eyes, even as she resigned herself to keeping them open. She would disappear from our house from time to time when I left to go collect in the fields. I would return from the fields or the mill, walking along the bank of our little stream, and find her gone, but only for a time. I have not read the Bible, my son, if I had, perhaps I would have done differently, but that year the bakery left us starving as the price of flour had increased quickly; thus, I would leave the house to pick over the fields and when I would return, covered in dust, with a bundle of wheat wrapped in my shirt—for indeed, if any part of the Bible is known to our ignorant Jews, it was that verse of the scriptures which says that God promises to the impoverished the left-over wheat of the fields. Truth to tell, to me this existence was trying, but

valuable in its own way, for it gave me time to think, though I had nothing in particular to think about, except perhaps the walking through the center of the vast clearing of our village, which seemed to me to represent a vast, living body. However, sometimes when I returned, Rebka would be gone. As I passed the inhabitants of our village on the way over the small hill that hides our house, their faces would tell me nothing about what I was to find upon arriving home, ready to peek again under the cover of the wooden box, to compare a discovery I had made, to give some knowledge to Rebka who, of course, was not there. As I hurried out, even an hour after her, I would see her in the distance, perhaps, moving from house to house, perhaps laughing, although when she saw me, she would not necessarily laugh; she would see me and her face would grow quiet in its childishness, her eyes cast to the ground, her lips seeming both to move and be unmoving; I would come up to her and say something in the croaking, thin voice I have developed in the last years; sometimes instead I would throw my arms around her and hold her close, and smell the sweat that could only be hers. What was she after? Perhaps she was looking for my little friend and teacher, the boy Tabor; perhaps she was moved by her passions still. What went through her head when she saw me? It was not simply guilt, it was not quite love, but to my mind it was a faith in the Lord to preserve the proper order of things. Then again, perhaps she did love me. In any case, what is certain is that she resisted all change. If there was anything she hated, it was the people changing. She did not change. This is what she said to me, I will never change. So, I would hold her close. We would go back to our house and sort through the grain. We had to mill it ourselves, our small portion.

Then, as I said, one day recently, after a great deal of this, she disappeared and I went to town and she was not there. I returned to the house; I was alone; and at last I began to

contemplate the story in which I had been involved up until that point, from the time that Miguel had come to my door. It was perhaps this event which precipitated my writing to you in earnest, for indeed, I had begun this letter even as your mother watched me from her table covered in flour, though I worked then without a sense of urgency. I am alone right now.

Where must I begin, then, having explained myself so far? I think I know. My son, you must understand my past, for it is your own past; I have been remiss in telling you my story and much that I say will be incomprehensible without what follows. Unless you understand that city from which I came, you will never understand what has happened to me in the years since Miguel came with news of Ezequiel and the time since your mother went into exile. Indeed, you will never understand why I have been such a fool all my life and remain a pitiable, desperate man even today, though I am hardly the fool I once was. By avoiding my example, perhaps, you may even save yourself from a similar fate.

I was born in a line of scholars stretching back to the time of the Second Temple, unless we had a liar in our past. Of course, it has been a secret; indeed, I myself am baptized, though perhaps my father meant that as a joke. Nevertheless, the fact remains that we were Jews living in Barcelona, in the Old City, where we worked on La Rambla de les Flors selling flowers; my fathers wrote commentary on the Talmud. If only I could evoke that time for you, my son: the heaviness of Barcelona's buildings lying on the earth, the haze moving off the Mediterranean, like a tired swimmer trudging back from the shore; the dense vapors that stopped the sun—all these things would stretch out above me, under the green canvas roof of our stand, in front of the cracked stairs that led to the house in which we lived, so many crowded to a room that manuscripts were used as pillows. My mother told me how I would crawl into my grandfather's

supply of ink—it was in a heavy chest, the ash and eggs; there were shells in my hair, stains on my teeth; the men all had such white beards and they sweated in the dark apartment, writing in the margins of the books. Oh, I had so many books at hand! Never have I seen so many since.

In the morning, I would play with Ruiz and Tabor, whose fathers worked with my father. Ruiz had long black hair that fell down his head in layers; his shirt was always too big for him, and I could see his browned chest—as little as it was in reality, it appeared to me huge—as the sweaty fabric near his neck hung down away from it. Of Tabor all I remember is a nose, one that looked as heavy and as permanent as a statue, bigger and more rounded than any other part of his body. We would race back and forth between the flower shops, crisscrossing from stand to stand. I would hide under my family's table and peek my head out, upside down, facing the sky, and I remember distinctly, now, how I would feel the coolness of petals on my face as they fell off flowers whose stems stretched over the edge of the table. My father would come and pick me up, saving me from aimlessness. Each time he came to carry me away—sometimes under the arm—with as much dignity as the occasion would allow—he would tell me seriously, now, with a look to my face and a great pause—that I, Baruch, would be a great scholar one day. My father was not a simple man. I tell you, my son, and believe me: he never told me what to be, only prophesied what I would become. He introduced me to the men who brought the flowers and bulbs, roses from the Orient, men who smelled sour unless they bathed, their faces cracked and peeling, although there was a kindness and a firmness about them, and after I touched their hands, I would hang around them, sitting cross-legged on the floor, their robes swirling around me, and when I awoke, having fallen asleep, they would be sitting beside me, still smoking and describing to my father and grandfather, great men all, the bustle of Kabul, a spire in the

mountains, and fields of poppies so thick that one could swim in them—all of this at night.

Nevertheless, I was a haughty child. I do not know what impression I have given you thus far. I knew nothing of humility and was unwilling to learn. I was perhaps eight or nine at this time. As far as I was concerned, Ruiz and Tabor were beneath me and I complained about them to my mother to my last breath, pacing around her as she sat on the stairs of our house, weaving flowers into a wreath. I told her all about myself, what my plans were, all manner of preparation fit for a lord. What excitement and what rage I remember feeling, how slow time seemed to move outside my head, and when I was trapped indoors, having overturned a vase or finally having given Tabor the smack in the nose he deserved, I would commune with a kind of devil, stretching out my arms, which must have been extremely thin at the time, and raising my fists and my face to the ceiling, I would draw the deepest breath I could and, letting a flowing kind of energy sweep through me, I would scream. Even you, my son, were not so bad as I. When you would fly into tears as a child, I would often think that we two must not be so different, feeling so similarly; but ashamed as I was of those childish feelings, I could only fault you for them, never pity.

All and all, I can say, I loved my parents, but they were very busy people. I remember distinctly, therefore, one time when my father took me to the public bath. Of all my time in Barcelona, perhaps this I remember best. We bathed together, he washed me in the big pool there, as I sat on a stone step near the edge which was a little cracked and scratched. He told me our family history, or what he knew of it, and I confess that to me it was little more than a list of names which I have forgotten. We went to the lavatory there, an open, wide room of stone, with ledges all around the walls with holes spaced evenly where men would squat. During the day, it

would be loud and chaotic with everyone talking, be it business or idle philosophy, and one could concentrate when the noise was just a din; but if there were a man with a voice of certain qualities there such that they cut through the talk of everyone else, it was impossible not to listen to his conversation to distraction. But at night, when we were there, my father and I, it was quiet. We could see the stars, few as they were, the sky as dark and blue as a flower whose name I forget, and, in the shadows, the figures of a few men, squatting, were dispersed around the lavatory. All was silence except for, at intervals, a wet sliding noise or a squish. It was so soft, you could imagine you had not heard it at all, and I found myself staring in one place, listening to the distant hum of the city. What kinship I felt there with all my fellow men, and despite my father beside me, I felt as if I were totally alone, but connected to all.

That night, I could not sleep because, for the first time in my life, I thought about dying. I was not even thinking about the possibility that I could die, but how one day, my mother and father would die. And I kept whispering to myself, I love them so much, I love them so much, with my cheek pressed into the pillow, tears disappearing over the bridge of my nose. And it was not so much that I loved them so much, but that I felt how much they loved me and I felt so guilty because of it. I rose from my bed and went to talk to my father. It was very quiet, although I could hear laughter in the streets, and I went up beside him where he lay. I pressed my hand against his shoulder a few times, and then he opened his eyes, looking directly up, as if staring God in the face. I started to cry again. Then he turned to me. What is wrong, he asked. I didn't want to say it straight out. I started crying harder; I thought my question was so strange. I said it haltingly to him, I am really scared. He asked me, what about? I sniffled and looked down at him again. He was still staring up at the ceiling, looking so relaxed, in the dark, the blanket half

covering him. I felt guilty for having woken him. I was trying to sleep, I explained, because explaining would make the situation better, and I was lying there and I could not stop thinking about how you are going to die and how mom is going to die, and I am going to die eventually, and how much I am going to miss you. I do not want you to die, I said, crying, and I asked him what happens when we die? He exhaled, not quite a sigh, but as if he were buying time. I remember so well his eyes, looking up, reflecting in the darkness.

Everybody dies, my father said to me, that is the way it has always been. But the Jewish tradition tells us that when we die, we are not gone forever. I am going to die someday, but I am still going to love you, and then someday, when you die, we will be in heaven together, with your mother and everyone we ever loved. Do not be afraid of dying, he said to me, we are more than just our bodies. One day you will grow up, you will marry someone you love and have children of your own. And someday your mother and I will not be around any more. But we will not have forgotten you. Do not be scared, there is nothing more natural than dying. One day our whole family will be together again.

Okay, I cried, standing there, fastened to the spot. It was so quiet. Now, I wonder how unsure he must have been, how afraid he must have been to tell me the right thing. Come here, he said, and I put my arms around him, hugged him tight, my face against his chest. I am going to miss you so much, I said. Do not worry, he said into my hair, I am going to be around for a while.

My son, it has taken me a while to recount this scene from memory. And although so many parts of it are still clear, it is as if my life around that one moment were moving at a very different pace. I remember at some point I left my father, lying there—who knows what he was

thinking after I left—and I think I went back to my bed: the route between the beds was traced in a haze, and indeed, as he told me, soon I was asleep. Of the next morning, I remember nothing. My son, I tell you this story, not to indulge myself, but to give you an idea of me, and therefore, of yourself. If we had such a conversation, surely you must remember it. And I think you had the same reaction as I did, for, although, I never loved my father more, it was his love that comforted me, not anything he said. Even as he spoke the words of scriptures, he did not give me the same faith, the faith he claimed to profess. I was not quite sure, then, that I believed what he said, or that his faith in God was warranted, for I was never quite sure he himself believed what he told me. Nevertheless from then on I felt as if I had gained some kind of knowledge, as if something of life was clearer to me. There was something in the world around me and where once it was unknown, now it could only be forgotten. It took me many years before I could tell you the same things he told me.

I am thoroughly dissatisfied with the preceding sections. My son, find it in your heart to forgive a man who has never written a meaningful word in his life for his inability to stem the flow of memory. Let me now quickly complete the narration of my time in Barcelona. In the ninetieth year of this century, my mother and father died and I was taken from Barcelona by my uncle, a man of immense girth. How my parents lost their lives I never knew. It happened in the night I know and I remember that evening, by coincidence, having disappeared with Tabor and Ruiz, my two good friends, into a wine cellar of a relation of theirs. I believe it was on La Ribera. Perhaps it was Ruiz, for his parents were wealthier than ours. There, we were playing a game: we had stolen reams of clothing from our parents, blue robes with gold sequins, all manner of shirts, a hat of velvet, some silk, perhaps there were scarves. Of all things to

remember, but I do remember all the clothing we threw there in a pile in the wine cellar. Indeed, you must forgive my way of telling a story, so digressive and filled with meaningless facts and events, when indeed it is the idea or conclusion you are reading for. As I said earlier, it was not so long ago that I learned the idea I wish to impart to you: let me tell you, my son, this world is transient and the next is eternal. It is not colorful words which are the proper form of the reflection on God, but the workings of logic and the fields of reason. Anything else, says Maimonides, is but mere *looseness of tongue in reference to God*. As I say, it is not through a story which you will get closer to the Lord, but through thoughts and reflections. But as Maimonides says, *It has, however become necessary to address men in words that should leave some idea in their minds*. This is true both in reference to God and in reference to the lives of men. For indeed it is the material and color of the scarves I saw that night that remains with me, not thoughts disconnected from a figure or an image. If perhaps I had been home that night, I would remember something very different of my parent's death.

As I said, Tabor and Ruiz and I were playing a game, wrapping ourselves in clothing and chasing each other through the shelves of wine. We would take turns hiding somewhere in the wine cellar. Then at a shout, we would race for the pile of clothing, diving for the ripped shirts in the heap. I remember that night I had a scrape on my shin from the stone floor, and I remember showing it to my uncle as we left, and he gave me something to put on it that stung. But that came later. With whatever we could grab of the clothing, we would return to our corner of the cellar, undress ourselves and come out into the open. The game was a kind of acting game and we would take on the attributes of the clothing we were wearing, and as we strutted in circles, taking one another in, the goal was to guess what the other one was dressed as. With each guess,

we would come closer to the truth. I tell you all this because it was to have great significance for what happened next. My uncle told me later that by the year of my birth, we were one of the last remaining Jewish families living in Barcelona. My uncle could even remember when the city was teeming with Jewish life, when the scriptures of the Lord were preserved by his chosen people—of course, this is how he spoke of us. He told me that when he was a child there had been riots all over Barcelona, how many of his friends disappeared in the confusion. He told us about a night spent in terror, hiding with the family above the flower shop of a gentile, hearing the sound of broken glass, and dried flowers catching flame on the stairs below. This is the sort of thing he would tell us when we stayed with him, when we could not sleep. After such a nightmare of a story, we would end up sleeping soundly, perhaps because we expected so much to stay awake, or perhaps because we became such a part of my uncle's story that we came to believe that we had escaped the riots as well, and were safe, in the arms of our relatives. Indeed, since the riots my family had kept to themselves, studied indoors and placed crosses on the wall. While the other Jewish families began to leave in droves, we, having taken the name Flores de Christo, stayed behind until we were nearly the only ones left. That night, the night of my parents' death, this is what my uncle told me. In an effort to appear as Catholic as possible, my parents had taken to attending the church on a weekly basis. What joy they took in it, we never heard the end of it! Shouting and carrying on as they got dressed, my father would say, We are going to have such fun tonight! He would kiss my mother on the lips and say, What a gentile she is! Such cold lips—he would press his face against her breasts—What a still heart!—he would cry—as silent in its working as any Catholic's! In this way, my father went to the church after a long day of study, with the characters of the scriptures written in the circles of his eyes. They

sang the prayers in Latin, crossed themselves, dressed in their finest, with a brocaded scarf, perhaps, this my mother wore, my father in a coat embroidered with gold thread. It turns out that my father, like you, was a fool. They say it skips a generation—oh, my son, how you and your grandfather would have gotten along! As if to prove himself a Jew, and a foolish Jew at that, my father wore his tallit to the church, kissing the threads and blessing it as he wrapped his shoulders in it, before he left our house. That was the last I saw of him, as I ran out the door, my last image of him is of his disappearance, as I ran out the door, in a flutter of tallit, white, blue, and gold. The sound of his muttering, his prayers, followed me past the flower stand into the street.

So my father wore his tallit wrapped around his shoulders, underneath his coat. Such excitement in his eyes! He kept chuckling to himself, my uncle said, so happy he was to bring Satan into the church. He brushed off his coat, beating it several times, led my mother down the stairs, holding her hand gallantly, and they walked down the Rambla de les Flors to the church on a street elsewhere in the Old City, and if I lie to myself, I can remember hearing the clap of their footsteps and the ring of their conversation as Ruiz and I raced to find Tabor. My uncle tells me that they got to the church, my father stroking his beard as he mouthed the words of the songs. My mother clutched his arm and would from time to time whisper into his ear phrases which the couple never revealed to my uncle but he said they were either expressions of distaste or reminders constantly of her love, as my father's eyes roamed over the faces of the gentiles standing straight in midst of the candles and smoke. For that I love my parents dearly. Then the time came to fake communion and my father knelt down on the bar and raised his eyes to watch the priest come forward to him and my father could not help but smile. The priest bent down holding the vessel of wine and offered it to my father, saying, And here is the blood of Christ, my

son, for you—; and as he said the last of these words, the priest met the eyes of my father and, looking into his face, saw that he was a Jew. The priest denounced him to the congregation, many of whom were acquaintances of my parents and knew where they lived. A riot broke out. They chased my parents back to our home and my mother cried out so as to warn the rest of the family who had time just enough to escape. It was providence itself surely that led to me, Ruiz, and Tabor, dressed like ghosts in stolen sheets, running into my uncle, crossing the street as we heard the riot in the distance and hurrying to investigate. My uncle seized me by the arm and picked me up as he ran. Ruiz and Tabor followed for a few blocks until they tired and could run no longer. I do not recall if I ever saw them again. All that was saved from my parents' house was the glass of the windows, seized at my mother's first shout, and a bunch of azaleas wrapped in a sheet of parchment.

My parents were dead or missing. That night my family and I, in a kind of caravan, circled through Barcelona, borrowing enough to sustain us from the friends we had in scattered parts of the city, and by daybreak, bundles on our back, I and about a dozen wanderers left Barcelona, and so, they say, a chapter was closed in the history of the Jews. I could not tell you how or why we settled here in Andalucía, so far away, among such unfamiliar people. My memory is dim, but I was raised by my uncle, I can tell you, of whom I knew not much. He had lost his hair early in life, leaving a shiny, often peeling top. He died soon after leaving Barcelona of consumption. What was left of my family and I would walk from town to town, pawning off diamonds and other jewelry in order to find food and a place to stay. Let me tell you, my son, when you have to run for your life, you start to pretend you are as old as the people around you. I stopped speaking so much, I would walk looking straight out in front of me, feeling my chest

puffed out, imagining that one could see wisdom and hardship in my eyes. When my uncle, and later, his son, my elder cousin Isaac, would gather us around the fire, if we were outdoors under the bats, or in the warm room of some friend we were staying with, I felt the need to offer my thoughts, and to their credit, my family, whatever sorrows they endured, put up with my opinions. How I must have stank! What a fool I must have seemed! So young, perhaps I could be forgiven, but to this day I have regrets. As I said, I would walk with my body taut, feeling my clothes on me, feeling tall, graceful and understanding, and the other thing I noticed, after our escape, was that I became very uncomfortable with things I could not see. When Baruch, who had dots on his cheeks, not pimples, but little black dots clustering around his cheekbones, told me to go do something nice for our hosts, something silly like bringing in water or calling on a neighbor with a message, that is, as I walked though an unfamiliar town, whether in sunlight or twilight, whether the rain made the entire world smell like spring and brought to mind the embraces of my mother—with what a clenching of my stomach!—or if tornados of dust scraped my eyes, I would always look behind me. At the slightest movement, I would turn my head, just a bit, to the side, never swinging around, but always spying. And if some certain person were walking behind me, and I heard the footsteps following me, I could never help but listen carefully, in case their footsteps would speed up, and the next thing I knew I would be on the ground, knocked over, like I was still wearing the white sheets of a ghost. So I became a much more suspicious person; I never believed in the nobility of God's creation any more than at that time, and yet I could not help but wonder, as I looked into the face of anyone passing, if I could escape, if I could run, if I could stop them. Indeed, I realized after a time that we were not simply wandering, nor did we walk with a destination in mind, but we were stopping in each town on

the way to Andalucía, judging each one. I realized then that I could look into the face of a farmer or the miller, whoever was taking us in, and I would know how many days we would stay in that town, and if we would be moving on soon. Eventually, one day, I knew we would stop.

We had come to the house of Horatio, a baker, who lived in a small house with wide doors that, by pulling them open with an iron handle in the shape of an arc, would swing open over a dusty walkway. My cousin, as usual, had gone on ahead to knock on the door, while the rest of my family waited behind. We saw him go up; the house was surrounded by a kind of lawn, green, with trees with red leaves brushing the side of the house. As soon as my cousin knocked, a woman wearing a blue and white dress ran into view from around the side of the house, only to turn back quickly a moment later. Then, with a laugh, a little boy raced out from the far side of the house, with glossy black hair and a small upturned nose. He was laughing, his mouth hanging open as he ran, revealing the few teeth he as yet possessed. Pursuing him was the woman in blue, who appeared just moments later. This time she saw us waiting and came up to my cousin to introduce herself as Horatio's wife. Indeed, it was at that moment that I first caught a glimpse of this woman's face. It was framed by black hair, curling slightly as it came down before her ears, and in the light, it looked as if she had twin violets tangled in her hair. She did not possess a slender face, it was somewhat round, with soft cheeks bearing a sky's worth of freckles, but the look of softness was tempered by her high cheekbones, which brought one's attention to her nose, which was small, and her lips, which were perhaps thin, but shaped into what was nearly a heart. Finally, she had eyes, warm and brown, and if you looked into them, it was like hiding under a blanket in the middle of the night. At that moment, she was running her hands over her bare arms, which were somewhat thick, speckled with red, but shapely, although

that is, looking back, a terrible word to describe anything specific. She was rubbing her arms, because a shadow had fallen across the house of the baker, a cloud was passing overhead, and a sudden wind brought with it a chill and a low moan that made everyone slightly uneasy. As soon as I saw her, I fell in love, not as I would later understand it, but in the way a child falls in love with his mother. Later, when they had taken us in, and we were sitting by moonlight inside, it was to her I went and sat near. She let me fall asleep against her as she held her son to her other side. She fell asleep, fully dressed, surrounded by children. I remember thinking as I drifted off such a feeling of relaxation and peace such as I had not felt in quite a while, and only feel very rarely to this day. It was the utter peace of a little boy completely dependent, when there is no shame in giving oneself up totally, nothing holding one back from worshipping a woman completely. How simple it is when a woman is simply your mother! There is no going back to that and nothing like it ever. My son, indeed, you will find it complicated when you find a woman who plays the part of both servant and queen. And let God let you find a woman deserving of your devotion and your obsession! For as she will be devoted to you, you, in a kind of paradox, will find yourself devoted utterly to her in turn, and so torn in two. And you will ask yourself, is this the role of man? Such a question strikes fear into my heart, for I truly do not know. You most likely have no idea what I am talking about, my son, because you are a runt and a fool. But heed my advice. Perhaps this is why I am telling you so many stories from my past, for by no means did I set out to do such a thing from the start. I have discovered that I find great solace in writing this tract to you, although someday I will run out of paper; it eases my mornings and turns me away from brooding, when I write to you having only recently woken up. So please forgive me my length, but let this be a testament to my existence, then, proof that I was

alive, my son, dedicated to you who, I imagine, I will never even see again. I will come back to such themes as I have uncovered here, by means of these recollections and stories, sometime later. For now, I tell you, Maimonides begins his chapter fifty-eight with the words, *This chapter is even more recondite than the preceding*. Perhaps it is too much of an interpretation to look into these words, but to my mind, they suggest that in each new chapter, the work becomes less clear and more obscure, in the same way that as we move along in years, such things as we had explained to ourselves in the past, become as yet more inexplicable. Our knowledge of things decays, my son, until we forget nearly everything about each other. This, I think, brings me back to the question of your mother, who, as I wrote to you earlier, recently disappeared. She has returned since I began this letter, let me not give you to worry any longer. But this takes me back to my main purpose in digressing on my own history. Surely you can guess the rest of the story; my family and I settled in a town in the area around the baker Horatio. We lived there and prospered for a while; my cousin opened up a jewelry shop, which had people coming from all over the region, there on the border of Andalucía, and the rest of my family lived in the floors above the jewelry shop, which we built together in the earliest years of our stay. As I grew, I became apprenticed to the baker Horatio, became friends with the young boy, who was only a few years younger than I, whose name was Ezequiel. For that reason, then, the house of the baker should have sounded familiar to you, and thus you should have had a certain suspicion, which might have been aroused in you, if you were paying attention, although perhaps you were not, as you are given to distraction, that herein lies the secret of the smells of baking bread that you grew up with. In this way, perhaps the main outlines of my life are becoming clear to you, and, of course, the details and the eccentricities you already know. You must have remembered

me as a very strange father. I worry that I cared far too little about you and what you were doing; I was often preoccupied; but I do not think you noticed: you were always off on your own. And I may have seemed inconstant at times, especially when you were coming of age, when, at the same time, so many loved ones seemed to give up and die. In the same year, my cousin met his end, as did all but one of my aunts and uncles. And Maria, the one who lived, sat in the store room of the jewelry shop, turning her rings around and around her finger, and asking if anyone had anything to tell her. The reason is not so mysterious. My son, for reasons I do not entirely understand myself, I have been cursed with ignorance nearly all my life. My son, I am a Jew! And for so long, I knew nearly nothing of what that means. How can one be a good Jew when no one of your kind is left to explain it to you? All our holy books had been left in Barcelona, my uncle nearly died trying to save the scriptures, and so, my son, my life was nearly empty for most of its duration. What kind of scholar am I? I could never be a scholar. What good was all my talking at night, arguments with Ezequiel, even my love for your mother was meaningless and confused. I realize, as I go on, to some amusement, I am being more recondite than ever. I think that in light of my current confusion, I will begin to tell you what now seems to me the true story of my life, and in the process reveal to you something of the lessons I have learned. For, above all, in writing to you, my son, I am trying to teach you two things, which I labored for many years to learn myself and both of which require a kind of knowledge. For indeed as Maimonides says, *by saying that a thing is not ignorant, we mean "it perceives" or "lives"—for everything that perceives is living*. Such knowledge as this is not like most knowledge; it is not made up of facts, and facts are what Maimonides calls *positive attributes*, and I will explain those to you later. Instead, such knowledge comes from knowing which things are not, which things are

wrong, and such knowledge, such a winnowing down of possibilities, is that which comes with experience, and can only be learned through *living or perceiving* for those are the opposite of ignorance. And since living depends on perceiving, in this formulation, it is perception itself that provides us with the knowledge of how things are. Or more properly, how things are not. For, in your life, in your very days, think back, my son, how often did you learn a new fact, which was also true, whose existence was completely unknown to you, and which was certain? Or do you learn more often that what you once thought was wrong, what you once believed was false, that something has changed or altered inside you, or that you now have had to take into account the very knowledge itself that such a thing can change, that you find you have no new knowledge of the way things work, but instead an understanding of what things could be, but are not, a knowledge which brings you closer to the nature of things. In this way, my son, I have come closer to a knowledge of two things which are of the utmost importance to you. The first relates to women and that is: how to love; and the second relates to us all and is: how to be a Jew. These questions, I think, are connected very tightly. Both require you to abase yourself, to give in; and indeed, you must abandon your dignity and let yourself go; you must abandon your body as I did back then, curled up against the warm, blue-patterned dress of Horatio's wife.

This story begins a few months after you left home. Your mother was baking bread as I packed loaves into wicker baskets for carrying to the various homes around town. I remember, and I wonder why I remember this of all things, that there was utter silence between us, when usually we are talking always. My son, perhaps it is not right for me to tell you this, but your mother and I rejoiced a little when you left us; for afterwards, whenever I wished, I could come up behind her while she was kneading dough and could hold her and whisper my love into her

neck. This sounds very awkward, I realize, I am choosing my words carefully. My son, I think I can make a confession to you, and I will because although it seems people frown on this kind of talk, it is such a part of things that I would be even more remiss as your father not to talk to you in this way; I thought this very strongly then, and even after the events of the story which I am going to relate to you, in which such things were called into question, doubt remains in my mind still to such an extent that, unsure whether this kind of talk is right or wrong, in lieu of certain knowledge, as I will always remain, I will in fact confess something to you. For what can it matter? For I choose to live in this little house away from the town, with just me, your mother, and God, and God made us in such a way for some purpose so that surely he cannot care about these words. Your mother certainly would be delighted by it, and as I said, for myself, although I can remember you as a child and can remember those things which we do not call childish at that time, I can also remember you as a man; and if I hope not to treat you as a stranger, as you so often accused me of doing, then I can tell you this about myself, in hopes of offering consolation both to you and to myself. Indeed, when set down in words, although so far from childish such things are, they seem as if they were conceived by a child, so silly and illogical, so caught up in bodily things as children inevitably are. Such are the ways. My son, I find your mother most beautiful when seen from behind, when her hair is tied up around her head, and her shoulders are bare and I can see her soft white neck and the little taut bumps of her shoulders and I can reach over and stroke her skin, and bend over her and smell her armpits. My son, if you are the same as I, if son is like father, than clap your hands together: you are not alone! I will bend over your mother and take such deep, warm draughts of her smell, and what a heavenly odor—for words such as heavenly are necessary to communicate the truly wonderful—especially when she has

been bending over the oven, and I can see sweat beading down her back, and I can touch the little moist spots under her arms! I will take her in my arms and bury my face in her body and smell until I am dizzy and then! Is this not how a philosopher feels when *by each negative attribute he advances towards the knowledge of God*, as Maimonides says, and one can almost believe, however falsely, that God, our Lord, is somehow at hand? I could close my eyes at those times and go limp and lapse into a kind of holy unconsciousness for the rest of my existence. Such are the thoughts I have had, and sometimes, perhaps you will laugh, I have fallen asleep against your mother and have let myself go so slack, that upon waking, I have found spreading from between your mother's breasts, down her side, mingling with the moisture of her underarm, a considerable amount of drool. Maimonides tells us that it is reflection on the negative attributes of God that is the proper method of prayer: and I ask, what is reflection? For the physician also says: *all creatures preserve a certain order and arrangement; they are not left to themselves; they are not produced aimlessly, but whatever condition they receive from that being, God, is given with design and intention*. With this in mind, can we not admit that it is part of God's plan for me to drool copiously or to find such peace, such solace in holding your mother's body close to me? And yet Maimonides is silent on this issue. You begin, then, to see part of my problem, for I cannot but wonder, when I lie in your mother's arms, somewhere in the far reaches of my mind, that such a thing as what I have done is not the way of a scholar. And I wonder where I have got such a notion as to feel guilty in becoming utterly subservient, in a way, to your mother, and I wonder if Maimonides, behind his words, felt the same way. Thus, I have identified another gap in my knowledge and have gained a kind of understanding. As Maimonides says, in reference to the Lord, *our knowledge consists in knowing that we are unable to truly comprehend*

*him*. But as you will see, I am hardly a scholar and in any case, at the time of the beginning of this story, no such thoughts had entered into my mind and, as I came up behind your mother, and, kissing the side of her face, I inhaled such a smell as to make me shiver, which was a combination of her sweat and her breath, having the smell it has when she first awakes combined with the smell of the bread she had snuck from the quantity she had baked. And just at that moment, my friend whom I have already mentioned in passing, and who surely you remember, Ezequiel entered my house, and in the way, so characteristic of lovers, for no particular reason, we jumped away from each other; but something in the way we looked—do not ask me how such things happen, for I have long wondered myself—betrayed our intent to Ezequiel who laughed upon seeing us. Before I continue, a quick word in conclusion, since we have so utterly failed as a father and a son—perhaps it is harsh to put it that way, but such must be the case, for I have not heard from you for so long—perhaps we can succeed as two friends, two strangers, if only such a way of thinking about it will let you listen to me and consider what, if anything, I can offer you by way of friendship. But enough circling around the story I mean to tell; perhaps I will return to this theme later.

Baruch! Ezequiel said to me, fool that he is. If you will recall, he has a distinctive way of looking like a lion with a mane of unkempt hair, but with none of the grace of a cat, except perhaps a moving facsimile of a cat, nailed together with wooden boards. Of course, at this time, Ezequiel had shaved his mane, and his reddish face and wide forehead made a striking impression under the lack of hair on his head such as one might experience when encountering a mountain slope devoid of trees. Baruch! he said and I glanced at your mother. At the time, I suspected Ezequiel had designs on your mother. He was one such who could always make your

mother laugh, although for my part, I could always make your mother cry. I took this as a sign of our connection: the things I sometimes said to her would make tears trickle down her cheeks and I would laugh as I lapped them up like a dog. It occurs to me now that I cannot recall if she ever made me cry. It so often happened that in those times of my greatest need for her, in the desire of my Rebka, I thought that if I could only catch a glimpse of her, my eyes would open up their shutters and let some deep reservoir of water escape. But when it came time to look at her, I would find myself unable to do anything but watch her cry and sometimes to laugh with her. In any case, Ezequiel could make her laugh. I hated Ezequiel, although only when we were all together.

Having interrupted us, Ezequiel explained that he had been asked by his good friend Tabor (no relation to my old friend, as far as I can tell) to act as a second in a merchant transaction in Andalucía, Cordoba in particular. And I know, Baruch, he said, how interested—this is the word he used—interested in scholarly matters, and Cordoba, as you well know, is said to be one of the greatest of all centers of learning, Jewish learning, that is, and so he thought to ask me—or us, as he now extended the invitation—if we wished to accompany him, knowing what he knew about our financial predicament and our poverty, our only son having left; and Ezequiel even agreed to chip in towards the cost of travel, when we politely declined. How far is Cordoba, I asked him, from where we are? I am not quite sure, he replied. The trip will take perhaps a few weeks, but no more. Will you come? I do not know. I would really like to know very soon if you will come, as my good friend Tabor is a very wealthy man, and I want to preserve his good graces for me. I know this, Ezequiel, I am no fool, but would you give me a second to think. I turned my back to him, and walked around the room. At the time, let me tell

you my son, I did not know what to do. It is a well known fact that when a man has no guidance, he seeks guidance in signs. They say cranes overhead signify such and such, but I know nothing about the signs of birds; nevertheless, I have noticed, even in myself, a tendency to seek out knowledge in strange ways, when confronted with a choice or a difficulty, when thinking only comes in spurts and one is left with a feeling that thinking is not enough, and that doing is something better, even as there is nothing to do except to think. And so I have often found myself thinking with my body. This is how I would phrase it, my son, although perhaps this body gives us nothing but pain. At least, this is what I have been sometimes given to believe. But the body holds in store such pleasures for us, and indeed, sometimes the body gives us pleasures that are not simple joys, but answers to complexities that the knitted brows of ten thousand scholars would be unable to untangle.

So, leaving Rebka and Ezequiel to talk, I turned from them to look out the window. I saw the landscape drenched in red; the sun was setting, or so I thought. The hills around my little house were a red unlike I had never seen, a red not like blood, but rather like the red of velvet or the red one might find on the walls and columns of some temple—such comparisons are often so vague, my son, but the beauty in them is that you know what I mean so precisely. I knelt down then, for I have always thought that prostrating oneself is putting oneself in the position of the child who wishes to learn. This is good not only as a way of subjugating oneself before God, but also as a way of doing something unfamiliar and putting oneself in a position never taken by grown men. I knelt and pressed my face close to the floor so I could hear my breath echo off the floorboards, and the exertion of holding myself there made sweat tingle on my forehead. I could hear Ezequiel and my wife talking. Rebka, so how are you? he asked. I am good, a little tired.

Rebka, you cannot tire out, who else is going to make the bread around here; you make the best bread and when you bake such things into them, like garlic or thyme... I remember once I found rosehips in the midst of a roll and such a heavenly smell rose from the baked bread that I wanted to come here and thank you in person, he said. I am pretty sure that I did not bake rosehips into a roll, Ezequiel, maybe your wife did that for you. Impossible! he exclaimed and Rebka laughed. Oh! Sarah could never bake bread into the kind of bread you make; I love her dearly, but she is a terrible cook and with the albugo in the one eye, she cannot see the food very clearly. All the ingredients find their way onto the floor like tiles in mosaics. She is unlike anything else that calls up a smile onto my face. Are you really going to Cordoba? Rebka asked. Yes. I hope to capitalize on the transaction myself, I do not hesitate in telling you this. For perhaps, on top of the payment from my good friend Tabor, based on his reputation, I will make my own way into the city buildings, and find some sort of employment there. Indeed, there is nothing like the city of Cordoba. I hear the city is lit at night by lamps, tall lamps along the street... When it rains, I do not know how they keep them alive, but can you imagine the grey fog overhead which keeps the sun from us, and beneath it all, beside us, we have a layer of light! No wonder the Muslims know so much; one could walk the streets talking until any hour of the night, arm in arm... Is Baruch okay? Rebka laughed at his question. Yes, yes, yes, he is fine; he likes to think in his knees, this is what he tells me. Ezequiel laughed. And what do you think of that? he asked. And Rebka said something I could not hear. I know, but what do you yourself think? I think it is a wonderful idea. Really? Yes. How? Have you ever felt yourself, when you were lying down, felt your whole body? Every part of you that you touch draws thoughts into your mind, not simply the thoughts of where your hands have been, but thoughts and feelings that rise from the touching of the belly

or the rubbing of the chest. I think in every part of your body, you store a little bit of yourself: you build your body when you run—At this point, I broke in, with a cry: That is not it at all! I turned around and saw her surprised eyes. She was silent, and I continued: The way you said things, it does not seem right. I meant that some thoughts you can feel in places of your body, that you can tell that parts of your body are associated with certain thoughts—for, Rebka, is it true or is it not true, that if someone were to disappear with your head, you would have no thoughts any longer? Ezequiel laughed. I am sorry, Rebka said, I thought... Stop worrying about it, I said to her, it is okay. She gave a frustrated exhalation. I am sorry, I said! And I was not happy, at that moment, that Ezequiel was there with us. Not that I had not caused her uneasiness; rather, it is only when she speaks to others that she translates what I have told her in our special language into the languages of others, and I can never seem to own my own thoughts after that. Ezequiel said to me, Turn around, Baruch, go back to praying. I am not praying, I said, I just need a moment, can you give me a moment? I turned back around, and continued to listen to them. Does he do this a lot? Just look at that shaggy, head of a dog! he said, laughing. I asked myself, What is it about laughter that is so antithetical to the spirit? For I have no problem in laughing at myself; I simply note that I have noticed this in the past, that laughter is utterly incompatible with prayer. For this reason, other types of communion with God are necessary. This is the feeling, I think, that Rebka told me about, when falling asleep in bed with all parts of her body. When we lie, arms and legs spread... surely you have noticed this, my son, that as the excitement grows among people, when the passion for another reaches a certain height, when you have had bowls of wine, when you catch sight of the mountain above you, when you kneel before the stars, when stretch your back and gaze at the ceiling, when you press your hands on

the forehead of another, when you lay your head on a post, when you stand in a field that extends in four directions, when you fall asleep with the soft skin of somebody else on your cheek and your armpits are touching and you can descend into the nook constructed by their shoulder and neck, when you wake up in an unfamiliar place, when you let the hesitation in your belly go and stand in the rain and forget that its rain, when you hear the cantillation, when a blinding light curls the side of a cloud like fire creaking onto a piece of parchment, when you leap up onto your tip toes, when you do all these things, there is something like a high pitched whine in your ears that focuses your thoughts. I have explained this in other places and will continue to do so. For laughter can be the holiest of holies, but only when you have finished absorbing the mountain above you, when the stars have been contemplated, when the ceiling is cracked and broken, when your spine is bent, when your forehead is cracked, when your post is driven into the earth, when the field is tilled with flowers, when your skin is no longer soft, when your bodies need no longer touch each other, when the rain has ceased and the sun is set and the rains come back, when the rabbi trips on his robe, when the cloud then covers up the sun it was drawing attention to, when the parchment is absolutely unable to be read, when indeed, you know not even how to read, when your toes are broken and the night is falling, and no one is around to help you up, and after you have called out to God to save you, after he has ignored your prayers, after the monumental spiritual feeling has passed, this is the moment when you can look down on yourself from God's perspective and say, what a fool, what a fool is he! And you can slap your loved one in the face, and spit on the ground, and laugh, because how ridiculous is this world and the world inside one's head! And in that moment of riding the edge, of balancing on the threshold, of absolutely abandoning all feelings, then you can see God laughing at you, laughing at you all

around you, and all of a sudden, you can laugh with him. And lest it be thought I am ascribing any positive attribute to our Lord—how far one leaves the realm of proper thought, despite the knights posted along the border by the wisest of scholars—I am only describing the realization that God is not stupid, that God is no fool, no fool, indeed. For just as God is not lacking in understanding, his world is not entirely serious. The difficulty lies in deciding how to act. For, like oil and water, the proper and improper cannot be combined. But knowledge of what is proper to God is difficult to attain. This is an important question, one to which I will return. But I cannot return to it fully. I am a simple man, my son. I have no knowledge of what is proper, only knowledge of the question. For I have only seen God's words, never read them. What a fool! What a fool! And how I hate fools, however endearing, however laughable they are! I am sick of writing about this, especially using these vague and hinting terms. Why cannot I not simply tell a story, like Ezequiel, where the story quickly comes to a head! He must have had great training, for to tell a story between two sips of wine is a great difficulty and requires talent. But what is meant by the phrase, "to lead the table," or "to sit at the head of the table?" It would seem such things are grave things. But what is the place of gravity in this world? One can only hold on to a heavy thing, before letting it drop.

In any case, I could not bring myself to put this into words for Rebka, so I remained silent. Ezequiel continued: I can see why you want to please him, Rebka. I myself just want to put my hands on those big cheeks, with that straggly blonde beard; I can understand the impulse of a woman; part of me wants to lay a hand on his chest and draw something out of him. Look at those big lips work! I know how he often talks to himself. You know, I am just kidding, Baruch; you are a handsome man. I can see why Rebka listens to you. Sometimes, I myself just want to

drive the top of my head into you chest, he finished. Rebka, whom I could tell was looking at him, asked, What keeps you moving around, Ezequiel? You know, I was talking to Isaac yesterday, Ezequiel said, and then started to whisper into Rebka's ear, so that I could not hear. Rebka started to laugh, louder than before. I could hear them getting closer. No, no, no, she said, over her laughter, that is a bad idea. No, no, it is a good idea, the best idea. I could hear them getting closer, creeping up behind me. I could now hear Ezequiel's whisper: Isaac was telling me about a man who went mad, this was in Madrid, and nobody realized it, until he started throwing chickens at women and yelling about eggs! Rebka laughed. It was said that one time he brought a dozen chickens into bed with him, laying them under the covers, telling his wife that he had gotten new bedding, and left two chickens at the top, their bottoms in the air as pillows; and it was only until after she had laid her head on the chickens' bottoms that she realized the trick that had been played on her. And the man became known for his practical jokes. But then he started disappearing for days at a time and the people all began to suspect that something was wrong that was not funny. And at some point, they realized that he was dangerous, but until that point, they had all colluded with his insanity for even though he put to them the most insane requests, his requests were always at first innocuous and impossible to refuse, so that everyone became a little insane because of his insanity. Whether it was going from house to house on some holiday and asking for his wife to go on ahead without him to revel, whether it was asking to be fed food cooked for exactly half a day, or kissing his wife only after she had acceded to his demand that she justify her being kissed—these things only painted the picture of someone going mad when they were brought to stand together. For when he would ask a strange favor of a friend, one on one, in a serious and considered tone of voice, not a soul would even question him; indeed, when

do we ever really think of what another asks us to do for them? For we go along very easily with the reasoning of another. This is a problem of trust, a very grave and serious problem; and, as we have seen, too much trusting can lead to your face being buried in the bottom of a chicken! Rebka laughed. There is no way I am coming with you, Ezequiel, Rebka said lightly; after all, how could we travel together after all the things you have been saying?

I myself had been listening to what he had been saying and very much at that moment, I am sure you will understand, my son, I needed to be serious. I started to hum and lifting my head and raising my arms, I threw my hands into the sack of flour that was leaning against the wall, and I gathered huge handfuls of flour in my hand and filled the room with the haze of escaping bread. I turned the flour over in my hands, again and again, as an object of contemplation. Ezequiel started to laugh. I turned around to meet Rebka's very, very serious eyes. I started to laugh and threw a handful of flour at her. For a moment I wondered if my sense of things had led me astray, if I had, as usual, done too much. Then she started laughing too. Of course, I will go with you, Ezequiel, I said to him. Rebka, it is quite clear, lovely. We are never going to learn anything living here in this house, I said. The only way to learn anything important in this world is to go somewhere else. This is what I thought, my son; and so perhaps you can guess why I have spent so much time in painting this scene for you. For I have always wished that in my youth someone had led me into the heads of others, so that I could have learned, once and for all, what is proper and what is not. For indeed, the first step in learning what is proper is to understand how men should not act, should never act. Only then can one ascertain how men must act when they must.

In any case, Ezequiel left and then your mother and I were left alone. As I looked at her, I

did not know if I wanted to get down on my knees before her or hold her body close to me or leave her forever or throw flour in her face. I know that you, my son, had always a better relationship with her than either of us had with each other, as far as the exchange between mother and son can go. It becomes very difficult in such situations, such as when we both stand there silently, as we were when Ezequiel had just taken leave of us, to say anything, least of all a declaration of love, although it seemed, the way her eyes flashed, that she wanted me to make one. I remember now how it happened some weeks later, when we were on the road, Ezequiel walking ahead of us, his things tied up and hanging from his back, and Rebka and I, lagging slightly behind, that we came to a small town and I saw, on the left side of the road—for some reason I remember that very distinctly—a woman wearing a kind of cloak, a red cloak but slung across her back in such a way that her one shoulder was left bare, and in such a way that she looked like a woman walking, cut in half. So dramatic did it seem, so swift was the cut that she looked like she had been sliced in half just then and was still taking her last steps, presently, before she would fall apart. And it made me think: this is a pointless image, my son, this is precisely what Maimonides would rage against! But I tell you, my son, I give you this image as a forewarning. I love your mother dearly, but it is no accident that in this letter I am writing to you I have filled up its pages, so many pages and many of them expensive in both cost and effort—for it takes no little skill to set one's thoughts to paper in such a way that they will seem to develop in time and offer their insight in a calculated move—with talk of women, talk of her, your mother, for, indeed, it was not my intent at all to speak of her so much, at least as much as I have. I tell you right now, my son, in writing this letter to you I meant to give you some kind of admonition, I wanted the chance to settle accounts with you, to impart some kind of advice,

perhaps, and indeed, it seems in doing so I have told you quite a story. And it occurs to me now that my doing so was no accident but something necessary in the substance of the thing itself. As Maimonides says, *all this we do, because we do not know their substance*. What kind of knowledge could I impart to you, my son, in the ways of living, that is, the ways of living a full life, a life that would make one's limbs strong and body tingle, a life which is a rich and abundant fulfillment, if not by means of knowledge of how I have lived my life; and in imparting that to you, it seems I cannot avoid telling a story. For to tell you my life is to tell you a story, although I did not live it as such. It sometimes happens that one gets the feeling that one is part of a story, when certain elements of the world around one match up to one's conception of such a scene, when certain music is being played, when the rain strikes, when the wind whistles through the grass, when the ground moves beneath one's feet as one runs from house to house—this profusion of images, none of which are particularly striking, are each one necessary, as images are necessary to stories, and a story is what necessarily I must tell in order to impart to you knowledge of human matters. And it occurs to me now that human matters are the only matters and if that is the case, then the most we can do is fulfill the promise held in our essence, our substance. For when we feel a buzz in our limbs, as I remember I did, as I do at times, when I think of the day when you were born, my son, far from the time and place of this story I am failing to tell, far from the woman with the red dress, sliced down the side, when I went in to meet your mother, flushed and sweaty and felt you—I admit, my son, you were beautiful, but you were not the object of my attention: rather, that was your mother, for never was she so beautiful. So many nights I would spend huddled against her stomach, for it seemed to be something right and beautiful in a way that nothing else was right. For it seemed as if I were

fulfilling a promise, I were colluding with myself, I were playing a part in a story, indeed. We all take pleasure in drinking, in lying in a woman's arms, in conversation, all these things are bodily things, these things are mundane, but to have a child—that makes one stop for a moment. And I will admit it, my son, I did not care for you a bit! It never concerned you. It concerned her. Actually, it concerned me; that when I came in and kissed her and felt her mouth in me, that I was connected to her, that I was floating in the warm murk of it, I was scaling the heights of perfume, I was stretching my arms into wetness. That the joy flashing in her eyes was sincere, that the joy in my heart was sincere, was what I was searching for, an indivisible joy. But although it might be indivisible, it was not explicable, it was not founded on sturdy ground. For Maimonides says clearly, *God cannot be the object of human comprehension*. And indeed, neither can those things in which he imbued himself! For if mankind was created in God's image, in what way can we be said to be comprehensible? In what way can the terms of the human promise be said to be clear like a law? What right does one have to assert that the one thing or the other is part of the promise? For, as I walked by the side of the road, and saw this woman, as if cut in half, I wondered how I would live without my other half of me, as the saying goes. For what is it that drives us together? For does not a woman deaden the senses; and is not the work of the scholar to be anything but deadened, instead, to be alert, to be vigilantly thinking? And yet it occurs to me that I only worry on this particular question because a woman is permanent and thinking impermanent. For I can never part with Rebka, indeed, I could never part with you; and yet, thoughts are easily parted with, especially when one has a partner, a wife, to keep one honest. My son, it is late. I fear I am not making much sense. I am staring at the page and my eyes feel like two seashells encrusted with sand, so dry that they are. Such complaints

must bore you. I want to tell you everything, my son, but as I move the pen across the page at so late an hour—your mother has called me to bed—she has fallen asleep on the couch, I can see her now, you know how she drools herself, her mouth always slightly open. If you were here, my son, I am sure you would laugh. As I move the pen across the page, I realize that what I want to say makes sense only as words in a dream that upon waking of which it is only the feeling that made one sure, and not the content of the words. This is an interesting matter, my son. Only the Lord God knows what it means.

It occurs to me this morning that there are perhaps three phase to a journey: the first, in which one converses with one's companions, bringing them into the present, sharing one's life; the second, in which one remarks on surprising things in the course of the journey, such as when one sees particularly deep wheel tracks—what a heavy cart! one says in delight, happy to have something to occupy the thing which always settles between people in their conjunction, like the skin which solidifies when milk is boiled—or perhaps when one has just passed a fellow traveler so that now one can list their qualities, comparing them with one's own; and third, finally, when a silence settles between companions and a trip passes in a blur of color, sunlight, and all those things which the mind perceives and only the heart can understand as it pulsates without any of our doing, each beat bringing man closer to God. Each step, indeed, is like the appearance of a phrase, with its hand clasped by the phrase before it, in the style of a great thinker. Maimonides writes, *it has been established by proof that some being must exist beside those things which can be perceived by the senses, or apprehended by the mind*, and indeed, I go farther, not only must some beings exist which I have not seen, but it is also through the steady pulse of the feet that such beings may be sought. Trees, the green, the red, the rocks which form irregular heaps, slices

of color, they all moved past us on the road in a straight path, like the words forming on this page, like water let down from a ladle, through which one can see what lies beyond it distorted. At some point, Ezequiel—and it is truly beyond my comprehension this next event, but indeed, it is true, like most stories, which organize and make sense of our thoughts, but at the same time, offer some breathtaking surprise—yes, Ezequiel encountered a few neat Cuenca men on the road who informed him that he was needed not in Cordoba at all, but in Seville. Land of street-lamps, suddenly drenched in shadow! I wanted to slap him, but habit held me back, my son; it does one good to have strung around one's passions the road of habit. It seemed that Genoese merchants located in Seville had taken over the business run by the merchants for whom Ezequiel expected to be paid. Ezequiel explained to us that night that the men dealt mainly in olive oil, cloth, soap, and other such things, and he was expected to accompany them on their return to Italy, but only for a little while, he said to us, and I know good Jews, he says, who live in Seville, they will give us a place to stay in. How he knows these people, being a nobody from the nowhere in Cataluña I did not know, but I did know that I was even more of a nobody than Ezequiel, and that however much I might pace in the little town we lived in, back and forth, I could never outrun the sound of the bells chiming the hours, the sounds of the Christians walking to pray, because invariably I was always walking to and from some well-known place, and I tell you, my son, it is the ultimate pleasure to be disembodied, and it is the only way to live, as one walks from place to place, to have one's head closed to the world, and to dwell only inside one's heart. Clasp your hands close when you pray, my son. Take your hands inside from the outside, lower your hands and turn your head away from the sky. Of course, you have seen more sky than I will ever see or ever have, so perhaps you can gaze at it longer and with more patience than I. The point is, we were going to

Seville, if you can believe it. I knew nothing of Seville.

I really do not care to waste paper on our trip there. It will suffice to say that things happened and habits developed for, as Maimonides writes, *existence is capable of producing the existence of many other things*. He says this in relation to God, but as to the affairs of man, we too are always creating. Indeed, as far as this story is concerned, and I perhaps remarked on this already, that the clever part of any story is that each part is divided into other stories, relations, and it is some great power that we have that allows us, only knowing the beginning and the ending, to surmise the middle from insufficient parts. So that you can guess the greater part of the trip from what has come before this, and from this: from the way Ezequiel hobbled through the Osario gate, from the way my wife clutched her stomach like she was ill, from the way I held her close, and told jokes with Ezequiel, from the way he had grown quite a beard, and so on. Of course, deciphering what I mean from images like this is something else, and that is why we tell stories that connect things, that move forward over beings and locations; God, however, speaks to us in images, I believe, and would that we could speak like him, we would be no less incomprehensible. Furthermore, who could in good faith could place such a burden on the listener? And yet, there it is.

So we arrived in Seville, with my hand on Rebka's neck, through the Osario gate, past the animal warehouses, which Ezequiel pointed out to us, Lord knows how he knew. And we got lost a few times, and we kept walking through the streets which sprung off every which way until we came to the other end of the city and could see, beyond the wall, the Guadalquivir, which had attained the color of a sunset, because it was late afternoon, and the river wound its way down along the city walls, and we watched it flow lazily past the city as we made our way east, the sun

at our backs. Then we entered the Genoese quarter, and we thrust our way through the dispersing crowds in Las Gradass, the last of the merchandise being wrapped up in blankets, the day being over, and there at last we saw the Cathedral. This was my first glimpse, my son, and however much I am a Jew I felt something in me tremble and one side of my head started to prickle as if the hair there was growing faster than on the other half. The nave was very nearly built and the sun came down over our shoulders, slanting off the Guadalquivir, and made its way through the nave, down the aisle being built, brushing past the sconces on the walls, blanching the stones, insinuating itself in the cracks—my son, how can I make you feel how it felt to be there, as the hall was slightly unfinished and the last of the workers were brushing the dust from their clothing and packing up to leave, the ropes still tied against the big stone blocks, and the huge nave, the roof arched and the stones like vines, the dome like a treetop, the foliage missing in places, the two sides of it missing, such that it was like a huge sleeve of God, as if God himself could reach down and thrust his whole arm through the nave of the Cathedral and wear the stone like some kind of armament, a piece of mail fit for the Lord God in his rage. But my son, this gives me pause, because I have fallen into the trap of letting my feelings surface; my hands write this text, not my heart, and in trying to make you feel what I felt, as I stood there, in the slanting light, smelling olives and dust, the wide square emptying with your mother beside me, thinking thoughts I will never understand, and now I understand again Maimonides, and I apologize if I have invoked these words before, but as it is said, it is *necessary to address men in words that should leave some idea in their minds*, however truly false those words are, and I hope I have communicated some idea of the city of Seville to you, and perhaps you can see yourself in my place, as I wandered along the side of the Cathedral under construction, unable to keep still,

moving down the path towards the olive oil market, and finally kneeling down, exhausted. My son, in brushing past the weeks we traveled I perhaps have given you the impression they were easy, but kneeling there, I felt such a sense of relief as I hope that perhaps you will feel sometime in your life, when you feel like a journey has ended, and a place has arrived and met you, and something has filled your belly; the stomach no longer churns over the emptiness of dissatisfaction and want, and you can feel as if the place you are in is not simply a place, but a place for you, a comfortable place, where one thing leads to the next, and one can see the beauty in the location. Place is everything, my son, and however many eyes may be watching you, always dwell within the place that God has granted you, and if you understand that, you will understand why, with the wall of Seville at my back and the unfinished Cathedral at my front, with your mother looking on from the side, weary and misunderstanding, and Ezequiel talking to the merchants in Las Gradass, I knelt and felt the blood of Jews and Muslims under my feet, I felt the past under my toes, and I wanted to cry for all the people who had let me live in this world and whom I will never thank, and what a feeling it is to feel unworthy before the very people who have given their lives to save you! It is this feeling that drove me to kneel and gather up my sleeves, and thrust my hands into the air so that the sun cast a shadow before me and the shadow pointed towards the Cathedral and I felt like God was flowing through me, through the sun, through my hands, outstretched and leaping, through the nave of the Cathedral, Christians be damned, and out the other side, flowing madly through the city of Seville, down Las Aguilas, through San Esteban, and out through the Carmona gate, striking the road towards the city as it burst from the stone and timber that made up the wall, and rushed forward and out and up into the sky—my son, have you ever felt that there was pure being in the world, beside us, flowing

around us—I felt it, for one never feels anything less before a monument—this was a monument, a monument to the strength of God. My son, I am always feeling like I am kneeling. It seems as if that is who I am.

And in my time in Seville, I would go and sit there, on the rocks, every day, and watch the men build the Cathedral, and I thought a lot about you. Maimonides writes that *God is not subject to any change or innovation whatever*, but I know from my father that we are made in God's image, and so the difference lies in what Maimonides calls the *relation of time*, from which it follows that perhaps we are indeed subject to change over time, whereas without time, God is not subject to change, but it seems to me that even in time, God would not be subject to change, as we are not subject to change, but only change in the way that we seem, for time, as Maimonides writes, is *an accident to motion which again is connected with a body*, and all of time is moving in a direction, and it is only through moving that one changes and gains knowledge of things. For it is only through the stepping out of my house, onto the road, that I began to find knowledge of things. And if it is only through motion, that is, time, that one gains knowledge, so that when one is standing still, one is not subject to change or innovation. God is standing still, Maimonides says, God is standing in one place in all the universe, and it is only by moving in space, through the space of God, that we can gain knowledge of him, and each part of him sheds light on the next, because the difference between them can be easily seen, and the attribute of what God is not becomes clear from the small part of God discovered, but nothing positive can be said about the whole of God nor without saying something about the whole. For how can one say something true about the parts, for no part can be understood without the working of the whole! In the same way, man is only perceived in parts, without the assurance of

the whole, and this presents a difficulty for the understanding of the whole of man, for one encounters not all of men, but only a small part, and each person found argues in some way against the notion one has of the whole. Indeed, one must not forget to treat each man as a negative attribute, for if each man were taken as a whole, our treatment of man would be nothing but a multitude of conflicting and confusing attributes that we might list. Instead, each man's distance from the next implies the difference between them, which is, in fact, a similarity which grows more defined the more men one encounters, although as Maimonides says, *we can only employ inadequate language*, and so great care must be taken in building up the essence of man. And indeed, it is the same way with the story I am telling you, for it is the distance of the events from one another in time, in motion and therefore in places, that sheds light on the invisible story that connects the thoughts and events—indeed, I cannot very well here distinguish between thoughts and events, except to say that the one comes from the heart and the other from the head—but who would say that thoughts do not inspire events, and that events do not inspire thoughts? But to return to my main point, if each man tells one a bit more—or indeed, tells one a bit less—of what man can be, then one's own self, of whom one has the greatest knowledge, can tell one least of all, in that the greatest distinction tells one the greatest deal about man, but only in one's relations with others. This presents a great difficulty considering that Maimonides' example of the boat, in which each of ten people give one more negative attribute regarding the boat by which they learn that the boat is a boat, so that ten people might give the essence of the one man much more often than the one man might give essence of the ten. In this way, people in their number give things their meaning, that is to say, uncover the meaning which is already there. And yet, there are disagreements among men as to the essence of things; for indeed, one often

feels as if the essence of man does not correspond to one's feelings about it, that the essence of man is in some way lacking, that the basis of man's thoughts and events is in its essence frustrating.

I fear that the preceding is much too recondite, in the style of Maimonides, who rarely connects things to his words, perhaps because he believes and indeed writes that those who *seek a true understanding of things*, as himself does, *establish the properties of things in accordance with the abstract notions which the mind has formed of them, and who are not misled by the inaccuracy of the words employed*, and so, it seems as if the abstract notions are different from words, and Maimonides attempts to describe these abstractions in words, which are inadequate, because, so to speak, many words suggest the realness of things, whereas his words, suggest the opposite and so are more real. Therefore, I will move ahead, yet again, to the turning point of my story.

With what money we had brought, which was not much—and indeed, much of it had come from selling linens and the rest of our bread just before leaving—we made our way to the Calle de Gaiteros where a stranger had told us, fingering a mustache that was not coming in well at all, that rooms were to be had. We would like a room, I told the woman there, who had an apron clasped around her enormous waist, and a piece of cloth wrapped around her head, so that, without the bulk of her hair, her head looked something like a large, trembling droplet of water. For the three of you? the woman asked, and I responded, yes, for the three of us. We would be very grateful to you, if you would give us just such a room. She studied us, somewhat starving and very tired, and I looked around the rest of the room, which was extremely messy, with a few men sitting at tables, talking, and a large stuffed bird, which seemed to be giving the room a

terrible smell, from where it had been stood, on a small pedestal near the entrance to the kitchen. The woman named a price, which was far beyond our means, and we thanked her, and left. Ezequiel was upset that I had not argued with the woman; Rebka was walking with her eyes closed, her hand lightly resting on my shoulder. We wandered into the streets, which by then were somewhat quiet, the sun nearly set, and we walked down streets at random, looking for a welcoming place. As fate would have it, in order to avoid a large cart, we ducked down Rose alley, and found ourselves, a few minutes later on the old Puerta de la Juderia, which we took to be an auspicious sign. And here is when my story begins to get interesting.

With a crash, a pot of olive oil, having been hurled out of a second-story window, shattered on the cobblestones in front of us, and we began to hear shouts from above. In an instant, Ezequiel disappeared, leaving Rebka and me alone in the street, which had become mysteriously deserted, leaving us with the feeling as if the sky itself had darkened and the healthy redness of the day were giving way to an austere, sluggish rain. How does one act when such violent, unexpected events occur? The shouts increased in intensity, and as I gathered Rebka in my arms, ushering her close to the closest wall, two men burst out of the building next to us. The one man, well-built, but somewhat stout, with a scraggly beard, had his back to the street, and the other man, tall, thin, with striking, long golden curls, lunged at him, his hands becoming entangled behind the stout man's neck, and both of them falling backwards, one on top of the other, into the street, where they fell with a grunt and a sickly thud. The man underneath, trapped against the dirty street of the Jews, was struggling to free a knife which gleamed in his belt, while the other one seemed to cradle the other's head in his arms, rocking his head from side to side, palms over his ears, holding down the other's arms with his elbows. The man on top,

the one with the blonde hair, went so far as to bend down and kiss the larger man's forehead lightly, laughing softly, saying something that was difficult to hear from where I stood, but which I later learned was Italian. I looked around the street, trying to meet the eyes of anybody who also happened to be out, but there was no one. Instead, my eyes rested on the church of Santa Maria la Blanca and I saw how the little square in front of it had been rubbed all over with shadows, for the last efforts of the sun barely stroked the outlines of the church, and the sun was rapidly falling, having made up its mind at last to leave at least part of the world in darkness, as it slipped down its track, bound to the dome of the heavens. Meanwhile, the larger man had escaped from underneath, and breathing heavily, had pinned the one with the curls against the step of the door and would have probably beaten in his head, if Ezequiel had not appeared out of nowhere, perhaps out of the Rose alley, perhaps he had run back from nearby San Jose, and kicked the larger man in the back of the skull, and perhaps I had imagined it, but even to this day when I conjure up the scene, I wonder if I saw the man's eyes pop out onto the face of his adversary, and leave his skull like fruit falls from a tree. At the very least, the man with the blonde curls spent a great deal of time brushing himself off and wiping his hands against his trousers when the fight was over. Ezequiel bent close to the man and they exchanged a few words. Then they moved aside from the entranceway as a few more men rushed out and began to haul the body inside, and two women emerged, tanned, looking like the sand at the bottom of the Guadalquivir, and they held between them a basket of bread, which they brought to the square in front of the church of Santa Maria la Blanca, and a small crowd of people appeared from the shadows, and a short line formed out of nothing. Ezequiel and his friend were about to slip into the crowd when I called out to him, Ezequiel! Where do you think you are going? Are you going

to leave your friends here like fools? And the people turned to look at us. Ah, what a look in his eye I saw then! So Ezequiel had to drag us along and I remained purposefully oblivious to his glares, and I wished I had never met him that time when he was passing through our town and Rebka and I had sold him some bread, and liked him so much that we invited him to our house for dinner, which was enjoyable because Ezequiel is quite a funny man—and I love him, despite all the terrible things that he does. But at that moment, for the first time, I came face to face with him; and it is at a moment like that, when a person acts in a way unexpected, that familiar things become important.

As we marched back towards the Cathedral, Rebka craned her head up at me and said, Do you know what just happened? She asked me, and I thought for a second, and then replied: I suppose it could be anything. For how does one respond to an event which one neither participates in nor understands? As we passed the church of Santa Maria la Blanca, the two windows and the arch of the entranceway looked like a comical, frowning face, and so I laughed. Rebka hit me. What do you want me to say, I asked her, perhaps it was a personal disagreement. Rebka spat against the crumbling wall beside her. So we will ask them! Just let us see where they are going, I told her, and then we turned down narrow streets in the dark, passed buildings that seemed all to flow into one another, or rather, seemed to fit together like a huge puzzle, the pieces not cohering, but rather standing apart, each painted a different color. Finally, it seemed like a thousand faces later that we arrived at the Barrio de Genova, the Genoese district, where all the rich Italians lived and worked.

We walked up a leaning staircase, the four of us, the one with the curls leading. The banister was painted blue and the paint was chipping; as we worked our way up the stairs, I ran

my hand along the banister and little paint chips went flying into the air, settling on my feet, in Rebka's hair. In a room to the left of the staircase, we found ourselves sitting cross-legged on a beautiful rug, Ezequiel standing against the wall, leaning, as the man with the curls, whose name we soon learned was Ambrosio, walked over to the table which dominated the middle part of the room, and placed his hands on it, staring right into the eyes of the man whom we no doubt had come to see, an elderly Italian named Jacobo. What is this, Jacobo asked. The last of them is dead, Ambrosio told him, and this is a friend, Ezequiel, a Jew from Aragon, and these are his friends, Baruch and Rebka, they need a place to stay while they do business for us. Jacobo turned to look at us, with a somewhat blank expression, as if he were looking at us out of politeness, but hardly seeing us at all. The city of Seville should thank you, Ambrosio, Jacobo said; instead, just minutes ago, a councilman came here saying if we do not sort it out, we are going to see taxes, and I told him, when you bring one tax collector into this district, I am going to throw him out this window and drag him all the way to the Guadalquivir. Jacobo laughed. The poor man really thought that was going to be the end of him. Jacobo said this with such a friendly grin, that I found myself smiling too. It is more complicated than he knows. Ambrosio was looking at the floor now. He turned to us, and said, If you want to know, the man who died this evening had attacked one of our ships from Genoa as it was coming up the Sanlucar de Barrameda. We have privileges in this city. Ambrosio smiled. I like your friends, Jacobo said. What happened to her? he asked, pointed to Rebka. There was silence for a moment, I looked at the two of them, waiting for some clarification. Her forehead, Jacobo said, lifting a finger to point at my wife. I looked at her, even though I knew what he was talking about. She has been that way ever since I have known her, I said to him, trying to be polite. Jacobo tapped his finger to his forehead. Can she

talk? he asked, It looks deep. Yes, she can talk, I answered, just as Rebka was starting to speak. It is just the way God made her, I said, at that time knowing no better than to attribute such an action to the Lord. Ambrosio started to pace around the room. I knew a man who had a dent like that in his forehead; he had been in a fight and the butt of a knife went through his forehead. He could not speak for the rest of his life. What do you want her to do? She is fine, I said, smiling, not knowing what to say. Jacobo laughed, We were just wondering. I am sorry, Baruch. You know, I say, one should savor marvels. At this, Rebka smiled. I have always known I was special in some way. Jacobo leaned back in his chair. My dear, you are a marvel, and if I may say, Baruch, you will forgive me, a very beautiful woman. You know, once I was a merchant, ferried cloth, soap, that type of thing around our sea, before I became a banker, and sometimes, when we would find ourselves off course, we should catch sight of some sea swell that grasped our hearts and shook them, because it seemed as if something marvelous was about to rise out of the water—Jacobo crossed his legs, and stopped speaking as he met my gaze. I had been staring at a huge volume, chained to a desk in the corner of the room. I see your husband has noticed my book, he said. It is the lives of saints. Every time I open that book, I am surprised and humbled by what I find. In that same way, you humble me, Doña Rebka. Every marvel makes one feel more a part of mankind. In fact, I feel closer to all of you right now. And Jacobo raised his eyes to the ceiling and settled into his chair with great dignity. You are a philosopher, Ambrosio said. Thank you, Ambrosio—and then, scratching his short, grayish hair, he said, You are kind. There is something underneath this world; maybe one day we will know what it is, but for now there is business to attend to. And that was the end of his short talk with us. Ezequiel bent close to Ambrosio, probably to ask to relieve himself, because Ambrosio pointed down the hall, and said: under the

bed.

At that moment, as Ezequiel was working through the entranceway, a strange looking man entered the room, pushing past my friend. He was somewhat lanky, with not much of a chin, but with some hairs there, almost in the form of a goatee, but his principle features were: a nose which changed directions halfway in its course, and a head which was clearly growing bald, a large forehead, covered by a mass of limp hairs, which began towards the back of his head and covered everything as they slumped forward. He had come in somewhat obsequiously to collect some papers to copy, being a scribe and a notary. Alright, Alfonso, said Jacobo, how are you? Are you well? Ambrosio clapped the fellow on the back. Hey, Alfonso, what do you have here? Ambrosio pricked a spot on Alfonso's shirt with his finger. Look what you did, Alfonso cried, you put a hole in my shirt! It was there the whole time! Ambrosio said, Look at that, Jacobo, what do you think? He turned to let the old Italian see, and it was true there was a little hole in Alfonso's shirt. The old man did not know what to say, so Alfonso laughed, and said, You know that is the third time today I have done that joke. Yes, continued Ambrosio, he put the hole in his shirt himself. It lets my body breathe, Alfonso explained. This little hole is why I never get sick. I can let the fumes out and they do not built up so close to me. Jacobo considered this for a moment, after which Ambrosio laughed and said: Alfonso, you live in Las Gradass, am I right? You have been to my house, Alfonso said to him. No, I have not, Ambrosio said frowning. Perhaps you have not, Alfonso said. Maybe I am thinking of someone else. Is this all the paper? he asked, tapping the sheaf against the table. Yes, Jacobo answered, and Ezequiel came back into the room.

My son, it is the fate of every man always to be divided, to be somewhat out of the

moment one is in; as I stood there, in the corner of Jacobo's room, craning my head sometimes to catch a glimpse of the conversation which I was perceiving as if I was not in the room at all, I was also aware of the presence of the papers in Alfonso's hand and the book on the side table, just as I was aware of Rebka beside me. In fact, her neck, which grew out of the two swoops of her shoulders, was right at my chest, and I wanted simply to let my head fall against them, but she would, I thought, hate me for it; everyone here thought she was beautiful, and she was, and it had been a very long time since anyone had mentioned it even in jest. On this point, I will tell you, my son, to this day, I do not feel old, I feel something quite different. I have only this darkened space of a room to give me respect, and my thoughts, I think, are no different from those of my youth. Instead, I only feel a change in the grit that gathers on my skin and seems to dissolve into my limbs and into my back. If only I could be free of this body, my son! One day I promise you, you too will want to leave your body behind, or at least to drain it of pain and feed it in abundance. For if the hope of the young is an earthly paradise, the hope of the old is a heavenly one. The heaven of the old might be youth, but only as far as the desires of youth linger on past their time. What a possibility, to be drained of all feeling! This is the hope of my old age, to become unable to feel, to be freed of all distractions; this does not go against God—I do not seek to question his creation. I desire only that desire which he himself has planted in me. For I only wish to transform into something new, to inhabit another body, to be born a man in old age, and to live in the palace of abundance and to take from it only a little.

I must have shut my eyes for a moment, even as I stood there on my two feet, because Ezequiel woke me with a hand on my shoulder. Behind him floated the face of Alfonso, glittering. We are going with Alfonso, Ezequiel said, and when I looked to Jacobo, he was

nodding. Ambrosio had gone. Alfonso lives in the old Jewish quarter. He will have room for us. He smiled strangely and looked towards the window. It is almost time for dinner, he said to us, and gestured toward the door. A blessing, to this day, I cannot quite believe my own story. One last thing: before I left, I went up to Jacobo, stepping softly, and I touched a small figurine on his desk. Behind me, Rebka was speaking to Alfonso. I want to know you, I whispered to Jacobo, meeting his eyes. I—and I faltered here—I thank you, you have been kind—but in fact, I only mumbled and smiled. Perhaps Jacobo understood because he rested a hand on mine, which made me feel like a small child, and said, I brought it from Genoa. I looked at him, at his grayish eyes, and his shaven cheeks, and I said, Thank you very much for your kindness, and fled the room, even though I wanted to talk to him, to ask him about his book, and about his life, which was so much more interesting and marvelous than mine. But he had been too kind to me, and we can only live having forgotten the good that others have done for us. It is too much a distraction to have one's debts in mind. One must be careless with others in order to live with them, to feel not like a child. Someone taller is always older, I thought to myself, someone older is always taller. Someone who looks like one's father, however old one is, however far one is from home, someone magnanimous, can always make one feel as empty as a child.

I remember very clearly the first step into Alfonso's room. The dark of night was creeping in from behind us, so Alfonso went in ahead to light a candle or two, and in this way, the room was lit by the flickering of light, trembling and shaking like the large glossy leaves of a plant near an open window, whose leaves curve downward slightly; and as they tremble, they gesture downward as if to say, calm down, calm down. What the light revealed was a relatively small room, a pallet to one side, a collection of pots in the corner, and two chairs, both worn,

with legs that splayed out as if tired of their weight. On the opposite side, in front of a tapestry which was nailed to the wall, quite colorful, but slightly out of place—indeed, it had a thin rip going down it from where the nail had gone in, and it was gathered up from the bottom so that I could not make out what it depicted—there was a table, its surface at an angle, and a stool that stood next to it, and a small side table beside it, on which lay a pen, a quill with the feathers cut off, well shaped, and three pots of ink, round, with the fingerprints of the potter still on them, and sealed, and around the circle of their tops one could see black, red, or blue. On the angled table lay a page, large, mostly empty, except for an outline which had been drawn over it, and a decoration of vines that entwined around the few figures that were there, which, in the little light of the two candles, seemed to disperse and come together again and dance before my eyes. All this description, all the words that make it up, came to me much later. Alfonso shut the door behind us and I asked him, What do you do? He answered, I am a notary and a scribe. He walked over to the table and slapped down the pages that he had taken from Jacobo. For example, I am going to copy some numbers for Jacobo. As he spoke, I moved quietly over to the angled table, hearing, but not feeling the creak of the wood boards beneath me, and it was only through the sound that I knew I myself was walking. What is this, I asked. That is a book I have to copy. It was not the first time I had seen writing, of course. I had seen writing growing up in Barcelona with my fathers all around me, and they read from texts every day, you know this, my son. And in our town as well, certain Christians possess little books that they carry with them everywhere, secreting them away in their pants, or tying pockets into their shirts for them, little books that fit into one's hand like an infant born too early, some of them sold by the peddlers who come through town, and others copied out by special request for those with a little money, and inside

them are the feast days, the holidays, the prayers in other languages, and so they can whisper them at any moment, and even a moment of crisis, they will have the pages nearby to consult, to flip through with their thumb. Indeed, what a sense of security they must have, to be able to handle their hearts in their hands, for to live one's life in one's own body is rarely enough, and in some way, one must imbue a thing with life and comfort to be handled and caressed as part of oneself. I had seen those few books and had heard of larger books, had seen the Hebrew scriptures of my fathers, but I had never seen a book as large and as ornate as the one in this room in my memory. Two huge blocks had been drawn in color on the page, and they were separated from each other by the use of a dividing line, making the design around the text look like the closed shutter of a house with a host of curling plants swirling around it, and the text was, as it were, written on the closed shutter, so that, since one could not look into the house from outside, one was confronted with something equally interesting and equally marvelous, the shutter being closed.

Meanwhile, Alfonso was preparing places for Rebka, Ezequiel and I to sleep, pulling some extra blankets out from under his bed, and shaking them off. Rebka asked him, What is it you are copying? She had seen me staring at the manuscript and the smaller, slanted pages that were lying nearby. Alfonso looked up for a moment, stared at Rebka, and laughed. I asked him, Really, what is it? It is a translation recently done by an acquaintance of mine, Pedro, a kind man if a little reserved, from Toledo. He recently finished it here in Seville, at the request of our patron, Don Iñigo Lopez de Mendoza, Marquis de Santillana, the great poet. What is it that you are going to do with his translation? I asked hesitantly. Well, I copy it from his notes to the large paper you see there, with the designs, and then someday I will present it to the Marquis if I ever

find someone to bind it! Where did you learn to do such a thing, I asked him. So Alfonso told me about what learning he had attained in Caceres, his home, and as he finished laying out our beds, he told me a little about his life. I was so weary that I heard very little of what Alfonso was telling me, but for bringing me into his house that night, I will forever be indebted to him. For, my son, I could reveal to you, of course, what it was that Alfonso was copying, but I knew it not then, so for that reason, I will reveal to you the nature of the book when it was revealed to me.

That night I awoke to the sound of a wagon breaking down outside, the first merchants arriving in Las Gradass before the dawn. The round shape of Rebka was a few feet away. She was lying on her back, her neck sprawled out like the rest of her. I could hear her breath as I studied her in the little light that had started to enter the room, creeping around the nailed tapestry that Alfonso kept against the wall. To the other side of me Ezequiel was awake, his bluish eyes matching the dawn moment by moment. I realized I had not spoken to him as a friend in days. He had learned to grow silent, or had chosen silence, over his normal talkativeness, his strange humor, his bantering like a child, which made Rebka and I love him. Ezequiel, I said to him, turning over. He looked at me, not sullenly, but waiting, imbuing the moment with a certain humor, as if waiting for my signal to start to smile. I was about to speak, when suddenly he surprised me, saying, Baruch, what has become of us? We never talk anymore. We've been on the road for weeks and for the last two I think we have not even said good morning to each other. Ezequiel, I said, we have been together too long; sometimes I think I have run out of things to say. He grunted in response. More than that, I said, every moment you bring new surprises. What are we doing here? I am indebted to Jacobo, he said. In fact, Baruch, I have been keeping it to myself for a long time, and it has not been easy. I would like to tell you my plan and see what

you think. We should leave here, though; I do not want to wake Alfonso or Rebka. I agreed, and we slipped out of the room into the grey morning of Seville.

As we broke out in the street, we were confronted with the sight of the overturned wagon which had woken us. Shattered bottles filled the street; some had rolled intact as far as the alley on the opposite side. The street smelled strongly of wine, and the cobblestones appeared like the wall of an old building, criss-crossed with purple moss. The wagon-driver, at a loss, had gone in search of help, leaving his cart deserted, like some lopsided rock submerged in a lake. Ezequiel laughed. Well, Baruch, a blessing, he said, and I clapped him on the back. He bent over, holding himself, and lifted two bottles by their stems from the ground. I picked up two as well, testing them to see if they had any cracks, then we ducked down the alley, shouting as one feels compelled to do when the sun has not yet risen, and one can feel the rays of God's light on one's face. By the time we poked our heads into the next street over, however, we were out of breath, and leaned against one another, a little embarrassed, but silent, until Ezequiel began to cough. I held him almost doubled over, until he was ready to rise, wiping his mouth, which I noticed now was ringed by a straggly whitish beard. I mentioned it to him and he said he wished I had his eyes, to see the sort of thing that surrounded my face. We walked shoulder to shoulder down towards the river. Baruch, let me tell you.

As I said, I am working for the Genoese, I owe them like I owe so many others. I could have stayed in Cartillas with you, but I have been thinking for a long time now that the only thing worthy of life is experience and I cannot help but feel the need to do something, and if I am risking my life, then that in itself makes my life worth risking. I do not know why other people cannot see it, but everyone has their own spirit and it is that which gives us our separateness. Our

individual spirits will us to action, but to different degrees. But each person cannot know all the individual actions of all the spirits, so one focuses on the spirits which surround one. Why else would the world be divided like it is, in which I have lived so far from where I began, in which every town is separate, our King riding from city to city, as if to keep up with the moving spirit of the people? It seems as if my spirit desires more range of action and since my nature is such that I cannot have any power, I wander from place to place. Ezequiel continued to speak to me, but I was not really listening. Perhaps he said those words, perhaps he did not, so taken up was I by the buildings we were passing and by the route we were taking, and more and more I was realizing that Ezequiel and I were very different people, which was both interesting and sad; I was a person who lived with all my heart, and he was a person who lived happily, or tried to. But for us, the least I can say, is that sometimes our interests coincided. My son, it is painful for me to admit it, but sometimes it is better to act for one's own reasons, than to listen to another person. Sometimes one can do nothing more than to act for another, and understand its significance later. We arrived back at the Cathedral under construction and it was still early enough that the nave, open on both ends was empty, still in the shadow of La Giralda, a minaret left by the Muslims. There was scaffolding to the sides of it, so we climbed up the side of the Cathedral, because in a flash I realized that there was no reason not to, for no one here knew that we were two peasants; indeed, Ezequiel was now living the last stretch of his life as if he were not. We emerged at the top, and crept along the roof, which was unfinished, crawling across wood beams, or stepping widely from stone to stone. Finally, we found a platform of sorts, right behind the face of the Cathedral which was bordered by two spires and from where we sat, we could see through a hole which was to form a magnificent window. We uncorked the bottles of

wine, and sat there, as soon enough, the sun began to hover above the sky, rising quickly over the horizon, as if the sky were an object with a hole cut in it and the light of existence were burning through. Mist hugged the roofs of the city in this warm, humid country, and as the sun finally disentangled itself from the outline of Seville, a flock of swans curled across the sky, swooping out of nowhere, and turning lightly back towards the river. There on the roof of the Cathedral, Ezequiel and I, like good Jews, imbibed the way our fathers had on happy occasions and sad ones, in order to dance in just such a way as to invite God in, the spirit of God who normally was so coquettish as to seem close, but entirely out of reach, until one lost the ability to sense any distance, and in that moment, when the spirits which surround one lose all individuation, then God sneaks in and like a child playing, one is driven to shout and leap in a way embarrassing for adults, but appropriate for children, who are as foolish as drunks sometimes, but possessing an innocence which adults can only strive towards. Indeed, my son, even when the beauty of the earth was more apparent than ever, one was reliant on a sense of beauty which was not inherent in the earth itself; one was reliant on the joy and spell of wine, and not the spell and joy itself; one was reliant on the kinship between spirits, between Ezequiel and myself, but at the same time, kinship was not enough, and although we rested against the wall together, shoulder to shoulder, our bodies were an obstacle. No feeling which has ever stirred the heart has not had a requirement and no feeling has never inspired some impossible action, no feeling has not created a restriction, a sudden wall, for feeling is not enough for us, I told Ezequiel, and Ezequiel agreed, we must always act. And so we did, after lying there like sacks, surveying the city, muttering to each other, I taking off my shirt and wrapping it around me like the tallit of a rabbi and moving in that venerable and respected way a rabbi moves, as if to fool the spirits of the world, which

Ezequiel had spoke of and now with all my being I thought were existent and at hand, I shouted LORD GOD. And Ezequiel murmured, rocking back and forth, Amen. LORD GOD, I cried, I AM SHOUTING AT YOU. Amen, murmured Ezequiel. I started to laugh. GOD, I cried, DO NOT LAUGH AT ME. He is laughing at you, said Ezequiel. I AM NOT A CHILD, GOD, I yelled to the city of Seville, I AM NOT A CHILD. You are acting like one, Ezequiel said. I AM AN OLD MAN, I cried, I AM NOT AND HAVE NEVER BEEN A CHILD. Even as a child, Ezequiel added, coughing. I cleared my throat, which was hoarse. STOP MAKING ME FEEL LIKE A CHILD, I finally sputtered out, and Ezequiel chuckled as I fell back against the hard stone and he put one hand on my hand and said, You are a sight to behold. I smiled and Ezequiel said, the Christians have it worse, their priest is called Father. We Jews are equals, he said. I mumbled, I cannot be a Jew. What? asked Ezequiel. How can I be a Jew? I know nothing of God, I responded. Do not be a fool, Ezequiel said to me, what do you feel of God? You have Jewish blood in your veins. I said, I feel like laying my head down against my father's chest and closing my eyes. When is the last time you had such good wine to drink, Ezequiel asked. Not for a long time, I answered, never maybe. I could say the same, he responded and then said, Baruch, God could be around the next corner, you know. If that is true, then I have wasted my entire life in building pleasant thoughts, I said, that is all I have done, working and thinking, building thoughts I can never even trust. Sometimes I lay on the ground and feel closer to the earth, I said, but I think there is only so close that one can get. When I could, I would hold my son close to me, I told Ezequiel, I would feel him and think of the fulfillment of Rebka, but I could only think about it, I was never fulfilled, as if God alone could fulfill me, and even that is only a thought. Let go, Ezequiel said. Of what, I asked. He laughed and muttered something that sounded like

Amen. The sun had just risen above the front edifice of the nave and was suddenly visible to us. At that moment, a swan, perhaps one we had seen flying before, came in a fluttering and a rush of wings to land right between us, between Ezequiel and me. We stared at the swan for a moment, as it craned its neck at us, a perfect, fresh, clean white; we stared at it as it knocked over the wine bottles which crashed far below us; and we watched as the swan curled its neck against its wings, and tucked its legs under its wings, and fell asleep right between us where we lay, keeping perfectly still, unable to move. On closer inspection, the swan looked peaceful, but hardly as graceful as it had appeared flying through the air. Ezequiel and I muttered some words to each other and could not help but laugh at ourselves. Our heads still reeling, we stood up and, careful not to wake the swan, we clambered down the scaffolding of the Cathedral, like children descending from a tree. My son, to conclude this short episode, I will tell you the thoughts that occurred to me as we returned to the house of Alfonso the scribe, that all actions are limited by the conceivable; that we can only understand ourselves in terms of what is conceivable, which is a terrible measure by any standards, and indeed, who cannot but say that no man is so foolish, but has misinterpreted the world entirely, having only been around people who have mistreated him in some consistent way, who have no respect for him, who have expected nothing more from him than foolishness, who have given him no experience but that which has taught him how to be in a way subservient, foolish, and, in short, misguided. It was with these thoughts that I turned the corner on Las Aguilas, Ezequiel at my side.

I do not quite remember what we had been talking about, my son, for in the aftermath of such moments, details often seem very far away. I knew I was speaking to Ezequiel, that I was gesturing with my hand as we walked up the street, when two men passed us on the opposite side

of the street. I remember it clearly now, although I hardly thought anything of it then. A few moments, later, I was just taking a large gulp of air when I heard footsteps behind us, quick, short, rapid, coming up to us. Someone said something and as I turned around, someone hit me; it must have been a fist which connected with the side of my turning head; and I fell down, or I must have, for the next moment I was on the ground, surrounded by scuffling feet. What, I asked them, What is happening? In answer, they were kicking me, there must have been two of them, Ezequiel was a missing presence, for nothing in particular filled my eyes except haste; I was afflicted with a certain blindness as repeatedly I tried to stand up on all fours, to escape, to run away, but was kicked down each time, only to try to stand again, all without my knowledge, without my doing, as if my body had taken over and was saving itself, without any conscious thought, only confusion, the vague idea that I had not quite finished my thought in speaking to Ezequiel, wondering where he was, and when we could finish what we were talking about, but among the thoughts I had none were that this was the end of something, for I barely felt the blows they were inflicting on me, because no part of this experience was real, so it seemed; so far distant they were from normal experiences, it seemed impossible that so dramatic a change could have occurred, that I was living it, that elsewhere people were waking up, eating breakfast, for I had lost any ability to understand the actions and thoughts of others. I was entirely captive, curled up, with my arms around my knees, as if mumbling, trapped in my own head, in my own body which was, on its own, defending its master. I have no advice for you, my son, if you find yourself in such a situation, for there is nothing one can do; one's body takes over, in a manner which is surprising and ultimately humbling. For then, mysteriously, the attack stopped, that is, I found myself running with the only thought in my mind that I had to get away, for I hardly

remember what caused the blows to stop, nor do I have but flashes of what I must have perceived as I ran down Las Aguilas, flashes like illustrations, of houses, of clotheslines, of a staring woman with huge eyebrows, of a little boy holding a cat by its front legs, a cat which was missing an ear, until finally I turned the corner and stopped against the wall, leaning against it, panting, and then, from the flashes, I perceived, after the fact, that which must have happened, the two men, the fist, the fall, the attack, the end, the running, and finally the turning the corner. I was left with unanswered questions of course, dizzy, barely able to stand, but I whispered to myself, I am fine, where is Ezequiel, and then, Why did they do that? Why would they? A woman had stepped out of her door, having seen me, and without thinking I told her, I was attacked, and she asked me if I was healthy, and I said yes, and she said, Be careful, father, for some reason, which I could barely attempt to reach, as slowly my sense returned. Then, against all reason, I rounded the corner again, to see what I had missed, and what I saw at the end of the street was Ezequiel on his knees, being helped up by two men, and a small crowd gathered around him, and I felt more confusion than guilt, that I had run away so quickly, and I walked back to my friend, I would have run, but my legs refused to work so efficiently as they had only minutes before, and I limped down the street not inside my own head, but as if seeing myself through the eyes of everyone in every house which lined Las Aguilas, as if my spirit was making up for the moment of entrapment in my one, single body. Finally, I reached the small crowd of people, who were staring at me. One of them ran forward and jerked my hands behind my back violently, and I yelled, What? in utter disbelief. Wait, Ezequiel said, wait, that is my friend. And the man who had me by the hands, who, remarkably, was red-haired, let me go, saying: Sorry, but I had heard the attack and ran to help you, and as I neared three men ran in different

directions, two down there—he pointed to an alley—and this one—he pointed to me—ran right past me down the street, without glancing at me. I said, I am sorry, my friend, but I do not even remember that. There was silence for a moment and I explained, I was attacked too, Ezequiel and I were attacked. Ezequiel nodded. Are you okay, I asked Ezequiel. Yes, I think so, but I think I am bleeding. He was right. How are you, he asked me, and I said, I am fine, but I sat down just then, feeling absolutely unable to stand a moment longer, and I put my head in my hands there on the side of street. Ezequiel, said one of the men, leaning down to my friend's ear. Do you know who those men were, Ezequiel asked. No, he answered. How do you two know each other, I asked abruptly. Ezequiel waved me away, saying: Remember Jacobo? Perhaps they are with the council. We bring money into the city, for years we have supplied them with bread, think of that, with bread for the council that cannot even supply its own people with bread; they need the Genoese. But maybe not, he said, and he trailed off. Ezequiel said, my purse is gone. Another man said, for all we know, it was simply chance. It was not chance, I said for being hit had somehow loosened my tongue, it was someone else, it was someone else's greed, that is not chance, as if someone had just realized that nothing but other men were blocking his way. Ezequiel now looked as if he were going to swoon, so the men gathered him up in order to take him to a well-known doctor, for Ezequiel was quite a friend of Jacobo, and the old man wanted to see him alive for some reason. The men wished me luck, I who escaped unhurt it seemed, and told me how to return to Alfonso's house. I left them there, walking alone down the streets of Seville, half-lost, half-remembering. In the distance, basket-boys were unloading the vessels docked in the quay; I could see them from where I walked and they seemed unusually colorful to me. This was the situation I found myself in, my son, taking step after step, for each individual

one was noted, past a man selling wide-brimmed hats, past a garden with long hanging boughs; I walked like I was going to get hit, my eyes darting from side to side, seeking out each object, my head turning left, then right, as if my gaze were dough being spread out over a board, entirely, with no breaks, which needed to be molded back into the whole, and I would glance behind me every so often. I do not want to exaggerate my unease, my son, in fact, to any one on that street on that day quickly growing hot in Seville, I would have seemed entirely normal, indistinguishable, I am sure, from everyone else charging down the street at that moment, and in fact, I told myself then that it was surprising how normal, how fine I was, except that every time a man passed me to the left, I would, without my will, follow his path with my eyes as he descended into the blindness behind me, and only then because of the sudden dropping in my stomach and not from any reasoned decision.

When I returned to Alfonso's room, it was already late morning and as I crept back in, I felt unusually stiff and unreal, as if I were stepping back into the room and seeing everything from a great height. Alfonso was gone, the room was bright, the manuscript on the desk nearly glowing, and there alone, waiting for me, was Rebka whose look was entirely distant when I first came up the stairs, but at the sight of me, as if against her own will, her eyes seemed to shine with feeling and she suddenly broke into tears, running to me, burying her head in the space between my neck and shoulder in order to hide her feelings, which embarrassed her because I think I was so often reserved around her, that is, not to say I was without passion, but I hid misery from her, grief, in any case, which I let loose in tears only in the moments before sleep overtook me, when my waking dreams had time to remind me of the deaths I had known and would know, and in that moment of weakness, I would be unable to feel anything but the hot

tears on my face before finally I was gone, hurtling towards morning. Alfonso went to go look for you. Where have you been, Rebka asked me, and I told her what happened haltingly, from the beginning, of course, because I felt as if to emphasize the attack in any way would be nothing more than a strategy for pity, which I neither wanted, nor would enjoy, because it would alter the relationship between us; between anyone, my son, pity creates unevenness, it sets the proper balance of things awry. In the course of my story, Rebka explained that she would not have been so worried if it were not for yesterday's events, and she told me how glad she I was that I was alive, and that she loved me, which she feared she had not told me in a very long time. I told her I loved her as well, that things seemed very far away right now in memory, and that Ezequiel had gone with some friends of his, that I was very sorry, and that I wanted to lie down now. My son, you will forgive me for not thinking entirely clearly, though strangely, I remember this scene very well. I lay down on the floor at Rebka's feet, as if in supplication, as if there were no bed in the room, and touched her legs, holding her calf close to me as if it were a pillow in the middle of the night. Rebka began to speak.

Do not ever leave me alone like that, she said. I was gazing up at her and I noticed the way her face had gone dry in age, but looked softer than ever. My son, one day you will have this feeling, of having spent so many years with a person that it is as if the two of you have grown up together. You will find, having grown up, that the experience will bind the two of you together, because each has watched the other understand the person they have become. My son, your mother was the first person I ever felt comfortable with stinking, with dirt and sweat in every place on my body and in every place on hers. In this negation of the body, in this denial of cleanliness, therein lies a trap. There is no escaping this person, then, there is no escaping love,

just as there is no escaping the memory of one's past and one's actions, for they are preserved in the body of the other person. I have noticed that this process of growing up, of losing inexperience, leads to wrongdoing and falsity. I remember that particular day that Rebka let me kiss her, from her ankle to her knee, drawing me up from the floor. What we ourselves make natural, becomes natural for the people around us; the insane draw others into their insanity; the inexperienced, when not exposed as such, draw everyone into confusion. In this way, I kissed her and she, I am sure, too worried to think of that kind of love, bent down and kissed me in order to placate me; but at the time I took it as a measure of her desire, which surprised me considering the circumstances, for I had only kissed her myself in order to bring myself closer, not desiring her at all except in the sense that I wanted to rest myself on her body, which for me was most comfortable and most wonderful. But because she appeared to me passionate, I drew her down onto the floor, atop me, and pressed her close, and suddenly I was so grateful to have her back that I jerked her close to me, holding onto her flesh, pinching her, and she cried aloud, and pressed back at me and pinned my arm against the floor, because I appeared to be violently passionate, but of course, she appeared the same way, when in fact our actions were nothing but empty, and empty actions always appear necessary. Your mother and I have never quite understood each other, my son. We have often made each other happy, we have learned much together, live together peacefully and in great harmony, but when pressed, the things which we hold to be most important are incomparably different, that is, the most important things to me, she disregards as foolish, or rather, she disregards them with indifference or confusion, with a look in the face as if offended by my expressions, which seem so obvious or easily understandable that it must be foolishness on my part to be so concerned, and in the same way,

with a unknowing disregard, I often make her feel insignificant because my words drain all meaning from the thoughts which encircle her heart. For at that moment, she wished to comfort me, to keep me company, to talk to me, to return me to people, when in fact, I wanted nothing more than to be alone, to think my thoughts, to survey and to understand. I said to her, Rebka, when you kiss me, you spit into my mouth, and she turned red and I said, I am sorry, but it is better you know now. For a long while I have only kissed your breasts, because your mouth is distracting. And it was at the moment, when we were both laughing, or I was laughing to set her at ease, and she was laughing to set me at ease, lying on the floor, distracting ourselves from the real problems, which were only problems when called problems, that Alfonso returned to his room. His back hurts, said Rebka quickly, and Alfonso smiled, nodding, understanding perhaps, but in any case, he said: Baruch, I heard about your attack. Rebka sat down on the bed and Alfonso stood a short distance from me, but far enough so that it did not seem as if he were towering above me. It is a curious thing, but a constant thing in my experience, for some men to appear larger than others, to appear like rescuers, as greater or even less. It is a strange thing that in our dealings with other people that so often others appear so different than ourselves. In any case, I was humbled before Alfonso, and rightly so, my son, for he was a man of great learning, that much was clear; and I knew absolutely nothing then, that is a fact, and so when he stood there, I crawled forward and kissed his boot, lightly, not overdoing it, of course, and said to him: Alfonso, forgive our intrusion into your home, in fact, I have decided to leave Seville at once, which even as I said it I knew was false, because for some reason, even the attack on me, further attracted me to this city of life, but I said it anyway. Alfonso helped me up onto his chair, the chair before his manuscript and said, It does not matter how long you stay, in fact, there is some

unfinished business with your friend and surely you would not want to abandon him. Alfonso had brought back with him some fish and bread and we ate with him, talking about the city, about his work. Alfonso wanted to ask me some questions about the Jewish tradition, for he said, many of the manuscripts he was copying were old Jewish works, works from the past, and much of their meaning was lost on him. I had to tell him that I knew very little about the Jewish works, nor could I read, and I said, It is very funny, but I am still not entirely sure what that means.

What are you talking about, Alfonso asked. What does it mean to read? I know there is knowledge in books, but how does it come to be there? I asked and Rebka laughed. I ignored her. Alfonso then sat me down and stood over me like a father might, although I could have been his father, and he took a piece of paper and placed it in front of me. Taking up his quill and ink, dipping the quill in the ink carefully, Alfonso with immense grace began to write on the page. I stared at it, when he had finished. It is your name, Baruch, Alfonso said, straightening. This is Baruch? I asked him. Yes, it says Baruch. Alfonso went through each of the letters before me, explaining the sound of each letter which made it up. So it is just the sounds! I cried. What do you mean, he asked. All you do is write down each sound I make, and then I can make the sounds I see on the page! Yes, that is how it works. You smile at me as if I were being foolish, Alfonso, but in fact, I have thought for a long time on this matter. You must understand that for me, somewhat of an orphan, I have for a long time been taught humility, indeed, I said to him, it may seem very obvious to you, but it is very hard for me to understand such things, never having been taught. The way I see it everything in life—this is how I think of it—I think of a bucket of water being filled to the top; the bucket is God’s creation and the water in the bucket is the world, the water being added to the bucket which enters the surface of the water and descends to

the bottom represents the many new beings in the world, and the overflow over the sides of the bucket represents the beings leaving the world, and a hand, the hand of God, comes down into the bucket, swirling the fates of the beings in the world together. God creates whirlpools so that each being is tied to those near it, swirling together in the path created by God's hand: this is the way I have thought of the world. And indeed, my son, this is what I thought then, perhaps I explained even to you this way of thinking one night when you had asked me one of your questions I had difficulty answering, although I am sure I never gave you that impression then, for, looking back, it seems that for you I had an answer for everything, even if I myself was far from sure. In any case, I told Alfonso, the meaning of the path of God's hand is only clear to God, having himself moved his hand in the bucket, but to us, who only perceive the path that God has pushed us on and those beside whom we have been pushed, nothing is entirely clear, for the only understanding I myself or anyone can have of the world is of interpreting the path one and one's fellows are taking and further, in the world, both in the earth and the sky, as for men and animals, their meaning is far from obvious; therefore, when I consider the learning in books, I had always thought that books required great wisdom and learning from experience in the same way that interpreting the world requires great wisdom, but in fact, anyone can speak a sound written on a page. I finished, uncertain of myself. Alfonso laughed. You are a remarkable man, Baruch. In my experience, however, it is not the reading of a text which is difficult, but understanding its meaning. I thought this over for a moment and agreed, saying, But of course, not knowing the way the letters work, you can excuse my mistake? Of course, Alfonso said, smiling. I looked over at Rebka, who I found asleep. Alfonso continued, For instance, I do not even understand the meaning of the texts that I copy; the notarial documents, of course I can

understand, but something like this, the meaning of this is hidden from me. He pointed to the manuscript on the angled desk. What is it, I asked. It is called the *More*. And you say you do not understand it, I asked, staring at the documents. He read part of it to me and I tried to memorize the words he spoke as I stared at the text. At the top of the page he read: *The investigation of this subject, which is almost too subtle for our understanding...* and I imagined a face in my head, Alfonso's face, speaking those words over and over again to fix them in my mind, as I stared at the text trying to match up the sounds with the words, long after Alfonso had gone, saying he had business to attend to.

It was sometime later that Ezequiel himself came to Alfonso's room, helped by one of the men whom I had last seen out on the street after the attack and whose name I then learned was Pepino, which I thought was a good name, a little ridiculous, but a good name. Pepino helped Ezequiel into the room. My friend was now limping slightly, but it seemed to me that Pepino was there mainly to make sure Ezequiel did not fall, rather than to help him stand. Ezequiel looked somewhat haggard but his eyes held a great excitement whose source I was soon to learn. He said to me, Baruch, you must come with me. I asked him where he had been and he said, With friends who, in any case, I want you to meet, or rather they wish to meet you. How do they even know about me? I asked Ezequiel as he lowered himself onto the bed beside Rebka who was half awake. Pepino leaned against the wall beside the entrance. I asked Ezequiel, How are you, anyway? Ezequiel said that he was fine, that he had told his friends about me and in fact, he revealed, looking me directly in the eye, that was part of the reason why he had taken me along in the first place, which I laughed at saying, Ezequiel, of course you had your reasons, but I alone made the choice to come. Ezequiel laughed saying, Of course, you alone, and he patted Rebka on

the leg, which made me want to slap him, God forbid I should slap a friend, and I decided that if God were serious, he would grant me the proper moment, which I realize now was more than I could hope to wish for. In any case, Ezequiel told me the following, which struck me very much: Many years ago when Ezequiel first came to this city he was taken in by a certain Jew of the name of Sanzo, a good man, who let Ezequiel sleep on his floor, let him join Sanzo and his wife for dinner, in short, treated him like an honored guest. It was at this time that Sanzo began, often after dinner, to speak to Ezequiel concerning his beliefs. Ezequiel then as now was a great wanderer, indeed, one whose surroundings rarely satisfied him. Nevertheless, Ezequiel stayed with this Sanzo, by then quite elderly, for a number of weeks. It made a great impression on him that Sanzo had spoken to him about the blessing of guests, which in fact was the welcoming not only of Ezequiel himself, but also a cloud of spirit, as Ezequiel said, a cloud of God. It was this phrase that made Ezequiel stay, despite his tendency to leave, despite the changing of the seasons and the coming of autumn. It should be mentioned that at this point Ezequiel made great emphasis on a certain point, namely that Sanzo was missing an eye. In this way, Sanzo would often keep his head turned so that his good eye would penetrate the man whom he had fixed it on and his missing eye would be left in shadow. In addition, Sanzo was missing an arm. Unfortunately, he was missing his left eye whereas it was his right arm that was missing, such that no matter which way he turned no shadow was great enough to hide his misery. He explained that he had acquired both his injuries in that fateful year of 1391. Indeed, at this point in my story, my breath caught. I asked Ezequiel, This Sanzo, had he accompanied us in our flight, our escape from Barcelona so many years ago? No, in fact, said Ezequiel, and he explained to me what he had learned which was that 1391 was a terrible year for Jews

everywhere; in fact, Sanzo had brushed his own shoulder and touched lightly the stub of his missing arm, murmuring that he could still feel his fingers where they used to be and just as he felt the presence of his missing limbs, he could feel the presence of so many Jews killed that year. In fact, the event which led to our flight from Barcelona had started in Seville itself, in this very city in that year, and Sanzo explained that invisibly he was flexing his fingers, the fingers which represented Seville, and it was there that the violence had started. At that time many Jews converted or fled, many died trying to do both, and in fact the streets were filled with a mob which sent off small parts of itself all over, indeed, as far as Barcelona, where—and here Sanzo said that he could feel a tingling in the missing chunk of his shoulder—the uprising had led to a great dispersal of many Jews, both learned and ordinary. Sanzo explained that he had once been an advisor, a physician to the nobility of Seville, but since that year he had been forced to hold court in his small dark room, in a distant corner of the city. How did you find him, I asked Ezequiel, and Ezequiel explained that one time he, Ezequiel, had arrived via ship, indeed one from Genoa, and Jacobo, then somewhat younger and working together on the same ship as Ezequiel, had been a member of Sanzo's circle, himself a convert, but only in name like so many others. In any case, Ezequiel stayed with Sanzo who told him a great many things about the world, and every time work or need brought Ezequiel to Seville he would stay with his old friend. It was, in fact, on one of these occasions that Ezequiel had happened to mention me to Sanzo. Why would you do that, I asked Ezequiel and Ezequiel laughed saying, Do not be so surprised, Baruch. You are exactly what Sanzo and his friends are looking for. This flattered me a great deal but took me aback, and before I could inquire further, Ezequiel stood unsteadily to his feet saying, Let us go, I will tell you more on the way. I said that I was very tired in particular

because so much had happened already that day and it was not even dinner time yet, but Ezequiel offered me his hand and pulled me up from the floor where I had been lying, thinking about letters, and reluctantly, but full of curiosity, I left Alfonso's room, kissing Rebka goodbye because Ezequiel said that she would be forbidden to come and she was rather sleepy anyway, so I felt that worked out for the best. We came out onto the street and proceeded to walk quite a distance taking so many turns that it was impossible for me to gain any sense of where we were headed. As we passed the street on which the attack had occurred, a great many people stared at us somewhat malevolently. Finally, after some time, we came to a decrepit looking building which leaned to the side and looked as if it were only still standing in virtue of the buildings around it. The street we came to was nearly deserted and when we arrived, it was late afternoon. On the way, Ezequiel explained the following, that he had told Sanzo a certain story about life in our town, a story, in fact, involving me and you. It so happened that one day you, my son, were outside in the grass towards evening which everything was black and gold and it was beginning to rain. We could hear thunder in the distance and you were running through the grass, at times, spinning around with your arms outstretched in such a way that spinning faster and faster, finally you would fall down to the ground and lay there very still for some time before rising again. Just then the storm clouds arrived and as the rain began to fall you kept your arms outstretched, fists clenching and unclenching, and you began to shout ha! and soon a small crowd had gathered around you, a neighbor first of all, a terrible person and a hunchback, but also soon many of the men and women coming back from the fields by way of the road by our house joined him, the hunchback. As if you were doing something wrong! In any case, soon your mother pointed out to me the crowd of people outside our window and I rushed out, of course, because you were lying

there on the ground as if in a fit. I came to your side, sitting down by your body and asked you what you were doing. You explained that it felt good to lie down in the rain and that as the storm was approaching you could feel, as you took a breath, all the power and majesty that was held within the storm clouds flowing through you; in fact, it was as if you held a great power in your fists, a power connected to the storm overhead. Indeed, you were particularly overexcited by the spinning around again and again and always, such energy you had as a boy. The crowd around us, of course, was murmuring and indeed, apparently Ezequiel was among their number, although I had not seen him there at the time. Your mother came out of the house and you were more likely to talk to her in any case, so immediately you told her that you had felt as if you were spinning on top of a world which was entirely beneath you, that is, you felt as if you were rising into the sky, as if you had the power of the storm in you. And it was at this point as your mother and I were sitting on the grass beside you, with a great crowd of people around us, that I spoke up saying that you, my son, were right, but not entirely right. At this, the murmuring ceased because the villagers were apt to listen to me, knowing how much I talked and the silly things I would say, so often secretive about my past. So I said the following and out of the corner of my eye I could see a number of children in the grass to the left of the crowd, spinning happily in the rain, that you, my son, had discovered a great secret, although you did not know it at the time. I explained that you felt as if you possessed the power over the storm in your fists, you could feel the energy of it passing through your limbs, and I said that I had no doubt that what you felt was a real power granted by God, or so it seemed to me, but I said, standing up, wiping the rain from my beard, that it was not only you, my son, who controlled the clouds, but the clouds which controlled you. In fact, I often thought such things as I worked with your mother baking bread

and I thought it as I delivered bread to the members of our town, each of whom dealt with me somewhat cursorily, but in such a way that we each shaped each other's lives, which one could easily see in the simple act of my giving them the bread that they ate; and in fact, what I said was that just as it seems as if we can control their world around us, and in turn the world seems to be affected by our every action, whether such an action is accomplished using one's hands or one's thoughts, in the same way, every act of nature affects us, such that we are all linked. In this way, nature is in command of us and we in command of nature so that all of God's creations are linked together and nothing is separate just as the fish in a lake move the water around them and in turn the water itself moves the fish and further, each fish interacts with the fish around it, through its fins, and through moving the water in which the other fish swim. In the same way, my son has called down this rain, and this rain has called to my son's heart. This impressed the villagers somewhat, although some laughed, and still others were glad that it were my son not theirs, and still others saw their own children spinning around outside my house on the grass. Ezequiel said to me that it was with those words that I established my reputation in the town and in fact, he was right that often I was asked my thoughts on the matter as if I were a sage and although I knew nothing, I often speculated, and I was vain enough not to correct anyone on the matter. In any case, Ezequiel had related this story to Sanzo who was particularly impressed, not knowing anything of my history, and it was some months later when Ezequiel happened into Sanzo's house that the older man, upon hearing Ezequiel's plans to return to Aragon briefly on business for the Genoese, requested my presence and my wisdom, although on that first day in light of my behavior, which was as mysterious as ever, he decided to conceal from me the true purpose of my accompanying him, because my claims of ignorance frightened Ezequiel, for he was greatly

in debt to the Sanzo and wished very much to impress him with my learning. Jacobo himself was part of Sanzo's circle of Jews and former Jews who, Ezequiel said, met sometimes weekly, a good number of people, in any case, from all around Seville, who came at great peril to discuss matters of great learning.

It was at this moment that we came to the door of Sanzo's house and I was particularly nervous, my son, as you can imagine, especially as we entered the house into complete darkness, or so it seemed. Soon my eyes adjusted and Ezequiel was about to light a lamp which was standing there on a nearby table, when an elderly man, hunched over, whom I took to be Sanzo, came into the room quickly and took Ezequiel by the hand, whispering a greeting to him, and gesturing to a couch on which a sleeping woman lay. Ezequiel nodded and Sanzo came over to me, took me by the hands and whispered, God bless you, my friend, for coming now, in our hour of need, and it was then I realized that Pepino had disappeared and moreover that I missed him for some reason. Sanzo led us then through a doorway blocked by a heavy drape of black velvet, into a more brightly lit room, if you can believe it, which I will take some pains to describe. The room had somewhat more than four sides to it, although it was difficult to tell how many there were due to the heavy drapery, not unlike that covering the entrance to the room, which concealed the windows, warding off the eyes of the neighbors. Instead of sunlight, the room was illuminated by a considerable number of candles which seemed to cover every conceivable surface, from specially made columns, to the arms of chairs, to the floor which, in fact, was covered by brightly colored rugs, whose fringe glittered in the candlelight. If what I am describing seems frightening, my son, please do not be misled, the room, if a little smoky, was well lit by the candles, some quite large in fact, and the men who sat upon the floor and the few

chairs which dotted the room, looked at us with the utmost friendliness and openness, in fact, to such a degree that my anxiety was lessened somewhat at that very moment. Sanzo himself was the very image of a patriarch and in him I could see the style of my own father. He sat in the center of the room, his face somewhat wrinkled, but in such a way as to emphasize his eyes which dwelt in what was in effect a nest of skin, above a crooked nose and an impressive white beard. His head was capped by a certain lumpy, roundish hat and he wore loose, baggy clothing the effect of which was heightened in contrast with the very large boots he wore, large and ripe looking, which were tied up tightly and hugging the loose cloth of his baggy pants close against his skin. He presently was lowering himself onto a small chair that looked like two curves of the moon set back to back. The rest of the men ranged from those that looked as young as you, my son, to a few that were older than Sanzo, in fact. Their beards ranged from white, to brown, and indeed, in one case, an off-putting red which made even me blush. The men were all staring at us expectantly as the velvet cloth closed behind us. I stood there unsure of what to do. One of the men muttered something in the back to another and there was some dry laughter. Again, I blushed. At this, Sanzo invited me and Ezequiel to sit down. As I lowered myself, I suddenly noticed a profusion of scrolls and books on the table and on the floor beside him. Sanzo began to speak.

Welcome, all, he said, and then spoke some words in a language which seemed very familiar to me, but which was incomprehensible. The men in the room murmured in response. Baruch, he said, turning to me, hello. My name is Sanzo as I am sure Ezequiel has told you. Indeed, Ezequiel has said a great many things about you and we wish very much to have your opinion on a number of matters that are dear to us. We are told you are from the north, from

Aragon? Yes, I supposed that is right, I said, and Sanzo said, We hold in great respect the writings from the north, from Gerona, from Provence and indeed that is in particular why we have asked you here, for we—and at this he spread his arms to encompass the room—we, he went on, have lost our way. For years in Seville we have watched the faithful grown faithless, the faithless become listless or violent; we have heard nothing new from abroad and we wish very much to continue our study of Torah but require some guidance. The Jews of this city have met with much misfortune, even plague has not left us untouched. We as rabbis have lost more than our congregations. We have lost the knowledge, the glory of the Torah. Seville breeds nothing but ignorance. A number of us here remember the glory of the Jews in the past, when we were younger, when the Torah was carried aloft through the streets not in order to ward off plague, but to the applause of the great hearted Jews whom we passed by. We knew rabbis of great learning then who stood over us while we studied Torah and we know that they possessed a secret, some learning, some truth that they refused to tell us; they refused to tell us for, they said, the uninitiated, those who had not attained the proper level of understanding would misunderstand the truth, would misinterpret it, and ignorance would breed error in the interpretation and uncovering of God's word. And then our lives crumbled underneath our feet and even in the calm of the houses of study, there was great confusion; they burst our synagogues, shattered the windows, torched our books, and our masters were gone, our teachers had fled or were dying and left us nothing but their texts, which we labor in vain to understand. For indeed look at me! said Sanzo. Every part of existence is in harmony with itself and the others and in this linkage... he broke off. You understand me? he asked, and he gestured to me with his missing arm, My right arm is missing, and tears streamed down his face, I was in the Juderia at the time of the attack,

the massacre, when they came at us from both gates, trapping us in, at the word of Don Fernando Martinez, and the mayor tried to stop the mob, but in the dead heat of July, they came at us with knives, my own sister's throat was slit, and they stole my arm, my right arm. You realize, of course, that it is a sign, for the right arm symbolizes *hesed*, he said, the mercy of *hesed*, the love which flows from God, which is counterbalanced by *din*, the judgment of God, the force of evil which is kept in check by *hesed*, *din*, the fire, which is quenched by the water of *hesed*, and just as evil has gone unchecked in this city... We refer to the massacre as a firestorm with good reason, Baruch, for it is a fire unchecked by *hesed*, just as my left arm remains unchecked by my right which is missing. And in the same way that my body mirrors the fate of this city, in the same way, both mirror the state of the Lord, whose garments have been shred, whose clothes are hanging off him, whose crown, indeed is tilted; the *sefirot* are no longer in harmony; God himself has sustained an injury and it is only through our deeds that we may heal the Lord, to revitalize him, for while the light of the Infinite will never cease to shine through the shuttered windows through which we may catch a glimpse of it, the fate of our people and of the world depend on God's harmony in fact, just as his harmony depends on our actions. Just as the wind brushes us, we in casting our hands, make the wind... Sanzo recoiled back into his chair, his eyes fixed onto the floor, and he wiped his brow slowly. We have lost the secret, forgotten the secret passed down, lost it in violence; how can we rebuild our people without our most vital mystery given solution, while we lie here powerless, unrenewed... Which, Sanzo continued after a moment, is why we need you, Baruch. Ezequiel tells us you are a man of great learning, a philosopher, a theologian, living alone. We know you are familiar with the *kabbalah* and we seek your guidance for elsewhere the secret must have been preserved and without it the Torah is meaningless to us;

we cannot penetrate deeply enough; as Rabbi Simeon says, *the Torah, in all of its words, holds supernal truths and sublime secrets*. And later he speaks of the woes of our people, of the fallen Israel who will rise again, but instead identify with Rabbi Aha who says *I have heard what they say, that it is a message of comfort, but it does not comfort me*. For we have lost the means to attain the message of comfort; we know not what such a message would be in this case for our misery and our ignorance stretch before us without limit and the mystery of this world is as boundless as the mystery of the Infinite from which emanates all lower mysteries. For we have no shepherds, no teachers, and no one to comfort us in our hour, or long years of need. We all of us sense the presence of the mystery in everything, but the feeling it strikes in our hearts brings us no closer to understanding it. We have read our texts, we have read our Torah, the works of the great rabbis, and all their words, read a thousand times, and they are not enough to raise us up from the dust. We lack the deeper understanding... we can do nothing new with the words of our forefathers; we are nothing in this age in comparison to them, this darkened age, this prison in which we work, and the finer points of our discussions bring us no closer to an answer, nor does our congregation even sit in wait for our wisdom, that is, they lost faith in us long ago. Baruch, we have placed a great responsibility on you, but so too are our woes great. We beg you, teach us all you know, for we need a living teacher to bring to life the fallen Israel.

I sat there for a moment, staring into Sanzo's eyes, the tired eyes of a great rabbi. All the men in the room were looking at me. I opened my mouth to speak, but instead bent close to Ezequiel's ear and whispered: You lied to them, with such rage as I had never felt, but also such sadness. Then I brought a hand to my face and brushed my nose. I turned away from Ezequiel, head bent to the floor and I lowered myself to my knees. Rabbi, I said, and then I looked up into

his eyes, which were both feverish and friendly. I spoke to them slowly and I noticed at the time that my voice, which was usually somewhat deep, although when excited it would rise to a high pitch, was now thin as if I were speaking behind my nose, and more than that, hearing myself as if I were not speaking my own words. I said, You do not understand, and there were scattered amens. I said, That is to say, Rabbi, I am not sure what to do. Sanzo furrowed his brow. In fact, I said, and this is difficult for me to say, but I have very little learning at all; I am sorry you have been misled for that was not my intention. I will give you what wisdom I have but I assure you, I am just a villager, a baker, maybe one with some insight, praise be to the Lord, but I have no learning. I have talked much in my day, but I know nothing, less than nothing, you must understand me, I have never read the Torah, I have never studied, however much I wished to, I tell you, I cannot even read, and these last words were the hardest of all to speak. There was silence in the room for a moment. I do not understand, Sanzo said, Ezequiel told us—Ezequiel, I said, did not know who I was. But then, said Sanzo, why have you come here, if you cannot help us at all? I do not know, I said slowly, considering my entire story in my head, trying to understand it. I was only accompanying Ezequiel on his trip, that is all. That is all? Sanzo asked. My father was a great rabbi, I said then, perhaps needlessly, I remember him very well, but he taught me nothing. I have a great many thoughts which are not fit to tell anyone I know, particularly in my town; there, where there is nothing of importance to remember, there is nothing to tie down my fancy, and I thought that if I came here, despite my fears, I would be able to rein myself in, so to speak, for I find it very hard to avoid melancholy—Sanzo sat back. Go Baruch, he said, with my blessing, whatever I can give. He laughed bitterly. You must think we are fools here, Ezequiel you most of all. Ezequiel, Jacobo has been looking for you, go to him

and take your friend away. I am sorry Baruch, he said, and his face, so much like my father's, looked down at me kindly. I felt as if he had done some great deed for me, that I was entirely in his debt and I felt my gratitude swell within me, like a great gust of wind which was mixing with a growing humiliation that grew as I stared into the faces of each man in turn. Their eyes had grown quite lifeless when they turned to me, like the eyes of a painting or a doll; they had met another failure, I thought, and I knew despair had not overwhelmed them, but they had not time to spare in a fruitless discussion with me, for there are matters in the world which require great learning and experience, and the possibility of a secret lies in everything, and as I know now, it is only by discovering those places in which the secret does not lie, that one comes closer to the uncovering of the most hidden matters of the soul. For while one may see secrets in all things, such mysteries are more feelings than realities. The true hidden matters of the world remain yet to be found and yet the darkness surrounding them grows light with each passing day. And I see that perhaps this sense of things was what led me to follow Ezequiel without protest and it was these thoughts that occupied me as we abandoned the room of the Sanzo's circle of kabbalists, leaving them to turn once again to their texts. I recall as I was leaving that my exit was followed by laughter in the room and another man's angry voice saying something; another voice spoke with great tired emotion; and a final one gave an enormous yawn which made me smile. It struck me very much that even such men of learning could come close to such despair. My preoccupation was such that Rebka even commented on it when I returned to Alfonso's room and my face felt particularly heavy and I returned her kisses limply. I told her what had happened and, lying on the floor again, explained to her what shame felt like, what it felt like to be so completely humbled by these trusted men, for although they had been kind, I felt such shame not

because I felt entirely a fool, but because I knew I appeared to be a fool, and perhaps was more a fool than anything else because I felt very strongly that at least a part of me had some wisdom in it and I had been unable to offer it to them for their consideration. I wish I had been born in an entirely different city, at the far end of the world, where even you, Rebka, would be able to understand the hidden matters of the world. And then, thinking more, I said, I would not live at the far end of the world, but travel throughout the world, without end, so as to gain all knowledge which is concealed in each place and which waits to be uncovered. I closed my eyes and said that it was a strange feeling to be respected, but humiliated, to be treated kindly and dismissed, to feel in one's own heart to be at once utterly poor and also not quite good enough. Finally I quieted down, keeping my thoughts close to my heart, returning again and again to the words I had spoken to the rabbis.

Ezequiel, who had been called to Jacobo's now returned from that place with Alfonso. Ezequiel then asked Rebka a favor and they both left together to attend the Thursday market, leaving Alfonso and me alone. At a loss for things to say, I related my story to him as well. He took it much differently than Rebka, who had laughed softly at certain points and rested her head against my chest for a moment. Are you okay, she had asked me, and I said I was feeling fine, and then I was just explaining what my feelings were, when our discussion was cut short by the appearance of our friend. I began to tell Alfonso what the rabbi had said, but very soon from the bed he stood up rapidly, angrily, saying, We will see how they act when that cramped little room is burning! Do you not agree, Baruch, that it is only in conflict that one can tell right from wrong? Baruch! he cried and he stalked the room from corner to corner, his head turning left and right as if searching for something in his own eyes. I was a Jew once, I am not a Jew any longer.

I converted some years ago, but I know where I stand, for I have acted for my part, and I can tell you... He trailed off and then started again, You see that book there, he cried, thrusting his finger at the manuscript I had long been studying, the one pinned up on the angled table, I copy that book, he said, because I am being paid to by richer men than I, learned men, all Christians, who think there is some secret meaning in this book written at some long past time. So what is the problem, I ask myself, Alfonso said, there is one problem. They are curious men, Maimonides was a great philosopher, they say, in a city of great philosophers in a golden age, forget the fact that he was a Jew! And barely a Jew at that! It makes me sick to copy this man's words. He writes, I tell you this Baruch, he writes about ordinary people as if they were fools, as if the Bible were not written for all, and I truly believe the opposite: for that is why all of our people spend so much time to learn to read, for nothing else is so essential to the people of Israel. And yet, Alfonso said, grabbing a paper from the table, Maimonides writes, *Literal interpretation*—what does he mean here, literal interpretation? What could it mean but to read what is written there in the holy book?—*is only an adornment*—an adornment! Like jewelry? Like clothes? Or like the crown we set upon the head of the Torah?—*to attract those who are incapable*—and who is he to tell me that I am incapable!—*incapable of comprehending the complex truths that lie beneath*. Surely no one would confuse the crown of the Torah with the Torah itself! The crown is a symbol of the majesty of the Torah, just as each word of the Torah brings majesty to its chosen people. I am trying to make myself understood. Maimonides, this villain, and the misguided Jews you speak of do nothing but dig deeper and deeper into the page, like a sharp pen scraping away the surface of vellum, deeper and deeper, destroying the words written on the surface, endlessly scraping until finally one cannot go any farther, breaking through the page, leaving a hole in the

fabric, which one can then look through—and behold, holding one’s eye up to the hole, one can see the world! What cannot one see through that gash in the text? But whatever one sees it has no relation to the surface. God’s surface! And these philosophers go back and forth in their interpretations, as if their statements, phrased for all men, had any meaning to the particular, arguing, always arguing. And indeed, I recall a story told by Rabbi Hayyim. I had heard it sitting in a synagogue, a time when I, after converting, had snuck back into the synagogue, carefully sitting in the back so as to avoid the faces of my former comrades who, although not unaware of my true feelings, shunned me, laughed at me, spat on me. The rabbi told this story in which a certain preacher was one such as Maimonides, going back and forth, back and forth, inquiring into the unity of God and he would say, *If He, the Lord, is not One, then such and such follows*, and treating each case equally, in the course of which, a man, a sturdy looking man with the curious light of God in his eyes, a man who was not particularly strong looking, one not particularly handsome nor beautiful, but on this occasion, he seemed like an angel in the fire and he spoke with such feeling as I tremble to recall. He spoke to the preacher, in a quiet voice, unused to oratory; his powerful words did not match up to his tone of voice. He said: I interrupt you, rabbi, for I am at my wit’s end! And he was balancing himself against the seat in front of him, leaning forward, as if weary. I come here to pay my respects to the God of my people and because here I can find solace, away from home. It was not so many years ago now, surely you remember... Everything I owned was stolen from me not so long ago, during the riots, when this city of Seville became a nightmare. I was beaten, rabbi, I had bruises all over my body, I was bleeding from my mouth, and I was left for dead by those that attacked me. Even they, the ones that knocked me down in the middle of the street and kicked me, even they thought I had

suffered too much. And as I lay there on the cobblestones, as I was kicked about and choked, feeling the insides of my body rebelling against the attack my outsides were unable to stop, only one thing kept my alive, a single coal in the fire of my heart—all my suffering I endured for the faith of *Hear, O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is One!* And I prefer this tradition of our fathers, these words for which so many of our people have died, than all the words which you expend about them, doubting them, as if they were not there on the page and in our hearts and in our connection to God. I myself do not care to listen to this preaching, whether *God is not one, and if so, such and such!* Then, the man left—and much of the congregation did as well. Baruch, I tell you, Alfonso went on, we do not have much, but we do have the truth. And I tell you, it is the philosophizing of our rabbis that have made us weak. Such reasoning as they preach is pleasing to the Christians as well: simply behold this translation into Spanish, work done for a gentile no better than any other. We possess the truth and the goal of our sermons and our teachings should not be the pleasure and solace of the congregation but their inspiration with the truth of things so all the world can be told the truth on the authority of God. I believe not in the back and forth of the words, but in the strength of Abraham, Isaac, Joseph and Jacob. I am tortured every moment to pretend to be a Christian, but what else can I do in order to make a living? And the Jews who remain Jews have betrayed their own people in the meantime. And why is there so much confusion? The words themselves of the story of the truth surely do not matter; for I can retell the same story in any number of ways and in diverse languages. It is the sense of things that must be conveyed. I do admit that the words themselves are powerful and remind us... At this, finally, Alfonso grew silent. You realize, of course, he said, that I am a widower. Do you think a man chooses to live alone in his age, with no company but books? Only

your senseless, dry rabbis would do such a thing.

It was with these words that I first gained a knowledge of the discord and strife that was contained within the unity of our people, my son. And surely in Alfonso's words you have noticed the revelation, the appearance of which I have concealed for so long. For indeed, it was the work of Maimonides which lay there before me, in disconnected pages, in the hands of a stranger. It is no surprise to find that men seek companionship, for what does man need more than a witness, that is, a comforting eye, a place of safe-keeping in one whose thoughts and life entirely coincide with one's own, one who replaces the companionship of one's own thoughts with the comfort of an image and body to worship and touch, someone to be at one's side, to take in one's words and remember them, to be pushed along by the force of another and push just the same. It is this that some men find in women, in brothers, in friends, and still others find a witness in God. And finally there are some who, it seems to me, are somewhat rarer to find, although I cannot be sure of anything, who find companionship in the words of another; indeed, I have already drawn attention to the books of prayer that the Christians page into dust, but I myself find my memory and spirit sustained by my two chapters of Maimonides, which I keep with me at all times, folded in a pocket and meditated over, in an attempt to understand him and in doing so, discover my place and indeed, even your place, my son, in this world of God. For I cannot help but feel as if Maimonides were taking some form before me as I read his words, as if the reading of the text were causing the shadow of an impression in my mind of a distant figure, a form constructed like a house in which dwells his soul. And it is not that I feel Maimonides before me, crouching on the table, but only some inkling of the man himself and his likeness to me, only obscured, not by deception and the incapability of words, but rather the screen of truth

itself, which removes words from the simple telling of a story or an exchange of facts and causes them to be tools of construction, of the creation in the shadow of an impression the world of truth, which reflects the truth. It is the truth spoken by Maimonides that obscures him; it is the truth we seek, in any case, the answer to the mystery of the world, the truth we seek above all in our dealing with words, as if words would be actions; and indeed, it is this matter that is above all close to me. For in reading, we seek nothing less than truth; in writing, we hope to attain the same; for wisdom is offered to all, but it is only for the wise. It is a great responsibility to be continually writing to you, my son, to have come so far in pages; and yet, nothing less than that responsibility is the single thing that could make me shy away from the page itself. I have long written more than I have ever read; nothing drives me on more than the pleasure of telling a story which gives me the chance, my son, not to share myself, although it seems often that that is what I do, but rather to let myself disappear for a moment, to let the blank page be a witness, to silence the scattered thoughts in my head, and confine my fancy to the bounds of the two sides of the page, a small vertical portion, indeed, of the world. There is a lack of loneliness in the lack of the self; there is no companionship so great as when one has even disappeared into the well of creation—or rather, the fountain which, each time one witnesses it, from moment to moment, is continuously renewed and surprising, and indeed, makes one doubt the very source of the waters which catch the sunlight as they fall. One never feels so lonely as when one is deficient in oneself; and we seek always either the long standing still or else the height of passion. In writing this letter to you, my son, I have felt both of these things in alternation and writing it brings respite from the troubles in my life, although my greatest trouble now is nothing other than the day on which I write nothing to you, which is a day that is enveloped by the rest, from which my

spirit recoils, and which draws me inward, my fancy bottled up. Then there is no grace or forgiving in my spirit and I can only lie beside your mother, face in the pillow, unable to calm her or to touch her. I can only guess that such a feeling is part of my nature. So here I have returned a little to the present, my son. And perhaps I can tell my story even faster now, for the story that follows Alfonso's revelation follows from the events which came before it in a long chain of events, each determined by the last. For I wish to take you up to the present; indeed, I have some wisdom to give you, my son: I am going to try to impart to you the secret of living, the great secret which I have discovered. And you will understand nothing of what I have to tell you unless you have understood all that has come before. There is no more direct way of doing things than writing; for one is only one word away from the truth itself. For myself, I know no other way to come so directly to satisfaction.

I take you back now, for such is my power, to the moment when Alfonso had just finished his speech. Alfonso had a way of looking at a person with great and curious intensity. At that moment, he was staring past me with a face which communicated to me that he was glad of having spoken all this to me; indeed, he had been quite eloquent and noted it himself. Then there came a shout from the street and Alfonso walked over to the window. No one was outside; just then, someone knocked on the door. A man entered, somewhat short, childlike, but with a deep voice which he barely used. I did not feel in danger of anything, even after such a long and terrible day; indeed, I had barely anything to eat and wanted very much to relieve myself at that moment, and I had been about to bring this up, when the man stepped forward quickly from the door, baring a knife. I have often stayed awake at night wondering how I would react if such a thing were to happen to me. In any case, the man quickly put the knife away, having only pulled

it out for dramatic effect, and glaring at Alfonso with chin raised, looked at him as if to discipline him, and explained that what he had done was wrong—for indeed, this man had found Alfonso speaking to his daughter, who knows what about—I asked Alfonso later and he had no idea what they talked about, an answer I have gotten from more than a few people and which will eternally baffle me, for it takes so much effort for me to speak to anyone privately that to speak and retain no memory of it would be impossible. In any case, this man's daughter had disappeared; her father suspected the brothels, and I wanted to say that it was interesting to me that chastity and flagrancy were so close akin to one another, and indeed, in raising you, my son, I wonder which I pushed you towards, for I myself, as a child, despised it when adults would speak to me about women, for I would grow embarrassed for myself on their behalf, so that it always seemed out of place to speak of such things with me, in fact, so much so that I gave off the impression of being somewhat reserved and cold, despite by ebullience as a child. And, raising you, I did not think I ever spoke of adult matters with you, besides those thoughts which came to be naturally, for I never felt any need to hold anything in my head from you. Indeed, I think this letter is the first time I have been completely frank to you. I cannot say what effect this had on you. For I often wonder at those who chuckle over women with their children, who learn to desire them well before any such desire would have occurred naturally. The same goes for those who turn women into demons from infancy. There is nothing of greater importance, it seems to me, than those things which get confused with human nature. For no child ever did anything but that which seemed to be right to him or her, and no child ever snuck about that was not oppressed, for they know nothing but their own feelings and the rule of their parents. Anyway, here was this girl's father come to berate Alfonso, whom, in any case, he suspected of being a Jew. It was at this

time, I later learned, that everything started to go wrong. As I lay there on the bed I felt as if I were watching the world from behind a blanket, concealed in all respects except for my eyes. People came and went from Alfonso's room as if it were the world itself, and men were born and then died, came and went, traversing from door to window to door, and only I remained; for old Jacobo could not help Ezequiel whom one of his old enemies, a man whose boredom had lead him into evil, had seen associating with the old rabbis, nor did the rabbis have any special love for the man who deceived them, and they laughed at him from their window, shouting in anger, while Ezequiel's enemy shouted Jew from the streets, and the rabbis fled the call. The rabbis were old friends of Jacobo's, of course, for how else did Ezequiel get involved, and Jacobo owed them a great deal of money which he had spent buying privileges from the Seville government, who hated him in turn, and the riot outside the house of the old rabbis gave them an excellent opportunity; and although eventually Jacobo got his privileges, he had to look on helplessly as a great deal of kind and generous people were torched. But of course, he might have said, everyone has a layer of evil in them, everyone has an emptiness in their eyes, just as everyone loves to drink, and although Ezequiel later told me that Jacobo had great admiration for my humility in front of the rabbis, he could do nothing but send Ezequiel away on a ship back to Genoa, and distance himself from the fleeing rabbis at once. All this was pieced together by me, a poor compiler in any case, due to a feeling of great anxiety in asking anyone the right questions. Ezequiel had denounced Alfonso to the riot before Jacobo's men surrounded him and spirited him away as Rebka cried, and so Alfonso fled as they came rushing down the slanted streets of Seville, and I was left alone in the room, as elsewhere Jacobo found his own Genoese rebelling against such an old Jew as he. It all gave everyone such a great degree of definition to

act in such a way that they were all so clearly connected with each other and events as happens when people are connected by something and come to believe that their actions are effectual. Of course, our actions only have effects by the everyday illusion of everyone's collective prayers; for who has not felt wonder, days later, at hearing of a prominent man's death miles away, and has thought, And Lord, he died only just as I was rising from my bed. In that same way, when everyone involved came to believe their actions were happened precisely at that moment in time when every action that could occur, did occur, it was at that moment precisely that the riot erupted, and the sheer love of action led many to the streets, for only rarely does anyone feel as if their lives have any significance to others, and only rarely does the world seem to change at all. But in such a moment there is never a thought of the God of this world, but the world itself and its people—for God only matters in moments of personal excitement, and everything else is worldliness, although it is the great triumph of man's existence on earth to combine the two in the great communities of God, in which, at the definite hour, a man can grow very excited at the thought of an entire world praying along with him. In any case, I became very aware of the emptiness in Alfonso's room, felt my body expanding to fill the entire space of it, and it was now, with inconceivable events and people meeting and collapsing against each another, that I felt as if each of my own moments were of particular significance, as I made up my mind that Seville was going to get me killed, because I was nothing but a child, because I had no idea what was happening, because I knew absolutely nothing, because Rebka was off with Ezequiel, because to be alone is the hardest thing for then one is left alone with oneself, a self who so often fails itself, and although one's fear of others is more than enough to keep one inside, nevertheless man has devised the mystery of traveling and the mystery of ignorance of the world abroad in

order to catch and renew every dissatisfaction as it falls from the eyes of every frustrated man and woman. In any case, my son, you will have no trouble understanding me when I tell you that the great single thing that I did in the time that was given to me was to steal two pages of Maimonides from the table where they lay, against the angled desk, the last two pages that Alfonso had copied, for one seemed not nearly enough and more than two, I feared, would inconvenience Alfonso, as well as be more difficult to conceal. It was in this way that I stole my own small part of the truth, leaving the rest of it as I flew down the stairs to find Rebka.

Of course, it was not difficult to find her; indeed, never in my life have I ever had the chance to be heroic. She was waiting outside the door for me. I could tell you that we left with a mob on our heels, but that was not the case. We simply left, not a single soul in the crowd knowing us for who we were as they rushed down the street. We gave a few half-hearted jeers as they surrounded us and I pointed out Alfonso's window to them, which pleased them very much, until a woman emerged from the building to yell at them and Rebka and I made our escape, she with her face incredibly serious and strained, although she was in no danger, but rather as if she felt the situation demanded seriousness and that, in any case, it was what I wanted to see her express now. We argued about this as we exited the city. I felt no regret at leaving. Except perhaps for Rebka and you, my son, I feel no real attachment to anyone; each person seems connected to me only by place and circumstance and, once removed from that circumstance, they are removed from my mind. For I have never enjoyed the company of others, but only the accomplishments of the self. As we started down the road out of the city, I said to Rebka, Well, that was quite an adventure. She grunted. No one will believe a single thing when we get back home. She ignored me. We had a long way ahead of us, granted, but that was no reason to be

grumpy, I thought. I move lightly over our journey home. On our way, we slept in the homes of hospitable people, willing at any moment to open their homes to two travelers getting on in years. It pleased me very much to be thought of in that way.

During daylight, we walked as much as we could. Rebka was mostly silent, except when pressed by a kiss; meanwhile, I tried to teach myself to sing. Thankfully, it was often sunny. Late one night, in the home of a small family, somewhere, we hoped, in the right direction, after we had enjoyed a small, but filling dinner, and told a number of stories about our time in Seville—for no storyteller is better than the one who has surveyed the action from a distance—Rebka and I settled down for the night and I finally decided to speak my mind to her, for indeed, much had been on the tip of my tongue. My son, you might accuse me of neglecting my duty as a husband, but you will forgive me, I am sure. For this was the case: it was only in the safety of a room at night that I felt I could let the two pages of Maimonides emerge from the fabric in which I concealed them and for many nights I puzzled over them, my fingers circling in and out of the designs on the page, whispering nonsense to myself. But on this night, after Rebka had recoiled from me, I decided to speak to her about what I had stolen.

It was at this time that she confessed that Ezequiel had told her that he loved her, which was not entirely unexpected. As I asked her questions in order to draw out the truth of the matter concerning the time they spent together, which she denied was in any way less than innocent, it became very clear in my mind that no matter how long I intended to question Rebka, she would never tell me the truth; for what she saw in Ezequiel was entirely different from what she saw in me. She loved and respected me, but neither did she understand me; she, on the other hand, felt comfortable and intelligent near Ezequiel, and although her love for me surely came first, there

was no way she could ever be content with either of us, for she was truly herself to neither of us, but only the self she felt she could give us. What is worse is that although I had lived with her so long that I had gotten used to her mannerisms, her manner of speaking became very apparent to me such that I realized that she could speak no innocent word guiltlessly, for every word was chosen specifically for the speaker in accordance with her nature; in this way, she could never escape the trap of whoever it was that she happened to be speaking to, and she would be eternally guilty before the eyes of her interrogators, not for any crime, but for the guilt of not being the woman whom that person needed, whatever she thought that was. A tremble entered her voice, I realized, and it grew into nearly a whine; one had the sense that no matter how many times she would be asked to explain herself, no explanation would ever be the same; for in that case one would be asking her to explain not just her actions, but her very nature, and one can ask no one to do such a thing. Therefore, she felt inadequate and ashamed at the very moment that she felt certain in her entitlement to love, for she hungered to be held and told the things that she thought would make her happy. I could see her in a way I was unable to see her at the time, when we both were young and I had seen her at one of the village dances, which were never so exciting as everyone claimed, and which only led into those things which caused excitement. At the urging of her circle of friends, she had rejected propriety. Now I cannot escape seeing the image in my head of her heart submerged in a pool of poison, flailing, attempting, failing to beat in a regular meter, to survive the poison which sluiced over it, making her arms and legs dumb and her eyes dead, eyes which I could never find any soul in at that moment; no doubt everyone is in love with the same poison, and in the same way, I am tied to her, although I have never been able to see beyond her fears and her trembling and her deceptions and her foolishness to entirely

give myself over to her, to be inside her in the same way that above all I wish to inhabit God. I had married the first woman I had ever really known; we knew nothing and could do nothing in crisis but to revert to that which came before: we both became children again and again and felt the inadequacies and pains of childhood. Aspects of our soul return to us in such moments, aspects which we have forgotten and changed and revised, but not let go entirely, circumstances having not forced us to face them. Nothing in my mind burdens it in regard to Rebka more than the single fact that she remembers nothing of the night we first kissed, none of the jokes, none of the smiles, nothing of my heart which I lent to her. Since then there has only been unevenness between us, as if our memories plumb different depths, and as if we have existed in two different worlds of time, following two different suns as they spiral hopelessly away into the sky. Nothing has ever made me feel so alone.

What she told me that night is not something you need to know, my son; rather the moment's significance lies in the pattern it represents. For doubt me not, I love your mother. Nothing pleased me more to embrace her when she was pregnant, from behind, wrapping my arms around her, to lie beside her as something entirely God given and naturally occurring along with a feeling that no amount of excitement can cause, but only acting in accordance with the higher law of the world, a feeling warm and inexplicably right in the way nothing else is. But never has night ended and morning come without doubt settling on our shoulders and although your mother and I lean on each other to live in this world, nevertheless I know that nothing ended in our lives when we came to the decision of marriage, hungering after that good feeling. We talked about things of that nature that night, and she was particularly concerned that I would not speak so much as I used to. I showed her the manuscript I had stolen, and in doing so, I

became very excited and even brushed her off when she bent in to kiss me, so intent I was in explaining the significance of the two pages, for I felt a kind of rage that Rebka could not sense the power that lay behind the threshold at which we now stood. Therefore, for much of the rest of the trip we fell into a kind of silence, in which both of us sang; for we lacked words to feel each other so instead we made sounds, like animals, like singers, as we traveled.

We had been heading north, when we came to our small town. I recall as we entered, our clothes not a little bit dusty, with scarves covering our faces, a few people who happened to be outside came to stare at us. Even behind her scarf, Rebka's long, now lank, hair blew in the wind, when the wind came, and of course, it was somewhat of a surprise to see such a woman, getting on in age—and yet, as I judged, beautiful as a young woman—appearing to have traveled what must have been a very great distance. As we approached, the familiar layout of houses, with the road and the grass by the side of it and all the things, even the trees themselves seemed exactly as they had been, only farther away. It took nearly a day for my eyes to cross that distance which the rest of me had already crossed; then things became very vivid, for it happened around sunset. At that moment, the dome of the sky, which is a special, great dome, admitted of no comparison in its expansiveness, and burning light fell away from Rebka and I standing there in the middle to the sides of the earth, the clouds elongated and sucked to either side, leaving toothed trails which connected tree to tree and black to black with strings of grey and gold. When we returned home, my son, we found bugs infesting the flour, dust on the floor, our extended family worried about us, all these things, and indeed, we set straight away to recover the orderliness of our house, such as it was, and it was at this point our house took the form which I described for you so long ago at the beginning of this letter, which was written, it seems to me, in a different time and place,

one which I can barely bring to mind, for even I have changed very much in the long course of writing this letter to you, a letter it is unlikely you will ever receive, but which in the end, I must save for you, in case you return home; for to my knowledge, you are nowhere, my son—you have disappeared into the world like nearly everything else and as I write this I know that no messenger could ever find you. My only hope is that one day you will return, fresh-faced like a boy, young as you were when you had long hair and barely came up to my chest, and come here to find this letter waiting for you, whether your parents are here or not, for this letter must tell you everything there is to know; for, if anything, I have proved that face to face, I can communicate nothing to you, and only the voice in the dark, the light on the page can hope to give you anything of value in regard to how to live your life. One must be prepared for when one must act.

It came to pass such that although Rebka prepared everything in our house for baking, I could bring myself to do no such thing, for it seemed to me that something essentially important lay before me in the manuscript pages and everything else was inconsequential, a layer to peel away before getting to the core of the truth, and that which I needed above all else was the ability to deal directly with matters as they were. So, I was met by a number of family members, cousins, for example, who came to me to learn about our time away, to help out, to rouse me from wherever I happened to be lying. Finally, in order to avoid their questions, I took to walking around the village in such a way that I seemed busy enough to avoid being stopped; it was in this way, however, that I made the better acquaintance of my nephew who was named Tabor. I found him as I was wandering around town one day. At that time, Tabor had just escaped from the room where his father labored to teach him Torah and was bouncing against the side of a barn,

chirping, leaping from here and there, with the simple joy of motion, and the unthinkingness which comes from such intent actions, and the feeling of wind against one's cheek and the deep sound that only the throat can give the head. I watched him for while until finally, tired out, Tabor flung himself onto the grass and lay there breathing. I walked over slowly, bent to one knee, and then stretched out beside him. You probably have a headache, I said to him. Nope, he replied. I am your uncle, you know, I said, though at the time, I only suspected that. Tabor acknowledged this. I asked him what he was doing out here and he explained to me the necessity of escaping the torture of his father's gaze. I realized then that this child was on the verge of learning everything I wished to know, all the knowledge which was invisibly around me, in the minds of the learned, and which I would be too ashamed to ask them to teach me, such an old man—for who did not but think I was the most learned in my small village, so arrogant had I been, and, further, where could one hope to start when the occasion arrives so late? I realized then too that throughout one's life the questions that need answers very rarely alter, but only one's feelings towards them: in what sort of voice would Tabor read in his old age? The secret lies not in the answers to the questions, or even the questions themselves, but rather the different people asking them; every question implies a questioner who has lived a life among other people. One can accept the teachings of God, only to learn from them later; one's knowledge may be great and yet if we cannot leave behind our childish sources of pleasure and desires, then in answer we will find nothing but division and dissatisfaction. *To leave behind* means nothing more than it sounds, to set aside old thoughts as if on the other side of the crest of a hill just traversed, and to walk on without them, until the world provides new thoughts to take their place; that is not to say that old thoughts ever disappear, for indeed, they remain always below the crest

of the hill once passed. I therefore took the opportunity as it was presented to me.

Tabor, I said to my nephew, you know how to read, is that not true? Of course, I know how to read, Tabor said, for indeed, he was proud of that accomplishment at least. In that case, do you wish to help me, Tabor? I said. Do what? he asked. I want you to teach me how to read, I said, wincing. Tabor raised himself and sat cross-legged next to me. He looked surprised. You do not know how to read? Well, do not let everybody know, I said, putting a hand on his shoulder and pushing him back to the ground. His disbelief was damning to me. But my cousins always—Tabor began, but I cut him off. Let me put it this way, Tabor, for perhaps I spoke too soon; of course, I know how to read myself, but what I am really interested in is how well you can read. Would you mind if you pretended to teach me how to read, so I might see how well you can do it? For one day, you will have to teach your own sons the ways of the Torah, and besides, I have not chosen you for no particular reason, you know. Tabor was silent. I took a breath and thought of my two pages from Maimonides. For, indeed, I said then to Tabor, I know a very great secret, which once you have helped me, I will let you know. What is the secret? Tabor could not help exclaiming, although I was sure he had been listening to what I had just said. I am not going to tell you that just yet, Tabor, I said. What is the secret about? Can you tell me about the secret? I said, That would be very similar to telling you what the secret is, but I can tell you what the secret is not: it is not like anything you have ever heard before. This set Tabor in a mood of great curiosity and excitement; I could feel him beside me, moving his fingers in a manner that implied great concentration. He stretched his legs out and sprung up, saying, Fine, well, can we do it now, please? I smiled happily and lifting my arm, pulled him back down to the grass again. Calm down, Tabor, I said, laughing to myself. First of all, I want to ask you if you know anything

about the scholar Maimonides, I said. No. Anything about the Jews of Seville? No. Of Barcelona? No. But you do know how to read Spanish? Yes, I know how to read the Hebrew script and I know how to do the Latin script as well, obviously, though we go over that much less. This is stupid. When can I know the secret? You are probably just making things up. I am not, Tabor, in fact, I learned the secret in Seville, from which I have only just returned, and that is what I said to him.

It was in this way that I found a teacher. Rather than wander outside, searching in the clouds for the source of my feelings, I spent the hours of the early morning before the first bells in seclusion with Tabor, for then was the only time that we might not be bothered; and indeed, no part of the day is more beautiful than that, although we principally spent it indoors. I invited him into my house, which was a little way from town, and we paid Tabor well with sweetened bread for breakfast and provided him with the attention deserving of a friend, for he often found himself abandoned by the caprice of the children his age. In this way, I began my studies. With what paper I could obtain cheaply, Tabor undertook to write out each letter of the alphabet, showing me each one and describing the function of the letter, for example, which sound it made. Pausing over each letter, I thought of a word which began with such a sound; for example, one of the first words I understood was my own name, Baruch, for as we came to the *b* on the list and Tabor spoke the sound such a letter made, I thought of my own name, and Tabor wrote it out for me and after he left, I studied it deeply, trying to link the sounds with the letters, at first scanning it slowly from left to right, saying the word aloud and trying to match the flow of my voice to the distance my eyes traveled on the page, but soon I had to work in fits and starts, jerking from letter to letter, saying each sound until my own name escaped me without my noticing it; for

indeed, the hardest thing was not to speak the word which I knew was written there, but to let the marks on the page speak for themselves, although I soon found that the more words with which I was familiar, the faster I was able to comprehend the messages written on the page in Tabor's sloppy hand. Nevertheless, until I understood how the long word was constructed on the page, I felt dissatisfied with my own work. Of course, I was often distracted by the concerns of my body, as I attempted to concentrate; but never had I felt such a driving force in my life, such a will to complete anything, devoid of distractions, and accompanied by a feeling of righteousness that admitted nothing less than the word of the truth. For I was absolutely certain that these very forward steps I was now taking would lead me to the top of the great mountain of feeling which I had always been attempting to ascend. And most remarkably, I think, my son, to me, was the fact that whereas before when I had been distracted from a task, by the advances of your mother or by the inflexibility and ill-luck that so often accompanies our endeavors in the world, I would often grow sour-minded, being distracted from a task which I had by necessity, by failure, left unfinished, now I was gracious and kind when distracted by the soft kiss of your mother, for I knew that my task was sound and the steps to complete it were designated for me and that I could complete it at my leisure, though no part of me wished to delay, except for the occasional stirrings of my blood, which in any case lent me a great deal of strength and love. Perhaps because I put so much of my energy into my task, leaving Rebka to handle the work of both of us, having convinced her somehow with my intentness to give me leave from the working world, I very soon was able to read, with considerably slowness, but sufficient accuracy most of the messages that Tabor wrote to me. *I am very hungry*, he would write or perhaps, *Look behind you*, at which I would turn around and see Rebka covered in flour and having fallen on her bottom to

the floor. Perhaps our laughter upset her, but she seemed to laugh at herself and indeed, once Tabor was gone, I felt so certain in myself that for the first time in a long time I let myself into her with absolutely no regrets.

Tabor, I think, was a good teacher, even a natural one. He would write out sentences for me with care and read them to me, and he possessed a remarkable ability to anticipate my concerns and to meet them head on. That said, I would only try to read the sentences he wrote out for me after he left and then slowly to myself. Meanwhile, he had to return home early in the day to begin his real studies, in Hebrew with his father, who, while not a rabbi, was a man learned in some respects and who wished his son to be a rabbi, or rather to set before his son a certain example of a scholar and let Tabor decide for himself that which he wished to be. Tabor himself acknowledged that his father wished him to be a scholar, but he himself questioned the significance of the immense labor undertaken in the quiet and dark of the study. Because he himself was not stricken with questions, the answers apparent to him in his experience, he did not value the studies themselves. Nevertheless he very much enjoyed reading the stories retold in the texts, many of which he told to me in turn; many of them concerned the rabbis his father often consulted in the Talmud, or of the biblical figures whose names were familiar, but distant to me. Indeed, it seemed to me that he was impervious to the doubts which so often lashed at me and tied my feet; his feet moved so quickly that even caught up in his own movement he could find easily the peace that I myself was looking for. His own lack of knowledge was an asset to him, for he was then mildly curious about everything and managed to fill the days of his childhood with exploration when he was not confined to work or his books. The days for him, it seemed, did not run together, but were separated by the multitude of his wants, for new toys, for

a new house, for someone new to play with; his changing desires gave shape and form to each day so that he was able to concentrate on bringing to pass his present desire, dodging his many obligations, and therefore fall asleep often excited at the prospect of another day which was sure to bring those things he wished for above all. No amount of disappointment seemed to crush his spirit. Looking back I find in my memory that you, my son, were possessed of a similar disposition; at the time, your seeming thoughtlessness and peace of mind and simple rages came to infuriate me, so uneasy I was with everything I knew and possessed. But with Tabor, in the new mood of my old days, I gained respect for the life of the child. I wonder, my son, if you ever outgrew yourself; if you grew into an adult living simply for the pleasure of motion or if you too were beset by the slowness of doubts, or if you found another way, which I myself once had found, before my ignorance became too apparent and too grating, a joy in the stasis of pleasure granted to us in our nature, by the comfort of the order of things.

At night, I would sit up in bed and carefully unfold the two pages and lay them gently beside the paper on which Tabor had written out the alphabet. Slowly, I would work, tackling each letter as it came, looking at Tabor's sheet to aid my memory, for seeing the letters there often brought the sound to mind even after they had seemed to disappear from inside me. Nevertheless it was slow going. I began with the first words on the page, noticing only when I came upon the period that my page would forever start in mid sentence. *The investigation of this subject, which is almost too subtle for our understanding...* it said, and when I came to the end of it I nearly panicked, a prickling leapt down one side of my head and I felt it spread over my entire body. I took up a pen that Tabor had given me and copied the sentence out, my whole arm rigid in concentration, trying to duplicate the marks on the page that meant *The investigation of*

*this subject, which is almost too subtle for our understanding...* At the time I thought, which subject must the text refer to but the ultimate subject? And the word that almost made me weep was *almost* for in that word was an affirmation of my own possibility to understand, for indeed, Maimonides used *our* and included all who read his text in his words. The text went on, ... *current expressions employed in describing it, for these are the great source of error.* This gave great speed to my pen, for I felt along with Maimonides that distaste, if not rage, at the ordinary expressions, for I had never heard anything said in my presence that had illuminated the true workings of the world to me, and indeed, I felt as if I were drowning in the river of error which had sprung from the *great source* he mentions. I then fell asleep in a daze, unsure even if what I had decoded was a part of my dreams.

The next morning, however, something had changed. It was as if I had entirely lost my ability to read; of course, when I looked back at the page on which Tabor had made his marks, remembering the various words that he had put there, *father, beard, legs*, I was able to murmur the words to myself, and even go so far as to analyze their construction, working the words over carefully, rounding each letter in my mouth. But when, in excitement, I turned again to Maimonides, a strange thing occurred. I again attempted to read the words that I had read the previous night, but although I knew the sense of what they said, I could no longer remember the words themselves and I found myself unable, as hard as I tried, to successfully sound out there words. I was always getting sounds wrong, in the wrong order; each word was a struggle to complete and by the time the last sound escaped my mouth I had entirely forgotten the beginning of the word; indeed, it was as if my confusion were so complete that I was seeing nothing but what was straight in front of me, a fog of incomplete and broken words to either side, speaking

with the creak of a wheel, my entire self given over to this painful process, distracted by a combination of the half-memory of the word I was attempting to sound out and the inaccuracy of my own tongue to form the words I knew and heard in my head which stood there in front of me in a very obvious way. Indeed, only after I had gotten to the end of the sentence then, in relief, I would return to the beginning, eager to hear the music of the words come smoothly and easily. But again the task was impossible and so much doubt set in that I lost all hope, although in its place gained a stubbornness and determination that heated my face and brought sweat all over my body. My face was wracked by a grimace, which I covered with both hands in order to hide it from Rebka, who was in the room, but not looking at me thankfully; then, those same hands were all that stopped a moan from escaping me; soon, my hands were working their way over my face, and I felt such a feverish energy in my body! I wished it above all to escape through my eyes and mouth but it seemed only to cycle back and forth inside me, indeed, seemed to be trying to escape from my skin for I was seized by an unbearable itching; it felt as if my entire face and arms, every exposed part were breaking out in some kind of rash; every strand of hair that brushed against my head tortured me and soon even my back was twitching and seizing in a way that was unbearable and I wished to do nothing but ball my hands into fists and fall onto the floor, my teeth and gums exposed, curling into a ball, rubbing everything sharply against the floor. Indeed, it was with great care that I stood up slowly, shaking and walked to the window, scratching my head furiously so that Rebka looked over with concern about lice. I kissed her and she distracted me for a moment, but she was busy with the bread, and then my frustration slowly melted away into curiosity and I sat down again with the paper. I considered simply moving onto the next sentence, but the fear of that dark, unknown territory stopped me, and further I felt I

could make no forward step until I was sure of the ground underneath each step that came before it. So again, I tackled the sentence... *The investigation*... I remember it now, the very sentence, so clearly. The words did not yield to me, each remained incomprehensible except for the brief moment in which my concentration was able to dislodge the mountain that concealed the sound from me, only to be locked again and opaque moments later. I was unable to understand my difficulty and I felt a rage like I had never felt before; I was tender all over from scratching my body, and I could feel a moist spot on my neck were my fingernail had nicked myself. I remember it very clearly that I sprang up from my chair and stood there against the wall breathing, and then unable to stand still a moment longer, I fled the house, indeed, fled is the only word to describe the intensity of my flight, for only the constant movement and the activity of the wind against me was able to distract me from the awful itching that convulsed my entire body. I simply ran in a direction, seeking nothing in particular except a respite from the itching, an answer to my inability to read these words when so many other words came so clearly to me, so easily under Tabor's tutelage. I felt so heated that soon I stripped bare to nothing, hiding my clothes by a tree near the edge of the nearby forest and I lumbered through the woods, as fast as I could which was not fast at all, until I came to my destination, the one place I could think of then, a small spring that lay hidden in the woods. There the water was intensely hot near the rocks by the shore, but the water was cool towards the other end of the small spring, near a cliff that divided the forest, and from which descended a waterfall from a considerable height. The water there was freezing and where the two waters met in the spring, there was a great outrushing of steam which coated the plants there and made all sorts of strange plants appear. I was not so far gone that I could not test the waters on the hot side with a foot; when I did so, my

foot came up red and although it was painful it did give me relief from my itching. When visitors came to the spring, they most often swam near the center of the spring where the two waters met; the currents there were strong, but not swift and there was not much danger of being cast to either side and the movement of the water was pleasant. I leapt in there, letting my feet scrape against the hard bottom of the water, strangely eager for pain, and with both hands tried to bring boiling water towards me, uncaring where I drifted, for I was completely blinded by the billows of steam. I could see nothing, only feel the tiny fingers of water against my face as I tried to breathe the cloudy air. It was not enough. Under the water I took to scratching myself, my legs, my thighs, my back as best I could; finally, unable to wait any longer, I lunged towards the freezing side, standing on the shallow part of the spring there and walked directly under the waterfall. Instantly, I was crushed and I fell hard against the rock, saved barely by my hands underneath me. I slowly fought against the water, getting up onto my knees, then rising slowly until I was standing, my knees creaking, and then lifted my face to the source of the falling water. It was then, with the immense battering of the water, and the roar in my ears, and the dizziness I felt from being unable to breathe except barely through my nose that finally the itching abated, as if the water were stripping off layer by layer, the sweat and rash and skin and finally, whatever it was that kept all myself inside me and it came out through my pores instead of my eyes and mouth. Unable to stand it any longer, I stumbled out of the waterfall and crashed into the shore. I sat there, on a log, for a while, my knees knocking against each other and my shoulders turned inward in defeat. And then, with agonizing abruptness, as soon as I thought of the task that still lay ahead of me, the itching returned, radiating out from my armpits and feeling as if I had eaten a terrible, terrible meal, I tried to burp, but only bile came up. I felt as if bugs

from the log were beginning to crawl over me, and then I turned back through the woods, returned to the place I left my clothes and put them on again, pulling them sharply against my skin, practically hitting myself in rage. I went home, weak, wet and ready to cry. I found myself again sitting in front of Maimonides. Then I was at a loss, kneading bread with Rebka, insensitive to her arms around me, unable to feel her near me, as if each and every thing, every person and event had come at exactly the wrong time. I was seized by this feeling of wrongness, as I shoved bread into the oven, moving in despair, furious at the pointlessness of my movements until finally, Rebka spread flour on the table, causing it to rise into the air, and I caught it with my nose and was wracked by an immense sneeze that I wiped out all feeling from my entire body. When it was over, I looked up, wide eyed, at Rebka who was staring at me. Then the itching was gone as was the bile in my stomach. It was as if all the staleness and insensibility that had confined me was gone. I even burped, somewhat painfully, and then embraced Rebka, my desire for her having returned with my sanity.

Then I dropped down to the floor and crawled under the table, pretending the discomfort this brought my legs did not exist. I grabbed Rebka's dress and held onto her leg. How are you this morning, Rebka? I asked her. Well, she answered, nudging me with her foot. Where have you been, she asked. I went for a walk in the woods, trying to think over my two pages... Have you read them yet, Rebka asked. No, I answered, unhappy with the question. Rebka bent down towards me. I thought she was trying to kiss me again and my heart sunk, for I had a lot to think about and just then I had become fixated on the opening of the window and perhaps she thought I was sad again. When she got close to my neck, she asked, Why are you down there, Baruch? She said it too loudly. My back, it feels better against the floor. You know, she said, that Tabor is here

waiting for you. I lifted my head. Of course, behind us stood Tabor, having come here for our morning lesson. His hair was disheveled and he had half a roll clutched in his hand. He was staring at me. Tabor! I said somewhat happily, How are you this morning? Well, he answered, as I tried to get up, feeling as though I could never really speak seriously to Tabor again. In any case, I wanted to explain to Rebka thoughts I had about her, but of course then I had to be silent. Anyway, all this is not very important. Tabor and I continued our lesson, knocking our two heads together in the side of the room where Rebka and I slept, his legs swinging from the chair and my one leg asleep and the other bouncing. After a while, sometimes we took our lessons outside on the wet grass. Occasionally, I would take him up at dawn, if he was unable to sleep that night, and explain the way the sun rose to him and crossed the great dome of the sky. I would tell him, then, parts of my secret and as I spoke, he would grow somewhat silent and contemplative. *God's existence is absolute*, I said to him, for, I said, *we comprehend only the fact that He exists, not His essence*. We only know, Tabor, this world we live in and one simple fact: that this is not all there is; that there is much undiscovered, that there is something concealed, something we have not yet comprehended, that standing in one place, here for example, we see only so much, but as soon as we take a step, we come closer to the revelation which shakes us with feeling. For God is not known; he is the unknown; and just as there exists your future somewhere on this earth, God exists as a mystery, a secret, which looms over us, there but impossible to penetrate. I felt very comfortable with Tabor for I never lacked anything to ask him, feeling no obligation to ask any particular questions as I might to an adult, worrying about what I should or ought to know already and about what was appropriate to ask; for I simply could ask Tabor anything and he would respond to the best of his ability. Of course, you know by now, my son, that eventually I

was able to master the art of reading. But, indeed, it was a monumental task; for the sounds refused to come, and moreover, my eyes refused to track the words on the page and they seemed to slide off the letters, unable to keep the letters I was to pronounce in focus. More often than not, I would find myself staring at the wrong word, or perhaps a word which looked like a different word; but in any case, soon the words themselves became perceptible to me and no longer was the task of bringing each letter to life like casting light on the sand of the parted Red Sea. Once I had learned a sentence, I would have it on my lips every moment of the day. *He is one but does not possess the attribute of unity*, for example; and as I said it the sound of the words became inflected each time I said it, perhaps influenced by the amount of sunlight or the room I was in. Tabor, you know, I would say to him in the morning *we can obtain to knowledge of the essence of the heavens*, Maimonides tells us; we know its form as a revolving substance of several spheres, but of the matter that makes it up, we can only use *negative properties*, for the heavens are so remote from us, we can have no direct knowledge of them and we see only how different and unlike they are from the world of the earth and suppose only the ways in which they are different or are *not*. This is the great lesson of Maimonides it seems to me, Tabor; all this I have gained from reading. Indeed, you, my son, have learned as much as I know, I think, in the course of this letter, for I have done nothing less than changed all my views of the world; it is for this reason that I have taken to carrying my two chapters of Maimonides with me wherever I go, for nothing gives me the feeling of being carried aloft more than to read a part of the text in a moment of confusion. I can let the cluttering of knowledge disappear and my concentration return to the puzzle of his words. For these two papers for me are a present truth and a constant companion. And I think, my son, you will learn that to be alone is not enough; for if one does not

have a partner in life, there is nevertheless a desire to imbue something in the world with a self, to have a single object which can be handled and which can *be* everything, and my son, perhaps, above all, this is the one thing which this text serves me to do, that is, this letter, if you ever read it; for I have a desire above all to use words to uncover the truth I have discovered of the world and of people, those things which exist and which I have captured here; for there is no higher pursuit than to create a world, to imbue something with a self; I have done nothing but this I see my entire life; from the houses I built out of twigs as a child, to the house I built carefully for Rebka and me, to the steps I take every morning; everything has this single goal, to create something which is organized and bears the mark of me as its author, truth unto itself, which in its turn may impart knowledge of the way the world works, that world which pushes against one at every turn and enters into even the moments when one stands alone in the dark with a woman: for Rebka, your mother, my son, and I grew distant over time, for I felt like a fool around her, even she who for so long had felt, I think, insignificant in my shadow. For I can not escape the fact that she has known me for so much of my life that I can now never escape myself; for I have put too much of my self into her, over too much time. She has seen how much I have changed; she saw me cower in Seville; and I can not become the person I need to be, the person Maimonides has made me, for she is always there, hovering, present, a reminder of all I have been and all that I hate, all the error and ignorance of my ways, and above all the doubt I have always felt and which only recently I have become liberated from, an event which she will forever have witnessed and which you missed, my son. My son! I do not even know why I care so much about you. And in writing the lines above, I feel I am being more clear than ever and yet more confusing and vague, my words running into each other, like nearly dead leaves crossing

paths in the sky.

In the beginning, my son, I told you that my story starts when your mother disappears; it has been months since I began this letter to you and for all I have done to impart to you a great deal of knowledge about your parents, nevertheless, I have been unable to write clearly about the present time. Indeed, your mother comes and goes from the house; sometimes when I have written many pages, she is standing beside me, watching my uncertain pen, which is still sloppy and slanted even after so many words; other times, she is missing and try as I might to find her, she does not show herself. What is there to do, my son? How can one even act when other people are involved? How do you, my son, even stand in the room with someone else you know? A stranger I can understand, but someone who knows you, someone who expects... Forgive me, my son, I tried to save us; I kept Tabor in the house, for Rebka liked him, I thought. I even finally felt the greatness of soul inside me and I returned to baking bread with her, but nothing worked out well: bugs had found their way into the flour; and as much as I looked at her shoulders, dancing in front of me as she walked inside the door, I could not help thinking about her, about who she would have been without me to temper her, if I had not through my torturous obliviousness silenced her, gave her unhappiness disguised as happiness; and I knew that whatever she told me had passed between her and other men she only spoke to me in confidence because she still thought she loved me; and I knew that the day would come, for it had to come, when she would lose that belief. Maimonides, my son, teaches us that negative knowledge is the most valuable kind. As far as Rebka is concerned, my knowledge of exactly what I will never know is all I have. One time, we spoke, just recently. We were walking together to bring a gift to Tabor's father, who lived alone, a widower: some bread, a pat of butter, nothing really special.

We wrapped it up in a blue and white cloth and Rebka carried it with her as we talked. That night the town was having a feast to celebrate Jesus's name day; the wind lifted Rebka's skirts up, chilling her legs; I could see them pebbling over. Her hair was pushed back too and I noticed as always its reddishness and the angles that some of the strands made as they were crushed against her ear. Since you left, my son, your mother has gained creases on either side of her eyes; her eyes are dimmer; her shape is entirely different, but no less huggable: in short, your mother is getting older, as am I; again, it does not really matter. We were not invited to the feast; the town was too suspicious of us by now. I told her, then, as we were walking, staring straight ahead, that I was trying to explain to you those things which have happened to us since we have been in the world. She laughed at me, bitterly, and said nothing. I tried to explain to her, my son, how much we have changed and she exclaimed, Baruch! You have not changed at all! You have not changed from the moment I met you. From the moment you starting pretending that you had, it was the worst time for me, when I thought you no longer loved me, when it seemed everyone else loved me more than you. For you said to me, let us not say I love you, and you quoted King Solomon! I quoted it again to her, *For God is in heaven, and thou upon the earth; therefore let thy words be true.* You do not understand me, Rebka, I said to her, mournfully. It has been many years, Baruch, that we have been together and this world will be with us for many more, Rebka said to me. I have tried for a long time to be the wife you have always sought and I have failed and Baruch, I think I have come to finally understand that it is not that I do not understand you, but that you simply do not like who I am: for we understand each other only too well, but you, at least, cannot admit it. Rebka finished with tears in her eyes. There are no ideas, Baruch; they do not exist in this world. There are only other people.

I do not know if she is right, my son. This letter has been an attempt to understand the world in which God has placed me, the events which he has seen fit to press me through; it has been an attempt to find what meaning I can in the moments of my life; it has been an attempt to discover what you mean to me, my son, and why it is that after so many years, I seek your companionship, however invisible you are to me now—and more, to understand God’s plan for the future as it relates me and Rebka and all those around me. My son, when you lived with us, you made righteousness seem very easy indeed; so much so that I even hated you for it. For you only had to sit there, rocking back and forth, to let a smile ease on to your face; for you drifted through the world I created for you with absolutely no plan and it made you lovely, for you attended to everyone around you as if they were you yourself. And soon you left us, wiser than all of us, wiser than me, for I know and am sure that you married happily, that you live on your own, with no need of the vainness that was built into the very walls of your childhood home. It seems to me that as much as I revealed in this letter in terms of my thoughts, I gave away very little in terms of the truth of how it feels to exist in the world for me, for it has been very difficult to tell my life entirely as a story, for the thoughts, ideas, and feelings that make up the memories of those stories for me cloud over my eyes and replace the very images that inspired them. So what is it that this letter is, my son, at long last? I realize now that it is a very long introduction to a very dark time in my life, for now I am alone as I write this; Rebka is gone, I think, for now. *Negations do not convey a true idea of the being to which they refer*, Maimonides writes, and it is for this reason that perhaps it was I who never understood Rebka; Tabor, my friend, is growing up; his father has remarried a widow; and finally, this letter lacks none of the elegance of Maimonides, for it uses ordinary words in the sloppiest ways. But at the very least, my son, I

have imparted some wisdom to you, have given you a belated education: for my experience has brought to me many thoughts and feelings, which perhaps can give you an idea of the experience of living. And just as I feel as if my soul were beside me as I finger the edges of the two pages, just as they give me hope and distraction in this time of want, I wish to give some pages to you, my son, in hopes that you can let yourself go into the world of another; for every world is different and each is unlike the last as it is to the first: and what one day I am sure you will need is a companion, a trustworthy companion, one you put yourself into without restraint, without hesitation, without regret, without comparison to any other thing. For this letter, my son, has been a way of gaining your trust, as laughable as that seems; for if anything, you can understand me now and you can trust me now when I tell you that as ignorant and ordinary as we are, we have the task to live, as hateful as it is, as God's creation as he created it, as baffling and as confusing as it is to us, as arbitrary and frustrating as are the foundations of human nature: for it is our nature to be lustful and hungry, half-witted and weary. And yet, there is a way to escape, to flee into liberation: for Maimonides says *the glorification of God does not consist of uttering that which is not to be uttered, but in reflecting on that on which man should reflect*, and therein lies the secret, for there is a subject which is worthy of our reflection, each of us: for in reflection comes the feeling, the overpowering feeling in which oneself and everyone is reflected. I remember, my son, at long last, the day you were born. Trust me, my son! Trust in everything! I have something to tell you, something you need to know! I remember the very day you were born. For, in the end, we are governed in life by nothing more and nothing less than feelings. You were born on a day when I was wearing, for the first time, my new clothes. The tailor Isaac made them for me and they were quite expensive, and we had saved for them for some time. We spared

nothing in hopes of becoming a mother and father. It was a pair of blue pants, dyed with juice, I think, or so I assumed, and a yellow shirt with the color and feel of dandelions. I kept them on with a tight black belt which I had owned for years and which had served me well; but with these new clothes I felt indeed like an adult; I felt as if the clothes gave me gravity; I felt like a rabbi, whose majesty comes from the wearing of his clothes. On the day you were born, my son, your mother reached the mouth of the river of beauty: she was sitting on the bed when I woke up. It was a little past dawn, just enough for the sun to arrive through our window and turn into smoke behind the window paper. In this underwaterish light I opened my eyes to face the wall; I could feel your mother there, her weight on the bed. I lifted my head to see her: she sat facing the window, her legs over the edge of the bed, her hands spread out and supporting her from behind. She had leaned back, letting her belly speak for itself, her lips together, her face clear and yet connected in some way to the bells that could be heard in the distance, perhaps in the direction of her nose. Her blouse, let out for the pregnancy, hung from her loosely; very nearly one entire shoulder was bare. So there she sat, at once heavily and lightly, relaxed in the way she leaned back, taut in the way her elbows supported her, and lopsided in the way her shoulders were turned and the way her breasts hung in the loose space of her blouse. She was breathing as I rolled up beside her and wrapped my arms around her legs; she smelled like sweat and the salt that grows in the hidden regions of the body. We had been married a very short time, my son, before we produced you; in many ways, I wish we had been blessed much later. Your mother, of course, was very beautiful; it was her very defects which emphasized her beauty: the indentation in her forehead led the eye to the freshness of her skin, her own eye which lazed sometimes, made one attuned to the pale, clean blue circles that were her eyes; her small black pupils

brought attention to nothing other than the darkness of her hair which ranged from red to black; the thinness of her legs, the littleness of her feet ultimately grew in light of the curves of her body. I pressed my cheek against it. How are you, Rebka, I asked her. Good, she answered, a little tired, and she made a small, happy sigh in her throat and fell backwards effortlessly onto the bed. How does it feel with all that on top of you, I asked her. It feels very warm; it is like the weight of a great deal on top of me, of even like you atop me, but at the same time, very separate from me, as if it were a heavy pillow I were hugging against myself that someone was ripping away. I bent over to kiss her, my hand on her. Then, she spoke again, with words I remember very clearly. You know, Baruch, I was very afraid to be pregnant with you; for my own brother's wife died in childbirth, and I worried at what kind of child you would make me; but as I am now pregnant, it is as if I would want no other thing for the course of my life than to be as I now am, forever in expectation, forever dwelling in a kind of house I have built for myself, as if always wrapped in a blanket, as if always in an embrace, as if beside a fire in an enclosed space, the smell of trees perhaps nearby. For my time here seems very beautiful to me, even if it does not seem so beautiful to you. She finished and smiled despite her melancholy, and gently rolled her head against my chest, inhaling, stretching back her neck. Rebka, I said, this time is very beautiful; when I said what I said, I only meant that I had not yet seen enough of this world to understand why it exists in the form it does. She started to speak, but I silenced her with a kiss. I said, I know, Rebka, but somehow understanding and beauty are to me, for some reason, related in a manner which I do not yet understand; but someday I think I will be able to understand this part of myself and in that way find all of life beautiful for itself, in the way it is perceived and the way it exists. I finished, feeling very foolish. Then, your mother and I ate, feeding each other; the

bread was very stale and as I spoke the blessing over it, I knew that, staring into your mother eyes, there was something pious in the act of speaking unintelligible words. Which is easier to pray to, a God known or an ineffable God? On the day you were born, your mother knew without question that it was time for you, my son, to be born; she knew it as she experienced it. Surely, you know, my son, the nature of the human birth, so I will tell you only one more fact about that day which has great meaning for me. The mid-wife, as she herself leaned against the wall, one hand wiping sweat from brow, in a brief respite from the work of birthing, said to me, Baruch, you will never forget this day. She even said, You are doing God's will, Baruch; for I know you have tried. This will be the day your wanderings will come to an end. For the woman had indeed taken care of me as a child, alone, without parents and I owed her a great deal; as such, I had always felt uncomfortable around her, for I never knew which words I could speak in order to repay her correctly. And yet I have never felt more blessed than when she said *for I know you have tried*, but try as I might, as much as I can feel righteous, there is no harmony in the righteousness with the workings of my mind. For I thought then that if I had my time to myself, if it were not spent in working the daylight hours, then I would accomplish a great deal of discovery; but in fact it was the hope of such a thing that stayed me. Since I have retrieved my two chapters of Maimonides, I know that my work is never done, for there is nothing deeper in human nature than the slumbering respite from thought that tugs at one at every turn. But, my son, the proper subject of reflection for mankind is that which we feel obligated to reflect upon; there is no other measure than feeling, how we feel in the world of feelings. My son, you were born clothed in the mess; Rebka and I lay in each other's arms for an hour that night, with you between us, a feeling in my stomach both warm and satisfied, refreshing and cool, as if I were

digesting the most delicious meal. You were a beautiful baby, my son, born with a full head of hair; no one had ever seen the like of it: it was curly and tangled and came down past your eyes. Your cheeks bulged and were soft and as you slept, your eyes worked softly beneath their covers. I once asked my uncle how it was that one could deal with the mysteries of living, of being with a woman, of celebration: he said to me, Baruch! Let it happen! That is all you need to do. I am sure, my son, you will expect me to protest that one can not let anything happen rightly without understanding; but I have since learned the first secret, that, whatever happens to one while one is living and sensible, nothing matters more than this: Let it happen, he said to me. But, I said to him then, you have to have the feeling.

I wish you to understand, my son, the single thing which you can trust me on: that feeling and righteousness are one and the same thing and they each are the same as reflection: for not to understand their unity is to misunderstand the nature of reflection, a thing which is not something at all difficult, but something natural and not at all concealed. Therefore, my son, I ask you to put your faith in me to teach you something which you perhaps do not yet know: for one can not give oneself over without trust, and that is precisely what I ask you to do, you who are so far away, whom I write about as if you were still here, even though it has been considerable years since you left and much has changed, I am sure, in your life and mine. Last I heard, and this was some time ago, you dealt in the business of bookbinding: I have already mentioned the books the Christians carry around, their books of hours, which tell them simply how to divide up their day into prayers, which they finger to death, and which, with each tear and rip, bring them closer to the swelling closeness of God. So, with this in mind, my son, I have written for you a kind of book of hours of my own, which I want you to take and meditate upon: I have given you a single

prayer; I have dwelt for a great deal of time on what follows. It represents the end of this long letter to you, which, I think, will be my only real gift to you. I feel perhaps that in the end loneliness has been the cost of writing, for, my son, we live on the surface of memory. I had a dream a night ago in which it seemed to me that a woman, naked, was lifted by a giant hand out of the waves, from deep under the water, by a monstrous hand, and when she was free of the surface and held above it, water sloughed off her, more and more of it, in fact, without diminishing: the more water that fell from her, the higher she was raised. So it is with memory: the further our own hand lifts us from the murkiness of our past, the more we shed of our memories. And yet what is the air, but another transparent sea? For one day a hand will pluck us from the air, and in each case, there is great beauty in the sea and in the air which is lost until the very moment we look down.

My son, there is great benefit to studying the lives of others, in order to understand their mistakes and to the imitate their successes! Trust me, my son, you have much to learn. One last story, I will tell you, in fact, one about my mother, who was a beautiful woman herself; she was a strong woman, she was, in fact the only person I have ever known who could make me laugh. Thus, she made it her business, as a mother, to entertain me as a child. My uncle tells me that even in the earliest days, she would never leave my cradle even if I cried long into the night, even if I woke her up as the sun was barely risen, even if she was involved in her own affairs; she would always be there, beside me, holding me until I was silent, or tickling me until I fell asleep from happy exhaustion. As I grew older into a sense of other people, I began to see that there was something else to my mother, something hidden, which I saw when I awoke at night, to see her sitting up in bed, staring out the window, thinking; and it was no great secret as in the

sense of a concealed past, a sin hidden, but rather the fact that she was looking for companionship from the child that she loved, that is to say, I meant everything to her, for inadvertently I had given her one of the greatest happinesses of her life, and therefore, there was nothing I could do to her that would break her, that would destroy her spirit, that would diminish her love for me; and yet, sometimes when I would go out to play she would draw me near, very closer to her, in a way that was strange, for we rarely hugged, and she would say to me, Have fun, do not come back late. What she thought about on her nights awake, I am not sure, but I think perhaps her thoughts were trying to understand: the way to watch me grow up, the way to act, the way to accept the way things were, or the way things had to be, so she could be silent when she needed to be, so she could speak up when it was needed; for there were times I recall when above all I wished to leave, to be with the friends I had in Barcelona, so big in my memory, but who must have been so small; I would whine to go even if my mother would be left alone; and this she accepted; I knew how she felt from her eyes, which opened up like eyes closing in tears and sometimes I would stay with her and other times I would just run off and play, sometimes unaware and other times aware of my mother's loneliness, but it was too easy not to act. There, in this, is the lesson, my son. It is easy not to act. If you do not trust me, at least think to yourself what I would offer to have had this wisdom with me from the start of my life, to have had the burdens of an old man's disquiet laid upon me as an infant. Then I would not have simply stood there watching my mother trying to sleep at night, wondering if she could see me, wondering what I should do, what was my obligation, what was my plan, but instead, I would have put my arms around her without question, without presumption or condescension; I would have done it as surely as I felt, even then, that I would never be at peace, for I wanted to die

when she would be dead. This, I never told her. Years later, when Rebka and I were moving from the middle of town to where we live now, very soon after we were married, I thought of the face of my mother, young, and yet old, as clear as it was freckled; Rebka was tottering ahead of me. We were carrying the objects from the old house of my cousins where I had lived to the new one, set up just behind the crest of the hill. We brought a few objects at a time, not that there was much, but we packed what we had into the largest possible sacks. At that moment, I was struck and even felt as if I were being stroked with fire down my legs and deep into my feet; I stopped short, slowly, in the middle of the road, in the center of the mud, all at once alone with the forcefulness and fear I felt for my mother's death, which had happened so long ago. I leaned against the side of the house of Ezequiel and I fastened my hand on his window-sill, feeling my face grow red as if someone wiser than I had asked me a question, catching me off-guard, so that my awareness was not of the question, but only of the obligation to answer. Rebka came back over the grass towards me, carrying a metal bucket stuffed a wool, folded up three times. An oversized, wide-brimmed hat hung down over her head, slanted, covering one of her eyes. She came up to me and murmured, raising her head so her hat covered both of us and, like a woodpecker, knocked her nose against my cheek, each peck soft, but distinct. I smiled to her gently, and looked below her hat at the smallness of her face in the shadow cast by the roof of straw. In our little house here, the brightness of everything outside is blinding.

My son, may you find comfort in these words.

Blessed are you, God, Lord of the Universe, who take away every moment of peace;

Blessed are you, Ruler of the Unknown, who give to us the spinning moment;

Blessed are you, King of Majesties, who grant us the grace to forget all the wrong that we have done to others;

Blessed are you, Truth of the Present, who grant us the grace to forget all the good that others have done to us;

Blessed are you, God of Lubrication, who set each thing smoothly in motion, from the hand of the father on the head of a child, from the wind which pushes us into others, from the love that passes in between the holy;

Blessed are you, God of Lubrication of all things, who set the mud slick and grant us grace to slip and fall, so we may better contemplate from the safety of the earth;

Blessed are you, God of Balance, who sit upon a lopsided throne;

Blessed are you, God, who give us the grace to damn ourselves and to live, to castrate ourselves and to live;

Blessed are you, God, who give us nothing but love;

Blessed are you, Lord God, who gave me these words when I sought you out, in the tower of a mill, with the center spinning, and you said to me, put your wrongs from your mind, and you said to me, forget the good for which others deserve to be repaid, and you said to me, let your bladder go, and you said to me, let your body open, and you said to me, let the sound of the Lord spin around you, and you said to me, let the servant feel peace in confusion, confusion in stasis, exhilaration in movement, and regret in silence;

Blessed are you, Lord God, who speak in the names of people, in the titles of kings, in the moment of feeling, which is yellow and filled with specks, which rushes down and up like fire, which is like a pillar of sorrow or a column of salvation;

Blessed are you, Lord God, who give us friends in things, enemies in forces, companions in feelings, fears in people, turmoil in ourselves, and peace in our nature;

Blessed are you, Lord God, you whom we thank for living in the days which are all days;

Blessed are you, Lord God, who press us up against those who are no longer with us;

Blessed are you, Lord God, who give us words for prayer;

Blessed are you, Lord God, who inspire wisdom, who impart trust, who set rocks in the sand, who rain water from the roofs;

Blessed are you, Lord of Lords, who set the leaves to yellow, who give it for pages to crease, for wisdom in solitude;

Blessed are you, Lord God, who give us reason in darkness;

Blessed are you, Lord God, who give us occupation for our minds, the absence for our thoughts;

Blessed are you, Lord God, who give us the abundance of life, the famine of living, the frustration of our nature;

Blessed are you, Lord God, for the poisons which heal us, the salves which poison; for all things you are blessed;

Blessed are you, Lord God, who turn all things into gods, ourselves, the weight of our love, the giants who crash around us, the children, blushing, who trip below us;

Blessed are you, Lord God, for entrusting us the world without which we would be nothing;

Blessed are you, Lord God, for the wisdom of youth, for the safety of old age;

Blessed are you, Lord God, for the story of our lives, the grace of will to live with the wrong, the doubt to move to the right;

Blessed are you, Lord God, who give us the words to describe the workings of the heavens as

well as the workings of a face, which tries its hardest to unify the smallness of its stature with the largeness of its lip;

Blessed are you, Lord God, who give us the words which anyone can understand, which everyone feels along with me when I shout them in prayer, even if they cannot see what I see when I see the words that I speak, but nevertheless, understand the look of my eyes and my outstretched hands in the words themselves;

Blessed are you, Lord God, who grant us the grace of shame and regret;

Blessed are you, Lord God, who give us the need to understand;

Blessed are you, Lord God, King of the Universe,

for the truth which is never exhausted.

## MIKEY, HIS WIFE, AND HER SISTER AMBER

2009

Why don't you get up? Yeah, I know, but why don't you get out of bed? The subway doors close behind him. 8<sup>th</sup> and Market dislodges itself from the windows. Mikey falls back against the clear plastic wall that springs up behind the last seat before the door. You should get up, Mikey says, gesturing with his hands as if to communicate the firmness of his tone. I know the pillows are cool and fluffy and the sheets are probably nice and warm and hell, girl, I wish I was there with you, but really, you gotta get out of bed. Yes, I've been working all day. It's really late! It's what? It's—he swings his wrist around, but before he can read off a time, he pauses, listening to the phone. The racket of the subway car peters out and the doors open. A few people slide past Mikey into empty seats, noting with a boring curiosity the white chef's jacket he wears, his six feet, the baggy pajamas which wrap themselves loosely around his waist, the double bag from Whole Foods leaning against his leg. All good stuff, interesting features. At the other end of the car, a swarm of young black faces follows a woman who's maybe a little older, but then again, maybe a little younger than Mikey as she navigates down the plastic lane with a stroller, jerking it forward at times when it catches on a purse or a bowling bag. The faces of her three kids separate and come together, as one leaps onto a seat, designating their stopping point, at which the other two, somewhat smaller, also try to clamber up from the dirty, marbled floor. It smells like Twizzlers, if that's possible. Mikey bursts out laughing, reaching up and switching his phone from left to right. Okay, hops, really, I gotta go. You promise me you'll get up? What? Just get up. Get up, sweet Jesus. Okay. The phone clicks shut. Mikey descends from his height to tie his shoe. The woman at the other end of the car is now seated with a harried look on her face as she herself reaches for her cell phone, searching the subway car for faces, keeping her other hand on the shoulder, then the elbow, then the ponytail of one of her kids, any of them. Only the stroller child seems at peace. The rhythm of the sound of the subway car reminds Mikey of the sound of traffic trying to push its way past too many traffic lights, too close together. The woman fumbles with her phone. Yeah, Marissa, we're coming, we're on our way. Okay. Yeah, we're excited. Your boy is making dinner? Can't wait. Yeah! You read my email? Mikey looks up from his shoe to see a little sticky hand bash against the side of his paper bag, a hand which, undeterred, rallies again with the help of its friend, the left hand. This time the pair of them brings forth two ears of corn, held together. The hands lift the corn too triumphantly, however, and their owner, a familiar looking child, falls backwards onto the butt of his little cut-offs. Mikey chuckles and watches as the kid, whose huge face cheeks look like they could be filled with icing, rushes back across the subway car to his brother and sister. Red light. Green light. A teenager in a wife-beater comes in, hefting a laptop blasting music in lieu of a boombox. Mikey watches the little kid run between laptop guy's legs back to his mother. The kid's sister grabs one of the corns and starts to jab her brother with it. A sword fight ensues in the back of the car. Stop! What? Sorry, I'm not getting much signal down here. Sashanna! Stop that! Yeah, we'll be there soon, okay, bye. The woman whose name is Amber hangs up her phone and at last, at last meets Mikey's eyes. Mikey has a big grin for her and he ambles over to her, happy because she's still beautiful, happy to see her excited, even if so tired on the surface. Amber! A quick cheek-to-cheek. Corn gave me away, I guess, says Mikey, who plucks the corn from the hands of his niece and nephew. He drops the

two ears into his bag and lifts the stroller child out of the train at the next stop. Brief tiled darkness and then they breathe fresh air. The color of the night sky is indistinguishable from the off-blue of the subway railing's paint. As Mikey emerges from the ground it looks to him like the sky itself is crisscrossed by other pieces of sky which turn into the warm tops of buildings, red and black, small abysses of empty windows interspersed with boards and then of course, there appear the windows lit up like the next station seen down a subway tunnel, maybe dressed in blue curtains, maybe sucking him up four floors into a room with a nice carpet and a smell like a delicious dinner combined with the heated heaven of a bed... Amber takes the stroller when Mikey sets it down. Sashanna is investigating a parking meter, then she gives a squeal because she can see, in the apartment opposite, the head of her aunt Hattie smiling and waving from the window. You smell that? Mikey asks Amber. Smells like fire. Yeah. Some of the buildings around here have fireplaces—see those balconies, a bunch of people use them for firewood, see? Yeah. Mikey coughs. I thought she'd never get out of bed, Mikey says. Hattie? Yeah. That's like her, says Amber. Mikey laughs. She can cook in her sleep though, she only needs me for the boring, not so sumptuous parts. They are crossing the street now, every spare hand connected to a child. Mikey looks up again at his window. Hattie's face is a little puffy, but she's waving a spatula now, or something, Mikey can't quite make it out. Amber wishes she was wearing something as comfortable as Mikey, wishes she could sleep with someone, wishes it wasn't just the three of them, not counting the kids. Mikey looks up at the sky. Hattie is gone now, just the lamp, the books, the globe in the window. It's such a beautiful night. Mikey is thinking to himself, he wishes he could seal everything up, everything right now, so as to make sure nothing escapes. Sealed, as in, nothing in, nothing out.

ROSENBACH

2009

**Document 1: Excerpt from the bibliography of “*O, that way madness lies...*”: *Poetic Insanity and the Genius of the Mad, a Study of the Mind of M. A. Rosenbach*, by Deepa Ramachandran. Published 2009 by Cambridge University Press.**

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**Document 2: Back cover blurb for Erik Weinstein’s 2008 novel, *Let Go, Let Go*, published by Farrar, Straus and Giroux.**

When a cynical rabble of academics gather at the Gaylord National Resort Hotel and Conference Center outside of Washington, D. C. to discuss the nature of man’s infinite faculties, the formerly faceless corporate fake-town is transformed into a nexus of philosophical posturing and middle-aged alcoholism. Introducing Max Lazarow, a experimental psychologist who feels more at home with expensive medical imaging equipment than William Shakespeare and Giles Deleuze. Max also attends the conference, but decides to steer clear of the crowd, aiming in his free time to gather together at long last his research into the nature of genius. That is, until one night when an old friend invites him up to the built-in night club on the eighteenth floor of the Gaylord. Max’s buddy introduces him to the beautiful Serena Singh, a former devotee of Gayatri Spivak and a long out of print novelist. Max quickly excuses himself for the night, but the next morning, to their utter shock, Max and Serena wake to find themselves together in bed at a B&B in Silver Springs, a hospitality establishment with an adjoining sculpture garden overseen by three black men, one of whom is blind. Max and Serena’s psychological struggle to understand how they came to share a bed makes up the bulk of Erik Weinstein’s third novel, a tour-de-force of elegant, Oulippian puzzle pieces which dramatically lays bare the passion of two human beings desperate for meaning in emotion.

**Document 3: Excerpt from the New York Review of Books, 56, No. 2 (2009).**

**Of Imagination All Compact**

**By Brian Hammerstock**

**“O, that way madness lies...”: Poetic Insanity and the Genius of the Mad, a Study of the Mind of M. A. Rosenbach**

**by Deepa Ramachandran**

Cambridge University Press, 432 pp., \$45.00

***Let Go, Let Go***

**by Erik Weinstein**

Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 262 pp., \$25.00.

The lunatic, the lover, and the poet

Are of imagination all compact.

- *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, William Shakespeare.

It was over a decade ago that a young Erik Weinstein complicated an already complicated critical stance towards poet M. A. Rosenbach. At that time, soon after the publication of Rosenbach’s most controversial book of poems, *i have never thought*, Erik Weinstein argued that a new era in Rosenbach’s poetry had begun: one, in fact, precipitated by the poet’s internment into a care facility following the onset on dementia. Soon after his 1996 article, Weinstein was joined in his research by cognitive psychologist Deepa Ramachandran and in the years since, Weinstein and Ramachandran have comprised a formidable duo, bringing both a scientific hard-headedness and a literary understanding to the problem of creativity. The two have emerged at last, bearing the fruits of their characteristic labor.

In her latest book, Ramachandran takes up the central theme of Weinstein’s original article, that of *capacity*. Rosenbach, as is well known, remains without higher level consciousness. That is to say, she has no “interior monologue.” She simply acts, without conscious reflection or forethought. The difficulty for critics lies in the actions she does take, one of which, for example, is picking up a pen and writing. If that were not enough to stir up controversy, Rosenbach’s consistent theme since her illness has been nothing less than bliss. In her introduction, Ramachandran takes a look at a poem from Rosenbach’s forthcoming collection from *New Directions*, *Bird on a Bowl*, in particular the poem, *Embrasure*.

Embrasure

Embrasure...

The cognitive faculties of such-and-such were fairly well defined...

It was not without a certain apprehension that he entered such-and-such a place...around the bend...

A heavy, honeyed latitude offered...

His body slain by clots, revered by nudity... Found him on the bed,  
went over, slept on his mouth, slept inside...  
So...  
Heavy...

**Document 4: Excerpt from a letter to the editor of the Washington Post, printed on 6/14/2010.**

It is with a heavy heart that I bring myself to correct Mr. Lester on his facts which he promulgated in his article of last week, *A New Puritanism*. Lester uses the example of my very beloved sister, Deepa Ramachandran, in his supposed expose of the “discouraging hedonism and lack of direction” in America in general and in particular, the universities. Disregarding the unfortunate and undeserved frequency of such attacks, I beg Mr. Lester to think to himself twice before libeling such an unfortunate woman as my very beloved sister. One does not leave a marriage of twelve years on a whim, surely, nor with a man whom she has spent the better part of two decades in close collaboration. As for her subsequent operation, it is well known that lobotomies have been regularly performed for much of modern history and indeed, as my sister has written, “Why shouldn’t a thinking human being opt out of consciousness if they so desire, for is it not within the legal limit? Indeed, in this country, we permit the taking of certain drugs... for someone who desires to be fully human without the conscious cares or worries, is not a lobotomy nothing more than a permanent form of what we allow in some small portion every day?” I, for one, do not agree with my sister. Nevertheless, I would not stoop so low as to attack her on the pages of a prestigious paper without regard for the shame and humiliation such an expose would bring upon the family of the named. Mr. Lester would do well to know that my sister and her new husband remain joyful and continue on their work every day. – Elie Ramachandran, Richmond, Virginia.

## GRAVE SOUL

2009

A few weeks ago, Tim's girlfriend, Anna, had a concussion. She had gone down to the Jersey shore for the day with a friend, Katie. Tim couldn't go. He had to work. Anna drove down at about eleven, expecting to stay until about three. Anna and Katie had lunch on the boardwalk. They went to the beach because Katie wanted a tan. After about an hour, Katie suggested they surf. The two girls squinted past the dunes, hands hovering over their eyes. The waves looked good. Then, Katie and Anna lugged their surfboards from the car and took them out into the water.

The first few minutes went well. At one point, however, Anna fell off her board into the water. As the next wave passed, Anna's surfboard slammed into her head. She saw lights and heard a sound like a metallic groan. The next thing she knew, she was surrounded by the sky, uncertain how or why she had come to be there. She stumbled to shore and, finding her towel warm, fell fast asleep. She awoke a few hours later and sat with Katie at a pizza place, but did not eat. The two of them drove home as night fell, the trip passing uneventfully, although at times Anna felt light-headed and briefly confused. It was not unpleasant, like a gentle high. That night, when she saw Tim, he said she seemed subdued. But he himself was in a foul mood, jealous of the time with Anna he had missed, and eager for details. He therefore made no special note of it. The next morning, Anna vomited after breakfast. Later that day, the doctor told her she had had her second concussion. Avoid physical activity, he told her, most of all guard your head. No loud music or flashing light. She nodded, not really listening. Again, it wasn't her first time with a concussion.

A few days passed and then a week, and then another. Finally, the day of their anniversary arrived. Tim and Anna had been in love for at least a year. They did nearly everything together. The couple celebrated by cooking dinner. Both of them loved charcuterie, so they bought a prepared plate of meats and cheeses from Wegmans. The entrée was a lentil soup, the recipe cut from the New York Times Dining section. Finally, Tim picked up a bottle of champagne on his way home from work. When the preparation was complete, two lovers enjoyed their meal, their legs entwining under the table, first in one configuration, then in another.

Anna and Tim retired to the couch, talking incidentally about their days. Anna put on the Daily Show from the previous day. The volume was turned down and Tim placed a kiss gently on the small hairs of Anna's cheek. Once or twice, as they made love, the phone rang. The second time, in fact, Tim answered it, Anna laughing. Perhaps it was Tim's mother wishing them well. When they finished, their eyes clouded over. Tim lay back on the sweaty couch and Anna turned to him, pushing her nose insistently into his side, rubbing her face against his skin. Itchy, she said. Tim laughed and pushed her away. She groaned and lunged against his chest, murmuring, Hold me, please, in the voice of a small girl. Tim put his arm around her. So cold, she said, her eyes fluttering open. Tim got up, happy to stretch his legs and brought over a blanket. He sat Anna up and placed the blanket over her. Do you love me, Anna asked him. Of course, I do, said Tim. This was to be expected on a night like this. Really? Yes, said Tim, this time more firmly. Why? Anna asked him. Tim paused. Anna asked again, But *why* do you love

me? You're so good, so good to me, she said, but why do you *like* me? She slapped her hands to her face. Hey, I can't even believe you're asking me that, duck. Inside, Tim was fearful, knowing that he loved her, but also knowing that he was incapable of answering a question like why. He looked into her eyes, which were soft and filled with a dull worry. She was looking at him like a little child. Why do you even stay with me? she asked again, I'm so... She groaned and afterward even pouted. You could be with someone pretty... you should have someone much prettier, she said, squirming on the couch, mumbling something. What did you say, Tim asked her, afraid. Like one of those girls from Degrassi, she said, giving a little cry of frustration, of helplessness that seemed almost to break free of her body before being held back. Wouldn't you love me more if I were all... skinny? Tim looked at her, horrified that they were having this conversation. Not at all, swan, I love you just the way you are. He was grasping for words. I never even knew you were concerned about your weight, he said painfully. C'mere, he said finally and held her tight. What's wrong? She slumped against him, sliding down to his lap, her eyes closed. Tim rubbed her shoulder, trying to think of the right thing to say to someone looking so wholly defeated. Say you love me, she mumbled. I love you, he said. Her hair was beautifully askew. You're so warm, she said. Kiss me. He did, bending down to kiss her where she lay against his legs. *Kiss* me, she said again, pouting her lips desperately, comically. He did again. Finally her breathing slowed and she fell asleep in his lap. Tim stretched himself out and tried to understand what had just happened. This changes everything, he thought to himself. What was Degrassi? Finally, at around one, Tim turned off the TV.

The next morning, Tim awoke to Anna making breakfast in the kitchen. It was very bright. As he came in, she threw him some pants. Good morning, crow, she said happily and kissed him gently, lightly, before turning to the eggs. You didn't have to do all this, Tim said, gesturing to the stove. Anna laughed. About last night, he started to say. Anna interrupted him. It was wonderful, she said, grabbing the toast. The lentil soup was delicious. Blending part of it was just the right idea. That's fine, Tim said, but about what we talked about... Anna was silent. Tim took a breath, about to launch into his prepared speech. I know you might be concerned about your body, he said, and Anna laughed. What are you talking about, she asked as they sat down to eat. About what you said, he answered, wincing. What? After dinner, when we were on the couch? Yeah? And we talked. About what? Don't you remember? Tim asked, almost yelling. We had sex and fell asleep, she said, I mean I don't remember much conversation. You whispered something to me, I think, she said, trying to recall. Tim stared at her. Just as he was about to explain what she had told him, a panicked look came into Anna's eyes. She ran to the sink and vomited. Tim was there at her side, wiping the sweat from her beautiful forehead, as smooth as a child's. She groaned. Concussion, she said wiping her mouth, I guess that's what it was. She turned on the faucet. As he watched the vomit disappear down the drain, Tim felt as if part of his soul were being flushed away with it.

## STUPID KIRILOV

2009

It was a strange way to end up. Deepa and Max decided not to do it at the same time, but rather one after the other. Deepa went first. If I can get into their heads for a moment, I'd say that the two lovers decided that they should be careful, leave one conscious in case the other fell ill. That was a prudent thing to do, a last hurrah for the oversight they were about to dismiss forever. Or maybe Max still hesitated, didn't quite trust that he would be the same, for indeed he had no way of knowing what it would be like to be permanently unconscious. One only has memories of such moments, such automatic moments, and even thoughts are untrustworthy...

Deepa smiled at him when he wheeled her out of the clinic, the only clinic that had agreed to go forward with such a procedure. The sky was grey and the parking lot was cold. Deepa smiled from above her scarf. While she was recovering, Max took her every day to see her brother, carrying her from her wheelchair to the car, careful not to bump her legs against the door, whispering to her... Deepa seemed very happy. As they rumbled down the hallway, she even commented on the nurses darting about, the angry, aged spouses arguing with the caregivers... None of it escaped her notice, even then. Not the smells, like toothpaste and alcohol, nor the thoughts which occurred to her, every moment in time.

On the day before Max's own operation, the nurses in the hallway told them that Deepa's brother, Elie, had taken a cold. The couple went in, then, I guess, with some apprehension. The room looked as it always did with countless vases full of flowers, wallpaper strewn with them... Max wheeled Deepa to her brother's side and plopped down on the bed.

"How are you feeling today, Elie?" Max asked attempting to boom. Elie didn't answer, his eyes working over the pair that now appeared before him. To speed things up, Max reached out for a piece of paper and a pencil. He wrote quickly, How are you feeling today, giving it to his brother-in-law. Max himself placed Elie's fingers on the implement, guiding his hand to the page, as if to give his brother-in-law's brain the impetus, the focus to write something, anything. Elie considered the words on the page and wrote Good, good... good. Magni...ficent, good. Max met his eyes.

"We heard you weren't feeling well, Elie," said Max distinctly.

At this Elie exclaimed, making a happy *blurp!*

"Oh, I'm feeling fine... really, fine, I guess, I'm not sure what you're asking, that is... I have a pain in the head, a headache, I guess," he said in a stuttering stream of words. At this, Deepa's hand slapped Max's leg. He looked at her, but before she could start to free-associate, a nurse knocked, poking her head in. She wanted to open the door for the various reporters who had come down to write his brother-in-law's story, that of a small-town poet interned in a care center. Poet who brought out two or three collections a year. Poetry and dementia. Same reporters at the public library readings.

Elie watched the door suspiciously. Then, on impulse or maybe because he had been planning it for weeks, Max got up from the bed, calling out for the nurses to wait a moment. He wheeled Deepa into the hall. A roar went up among the reporters. Max ran Deepa's wheelchair forcibly into their midst as they gaped at her. A distraction. Someone else a little damaged. Closing the door at last, Max turned to Elie. Finally. Finally.

They spent a moment alone, considering the teal bedspreads and curtains, the pebbly, white walls, the large tiled floor.

“What do you think, Elie, should I do it?” asked Max.

“What?”

“Should I lobotomize myself?”

Elie was silent for a moment.

“Well, what about Deepa?” Elie asked.

“Well, obviously. I realize that’s an issue, but I feel ridiculous, since we agreed to do it months ago. I had all the time in the world to call it off, but I waited and waited, didn’t say anything, kept my peace...” Elie’s attention was wandering. “What do you think?” Max asked him directly.

Elie shrugged or made some equivalent motion.

“Well, if you, you know, want to write another...book or something...”

“Then, what? Should I do it or not do it? I mean, for god’s sake, you’re a poet.”

“I remember things, it’s not just words, not just words. Just holding one thing in my mind at a time as much as I can, like looking up at it, just the one thought, holding on...”

“But I *like* thinking...” Max groaned.

Elie got up from his chair, shuffling over to the bed. He placed a hand on Max’s leg.

“I like you, Max,” he said.

“It’s dumb, it’s so stupid, you know,” said Max, “What are you thinking right now, Elie? You could turn it around and ask me, what am I thinking, maybe I’m not thinking anything... You’re a zombie, Elie, you have no control over your life, you just do. Although maybe you do have control and you just don’t think about it, you just control.”

Elie had flung himself back onto the bed like a kid, reaching his arms up, exhaling happily. He began to hum, rising up from the bed.

“Look at that sky!” Elie said, pointing, “That’s a sky.” Max looked through the window, over the trees, beyond the roof of the next building, the antennae... Elie continued, “It’s grey, of course, but like the grey of a sidewalk, maybe, and those dark spots are the gum stains on the concrete, but look how it’s moving! Somehow it’s just been poured and hasn’t set yet...”

“Mm, yeah, though it’s nice outside, you know.”

“Nice?”

“Yeah, high 70’s, nice if you can forgive the grey. The window’s open a crack, you can feel it.”

“Hmm. Don’t you just feel surrounded by weather?” asked Elie.

“Well, obviously, but I think I know what you mean,” Max answered.

“You feel it all over.”

“You know, it reminds me... I don’t know if you remember this, but we used to take you out into the rain all the time, spin you around till you were dizzy. You were still in a wheelchair. You were very happy.”

“Yeah?”

“Yeah—Anyway, it’s supposed to be nice for the rest of the week too. No storms till the weekend, it looks like.”

“Mm.”

“You really don’t miss your thoughts?” Max asked finally, an edge to his voice. He smiled at his brother-in-law as if encouraging him to respond. Elie smiled too, good-naturedly, waving his hands, unable to articulate an answer. So complacent...

They were interrupted by the nurse, barging into the room again. Deepa’s face peeked out from underneath the nurse’s arm. She held up some book someone must have given her. She was excited. Max felt a little different now. He got up, saying goodbye to Elie, putting a hand to his shoulder, and then left the room, slipping the handles of Deepa’s wheelchair into his own hands.

“I feel like a really stupid Kirilov, you know,” Max said to Deepa.

Deepa chuckled languidly, rolling back her head to look at him with a deep, endless, diffuse love. It was like looking into a nightmare.

“That’s a terrible thought,” Max said aloud, wonderingly.

## WALLPAPER

2009

So it was only wallpaper. William Morris, the genius, designed the thing. Lines like the kind car wheels leave on gravel—you know the type, particularly when you're leaving on some kind of trip. That is to say, the wallpaper had the same traces that water leaves when you've poured it from the glass, ghostly traces (are there any other kind?) of large, ornate flowers, nearly erased, seething with a faded blue light that breaks around the smaller, barely visible flowers, vines, crosshatches in wood, white fibers between large flowers tossing their heads like poor Laocoon and his sons (I'm thinking of the Greek sculpture), the flowers like eruptions rising to the surface from the bottom of the glass that's practically empty at this point, I mean, you've been pouring it out for a while... In short, autumn colors with mounds of leaves appearing to segue into the same mysterious quiet that came before. Dawn through space, flowers rushing and entwining all around you...

I'm sure you can imagine the scent of squash blossoms. I say scent, not smell. The delicacy of the waitress laying them out on the table, freely coughing into her hand, sneezing, then laughing, then sneezing and laughing even as her eyes remained entirely serious, entirely afraid. Led out by two other women, I mean, she was hysterical, she was led out by certain voices asking, *was she sick?* Can brain disease spread? Who knows? Same woman who changed the towels in our room, you know, the one with the wallpaper, a decanter of sherry, a decanter of brandy, sherry terrible, really, didn't make up for the smell like a nineteenth century litterateur pounding his mistress the wrong way around, you know how sweat pools. Look, we came down to Virginia via the long roads, the thin roads, the roads like honey dripping from a spoon. This is a country where we have skylights in our automobiles, not lit cars on light-rail, give me a break. This is a country where the windows are open—this, of course, being how we drove down our long, thin road to Virginia with the windows open, of course, with music which could have been Allen Ginsberg intoning some chant with monkey cymbals tied to his pinkies, but actually was Philip Glass walking up steps as if there was no second floor to his office building because this is a country where we don't build second floors, you only get only second chances to build the first.

The house in Virginia, of course, had a second floor because French oligarchs ran the place, believe it or not, although they included underneath curtains as red as some bird song that Messiaen heard one time in Utah a piano from the 1870's designed by Mrs. M. A. Virgil, a tall woman, perhaps, with a short mustache like honey dripping from a spoon, maybe she had large breasts, maybe not, who knows? She taught piano, invariably Chopin, she often excused herself, she often amused her students by speaking a stuttering French, but she was a lady of this country, she was not at all an oligarch, although she had some Germans manufacture her pianos which sold widely, but not abundantly throughout the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, pianos which had no strings, but rather a mechanism by which each key emitted a click when pressed down and a click when let up so as to allow the conscientious pianist to hear the very rhythms, the very precise clicks of the music he or she should have been making and this years before the electronic keyboard, years before the touch-tone phone, years before popping records, before people could smack their tongue against the roof of their mouth in polite society. Look, the frogs even put one of Mrs.

Virgil's pianos in the hotel room, that is, the one we were staying in, the one with the wallpaper by William Morris, who was British, obviously, friends with J. W. Mackail, who translated Callimachus's gem-like epigrams, he knew Rossetti, he knew Marx, I think, but that might be a stretch. This is what we had to deal with. It was just summer, after all. We were only going to see Monticello, read old cookbooks, purchase any number of stamps...

It's a shame they took that waitress away. We saw her coming out of the bathroom after all that, after years of construction, we saw her gingerly held aloft by exactly two fingers, she was still laughing, as if she could laugh and sneeze at the same time, like she was opening pepper packets, like she had some degenerative brain disorder, like she was some kind of enigma, you know the kind, the kind that live on tombs and appear in poems by Callimachus, the type about so-and-so who lived here who doesn't anymore. Or maybe so-and-so died in this spot or was never found. I could go on, of course, but really, it was only wallpaper and I hate to exaggerate the importance of even small things like that.

So we're sitting on two bedspreads at this point, she and I, who I haven't really talked about yet. And look at everything: the paper on the walls, the decanter of sherry, curtains decaying with squash blossoms outside the window and the long road like jelly behind us. Walking across the flowers, through the vines, there's that insane waitress who's probably from around here, who probably got me sick. Now I'll never get the chance to see Jefferson's Monticello. Did you know he built it after his trip to France? I mean, for god's sake, what can you do? You've just arrived from far away, you have to take a day of rest, you know... So maybe everything can wait until tomorrow. That's what we came down here for, right? Look at these things like invisible stalactites in a pitch-black cave, like an old crooked fence laid one plank at a time, like the misshapen diary of the woman sitting next to me.

EDEN  
2009

It's true we were noisy and of course, the cops had to come. While the head of the labor alliance tried to pick a fight with a policeman who ended up being infuriatingly sympathetic, Eden and I sat inside a poster-strewn bus-stop a little ways off. I liked her, but wasn't sure what to say. Some women are born innocent, others are born seemingly adults. Sometimes a woman is born who's both, a woman who knows how to move with grace, who seems as uncorrupted as she is feral, carnal. Eden was none of these. She couldn't even be called innocent. I didn't know what to say to her, but I liked her very much, so I mentioned that I'd seen her video online. She blushed, not sure how to proceed. I laughed gently. Don't worry about it, I said, I thought you were very sexy. I think I put her at ease. The protest was moving again and off we went, jeering at the banks, the arms manufactures, the YMCA, Barnes & Noble...

It was a potentially awkward situation, as you can imagine. I liked her name when I saw it on the list of people signed up for the FUNK THE WAR protest—she was one of the few volunteers the student group had attracted with a desperate craigslist posting, which appeared at the eleventh hour and appealed to those locals hungry for what they all invariably described as community experience. This was back in the day when the whole campus shut down around eight PM and it seemed like all human activity would be halted in the middle of trying to escape, like a piece of paper jammed in a printer. I saw Eden's name on the volunteer list and when I searched for it online, there was her video, which at some point in the past she'd posted to an amateur porn site. The clip consisted mainly of her torso and at times, when she moved away from the camera, her jeans. It was nice, really, although anyone could see that she lacked something desirable that the other girls on the site had. Eden offered up her breasts to the camera like a sacrifice, turning this way and that, moving them forward towards the lens so they looked like two slow cruise ships which, before they hit the invisible iceberg of the camera, managed to halt before slowly, slowly shifting into reverse. Her breasts were large, admittedly, but she moved them as if, while she *thought* they were appealing, she didn't feel it in her gut.

Back at the protest, our modest dozen or so dissidents continued to dance around the shopping cart which they'd loaded with an iPod, some scarves, and a battery-powered amp. The students were decked out in burlesquery; the locals hovered off to the side, wearing sweaters. As we walked together in the midst of this small, but energetic crowd, both of us somewhat at a loss, in the night air which very distinctly reminded me (and possibly her) of mint ice cream, I asked Eden about the circumstance of her video. I think she was glad to talk about it, particularly because one thing led to another such that, in response to one of my questions, she confided to me one of her fantasies. She said that she'd always fantasized about having sex in a pool. At that point, we detached ourselves from the protest, heading back, hands working in our pockets.

The athletic center was farther from campus than most would have liked, so it was empty at that hour. Both of us were quiet, excited. Eden draped our clothes on the diving board and we slid into the pool, touching. The chlorinated water dispersed all her hard-earned lubrication and the whole affair, despite the pleasant floating, was somewhat painful. We kept at it though, in deference to her fantasy. By unspoken agreement, we left the pool to climax, each of us, a few minutes apart. Afterwards, it was very peaceful lying there with her, very wet, on the mat by the

side of the pool.

When we decided to get dressed, we realized that our clothes had fallen into the water. Luckily, some athlete had abandoned an enormous pair of sweats next to the ellipticals. With a smile, I asked her if she thought we could both fit inside. Wouldn't that be amazing, I asked. *We could be wearing the same pair of pants!* She hesitated, but I kissed her cheek, whispering, *the very same pair of pants!* And I tell you now, triumphantly, yes, we did it. We pulled the pair of sweats up around us. Then, together, we covered our torsos with a pool towel and fell asleep, hugging by necessity, mostly warm and very secure, feeling the plastic of the reclining pool chair underneath us like an old friend. She had her arms around me the whole time, hanging onto me as I stroked her hair. I remember waking up in the middle of the night, feeling her sweet breath on my face, and into my head came Mozart's Piano Sonata No. 11, which the local classical station sometimes played. It's one of the simplest, most beautiful pieces of music I know. I wondered, then, what we would have been like, me and her, if we had lived in another age. We might have danced to that piece, propped up by clothing, moving decorously through the air.

For a moment, through the window, I could see the burned-out old Shultz building across the street, glowing behind its scaffolding. The whole block was deserted and dark, but there, in the window, hung a brilliant chandelier whose light was reflected in Eden's face. We slept till morning and spent the next day together and, at last, neither Eden nor I were afraid.

## SASHA AND THALIA

2009

The story begins in Disney World when Sasha is very sunburned after a day of laboring in the tepid water of the Little Lagoon. The Little Lagoon, of course, is a kid's zone (only kids) which is surrounded by deck chairs with parents and Galaxian machines with money changers, full of sand formations and tubular slides. Sasha, as you can imagine, wasn't swimming with the other kids, but heaving with every limb the stubborn sand of the Lagoon's sand-bed into a fortress, his back in full view of the sun. His parents were there, reclining behind glasses at a distance. Also, his cousin Thalia was there. In fact, she was helping him build the fortress. More on that later.

Sasha is a little boy, I guess ten. At the moment, he's pressing his fiery back into the wall of his hotel room, almost crouching under the sink. It's probably around three in the morning. He's digging his hands into the carpet, which is very green and patterned. He is not crying, but his face is scrunched up. Thalia, lying on the cot in front of the TV, watches him over her pillow, under the covers. She watches as his nails rake the rug in distraction, until he falters, a strange look in his eye. He brings his right hand up to his face and then something scares it away and then Sasha is rubbing his hand against the ground, nearly whimpering. Thalia climbs over her pillow. Hi, Sasha says quietly as Thalia sits down across from him, under the towel rack. Thalia is the same age as Sasha. What happened to your hand, Thalia asks, sticking her index finger into her mouth, which, strange as it sounds, she enjoys much more than her thumb. I was moving my hands on the carpet and one of those roly bugs was in the carpet and I killed it with my fingernail by accident, it got stuck under it! Sasha winces and shivers. Thalia starts to dig into the carpet too, enjoying the warm, red sensation of the friction.

Of course at this point, Sasha is a little embarrassed in front of Thalia and mostly ignores her, distracting himself from his sunburn with the back and forth movements of his hands—they're both doing it now—and also by imagining winter. Not just any winter, but one seemingly mythical in his memory during which some seven feet of snow falls and he falls in the snow, tossed by his dad and he finds himself trapped in a cylinder exactly his width, the sky as far as a ceiling fan or farther. He has to tunnel out of it, across a world which (it doesn't even enter his mind) was merely the lawn yesterday. Though he might create a network of tunnels, a tunnel system, what he does, in fact, is create a chamber under the snow that's all his own, a very warm and dark place, but not that warm, no, in fact, rather refreshing, in which he can feel not only very alert and ready to take care of business, but also where he can sleep until he's ready to construct the tunnels again. Indeed, he would like to furnish his little hole with filing cabinets and trunks where he can store his documents. Since the world is entirely enclosed in snow, grey pressing in to every window, hugging it closely, granting every interior the silence of ice, of course, of course, Thalia would be there too. It doesn't occur to him for her to be absent, really; he just imagines her in some other tunnel where he might find her, accidentally perhaps. Of course, when she gets there, he'd have to charge her to use his tunnels, to take up residence in his snow chamber— though in fact, at this point, better call it a snow hotel. He would accept only Sasha dollars, with his face Xeroxed in the middle; he would accept only the silver dollars he'd made by scratching his profile and initials onto thin silver disks which he got when his dad took him to

this shop where they sold gold and silver in various forms. He would make a little mark in the registry on his snow counter when Thalia would come in. He would demand some kind of identification, perhaps one of the cards he himself had printed for her using those pop-out business card sheets for laser printers. He might even give her a discount coupon, the scissor lines of which he would have spent some hours dotting that very day.

Of course, Thalia would be quite uncooperative. She would beg to be let into the club, she would yell boorishly into her plastic cell phone which couldn't call anybody anyway, although every time she lost it, invariably it would be replaced. Thalia would throw snow at him, probably, or maybe just knock his structures over while she practiced her modern hip-hop dance technique. When she got tired out, though, she would always come around to Sasha. They'd confer in Sasha's icy conference room formed out of the snow his dad overturned with his shovel or, if we're talking about earlier that day in Disney World, they'd be conferring motionless, floating like two dead fish on the surface of the shallow pool by the white sand, watching the arms of parents carefully placed near diapers. Having determined the division of labor, they'd tackle the sand or snow, heedless of the wet and cold or heat and burning, until hours had passed and every joint ached from the elements and the grandiloquent spires and domes had appeared perhaps, though sometimes they wouldn't appear—or, more often, they would be completed to an extent before being knocked over by accident, before new ideas for designs left them obsolete, irrelevant.

Now, as they sit across from each other, Thalia says, You're really red. No, Sasha says, but look! He presses his fingers into his arm where they leave yellow, glowing indentations. Thalia sneaks over, grabbing his wrist and with her own fingers tries to make birds on his arm. At some point, Sasha decides this is making him uncomfortable so he tries to turn away, but of course Thalia starts to tickle him, which makes him both laugh and feel like his back is being licked like a lollipop of fire. He starts to tickle her back, but she runs away to her cot. Sasha follows her, seizing the double layer of blankets from the bed and hurling them, trying to trap her underneath. Thalia goes down. Sasha crawls under the bed, which is now dim and enclosed from the blanket he'd thrown. Thalia is lying there, slyly, having pushed two pillows on either side of her, adding to their cave's fortifications. Sasha crawls out again, grabbing his watch, his crazy bones, his magic cards, etc, and returns to the cot to display his hoard, but not before pausing before his parents' bed, spying on them, wondering if they're awake. We should go on a new mission, he said to Thalia, as he settled back down. Where? We should get stuff from my mom's night table. No!—guess what? What? You know what I heard? What? You know about genitals? What? The genitals! We have to take our clothes off. Uh. Thalia starts to wiggle out of her clothes, wiggling from side to side, sliding her shorts off. Sasha isn't sure what to do. But, of course, he takes his clothes off too. We should get married, Thalia says. Sasha is in love. Do you want to touch? Sasha isn't sure.

The worst of it all is the next week, after they get married, when his mom calls him into the kitchen for a phone call. It's Thalia, saying that she's found a new husband, a wrestler who's been to jail, a man whose name neither he nor she can recall, though that seems unlikely in retrospect, since those names are often so memorable. Some years later, Sasha can't remember if, when he heard this news, he cried or took it as a matter of course. Looking back through the structure of his memory which, for some reason, reminds him now, as he's having this

reminiscence, of a jungle-gym, he wonders if that moment with Thalia was a formative experience for him. In any case, he does recall that after hanging up the phone, crying or not, he went up to his room, but not before stopping to look at the ominous wind outside, which cast the leaves out of their piles and blew a number of cardboard boxes across the road. Sasha thought he might use those boxes, but decided against it, perhaps, because he went upstairs to his room and, alone, began to write software for his computer.

## WHEELCHAIR GUY

2009

Oh no, the young Marcel Proust has a cold. Hah! Touch your neck. Time to stop stuffing your fingers up your nose. Kick the Latin book onto the floor. NO MORE SUBJUNCTIVE. Eyes against the pillow. *Oculis apertis!* The hour of four o'clock in the afternoon, isn't it? Yeah, you know me. It's only a fever. You saw me in the Berkshires. Hide under the covers, Marcel, squint into black butter, cover your face with those spice blankets. I'm only a voice. Remember me? *MY GAL HAD LEPROSY, I WATCHED HER ROT!* There I was, in front of the bookstore. For twelve years! In my wheelchair, my composting jacket? You didn't like my jowls? My flat dry face, my dry ice cream... You wanted to wipe it off my chin, didn't you? You want to rub your little fingers into my sleeve, didn't you? You wanted to sit down and ask me about the balloon tied to the flag rammed down my spine, no? *ONE NIGHT SHE CAME TO ME, I SLURPED HER SNOT.* HAH. YOU saw my friend sitting next to me. YOU saw his pate! His yellow pad, covered with aleph bet. Practically lunch time, right? Snuggle under the covers, Marcel. No, swing your hairy little legs out from under them. Stain your shirt, Marcel! It's all coming back to you. Even I can't get rid of my friend, my daughter likes him, she runs the bookstore. Lobster rolls. Thank you, darling. There she goes. What a thing. "I'm frail, asshole," I say to my friend. *I SPANKED HER HARD! HER SKIN CAME OFF!* What have I been thinking about, Marcel? I know you're wondering in your head. What could he be thinking? What does a man think about when he's confined to a motorized recliner? A hunchback! A monk! I SAW YOU MARK ME DOWN IN YOUR NOTEBOOK. My daughter served you, houseguest. Look, Aristotle clearly says—*WITH A KISS I SET HER AFLAME, HER LOVELY FACE WAS NEVER THE SAME.* Reminds me. I knew ceviche lady. CEVICHE LADY! This was in my time. Floating in the pool, noodles under arm. Stranded in the deep-end like a decoy duck. *MY DAUGHTER'S MOTHER, MY ONLY LOVER.* My friend tells me, "You—in the wheelchair—you knew ceviche lady, in your time!" I did, I did! "Give me just one inspired utterance. Just one umbrous ember." That's what my friend pronounced. You saw him, Marcel. You know the plastic chair he sat in. Legs crossed. Balding. Writing. Considering our relation to the Hellenistic dark ages. Have you ever thought about that? Aristotle says that art and science have flourished and perished a thousand times already. My friend grows them in his basement. *WHAT IS WRONG WITH YOUR SKIN? MY LOVE, YOUR HAIR IS GROWING THIN!* Tell your Latin teacher on Monday. Yell it at her. It's a rhetorical device. *MY GAL TURNED GREEN, A NOXIOUS SPLEEN. A SORRY LOT, A DEAD ASH POT.* God, Marcel, you still awake? You going to lie in bed until coffee and croissants solidify beneath you? You going to leave a greasy monument to the future? A short memoir? *SHE TOOK THE LEAP, ETERNAL SLEEP.* I'm talking about ceviche lady. In the sauna. Aromatic. "Did you know," she said softly to me, "Did you know you can eat shrimp without cooking it?" A hush. I said no. She cupped her mouth with her hand. "Lemon juice," she whispered and then repeated it, "Lemon juice. That's all you need." All you need, Marcel. Drifting off... It's regenerative. Start from scratch. No fever. Forget fever. Just lemonade pressed against you. The night air like a balloon. Let the air out, Marcel. If it pops—so be it. you're awake anyway—blow it up.

FIELDING  
2009

So it was around three o'clock that the Chabadniks began to quiet down. They had spilled out onto the street, holding the Torah aloft, locking arms... And this despite the cold! So what if their breath materialized in front of them like joyous angels? It is not every day that the last words of a new Torah are written! Eli staggered home with Isaiah picking at his arms, fell into bed—what a cozy bed it was!—but was unable to sleep, the sound of celebration ringing from right to left through their co-op on Ocean Ave.

Soon Eli could hear voices from across the hall, from David's room. David's voice. The voice of his clean-shaven step-brother Fielding, who'd needed a place to stay. Fielding was speaking intensely. Eli could not but hear him in the dark. Do you understand me? I want you to try. I want you I dare you to kill me. Show me you're not a fucking pussy David and kill me. Isaiah's laugh, his three-octave laugh. I am not going to kill you, Fielding, Eli heard David say. Ask Isaiah to kill you. No, you faggot! Fielding's voice was hoarse. You are going to stop wasting your time playing that stupid video game. You are going to murder me. Or I will I will break your glasses. I will kill you in the face with your own glasses. Do you possibly know what it feels like to have your own glasses sticking out of your face? Let me get Eli, he heard David say, he will kill you.

Eli refused to look at the door until he heard David knock. What? Eli asked, pulling off the bedcovers. We need your help, said David. Eli laughed and said he'd heard. The pair walked slowly across the hall, empty but for a night-light in the shape of a Star of David.

David's room was the coziest. Well-lit. Scripture in the alcoves built into the wall. In the middle of it, there was Fielding, kneeling on the rug, kneeling and swaying from left to right, his boots tied just below his knees. His hands rested on the floor, then worked to cover the small band of flesh above his belt. Isaiah sat cross-legged on the bed, a book of Schneerson on his lap. He looked up at Eli, saying, He wants us to kill him. I was just trying to read, always an interruption... *Someone is going to have to kill me!* Fielding roared. *You kill me!* He was looking at Eli. I'll do it, David said, holding the long ruler he used to measure out lines of text, maybe three feet long.

Eli, of course, played along. Ah! You bring a reform Jew into the house, what do you expect? he asked, grinning. David was testing the ruler, swinging it shortly close to Fielding's neck. Wait, wait, we have to do this right of course, Eli said. From David's desk, he took a box of tin foil. Hurry up, Fielding growled. We need a blind-fold, Eli explained, wrapping a length of tin foil around Fielding's head. Yes, that's it. You photograph it, Eli, David said, handing him a digital camera. Fielding's voice, muffled by the foil. Ready?

David towered over his step-brother, his legs apart. Fielding was hunched over, his head covered in what looked like a bag of metal, his hands working, ready. It won't work, Eli said, it won't take the video. Let me see, David said. I pressed the wrong button, I think. David put down the ruler.

*You are me and you are going to kill me. I want you to murder me. I want to die.* Another gale of laughter from Isaiah. All night! All night! He's even been giving David massages, trying to choke him, Isaiah explained. David handed the camera back to Eli. Are you ready? Do it. Are

you ready? *Do it*, Fielding commanded. Okay. *Now!* The memory card is full! Ah—David, come here and look at it, come here. Eli at last whispered into David's ear which now was close, What are you going to do to him, really? I'm just going to hit his neck a little. Hopefully he'll stop. Isaiah, meanwhile, despite his excitement, could not but think. Could not help but think despite himself. He wondered if he'd have the energy to lead services tomorrow. Then: *kill me you faggots*.

As Eli lifted the camera, his hand poised over the button, David lifted the ruler. Then, with more force than Eli expected, David slammed the ruler against Fielding's neck, not once, but twice. The camera recorded their hush. Fielding seemed to lean perilously.

*SON OF A BITCH!* Fielding ripped off the tin foil with a screech, with a wild glare. I will kill you all! He reached out and seized a standing-lamp, an old antique near David's bed, ripping the cord from the wall. The room turned black.

David threw down the ruler with a shout, turned, and fled into the hall. Fielding charged after him, using the lamp as a spear. Eli barely had time to press himself against the door-frame. He couldn't help smiling as he looked over at Isaiah who'd fallen onto a pillow. What a gift he is, Fielding, he said. We're nothing without him!

From a distance, they could hear the bathroom door slam shut, the lock click. They could hear Fielding lifting the spare mattress from the hall and trying to shove it against the door. They went out to help him. David opened the door a crack. In his hand, he held a toothbrush, his mouth was frothing. This is so contrived, he said. Eli handed Isaiah the camera. Then, with one more shove, Fielding succeeded in wedging the mattress between the ceiling and the floor. At the same time, however, he knocked loose a ceiling tile which fell on his head in a cloud. For a moment Fielding was stunned. Eli and Isaiah doubled over in laughter. Oh, David, you poor soul, you missed it! You missed it! The camera was not even on. Ah!

Well, are you all satisfied? asked Fielding. He brushed himself off. His suave demeanor had returned.

A few minutes later, Eli and Isaiah had already disappeared into the dark hallway. David finished brushing his teeth. When he came back into his room and sat down at his computer, Fielding was there waiting for him. He began to caress David's shoulders; he wrapped his arms around David's head. I have the power to kill you, Fielding whispered, choking David gently, light-headed. I can give you whatever you want. Do you understand me? I have the power to give it to you. To give you everything you want or not.

Go to bed, Fielding, David said. I blew up the blow-up mattress for you.

\*

In the morning, Fielding left the brick co-op, his hands sliding down the thin metal railing of the front stairs. It was a chilly day. Lubavitchers and their parties, Fielding thought, wonderingly. The leaves spun around in tiny storms.

A few days later, after Eli had visited his parents in New Jersey; after Isaiah had discovered a package on the Q train; after David had at last read from the new Torah, properly dedicated with love and devotion; only then did Fielding, David's step-brother, slip away from himself at his apartment in Long Island City. His mother was preparing a crock-pot in the kitchen. The doctor said it was a bleeding in the brain. You get a knock on the head and you're fooled into thinking you feel fine, he explained. Meanwhile, pressure builds up in your skull. He

laid a hand on Mrs. Roth's shoulder. I'm sorry, Libby, about your son. Really, I am. Speaking of which, how is David, is he well? A Chabadnik? Good for him.

## THE INFINITE BOX

2009

This story begins a long time ago and it's significant that Mateo still remembers it. The story begins in 1997 with a contract between four parties treating the issue of bed-times. Four signatures were required: Mateo's little squiggle, the elegant scrawl of his two older cousins, and the controlled loop of his mother. The point? The night, like every hour, stretched on as if it would never end. His two cousins still existed for him as legs and bodies, shorts and sneakers, glasses on the table, their damp, bony hands on the dollar or two, the floppy disk, a knock-off version of Mortal Kombat rewritten in BASIC, their hands on the keyboard of the Packard-Bell, the colors, teal, white and grey of Windows 3.11. Time was too long to treat as if it were short. The contract was signed; their fates were sealed.

The next step was the creation of a world. Mateo's family moved to a new house; the Packard-Bell went into storage; their new Dell arrived in a large box filled with a soup of packing peanuts into which Mateo wanted to sink. Later, his father drove him out into the woods, through a clearing, past a huge building. That's the Comcast building, he said to Mateo. They're the *only* ones who offer cable internet in South Jersey. Overpriced and unreliable. They got us trapped. The world was tan, blue, and quick. Mateo watched the computer restart: Dell, Microsoft, Windows 98.

Mateo unveiled his latest concoction.

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Hello World!
WELCOME TO THE POS (POWER OPERATING SYSTEM)!
CREATED BY MASTER MATEO BLANCO.
FOR ALL YOUR COMPUTING NEEDS.
ENJOY!
What is your first name? Mom
What is your last name? Blanco
Your name is Mom Blanco !!
Goodbye.
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Someone was throwing out an Compaq desktop computer. Mateo brought it to his room, heaved it onto a shelf, stole an AOL CD, a telephone cord, strung it two rooms over, signed up for a thirty-day dial-up trial. Now there was no reason to go downstairs except for food: he fantasized about half-sized refrigerators and gas-powered stove-tops, imagined everything in one place, absolutely self-sufficient, always available, organized.

From this private island, however, he ran a brisk exports trade. He animated smiley faces for his 5<sup>th</sup> grade teacher; he wrote a program for money management in 6<sup>th</sup> grade; in 7<sup>th</sup> grade, he entered the science fair with software that grew and evolved artificial organisms; he spent 8<sup>th</sup> grade English class reading programming manuals; online he devoured the Eric Raymond's *How To Become A Hacker*; he bought his first domain name in 2003; he sold his software to kids at Hebrew School on diskette; he left his high school programming club in disillusionment...

For his Latin class, he created a text adventure, a game in which one played the part of Aeneas, wandering through Troy. The world presented itself in short descriptions, while one's actions were decided by a word of command typed on the screen. Files started to appear on his computer: an idea-network, an Athena project, a Minerva project, a God project—you must excuse his megalomania. Structures filled the files: Worlds, Neurons, Creatures, Memories. As he fell asleep, he planned in his head a program who would live in his computer and talk to him,

who would know everything about him, track his every move, who would know him well enough to make him laugh, who would thank him for continuing to write, for continuing to build a universe around him. Mateo filled pages with cognitive models, theories of memory, actions and reactions. He paced around the edge of the bathtub, pontificating to his mother, his father, his brothers, whoever happened to be there. He checked out books from the local community college's technical library, skipping the pages with math he couldn't understand. Nothing stopped him from sinking deeper and deeper into the box on his desk, learning more the deeper he sank, with the sole hope that something inside the box would move, would twitch and squirm, would show some sign of life, would begin to learn, would take impressions, would display a single character on the screen, a single glowing letter, like sentient bubble rising gently to the surface of a lake, only the first delicate pronouncement of a young brain.

I don't have to tell you, I'm sure, that nothing came of it. Perhaps his theories were incomplete or altogether false; perhaps his eyes failed him after so many hours, or maybe his neck rebelled against the strain. He turned off the infinite box. It stayed on. He turned it off again. It suffused the room with a pale glow. Directly across the street, in the window of his neighbor, Mateo could see that Angela's room was bathed in the same wan light. He could still feel it around him as he fell asleep.

Meanwhile, while Mateo wrestled with his desire, his brother glued himself to a new laptop, a better cell-phone, a youtube account which he used to post how-to videos, a twitter feed and an anonymous following of thousands. Mateo could barely imagine what the inside of his brother's head was like. He himself could remember when he signed the contract, the contract for sleepless nights in front of the computer; his brother, only five years younger, had the contract signed for him. The story ends, then, with Mateo far away from his bunker, trying to figure out how to live as one infinitesimal in the infinite box.

## MEINONG'S JUNGLE

2009

First, a little background: as is well known, the history of Anglo-American thought took a decidedly analytical turn in the first years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Our philosophy departments today remain inexcusably biased toward Russellian ontology—an ontology which has snuck under the door as the seemingly inevitable assumption of our logic. At the present moment, the generally accepted view is that, to use Quine's phrase, "everything exists." Of course, this collective forgetting of our philosophical inheritance leaves vast regions of possible thought more-or-less unexplored. Despite the handicap of waging a Pyrrhic struggle against the majority, there are those who, in the not too distant past, held to a more catholic notion of being. I refer, of course, to the work of Austrian philosopher Alexius Meinong,—a man who subscribed firmly to the view that everything most certainly does *not* exist and that, in fact, philosophy should jettison its bias towards the real, that it should engage valorously in a systematic investigation of that which is non-existent, incomplete, and fictional;—for indeed, such unknown territory possesses the most dire need of cartography.

So much for an introduction. My story, in fact, starts in-transit to London, 1934. At the time, I was studying law, or rather literature, for my law books yet remained in Vienna, a city from which I had fled some months previously—they languish there, no doubt, in my tenant's forgotten wardrobe. With the trains following one after the other, I had not had the chance to devour anything but novels. Thus it was that I was seized by a real and genuine shock; I realized that on the very same train as I sat an acquaintance of mine—or rather, a friend of a friend—the novelist Stefan Zweig, a man whose company in the years to follow would be sorely missed and whose posthumous reputation deserves only to increase. At that time, in early March, I regret to say that I was hardly aware of him, having seen him only at various distant gatherings in the city, although *that day*, if only by necessity, he had caught my eye, burdened as he was by a considerable package. I approached him with some trepidation, to help him carry his load, my mind rapidly paging through all such books I had *not* read and might be expected to. Of course, however, he greeted me quite warmly; and, to my delight, recounted to me a story: that of an old bookseller with a rigorous store of memory, who lived in a Viennese café, acting as an obscure, bewhiskered card-catalogue. Not only that, but Zweig had just obtained, with the help of the café's aging waitress, the collection of books—a regular lumber-room—which this old mentor of Zweig's had abandoned, in despair, by the side room of the café some years before. It was with this weight that Zweig was burdened, one which he bore admirably, but with the distant eyes of someone who has witnessed, in his time, a great secret, or rather a great mystery.

At the end of our journey, Zweig clasped my hand and, adjusting his mustache, proposed that a volume be chosen at random for me, as a token of friendship, or, rather, as an oracle perhaps of things to come. As the reader has no doubt surmised, the volume which Zweig transferred to me that day was Meinong's *Theory of Objects*, a book which disappeared into my coat pocket and did not emerge—so firmly had I stuffed it in there, so rapidly did events cause this particular coat to vanish from my coat-tree—until some years later, when, hearing of Zweig's suicide, the thought of our exchange returned to me; dusting off my old Austrian jacket, I discovered Meinong's text staring me in the face like a talisman, a baleful eye, or an

inexplicable source of light in a cavern.

I was living in Oxford then—holding a junior chair in Mathematics—looking constantly over the shoulders of literature students as they passed around copies of Beckett or Céline (depending on the progress of nihilism—which one is worse in that regard I cannot say), and spent much of my time in the library, pouring ineffectually over Valéry's letters, various nonsense; I was at a loss for new ideas; absolutely adrift. It was as if all my occupations—as reader, as professor, as stroller, as recondite participant at beery, candlelight discussions—had been pressing me on towards the same thoughts, the identical conclusions; as if each new path was really a spiral, or rather a number of spirals, spinning together towards the same point, lying against each other, alternating, like layers of strudel. I was after something new. Something true, perhaps, but anything surprising would do.

Wittgenstein had just passed away; Russell was pressing the *Tractatus* on anyone who dared enter his office. I will never forget my time in the library, sitting adjacent to the window so that, in the silence of the books, I could hear dimly the rush of wind outside, a cold low moan that seemed not to originate outside, but rather, like a paradox, inside the walls of the Bodleian itself, as if there were an unknown stairwell or passage, a chamber whose doorway had hitherto lain uncrossed, whose voice was whispering to me through many layers of stonework. Perhaps I was only imagining it, but I distinctly recall the soft breath of air against my face, so tender and minute, like the puff that accompanies the closing of a packet in an archive. I had just collapsed into a skeletal armchair, largely insensitive to my surroundings, and it was with this breeze bringing moisture to my eyes that I read the end of Wittgenstein's preface to the *Tractatus*, *On the other hand the truth of the thoughts that are here communicated seems to be unassailable and definitive. I therefore believe myself to have found, on all essential points, the final solution to the problems. And if I am not mistaken in this belief, then the second thing in which the value of this work consists is that it shows how little is achieved when these problems are solved.* Thus the greatest philosopher of our times. So you can imagine what dull, seething, desperate curiosity with which I, not too long afterwards, approached Meinong's short volume, not expecting, but hoping.

Snow had settled around us. It distributed itself at thresholds, against the walls of sheds; thereafter, rain came down and molded the snow into a more malleable form, which reshaped itself, turning inward into puddles. I cannot recall if I discovered or invented the following location: I was walking, for I had a habit of walking; it was perhaps twilight; it was dark, I was under a bridge; water ran; from deep below me, I could hear water draining. There, surrounded by the bridge's supports, which seemed incommensurable to the bridge's weight, I had my first thought. Meinong had taught me, more-or-less: *Make a list.* I formed a void in my head, as if clearing a space in an instant, smooth and dark. *A list of all the objects which exist.* They descended through the void from somewhere above me, glittering downwards, towards the void where the last finite object would twirl. *Each object is associated with a corresponding set of properties.* Like a fine watch-chain, a dotted line, as thin as piano wire, connected each object with a loose circle, whose circumference wavered slightly like an under-sea plant. Within the circle, hovered patches of gem-like brightness, whose inspection revealed to be pure sense-perceptions. Each was a swirling mass of lights, an infinite number of properties culled from the world, all the cool-ness, the inky-ness, the slender-ness, the smooth-ness, all such attributes of a

pen. I rose up and down this skyscraper of objects, as if on skates. *These are all the objects which exist and their properties; now continue the list of sets on the right. Form all possible sets of properties, finite and infinite. For each new set of properties, there is an object associated with that set which has only those properties.* From my left rose a gold mountain; to my right, lassoed into an amoeba-like bag, a shining puddle of pure gold-ness, bumping insistently in a wide space against a towering, distant well of mountain-ness. Here were all the non-existent objects, the incomplete objects, the objects fictional or half-formed: the object defined only by the properties blue and round; the object defined by only the properties tree-like and square; the object defined by only the properties of having exactly three points; of being both round and square; of being tear-streaked and red-faced; of having been lost and wandering; of being male, lithe, blonde, and nothing else, the lithe-ness curling around a ghostly armature of masculinity, a shower of blonde-ness inhering near the head, diffusing downward. Here were the ideal objects, the ill-defined objects, the objects of assumption. The objects which are, but do not exist.

I emerged from underneath the bridge; I continued to walk down the grayish-blue path; I bent down, at times, to scribble some notes on a small card on the back of which I had written several call-numbers, books which I meant to investigate later. Lights hung down the street; the illumination was sweet; the light struck my eyes like candy. The cold wind lifted my scarf; the slush crunched under my feet. I closed my eyes, tried to envision again the world of Meinong's book, my hand still clasped around it, warm inside my pocket, revealing or, rather, opening up in my head. I felt as if I were walking amidst the untamed menagerie of non-existent objects, their forms rising around me like leafy-ness and imposing-ness, dark-ness and elephant-ness. Meinong, I later learned, had suffered from inherited semi-blindness. I squinted against the swift wind; around me towered an object of house-ness and porch-ness; of steeple-ness, white-washed-ness and shrub-ness; of flurry-ness, warm-ness, distant-voices-ness, inviting-ness; of faraway-ness, of mailbox-ness, of lady-ness, of staggering-ness, of wearing-shoes-ness, of red-lips-ness, of large-eyes-ness, of pale-face-ness, of birth-mark-ness, of gasping-ness, of close-ness, of tripping-ness. I caught her before she fell, having slipped on the ice.

Thank you, she said. I straightened her up, my hand on her arm, thick with sleeve. She smiled at me; I, of course, smiled back; she entered the pub; I walked on.

I lifted a bough and began to tour the field of all possible instantiations of woman at the pub. The various she's were arranged in a line, in a row of increasing number of properties. Female-ness; female-ness, legs-ness; female-ness, legs-ness, legs-and-arms-ness; female-ness, legs-and-arms-ness, arms-ness... Every possible iteration of her, each scrambled and half-developed, rotated slowly in the deserted field, barely crushing the soft grass beneath her. At the very end of the infinite line was she herself, the complete object corresponding to the infinity of properties that she held close within her; I could see her in the distance, like a star behind the clouds; or, like the moon behind the clouds, clouds illuminated only by the moon behind them. Every one of her was bound to a chain which shot forth into the ground below. I found the impossible hers, the object with she-ness and he-ness and obese-ness; I found the she with face-ness and gaping-hole-ness; the she that was a glistening female figure, composed of what seemed like the curves of hard-boiled eggs, shaped and formed around a sculpture. Chains, I now saw, leapt outwards, clanging, seeking, and fastening on to objects well-distributed around me. Each object was bound to the world by its properties; each impossibility was grounded in the possible.

At last I reached the complete her. She crouched there, hand on her knee, daring me to look back at the finite number of steps I had taken, at the jungle which was thinning out. I looked back; the menagerie was concealed behind an ever growing cloud of chains, binding even the non-existent objects to the world whose properties defined them. With what seriousness I tried to penetrate that cloud! I was twenty-seven; I was walking across an ice-patch. What was I looking for, in charting Meinong's jungle? Nothing inside the jungle at all; I wanted out. Consider a non-existent object with a non-existent property, a property so far removed from any existence-bound property as to be inconceivable, a property not of this world, a property absolutely outside of the finitude of existence. I sought that property, or rather, those properties, for I could not say how many there were.

I sat down on a bench; I pressed my cold hands against Zweig's book; I closed my eyes. I felt the wind on my lips; I entered the jungle; ruined objects rose up around me. I was walking, and although I wished to continue, I kept having to turn back. The world fell away from me as I sat on the bench; I got up, went home, fell asleep. Meinong's volume returned to its pocket. Day dawned on Oxford in 1942.

Today, I am not much wiser. I tell this story to you so that you understand my search. I have no more answers, but there are those far cleverer than I.

2010

BRIEF HISTORY, OR E (UNFINISHED)  
2010



*By Matt Weiss*

*Men fight and lose the battle, and the thing that they fought for comes about in spite of defeat, and when it comes it turns out not to be what they meant, and other men have to fight for what they meant under another name.*

- William Morris, *The Dream of John Ball*.

*Only the changes in the realm of Spirit create the novel.*

- Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*.

*1. 6<sup>th</sup> Century B.C. Philosophic Fragment attributed to Agnoios; translated from the Greek by Donald Alderman, 1923.*

It is asked, Why does man sneeze most of all creatures? Man sneezes most because of all creatures his nature is most involuntary. Man stirs himself to sneeze, for some reason which he knows not, and still the passage into him brings from him a sneeze. It is such that man's being unfolds itself amidst a wide array of fabrics, those which clothe the world as wool clothes a man lying in rest, whose feet are wrapped, and whose fellows are hides and dry herbs, within pillows or without. Man unfolds himself at dawn, amid those other garmented beings, which to him remain folded and empty, and to the most persuasive questioner man will be unable to tell for what he woke himself. And yet it is clear, that man unfolds himself without willing it amid other folds in the bed; to him, he alone is clothed; and that which is invisibly folded around him remains as lifeless to him as a forest when the trees have burnt, or as mysterious as a sacrifice to a foreign god. As man involuntarily shivers at dawn, he will try to clothe himself in the garments which lie about him, and he will fall again to sleep for himself, without unfolding his bed-fellows to appreciate their composition, or, indeed, without appreciating that which could be contained in them, but merely folding them around him close. This is the same as when a man sneezes, during which action he expels a violent, thick substance, which erupts from inside him; he knows not what precipitates his sneeze, or of what it consists. At times, perhaps the odor of rotting things, or of a potent herb, rips a sneeze from him as if, in another world, he were tearing a blanket in a vision or in surprise. But other times the sneeze comes from him like the semen of young men in a deep sleep; these young men burn in the night, they shake off their garments in sleep, and bring forth involuntarily, and waking, have no knowledge of where they lie, of where they have awoken, and shiver, having shaken off their garments in the night. Especially at dawn man's own bed is most foreign to him, even as it comforts him. And even if man were to clothe himself, again, in his garments, and draw his blankets close to him, he would nevertheless be clothed in foreign dress: at dawn, in his confusion, man knows not whether he placed his blankets there the night before himself, or whether they were made for him by another, or whether, in the night, he brought them forth out of himself; he uses them without thinking, unable to decide their origin. In the same way, man sneezes onto his arm, and wipes his ejaculate away, without thinking one

way or the other, whether men have sneezed before him in the same way as him, or whether, someday, another man will wear his dress, upon which he has discarded his ejaculate. Perhaps, as another man has said, the souls of men have an odor, and smell even in Hades. If this is the case, then the souls of men, invisible bed-fellows, must bring forth sneezes sometimes, which are nothing but violent responses to the ghosts, whose subsistence in the world pertains to their being. For man, having unfolded himself at dawn, persists in the world in the next hour, cloaked and folded.

Thus, I have proved that man's being contains the element, above all, of the involuntary; that man's being is itself involuntary; that man does not become, but already exists, at one hour or another, just as the beings of the past have already existed and still persist, and as the beings of the future already exist and will persist, to the causes of whose sneezes will be added the invisible movements of the beings of the present; and, finally, that man's being is to be unfolded insofar as he is concerned, but is truly cloaked in the folds of the others once unfolded. Man ought, then, to shake himself fully awake at dawn, when he comes into the world, and not to reconcile himself to lethargy; and although he cannot judge, in his confusion, the beings folded around him who lay with him for the night, he nevertheless might inspect the composition of their garments, so that he might better learn to clothe himself the next morning. Of this, I have no doubt; but because man will persist in seeking warmth in the morning, and because the composition of garments does not suggest the beings folded within them, and, therefore, because man is left alone or confused in the first hour of his being—thus, man will continue, because of an imbalance of heat, to give forth semen as well as sneezes at the moments in which he might least wish to do so, and be left at every hour, asking his fellow man, why?

Thus we might understand the significance of Apollo's ancient sign, which he left at the Temple at Delphi, along with his oracle; there, he wrote the letter E on the walls, which drip with holy flames. The E, they say, is as old as the mother of the earth, who once had a temple of her own in that place; the earth is man's bed insofar as man may wake himself anywhere, and be clothed in the garments of the earth, during which time, the E may hang above him, like the scent of mystery; and, like the three lines of its structure, which move in parallel as the past, the

present, and the future, man unfolds himself along three lines at once, as he blinks at the E, which can barely be seen, as he rouses himself from bed.

2. *Palladas's Account of the Fall of Antiquity, c. 4<sup>th</sup> century A.D.; translated from the Greek by Annie Devereux, 1928.*

...my constitution is as poor, and my paunch as decadent as this city, full of tears, gas, and discomfort. I write this for you, you pig, at dusk, when I can hear that endless vulgarity outside, to which you contribute, mangling the accents beyond all repair, beyond these curtains, beyond this window, through which I can smell this armpit of a world, but thankfully not see it. When I give this to you tomorrow, I foresee, with displeasure, that I won't be dead; and when you pout at me, you son of a pig, and ask me about the use of the locative, hopefully I will be drunk enough to give this letter to you, but not so drunk that I will raze your perfumed face, in a tired, energy-less rampage, beating you into the floor of that thing your father calls a palace with bags of money.

Once I thought I'd be called a poet, or perhaps a philosopher; my fate apparently has been to be a grammarian: to be born weeping, to sop up my tears with books, to die weeping, as naked as I arrived, and after death, when weeping has stopped, I can't even imagine you will remember me, the last fat blot of my race, who has, it seems, deservedly, been condemned to die along with his books, to remember what nobody reads, and not even to take any comfort in the fact.

All I have in this world is ill-fortune, and an ugly wife, whom, thankfully, is as fat as I am, and so even when we try to make love, we tire ourselves out before she has the chance to bring forth a little pig as condemned to slaughter as myself. She barks at me without end and, more than that, she expects me to listen; listen, my young ass-eater, only twice are women worth anything: the night they are married, and the night they are laid in the grave. Can I tell you what I did, after heaving myself off her, and after watching the dying sun fall off my balcony, as if daring me to leap after it? I went out into the mob, with my copy of Callimachus in my hand, and sold it for a pittance, so I thought I'd be at last free from the weight of his slim sacrifices. How many times have I raged at Callimachus, that wit, that dealer in jewels, and in this same rotting city, in a time as lost to me as the only woman who understood me? I've even gone so far as to obliterate it all from my memory, so I won't be haunted by the suggestion of a better life... Daybreak in the city....

*Her tale was told, the other's listening done,  
 And both birds slept. After a little while  
 There came a frosted neighbor, breaking sleep:  
 'Up, for the night is gone, and home from hunting  
 Night thieves return; the morning lamps are lit...*

The morning lamps are lit! Only once in this miserable, darkening life, a life emptied both of well-formed praise as well as silence, absent even of those thin vibrations in the air, remnants of ancient melodies, that Plato once played, before he gave up his strings, that lingered on for centuries before I came onto this earth, did I ever hear someone's speech that made me want to live, a speech that made me desire nothing more but to keep my eyes open for that glimmer of a now melted-down past, to stifle even a sneeze, which, we are told, is that which, in what it represents, condemns us to servitude, ignorance, and poverty, to cover up the slightest cough so that the story will not be interrupted... When I went to the house of Hypatia, the only human being who ever knew me, more beautiful than Helen, and, what's more, who had more genius in her than any Roman, more genius than, in quantity of matter, could have inflated the fattest lips, the most gratuitous breasts, the most horrendous pillow of a rear end. I would lie on her couch, my hair already graying; she would stand by the window, in something transparent that barely covered her arms, which ended in hands as lined with veins as the ripped and misplaced passages of my life are lined with mucus or unlooked-for tears; she went over her lectures with me, about the starry house of the world, about the stars which she helped to measure, as if this world were a temple, which is now as ill-used as a tavern, where gods serve hot drinks to mortals. She would illustrate her discourse with abrupt gestures, later in the morning, to the aristocracy with whom she consorted; and the next day, we would write to each other: she—in her station!—also consorted with me! We traded in Hesiod, Homer, of course, but she loved above all those mystic works of philosophy, that, she said,

*Run through Plato, as Plato runs,  
 Like delicate air, through the stars...*

Do you know who sang those lines? Mercifully, neither do I. This woman, as perfect as a statue, and I—we were like two siblings, who, after the interval of a lifetime, have been reunited,

and so can take mutual pleasure in the recollection of a house destroyed, and of parents who, ignominiously, have died.

Can you imagine if I had the bile-filled, rabbit-like heart of an orator? If I could denounce you in periodic orations, and ill-use you, and strangle you with so many worthless, grasping clauses? If I had the energy to shame you, to get up from this couch, and lumber into you, when I can barely lift my head from where it spirals into the desk? What would I say? I would turn on you like a tearless god and ask you, Were you among the mob, the one incited by that bishop, who swarmed around her carriage, as she came home to rest? Were you there, you fat-lipped, trembling slave, when they rocked the carriage back and forth, until she fell into their grasp, among bodies that stank, and eyes that were blind, and ears that were stopped up, which had never heard the half-pleasant music that this world has coughed up for us, whose noses sniffed her like dogs, glazed with slobber, about to ravish each other? If you had been, would you have seen me? Were you present while I was absent, when they dragged her into that temple which Callimachus had once visited, which by then they'd urinated on, and, scrubbing away their own filth, consecrated to their god, that one ignorant in his slavery, laughable in his hubris, that pretender to novelty? Was I there then when they stripped her of her clothes, while she considered whether to struggle, or spit on them simply?—for how I wish she spat on them—Was I there when they scraped off her skin with tiles, pot shards, and screams, while she could barely think of those beings outside time on which she'd speculated her entire life? Was I there when they ripped her body apart, like they rip apart temples, apart poems, breaking vases, sinking ships, cutting the throats of mothers and daughters, fathers and sons, never giving them the dignity of tears, which is, at last, our only right in the world, the right to weep? Then they carried the pieces of her throughout the city whose stones were once caked in poetry, whose stones once shone like gems? When they burnt the very last pieces of her at Cineron, were you there without me, and did you perhaps, laughingly, sew harsh salt into her being, by making some wisecrack in your broken Greek?—for since you stopped short of raping her, you might as well have raped her language, which carries in it the history of the fallen...

Let me tell you: I went to the statue of Hercules, Zeus's son, for there I felt I could weep in private for the death of Hypatia, even if my tears were not gently falling like the tears of some

virgin, but coarse and bubbling out of me, over this fat, unshaven face I'd love to rip off. Zeus, once you defended us from evil, I prayed, you whom three moons bore, you, Zeus, who never lost a single battle, who were never subdued, but who, now, here, lie prone: why? And in the darkness, the god stood beside me, and said, Even I, a god, have learned to live with the times.

Agnoios said we forget ourselves at dawn. I'd go further, with an empty, worthless pride, to add, if that is so, then by dusk, we will have forgotten ourselves for a long time, and when night finally falls, drunkenly, we should be thankful even more of having forgot. Or perhaps, it isn't that we have forgotten, but that there was never anything to remember at the origin, and everything we thought was worthy, was thought worthy for us. Are we dead now, and only seem alive, having fallen, imagining that a dream is life? Or is the truth that we are the last ones alive, and life itself is dead? The doors to the temples are shut for the last time, and the only sound to hear is the soft rustling of a few curls of papyrus, covered in shit. Are they now twirling dryly out from under the heavy gates, with some anonymous sighs that even you, you pig, might hear, if you were to watch them come to rest, lightly through the air that huddles close to the ground?

It is finished, and it is as if it never began. If the living didn't cry, if I could have beaten them into the sweaty dust of this cesspool, if I could have brought down over their heads the library they burned, if I could have held a shield and a spear, or even a child's dagger, just a little sharp, or, forgive me, a pen, then I could have stabbed their eyes, and ripped them in three parts like that hateful, sullen, vulgar god they worship! What do you want to learn from me, child? I've already sold my pens, my paper, and even my Muse; and my parents have long since been sold into slavery.

*3. The Life of St. Ermine, told in his own words, c. 1300 A.D.; translated from the Latin by Annie Devereux, 1928.*

I recount my story to You, now in this Persian city, not so that you might know what spiritual struggles I have brought to a kind of end, for You exist and have always existed as my witness, but so that others, reading this account, might understand something of the strange time through which I have borne my years, and so might, by means of this picture, bring the good struggle within reach.

Having been born in Naples to a wealthy family, I was induced by my father to study at the university in Paris, during a time when numerous controversies were raging among the faculty. I was not a little unmoved by these struggles, but, having a mind more suited to contemplation, I roamed far from my familiar surroundings, out of a desire, perhaps, to see the world, and eventually enlisted on a ship, bearing great quantities of roses from this land of Persia to our sea. During this time, I was possessed, as if from outside me, by an ever self-renewing lust, and, in my time, I have done, or have witnessed among my fellows, everything which human beings, their eyes darkened by some inner desire, can work upon each other, particularly in cities of port. One woman, however, refused the fulfillment of my desires, having the belief that, because procreation brought forth matter into the world, and matter being that form in which the particles of light are trapped, intercourse was sinful; it was thus that she demanded I wrap myself in a guard, which her people used, derived from the intestines of sheep, before we would consummate. As I lay beside her one night, folded against her, I felt the overpowering desire to impregnate this woman, for reasons I could not explain; as the days wore on, I became quite certain that her refusal of my consummation was a kind of seduction; and finally, rather than consider the source of my perverse desire, I sought to lose myself in her one night, when she should have been unaware of what I was attempting. She fled from me, however, and, thinking nothing of myself, I followed her for days into the desert.

For two months I followed her, seeing a flash of her body on the crest of the next dune; these visions would fill me with the illumination of passion, even as, the more I contemplated her, she began to grow disgusting to me, which, I confess, made me desire her the greater. Out of a kind of desperation, watching her laughing at me from above, I would try to release this feeling

in self-pleasure, but before I could conquer her, she would flee again. One night, after such a frustration, I sought shelter in a cave; I paced back and forth like a lion, as if trapped, although there were no guards at the mouth. In a fever, I began to contemplate for the first time my situation, and in my fever all words began to lose their signification. Why did I desire this woman?; for although my desire had increased with each interruption, I could no longer recall the original desire which joined me to her. Who had I been such that I desired her then? Lying face down in the cave, I dreamed I had caught her, and was attempting her final seduction, and found myself acting strangely, as if I were impersonating another seducer, who had perhaps taught me in the past, although it seemed as if I impersonated a mass and not an individual—or, perhaps, a seducer whom I had only imagined according to some law, not knowing the art of seduction, except for that which appeals to the common frailties of all women. Who was she, then?, I asked myself for the first time; there was no answer to the question, for, to me, she was no woman at all, but some conjuration of all women, and although my reasoning might illuminate her against the wall of my cave, I would never be able to touch the colored glass through which my light would shine in despair, although to be sure I would know something of her color.

It was You, then, who found me lying at the mouth of the cave, in that hour of starvation; it was You, then, who kissed me, biting my lip, and stroking my hair; it was You, of course, who disappeared as soon as I tried to bring you closer to me, as if I might presume to deny you your interruption. And with this tease, I forgot all thoughts of that woman whom I had pursued, and I resolved to remain in the cave and attempt, above all, Your seduction by any means.

At first, I treated You like a woman, for, I reasoned, You must have contained all the perfections of a woman, although in truth You are more simple than any woman. I called out to You with sweet words, and when I received no answer, I raged against myself for not knowing those which would please You. I laid myself out on the sand, naked, and tried to hold the sand that contained You, but You slipped away into invisibility. I desired You more than any woman, but each time I reached out to stroke You, You danced away, and I could find no explanation because I was but an imposter and I lacked an understanding of the nature of my own desire: my desire seemed to me both an event consequent upon myself as well as consequent upon some

universal law of Your creation, drawing me towards You even as You leapt away, so that I could not tell if I desired You or You desired me. At those moments of frustration, I felt the passion for You the greatest; and soon, I began to imagine You differently, at first as a woman, lying before me, perfumed, staring at me with hooded eyes, opening herself, and drawing me in with her hands; but I turned away before You could frustrate me. Then, I imagined You and I, not as a man and a woman, but as a horde of men and a horde of women, each upon each conferring with each other, discussing their most pleasurable pleasures, in language that merely clothed the matter, and prevented each from understanding the other; finally, each turned away from the other, at the height of the passion that came from the promise of their individual dreams. That being not enough, I imagined You not bound by any enclosed flesh, and I wanted to dig my hands into the earth of Your multitude, but I refused to touch You, even as I desired most to lose my foreign desire in You, for in whatever form I could conceive myself taking in relation to You, I could never escape this desire which seemed to come from without. And at last, although I wanted most to speak of You and call You in prayers, I refused myself to speak of You; I would imagine one revelation upon another, which You might reveal to me, and I desired one more refusal upon another, until my desire for You was perfect.

And still You did not cease to tease me! At last I realized that because I did not understand the nature of my own desire, You would always have power over me. I asked, Did You design this effect from the start, that I might recognize Your power in this inexplicable desire? Or, have I deceived myself all along, and the desire comes from me? In which case, how am I to know what is proper to You in regard to desiring, and have I been impersonating a seducer unfit for You? The latter possibility presented the most difficulties and therefore I assumed its truth; I was, then, but an imposter in my own self, trying to consummate a desire I did not understand for a being about which I knew nothing at all, except that at nights I felt that He kissed me.

In this way, I spent many years in the desert, building desire upon desire, until I found even a kind of burning satisfaction in refusal upon refusal, knowing that I could know nothing certain of either You or myself, and thus I could only refuse triumphantly that which I desired, for my refusal contained an acknowledgement of all this, and provided for a good exercise of the

mind. In this activity, I have lived with the passion and the good struggle in me, and await the day when You, my seducer and my seduced, will strike me down: for we are not like lovers on either side of a wall, having some separating space which might be removed between us; rather, it is as if I, new to a place, must pick you out of a crowd, although I have never seen you before, and I cannot know if that person whom I perceive as You I perceive in that way because it *is* You, or because that one appeals to my desires, whose value I still cannot judge. Thus only with the destruction of myself will confusion be at an end, and all uncertainties transformed from a passionate struggle into a motionless peace. I offer this account to You not as part of my struggle, for You know all this well; rather, I offer this account for the others, who might have given in at last to lust.

4. *An Account of Elizabeth Browning, Executed at Tyburn, September 14, 1676, for Torturing her Female Apprentice to Death; published 1680 as an anonymous pamphlet. A similar account appears in the Newgate Calendar, published 1816, although there it is somewhat changed.*

Nothing at all may prepare the Reader for the Excruciating Account which follows; not even those who lived at the Time and Place of the matter, when it first became Known, were spared an Affront to Natural Law and Morality, and indeed they stirr'd themselves to shew their Indignation honestly as appears in this Relation. Having not the Excellencies of classical Learning, the Crowd was able to make no Comparison for this Cruel and Inhuman act; but no doubt mov'd by some Universal Principle, they harangued *Mrs. Browning* with One Motion from Newgate, to Tyburn, and thence to her Resting Place.

Having employ'd her Early Years in Service to a few families of Good Name, this Cruel Woman was married to *James Browning*, Plumber, come to the City from Greenwich, where he had formerly pass't some years, and, settling around Fleet-Street, oversaw a great deal of Business. *Mrs. Browning*, the mother of Sixteen children, having then some Facility in Midwifery, was appoint'd by the Clergy in St. Dunstan's parish, to care for the Impoverish'd Women needing to Lie-In during the time of their Work. During these Years, to spare herself the need of Servants, *Mrs. Browning* took an Apprentice call'd *Mary Mitchell*, and another shortly thereafter call'd *Mary Jones*, a Girl equally Poor, having been in the Care of the Parish, but skill'd in the Art of Sewing, and quick to learn other Trades. At first, these Orphans were shown a degree of Civility; but soon were shown a Countenance of Most Savage Barbarity.

Having laid *Mary Jones* across two chairs in the Kitchen, *Mrs. Browning* Whipp't her with Wanton Cruelty, so much so that at times she was oblig'd to desist from Exhaustion. This occur'd with some Frequency; and afterward she would throw on her Water when the Whipping had Ceas'd, or even Douse her head in a Pail. Having received numerous Wounds on her Head, Shoulders, and Other Parts, *Mary Jones* determin'd not to Bear with such Treatment, if she could Effect an Escape. Her room being against on the Street-Door, the Key having been left unattend'd, one morning she Escap'd from Confinement. Thus she repeatedly enquired the Way to her former Home, and, coming to find it, describ'd her Treatment, shewing them certain Bruises. A Surgeon, having appris'd the Severity of the Wounds, advised the Parish to threaten

Prosecution on *James Browning*, if the latter refused Reason for these Severities. Nothing came of it, however, tho' *Mary Jones* was Discharg'd.

The other Girl, *Mary Mitchell*, continu'd with her Mistress for about a Year, and, being shown Similar Cruelty, also resolv'd to Effect an Escape, but was stopped at the Door by the Younger Son of *Browning*, and was Punish'd Severely. At this time, a third Girl, *Mary Clifford*, was bound to *Mrs. Browning*, and she was treat'd with Still More Cruelty; she was frequently ty'd Naked, and beaten with a Hearth Broom, a Horse-Whip, or a Cane, 'till she had quite lost her Speech. The poor Girl, being somewhat Deform'd, was not permitt'd to lie in a Bed;—she instead was given a Mat, within the Coal-Hole, a place Remarkable for its Cold, having nothing for Cover, but her Own Clothes, and so nearly Perish't. On one Occasion, nearly Starving, she broke open a Cupboard in Search of Food, but she found it empty'd; another time, she broke some Boards, in order to give herself a Draught of Water. Thereafter, *Mrs. Browning* induc'd her to Strip Herself, and for a Full Day, repeatedly Beat her with the Butt End of a Whip, a Jack-Chain fix't round her neck, the End of which was fasten'd to the Yard Door, and Pull'd Tight; at the end of this, she was left Naked for Days, her Garments having been Ripp't. The two Girls were so Frequently Beaten that their Heads and Shoulders appear'd as One Sore; and when a Plaister was apply'd, the Skin used to Peel Away with it. *Mrs. Browning* used to Tie their Hands with a Cord, drawing their Hands up to a Water-Pipe running across the Kitchen Ceiling; then, this Water-Pipe giving way, she requested her husband to Fix a Hook in a Beam, so that the Cord might be drawn up, and the Girls were Horsewhipp't 'till Bloody'd and Weary.

One Day, the Elder Son, having directed *Mary Clifford* to put up a Half-Tester Bedstead, and the Girl being unable to do it, found to Beat Her 'til she could not Stand, and would often continue to do so when the Strength of his Mother ran out. *Mrs. Browning* would sometimes Seize the Poor Girl by the Cheeks, and, forcing the Skin down Violently with her Fingers, caused the Blood to Gush from her Eyes. *Mary Clifford*, unable to Bear these Severities, complained of her Hard Treatment to a French Lady lodg'd in the House; this Lady having represent'd the Case to *Mrs. Browning*, the latter Flew at the Girl, and Cut her Tongue in Two Places with a pair of Scissars. She Whipp't her 'til Blood was Streaming from her, and while she Wash't herself in

Cold Water, continu'd to Strike her Shoulders with the Butt-End of a Whip, and after Many Days, the Poor Girl's Wounds began to shew Signs of Mortification.

At this time, the Mother-in-Law of *Mary Clifford* came call on her, but was Turn'd Away from the House; *Mrs. Deacon*, a neighbor, however, inform'd her of the Frequent Groans heard from the House.

Having gone to Hampstead on Business, *Mr. Browning* bought a Hog, and sent it Home, which was put in a Cover'd Yard, to which was Add'd a Sky-Light, which it was thought Necessary to Remove in order to give Air to the Animal. Now, *Mr. Deacon*, the Neighbor, ordered his Servants to Watch this Sky-Light in order to Discover the Girls; through the Window, they indeed saw one of the Girls, stooping down, and upon informing the Mistress, the latter call'd some men to climb up onto the Roof, and drop Bits of Dirt, so that the Girl might Speak to them, although she was found Incapable of doing so. The Neighbors, then having Inform'd the Parish, gathered with some Overseers at the Door, and the Clergyman demanded the Sight of *Mary Clifford*; *Browning*, calling the girl *Nan*, claim'd she knew no such Woman, but if they wish't to see a *Mary*, she could produce one, the latter being *Mary Mitchell*. The house was search't, but nothing found; *Mary Mitchell*, tho', was taken away, and it was found that when her Leathern Bodice was Remov'd, it Stuck Fast to her Wounds, and she Shriek't with Pain, and afterward Confess'd All that had Occur'd. The Overseers, returning to the House, threatened to Drag *Mr. Browning* away in a Coach, which induced the latter to Produce the Girl from a Cupboard, under a Beaufet in the Dining Room, after a Pair of Shoes had been Put on her by the *Browning's* Eldest Son. An Apocathary having been call'd, the Girl was Pronounc'd to be in Grave Danger for her Life.

*Mr. Browning* himself was imprison'd in Newgate, but his Eldest Son and Wife made an Escape, taking with them a Gold Watch and some Money. Meanwhile, *Mary Clifford* dy'd, and an Alderman found the *Brownings* Guilty of Wilful Murther. At this time, the Mother and Son were moving about London frequently, having Disguis'd themselves, but, while they stayed at the house of *Mr. Dunbar*, a chandler, he happen'd to read a Notice in which an Advertisement clearly describ'd his Lodgers; thus he travel'd to London the next day and Expos'd them. The Mother and Son were taken to the Old Baily, and Indict'd; *Elizabeth Browning*, after a Tryal of

Eleven Hours, was found Guilty of Murther, and Ordered for Execution; the Husband and Son were convicted of Misdemeanor, and Imprison'd for Six Months. Before her Execution, *Mrs. Browning* Confess'd to a Clergyman the Enormity of her Crime, and Acknowledg'd the Justice of the Sentence. Her Parting with her Husband and Son was Affecting beyond Description; the Son fell to his Knees; the Mother bent over and Embrac'd Him, while the Husband knelt on the Other Side.

On her way to the Fateful Tree, the People Express't their Abhorrence, in Terms which, though not Proper to the Moment, Testify'd to their Destestation of her Cruelty. She Join'd in Prayer with the Ordinary at Newgate, and was Follow'd by a Crowd to her Exit at Tyburn. Afterwards, her Body was put into a Hackney-Coach and Convey'd to Surgeon's-Hall, was Dissect'd, and Anatomiz'd, and her Skeleton Hung Up in Surgeon's-Hall.

5. *Divers Threads Picked From the Weave of the Feminine Sex; appearing in the Form of an Intercourse between two Gentleman of Good Breeding, and the One's Servant—Strung-Out here for the Edification of Young Persons of both Sexes; by Frances Davers; excerpt from the second edition of 1748.*

—It so happened that the two gentlemen—*Sir Universalis* and *Sir Particularis*—were reclining one night before the fire of the former; *Universalis* had laid himself back in repose, admiring the bowl of his pipe, while *Particularis* had just finished to set his own pipe on the mantel and was standing pensively at the fire, his hand on the mantel, and his hip and one or two fingers dangerously close to the flames. I have a history for you, *Particularis* said, which I cannot get out of my mind. The events occurred some years ago, when *Elizabeth* had been just laid to rest; one of her courtiers happened to fall ill soon after, and it was said that he had been one of the *Queen's* lovers. He retired to his estate outside London, and after a few days of inactivity, imposed upon his maidservant, a young girl of about fifteen, to read to him from some of the books in the library, chiefly to ease his mind, for characters having been recounted in this way seemed to join the animal spirits in conjuring motion in the limbs and emptying the heart of the miasma that grows up in it. She read to him all manner of chronicles, parts out of *Ovid*, and, frequently, she recounted to him the lives of saints, for he felt that she was old enough for the liberty of reading such divers material. After each book, before she was dismissed for supper, he would talk to her on it, and often, having recalled the memory of having read the books for the first time, as a young man, he would inquire how she stood by the books, if she had liked them, &c. At these times, she would reply that there were parts in them that were amusing, others didactical, and some that had been better off not told at all; as she spoke, he would listen raptly, and fix her image in his mind as if he were gazing at her by means of a perspective glass, such having been newly invented at the time: for, indeed, as the weeks rushed forward and retreated, and his infirmity lost itself elsewhere, he had grown fond of the young girl, and began to invite her along with him while riding into the countryside, in walking through the garden he liked to keep, and, of course, in reading.

It so happened that one evening, while he was speaking to a messenger, having recently arrived with mail from the court, that his cook came into the room to inform him that his young maidservant had been in the library and, not having been graceful enough with a paper knife, had

cut herself open, and followed to swoon at the sight of her own blood. He rushed over to see her, and kissing her gently on the lips, was able to rouse her shortly. She explained thereafter, the gentleman having carried her into his room to lie rest, that she had fainted not at the sight of her own blood inasmuch as that was not frightening in itself, but that the sight of it recalled to mind a story she had read of *Old scratch*, that is, the Devil himself, and how he had got his name: that in the beginning, the angel in charge of creating woman from man had forgot to give woman a proper organ—she blushed—, and that Satan had taken to solve the problem by digging out a sawpit and sitting himself down there with a scythe: one by one, the women would come to sit above it, and the Devil would swing the scythe and gash them there, and so he had got the name *Old scratch* for this act; and that, at the time, he had given the taller women more shallow scratches, on account of their height, but that with malice, when a shorter woman came to sit above the pit, he would cut her deeply, so that this is what had crossed her mind, when she saw the sight of her own blood on the pages of the book, and consequently fainted. At this account, the gentleman smiled down at her, wrapped in blankets on the bed, and, holding her shoulders while she propped herself up by her elbows, told her that he did not hold it on her account, and, making a jest of it, told her than no woman marked by the Devil, such as those she mentioned, meant anything to him, but she herself; that it was only a story, and that there were much better tales, and moreover, that the next time she was moved to faint, he promised to be at her side.

—The fire emitted a crackle at this time, interrupting *Particularis*, but when, after a minute or two, he stayed silent nevertheless, *Universalis* found to ask him, if that was the end of it? Not quite, *said Particularis*; for it came about by chance that a few years later, much after the maidservant had been dismissed for some reason or other, the gentleman chatting with his cook, had from her the truth of the girl's swooning: for although the gentleman had entirely believed the story of the girl at the time, the truth of the matter was this: that, despairing on account of that she could never expect a gentleman's love, and upon hearing, from the cook, who was an older woman and confidant of many of the servants, the story of how the gentleman had in his time sat at the bed-side of the *Queen* while she lay in peril, she was moved by passion, and, the idea fixing itself inside her that she would never do so much for anyone as a *Queen*, she retired into the closet, which, as you might know, although today will be found stuffed to bursting with

*holland, silks, laces, &c*, and other *fine garments*, in those days, was then a place in the house for solitude and prayer; it was here, crouched in devotion, unable to decide for herself if there was any hope in gaining her master's love, and if, in fact, any truth resided in those love-filled stories which they had read to each other, and if, moreover, she happened only to be worked up into such a state on account of those silly stories,—which seemed worse, in that it gave lie to all her feelings—she reached up blindly for the cross on the wall, and taking it to her limbs, gashed herself,—tho' at the sight of what she had done, she fainted dead away, and woke up to the fulfillment of her phantasy.

—But in the end, she was dismissed, you said, *asked Universalis*. That is how I heard the story, said *Particularis*; whether he was called to court again, or if there lies in it some other reason, I do not know. And is there a *moral* in it, *asked Universalis*.—But at that moment, there was a thunk against the door, and, opening it, the two gentleman found their own maidservant, having listened to the whole history from the key-hole, fainted dead away...

6. *From the memoirs of Jean-Gabriel Guillemain, a composer of the court of Louis XVI; published after his death in 1795; translated from the French by Kelsie Devereux, 1929.*

...and despite the cruel winter, all of Paris was buzzing with the news of that latest slight to Mademoiselle d'Éon, which in some fashion related to an incident having occurred in London; of the arrival of Gluck with his *Armide* in hand, for which he ardently sought the favor of the Queen; and lastly, of the impending return of Voltaire himself after about thirty years in exile. I cannot remember if it were that same winter, during which a great many died—some in the streets, having come from outside the city in search of charity, and some across the ocean, at the hands of the British—that Voltaire met Death on account of an excess of narcotics, or that the Gluckists and Piccinists began again to pitch themselves at each other in the street, while their masters dueled with their *Iphigénies*... It suffices to say that I had fallen out of favor with the court, still hungry for operas, that passion which Lully had kindled, Rameau had flamed, and which now was continued by those invitees to the court, the Germans and Italians... Without taking leave of the King, with whom I confess I had once enjoyed a kind of friendship, and to the end, I will consider a man who possessed great qualities—kindness, decorousness, and learning among them—I retired, so to speak, from the life I had previously led: and, foreswearing coats, wigs, and much else, I devoted myself that winter to the repair of the battered harpsichord, which had been a gift from such a dear friend, many years before. Versailles and everyone in it could have been melted down, as far as I was concerned, and share the fate of the King's toy soldiers, which would be seized for their gold some years later. And so, I entered into a period of speculation, the results of which the reader may find interesting, and which was sustained by my feeling that all men, at various times in their lives, from antiquity to the present, have experienced the necessity of taking stock.

The common man accuses the philosopher of abstraction; both of them, in their way, overlook the truth that lies in the term. I myself, waked early each morning by Christophe, would be unable to rise from bed until I had in every way anticipated the events of the day; every meeting, every turn, every accomplishment, required foresight, although the paradox lay in that, having seen through the day from start to finish while still under sheets, one barely felt the need to live it in its entirety. Every night would leave staff-sheets, tobacco-leaves, and the innumerable

little helpers for the repair of my instrument which I had obtained, scattered around the room; and then, for the first hour of the day, nothing pleased me more than, having finally arisen, to clean,—I forbade Christophe to do it—allotting each thing its proper place as if granting the air in the room space to move about, which in turn felt to me like clearing a space for movement in my own head: this freshness which I sought in the morning is what I mean by abstraction. Materialism, I found, would regain its ground as the day wore on, barricading off the streets of the mind, and closing down the wings of its house, the clarity of the morning air give way to the slow, smoky vagueness of dusk.

When I felt these cares falling on me, I would bid Christophe farewell and climb up the little hill near my apartments; and, seeing the grayness of the sky contrast with the fiery color of a nearby building; or seeing the untouched blue of the same against the rocky darkness of an alley, the pitted whiteness of the snow, or an odd green here and there, all of which I found in various places, and near various buildings, I would feel two things in rapid succession: first, a terror at the sight of all of these colors, which might so quickly vanish, as I might vanish between the space of one heart-beat and its next; and then, an experience like an immersion, at different times as if in a number of distinct liquids, whose viscosity—which either impaired or innerved my mind and body—suggested at once two further things: one being that this immersion represented one condition under which I might lead my life, and the other being, to my surprise, the suggestion of an unknown piece of music, whose qualities were identical to that of the viscosity of the liquid, and which, to my thinking, would have conjured up this feeling of immersion were it to have been heard: in short, from the orderliness and vitality of the morning, to the lethargy and disconsolateness of the evening, their lay in between a series of different liquids through which I might pass, as if hearing in succession a number of different songs.

Not one of these songs was in any way familiar; I think I had heard too many melodies in my time at the court, and nothing could be further from moving me than the sentimental wavering of those melodies which I had heard drift from those inner chambers where performance were being held, whose spare little flourishes were counterpoised with the sound of each of my feet, passing by, on the floor. I had in my youth been much in favor of these compositions, and although now I could not in good faith find any pleasure in them, I was unable

to determine if that were because I was then engaged in a project of greater sophistication and sublimity than my contemporaries, or if I felt such a revulsion precisely because I had once so admired those compositions when I was young, that is, when I was a very different man. For, I should say, it was not that these fashionable melodies did not move me at all; rather, I felt myself transported very much, and to such an extent that the enjoyment was so pure that I felt forced to hold it in suspicion. Did no one but me experience this paradox? Were the Gluckists and Piccinnists so enraptured by their own tradition that no other music seemed possible? Or, was there something eternal in those sentimental melodies, which, because of my circumstances, I had disdained, or rather overlooked? These were the questions that accompanied me on my walks; and in my experience with musical immersion, I believed I had begun to find a partial solution.

To finish with these particular recollections, and to move on to other matters, I should relate one thing more: one evening, having invited Christophe, for once, to accompany me on my walk, and despite the chill wind, and the flapping of our garments, being in quite a mood to talk, I discussed with him my dilemma, and he told me that his father had recently come to Paris from the countryside, in order to find work, and had engaged with a number of men educated in hygiene and chemistry, who were studying the nature of cleanliness: in particular, they were in the process of uncovering certain cesspools which lie under our city, not only under houses, but under other edifices—he mentioned as one example an academy of medicine whose students were inclined to discard limbs, having been dissected, in the cesspool beneath the building—and that the men engaged in this project frequently fell ill, not only upon touching the stuff, but even at the very smell of it. One man, in fact, ceased altogether to breathe after falling into the muck; he was carried to rest, frothing at the mouth, with limbs stiffened, and tongue swollen, and, although eventually he recovered some of his dignity, he was unable afterward to rid himself of the lingering smell to any satisfaction: he said it had settled in his nose, and no amount of scraping or scalding would purify him. Christophe told me that it was only when he happened to hear music that this man's nerves would subside, music whose alternating chords, even if dissonant, seemed to drain the putrefaction from his senses. At this point, Christophe and I returned home; I thanked him for his words, and told him build up the fire: while he did so, I

thought for a long time about his story, and at the same time engaged my hands in repairing the harpsichord...

7. *Excerpt from The Navel of the World, a novel by Johann Augustus Abbt, written in parts from 1790 on, but published fully in 1805; translated from the German by Ernie Schlink, 1922.*

Ἐλκος ἔχων ὁ ξεῖνος ἐλάνθανεν: ὡς ἀνηρόν  
 πνεῦμα διὰ στηθέων ‘εἶδες;’ ἀνηγάγετο,  
 τὸ τρίτον ἠνίκ’ ἔπινε, τὰ δὲ ρόδα φυλλοβολεῦντα  
 τῶνδρὸς ἀπὸ στεφάνων πάντ’ ἐγένοντο χαμαί:  
 ὥπτηται μέγα δὴ τι: μὰ δαίμονας οὐκ ἀπὸ ῥυσμοῦ  
 εἰκάζω, φωρὸς δ’ ἵχνια φῶρ ἔμαθον.

Our friend was wounded, and we knew it not;  
 how bitter a sigh, ‘mark you?’ he drew up all  
 his breast. Lo, he was drinking the third time,  
 and shedding their petals from the fellow’s  
 garlands, the roses all poured to the ground.  
 He is well in the fire, surely; no, by the gods,  
 I guess not at random; a thief myself, I know  
 a thief’s footprints.

—Callimachus, Epigram XLIII; Trans. J. W. Mackail.

... What a roar the sea gave the beach there! where a ship had sunk bearing roses to Delphi; where the games were being held; where shells and petals, lying in heaps of red, mingled with fabric of my dress. The wind tossed the petals around in gusts; the cold air brought from afar the sound of the beating of drums; each of them sounded, in the roar, like the profound echoes of footsteps receding down stairs towards the depth of a cave. Was she lying on the sand some distance away, here outside Kirrha?; was she gazing past the water at the distant ships, the last of which blocked the sunlight?; or did she have me in sight, as something red and green, from where she stood on a ship destined for an unknown port?

I had loved her with a love that shone like the gold of honey; but what man knows his own love?; what man can excuse his love with reasons beyond pictures?; or the assurances of that untaught fate which, on a whole, unfolds in time, but is not a part of it. Yes, she was raised by a father, her mother had disappeared;—her left eyebrow had been singed off, and the other was a faint white... Yes, she was once virgin like Artemis, and I too once caught her bathing, naked, but for what the night and moon offered her as clothes. The trees parted—I saw her with

her arms in her hair—I looked down, and I put my hand on my cheek.—She called out to me—I called her... I did not stir from the trees, as if paralyzed by what I knew. How many times had I heard her countless ifs?, as she descended the stairs, as cautiously as if she had never been there before, rehearsing her wish before she reached the oracle... They say Delphi is the womb of the world, and that the temple lies at the world's center; nevertheless, she shivered sometimes when she emerged, her questions never answered, but what hope I saw kindled in her eyes! She always came to talk to me, there, where I stood by the wall; there, where the sages of all of Greece had come together many years ago to dedicate their wisdom to Apollo, in three elucidations:

Know Thyself

Nothing in Excess

and the letter E, rising above the room. About these things, in response to her questions, I had nothing to say.

My mother tells me that when I was young, having about eight years,—and we had just come from Thessaly,—I stole away from the house, not too far from here, and wandered up Parnassos, where I could see the two cliffs which enclose Delphi, and the olive groves below. I remember the sun roaring out from behind a cloud,—striking the cliff face,—and the blinding light—like mirrors, the cliffs, they shone—and passing out, rolling down the hill.—My mother says that when they found me, sick from stolen olives, the grass which I crushed as I tumbled down formed the shape of an E. And so, they took me to the temple, and I saw the E there for the first time; I saw too the oracle herself, sweating—beautiful—hair matted—her strengthless fingers wrapping themselves around her womb. As we turned to leave, she made a groan that resonated; I looked back and saw her eyes as dead as coins,—her eyelids constantly crashing down at different rates, struggling to stand against the sluggish flow of honey that pressed down on her brain. She could not have been older than myself when I was chosen to be a priest of Apollo; then I was taught to tend the temple, and keep the sacred fire burning, while Pythia spun her hexameters below.—

The night sky was a deep purple at the top of the mountain; the races were beginning, and fires were lit, which flickered above the tree line towards the clouds,—and smoke rose with the voice of the chorus and the shouts, taken up by foreigners and natives alike. The oracle herself

was there—I was certain—in the guise of an old woman, small and shrouded, whose knees were bent inward in the shape of her famous perch. And she, wine-drunk, rosy—did I feel petals in my hands?—had been separated from the rest.—Our dilemma is to be the loveliest things and the most obscure.—I pushed my way through the crowd, ducking beneath torches, breaking through rings of men and women. I found her, sitting on a rock, drawing in the sand with a stick, in a single gemlike moment;—I wanted to preserve that moment by carving it into marble, which would chip away and erode over time, until her lovely face would be washed away, and nothing of her would be saved except an empty shoulders, lovely shoulders, and a smell brought from some place out of sight,—in an intimation that not everything had been accounted for, that now her missing features were become a part of her,—and no one would know anything other than what had been given, and she would be nothing that remains.

Feeling her swell beside me, I took her into the forest, hearing many voices in my head, as if I were catching up to a whispering traveler having passed, or as if, along with the rush of water, I were feeling a plant tug at my ankle as I slid downstream,—and then there stood the temple, rising into those stars, who, when night is silent, see the secret loves of men.—The walls seemed to be dripping oily fire, and the curl of her hair, which always stuck out, was flat like melted wax. I took her down into the darkness, the sweetness of heat hovering over our heads; the fire was still burning in the inner chamber, but the room was empty. She asked me no more questions then; the sight of the E upon the wall—it struck her dumb, bathing her eyes in divine perfume. I never would have touched her—she was lovely, but not beautiful, with her eyebrow missing and oval face, now flushed and expressionless.—But the cushions,—they lay there—and we had to stoop;—the ceiling was low... For then, the silence seemed to issue a great hum, wrapping itself around us like suffocating blankets, which seemed to trap us beneath the honey which, forming a mound atop us, had slid down an enormous branch where hung the comb. We could not take sharp breaths of air;—the sea no longer extended around us on all sides;—no sun burst off the waves, and no blade sliced us; no tongue bled. Lying there, I expected the E to come to me as willingly as she had, and although I saw it moving out in the distance, I was left alone with her, wheezing softly, and her hand which twitched.—

The next day, they said they found that she and all her girlish apparel had disappeared and in the room were found images of the Dioscuri, a table, and silphium upon it.

...

8. *Excerpt from The Secret of the Greeks, and its Influences on a Few Modern Writers, by Georg Fahrenkrog, published in 1850, first delivered in lecture form in 1831; translated from the German by Ernie Schlick, 1921.*

### I.

The animating question of the present work can be simply stated: What secret had the Greeks, and what can we know of that secret? As such, we are indebted to the work of those admirable philologists who have labored through close and rigorous study to recover what, to the present age, had seemed lost. The recovery of the secret has not merely academic interest for it bears upon the philosophical problem of history, first identified, in its developed form by our lately passed Hegel. According to the latter, one who wishes “to re-live the life of nations and enter into their spirit,” cannot simply immerse oneself in the materials which survive an age, but theorize the inner logic by which that life considered itself. Each work, in its own way, exhibits the spirit of the age; and, in this way, because each spirit-in-time, in having negated the spirit of the previous age by means of the self-consciousness of itself as spirit, constitutes itself once again as whole in the present, it bears within it the traces of all previous spirits, in a negative form. With this in mind, it is clear that the spirit of our present age contains within it, still glowing, the yet flashing coals of Greek life; it requires then only an effort of mind to fan these coals into consciousness, to draw them forth again by running through the motion of the dialectic in reverse, and so, by taking as object the ancient spirit, and as subject the present, once can, by means of the negative act of the subject, draw into the consciousness of the subject a second time the ancient spirit, now appearing, in the dialectical form, as both subject and object, and thence only living subject.

In this way, one can put Hegel’s dictum to test, that is, his so-called “lesson of history,” that “things which may seem trivial to us have not always been in the world; a new thought like this one marks an epoch in the development of human spirit.” Accordingly, it should be possible to recapture the not-trivial by means of the reconstituted self-consciousness of the past in negative contrast to the present, which is only possible insofar as the present contains the buried seed of the past within it—or if that metaphor leads one astray, it is better to say in place of a buried seed, a leaf, having fallen, which once grew from the seed which spirit planted in the past, and which is now found, in its shape, to contain a kind of map on which the past is charted:

indeed, this leaf is not one leaf of many, subject to the contingencies of nature, but rather the precisely representative original leaf, having been discovered, and isolated, by the self-conscious movement of spirit in time, and so may serve as the object on which the dialectical operation is performed. (In this activity, then, Goethe too proves instructive.) If this should prove impossible, then one must accept the fallibility of the mind, that the presently trivial in works of the past, which Hegel asserts was precisely not-trivial for the past, are, in fact, neither trivial in the past nor the present, but only seem trivial insofar as the present *does not even understand the past*, and is thus far from containing within it the reconstitutable traces of it: in this case, that which is mysteriously trivial in the past does not present an enigma to us in the present due to our presence at a higher stage in the dialectical movement of spirit; rather, such is the case because we have, indeed, lost the knowledge of the questions and problems to which such trivialities were answers and solutions.

In this endeavor, we must authenticate the claims of two of our esteemed classists, the first being G. F. Creuzer, who considers the mysteries of Greek religion to be of Eastern origin, the latter of whose doctrine of divine revelation contributed to the self-consciousness of Greek agriculture as divine, and cleared the way for the later self-conscious organization of agriculture by civil society, an effort which Hegel appreciates as a triumph. The second claim is more disturbing for students of Hegel, and is embodied in the work of C. Lobeck, which understands that the designation of mystery is a later misunderstanding, begun, in part, by the Greeks themselves; and, that the mysteries of the Greeks, in their origin, in no way differed from their natural behavior, and has no special origin. In his *Aglaophamus*, Lobeck writes,

If the Greeks had nothing else to do, they laughed, leapt, and rushed around, or, since from time to time man is also so inclined, they sat down, wept, and wailed. *Others* then came along later and looked for some kind of reason for their remarkable nature; and so, in order to explain these customs, those countless festival legends and myths were created. On the other hand, it was believed that the droll activity which took place on festival days also belonged necessarily to the festival ceremony, and it was held to be an indispensable part of the divine service.

The content of this view suggests that the movement of spirit is not the rushing forward of spirit coming to a self-conscious understanding of itself as such, and thus attaining a new height of

development, which both incorporates and makes obsolete the past; rather, it suggests that the movement of spirit is precisely the unconscious misunderstanding of itself as such, and, thus attaining a different, but by no means higher or lower stage of development, both incorporates the behavior (but not consciousness) of the past, and makes the past, not obsolete, but mysterious. Self-consciousness, in this account, only further develops the misunderstanding of that which was already unconsciously misunderstood by those who already came later. Lobeck suggests that the origin of Greek mysteries lies not in the working of thought, but in the boredom which calls up action, which is alienated later from its true origin by thought itself.

## II.

To appreciate that old contingencies could be misunderstood as something of philosophical seriousness, requires in the thinker a degree of ironic humor in his relation to mankind: one contemporary of ours who seems to possess this particular kind of detachment is J. A. Abbt, the study of whose *Navel of the World* we now turn to, in particular, the second part of which, called "The Return": the first part ends with the defiling of a maiden by a fallen priest of Apollo during a night of revelry; the woman disappears the next morning, and Abbt ends his chapter with a partial quote from Pausanias (3.16.3), which contains a reference to the child-twins Castor and Pollux, and to an ancient abortifacient. The second part begins during the period of the woman's absence: the young priest has grown silent towards his countrymen and, unable to play his role as a teacher for them in the present situation, sits among them without talking, merely watching, and at times, rocking back and forth. Intrigued by his movements, which alternate with stillness, each of his neighbors comes to him in turn, self-consciously determining his role in the mystery. The potter, Arato, is first, and asks him tentatively where the girl has gone, but receives no answer; then comes the farmer Nikolos, who suggests, by way of advice, that the girl's parents must feel her absence worse through loneliness, and that the priest might even find forgiveness there; the wife of the bronzesmith, Irmenos, comes next, with his daughter: she takes the priest to task for disregarding Apollo's three dicta; then Irmenos himself comes, and, inviting the priest into his home, asks him why he did not make his love public; then comes Orphes, the orator, who denounces the priest's having disturbed the balance of both the gods and the community; and, lastly, comes his cousin Sara, who, after admitting that she knows

nothing of his mystery, offers him in kindness a bowl of water, at which the priest is moved very much, but still does not respond with speech; finally, the townspeople cease to speak to him altogether, and instead he must overhear their words in the marketplace. The priest perceives the town's plan: to solve the mystery by re-enacting the night of the capture; by living the lost moment themselves, they presume to understand the logic by which both the missing girl and the priest had acted, and thereby come to a greater understanding of the rape.

The first reconstruction is a failure: on the one hand, the movements of the actors are at first too tentative, and, then, when the moment of consummation is supposed to have occurred, the excited crowd eggs them on to such an extent, that the two actors, the son of Irmenos, and the priest's cousin Sara, have to be pulled apart by three of the strongest men in the community. In response, the next day the town determines to send out messengers to summon witnesses to the rape, luring them back with the promise of hospitality: as each witness is interrogated and fed, the priest's uncle and Nikolos, the farmer, draw lines in the sand which trace out the path that each witness is supposed to have seen. After a few days, the lines in the sand seem to form a collective path, and that night, another reconstruction occurs: Orphes, the orator, plays the part of the priest, and, in a moment of rhetorical inspiration, adds a dramatic speech in the middle of his performance; after the applause, he carries off his maiden, following the pre-determined paths, but, as he enters the forest, the lines thin out, and, at a loss, he performs the rape abruptly then and there; the audience is unconvinced, and the night ends poorly. In light of what they perceive to be the problem, the townspeople resolve to remove the variability of the actor's judgment in following the mass of lines by, each night, decreeing a different line to be tried in turn. In addition, the townspeople judge well the practice of soliloquy, but henceforth mandate speech for both the man and the woman: for a knowledge of the characters' thoughts is seen to be of value. Each night a reconstruction is performed; each day the speeches are perfected by puzzling over the hearsay of witnesses, and guessing at the rest. Markers are drawn along the paths, to give the sign for a speech; soon, cohesive scenes develop, which lead them to consider the role of the temple in the mystery.

The performances continue each night, to the enjoyment of the crowd, but many soon grow unsatisfied with the spectacle, and wish to push deeper into the mystery so as to restore

order to the people, and truly satisfy their hunger. Ainax, a begger, suggests a pilgrimage to the mysteries at Eleusis; the matter is intensely discussed for days, and at last, the townspeople abandon the priest and sail forth, with ominous birds spinning overhead. Abbt thenceforth describes the mystery<sup>109</sup>; meanwhile, the priest has remained at Delphi, where a few still seek the Oracle's advice. To their amazement, the priest enters the temple and kneels at the inscription of the E, the cipher for all of Abbt's work; the priest then tells the onlookers that "all mysteries are

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<sup>109</sup> The party was of one mind. In divine awe, they forgot themselves and moved as one through the city of Athens on the first day of the festival. The priest from Eleusis had come—he spoke—and his words came from somewhere deep in his chest,— slung out like coiling green vines which the sun has imbued with new fire.—

They washed their hands in sacred water and Irmenos fainted when the water touched his hands. That night Sara had nightmares:—she was Persephone—stolen from Demeter—kidnapped to the underworld—. She saw herself eating a pomegranate seed, and could not stop; her hair sloughed out of its roots and she melted into the stone walls of Hades. She woke up— and her neck was frozen—her eyes like two dead coins.

The next morning they walked to the sea and bathed themselves.—Children shouted happily in the waves.—Nikolos's grandmother, once a great beauty, gathered her grandchildren up in her arms.—Ophes, too shy to undress, slunk away, but rejoined the group,—sweating,—as they re-entered the city and a pig was slaughtered. The next day held more sacrifices,—one became another,—as a feeling arose and flowered, of an immersion in the past and a moving in the present, as if the two were as tangible as sounds, colors, or shapes.—On the fourth day, they rested.—

The procession to Eleusis began along the Sacred Way.—They crossed the river Rheitoi and rested, and then the river Kephisos, where men with covered heads insulted the parade, jeering, mocking, and abusing them in the tradition of Iambe, who had comforted Demeter upon the loss of her daughter with her crude, ribald songs. Demeter laughed and was comforted.—

That night the procession arrived at Eleusis and danced— shouted obscenities in iambs—poetry beat its wings—and was personified by Iambe, and then Baubo,—the old nurse who too had comforted Demeter upon the loss of her daughter:—it is said that when Demeter refused her offering of wine, Baubo exposed her secret parts, exhibiting them to the goddess; Demeter laughed at the spectacle and gladly took the wine.—Giddy and relieved, the townspeople slept—and the next day, fasted in the memory of the stolen Persephone.—Their memory grew faint here, but in the sanctuary, they ate and drank,—the story of the kidnapping was unfolded—shown in pictures—people cried out—there stood the holy objects—blinding light and dizziness—they were shown—an afterlife—ascension.

That night they slept in the telesteron;—the next day they paid homage to the dead;—then at last, they returned to Athens—walking slowly—each person again themselves—far too clearly—dwelling within on the cosmic images, which each had played out inside their heads.—The only sounds they heard were footsteps,— and with each one, the father of the missing girl whispered her secret name.

the same,” and proceeds to close his eyes, and sees a vision of the missing girl, which becomes reality.<sup>110</sup>

When the townspeople return, they find the priest still sitting, silent and motionless; and the girl has been returned to her home. The people question them both, but no answer is forthcoming. The story is concealed, we are told, for the people’s sake; in the face of the concealment, the people act rightly; and so, the girl becomes, not by choice, the representative of all their cares: for “mystery hung around her, like the stars, who, when night is silent, see the secret loves of men.” Thus ends the second part of *Abbt*; and we can see in him, thus, a close reader of both *Lobeck*, and his greater contemporary, *Goethe*...

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<sup>110</sup> Sometimes I imagined that the months during which she had been gone were an empty house with one room and with every blink of my eye, I would place a rose petal on the floor,—transferred from my pocket to the ground,—until the whole house was filled with rose petals. I would throw myself down through the roof of the house and fall down into the blizzard;—there would be darkness all around me except for the blizzard of rose petals—whipping past me—striking my face—twirling unbalanced—gusts left and right,—and the velvet redness on the back of my neck,—and the smell like her—like the temple—like my hand on the beach,—and the taste like when the skies had steamed with boiling water and steeped the petals into a mixture of rose.—And then the petals and the white water would gush—slowly—but with great force—from the openings and doorways.—Around the house would form pink swamps, with redness slick on their surface like oil. When all the water had trickled out,—when the house was empty again,—it was warm inside and comfortable;—and as I turned around, I saw her enter—a dark and slender silhouette—saved by the sun behind her—coming down the stairs in mid-step— with a bruise and a ghost—her hand on the wall—her knees and her hair and the nine months wrapped around her like cloth in strips,—and only in the naked places could I recognize the girl I knew. Through the empty town we walked—I held her and she limped—a thin line of rose petals dripping down her thigh.

*9. Excerpt from The Orphans of Calcutta, by Satis Chandra Mookherjee, which appeared in the Women's Weekly of London, the Week of August the 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1874, as the third of twelve installments*

In mid-December we returned at last to the town of London. I recall very well standing at the prow, with the Hon'ble Mr Whippleton beside me. The air touched us with a biting chill that I found lovely, as our ship came down the Thames; the same air then became filled with the voices of maritime men and merchants. We were arriving at Blackwell, on the East India side of the docks, where our parting from our fellows was heart-felt. We clasped each other warmly, and Mr Whippleton and I disembarked, and he proceeded to hire a carriage for the two of us. Out the back, as we moved off, I saw the water vanish behind us, as I imagine it had for so many people, perhaps who had been strangers. They had come here into port, and the City had been quick to offer its enfolding embrace to all. How is it that I feel such an affinity for this City? My passion for it comes from some place within me that I cannot put into words except to describe it as a place in my skull.

Over the next few weeks, we continued our investigation. The people we met were most kind and helpful. The first orphanage we visited was near Newgate. The conditions were not incommodius, and the children appeared to us very gay. In our conversation with one of the women in whose charge the children were, Mr Whippleton inquired in our usual fashion about their development. The woman told us that she had found the children to be very reasonable, in their own way. Some were more quick to learn than others, but most were satisfied with their circumstances. One aspect of their care she was very insistent to point out, which was that the children were allowed to keep a small collection of objects of their own. She had noticed that when the children had attained about eight or nine years they became preoccupied with their objects, which they traded amongst themselves, or bought with a few pennies, supplied perhaps by some charitable stranger. Even the younger ones, perceiving the fancy in the eldest, would begin collections, which were mostly hodge-podge and mere copies of the collections of the latter. Many children aspired to collect objects of all the same type, no doubt in the interest of completeness. This would become a kind of hobby-horse to them, and they expended great energies to amass their collections. Some children invented games to play involving their objects, but some were content merely to hoard their collections in greed. She had also noticed that by the time the children had grown a few more years, the desire to collect would very much

dissipate, although some continued to keep their collections in secret until they were very much older. She was pleased in general with this sort of behavior, since in its way it kept the children very organized and they did not want for activity.

After conversing for a time, she took Mr Whippleton and I around the hall where the children slept, and we found them very happy to show us their collections. Some specialized in little bits of print, taken from notices, newsprint, or the occasional book. Others collected little stones, string or pieces of coloured glass. One child in particular made a great deal of his collection of hair which he had obtained from his mates by trading objects they desired much more. Finally, having added to their collections by what we carried with us, and thanking the children for their time, Mr Whippleton and I departed, with a great deal to discuss.

“Did you collect very much in your childhood, Mr Mookkherjee?”

Mr Whippleton asked me this sitting at a coffee-house in the same area.

“I do not recall very well if I did or did not,” I admitted, “but I do remember that my brother once was very interested in the collection of birds’ feathers, and it pleased him very much to point to a feather and describe to me the bird that had dropped it. He often brought me along to come collecting with him, in fact. He never let me keep a feather for myself, although I learned a great deal about the birds by working with him.”

Mr Whippleton considered this for a time, and then related the following:

“I cannot say that my school-mates and I were crazed for collection. We spent a great deal of time together, of course. Not in an orphanage, mind you. Perhaps there is the point of difference. I do remember though that our group put great stock in women’s kisses. Not a day went by but we shared our stories of the maids convinced to give us a little kiss. No female would refuse a boy. We had just to cry out and fall into their arm, and bury our heads there, and they would cover us over. It became quite a game to acquire these kisses in the most ingenious ways... We stopped sharing our stories about it as time went on, I think out of fear or embarrassment, although to my knowledge we all of us still pursued those creatures who had taught us so much about loveliness.”

“And do you think that this is much the same?”

Mr Whippleton did not answer me directly, but instead suggested to me something quite profound.

“You know, some of our philosophers see in the course of childhood the course of mankind in miniature.”

“The course of mankind as it has so far run, or the entire course not even having yet happened?” I asked.

“I think it comes to about the same thing. If it is true that all children acquire this mania for collection and lose it at a stage in their development, it gives me at least hope for an end of this acquisitive age.”

“But could you not just as well say that it were this very age which induced the children to collect their objects?”

“To my mind, the behavior has a general character to it. There are many stories of the wondrous character of the object cabinets kept by the learned men of the past, the walls of the great patrons covered from ceiling to floor with images, the heads of those philosophers bent on cataloguing God’s creation, or even that famous composer of Paris who spent so much time to discover the origins of the melodies in his own head. This all seems to have the same character, although I suppose one would have to deduce from where they got the idea.”

“And if it were deduced, as you say? I can very well imagine a collector of things in their age having very different reasons for collecting than we might have. Is it to be considered the same phenomenon?”

“There seems to me some distinction between the miscellany of these children’s collections, which we might group with the dusty lumber-rooms of the merely curious, and that more noble drive to acquisition which tries to bring together like things in the wisdom of years. This sloppy age is as greedy as those ill-taught children, Mr Mookkherjee, and if there is any universal it is that men will justify to themselves whatever vice they wish, by making lies about its origin. And that is the end of it.”

We stopped our conversation there, as Mr Whippleton had become quite hot. I was reminded then of one of the varieties of analogue given in the *Nyáya-sútra*, that one called *balancing the doubt*, wherein the homogeneity between the eternal and non-eternal in perception becomes grounds for a possibly futile argument. The example given is this:

Sound is non-eternal,  
because it is a product,  
like a pot.

Whence the opposition offers:

Sound is non-eternal (or eternal),  
because it is an object of perception,  
like a pot (or potness).

It is explained that the opposition here alleges that sound is homogenous with a pot as well as potness, inasmuch as both are objects of perception. Because the pot is non-eternal, whereas potness is eternal, there arises doubt whether sound is non-eternal or eternal. This argument is rendered futile in most cases because of the heterogeneity of sound, which is a product, with potness, which is not a product. Thus sound must not be considered eternal, but, as a product, it must be considered non-eternal. On this account, the reader of the *Nyāya-sūtra* is warned always to weigh a thing in respect of its homogeneity as well as its heterogeneity from other things, or else the true nature of a thing will be always concealed. If even after both homogeneity and heterogeneity have been weighed, doubt remains as to the true nature of the thing, this doubt will be endless. It seems to me that the doubt which arose between myself and Mr Whippleton arose from our inability to decide the eternal or non-eternal nature of collection because, although both may be objects of perception, it is unclear whether the eternal thing produces the effect, or the non-eternal thing is the producer. Without knowledge of the mode of production, such doubt as we experienced will find no end.

It is no accident that I have thought over his words a great deal in the months since his passing, and I humbly report them so that the Reader might consider them too, and the age he lives it. Whatever the nature of our endless doubt, the memory of Mr Whippleton, and his example, will be a reminder that some good men exist even in such an age as ours. It is his example that every day convinces me to put the account of my time with him to paper. And I am eternally grateful for the *Woman's Weekly of London* for providing me with the generosity of this short space for writing each week. You do this great City of London a very good service indeed.

*10. Excerpt from The Discovery at Oxyrhynchus, the Letters of Bernard Pyne Grenfell; edited by Arthur Surridge Hunt and published in 1927, London.*

6 March, 1896  
el-Bahnasa, Egypt

Dearest Mother,

You will scarcely believe me when I tell you what we have discovered, although you alone, save for few, will perhaps best appreciate our triumphant accident, viz. the interest you expressed to me concerning the scarabs. At our last meeting I communicated to you my hope concerning the possibility of new finds, considering that Aristotle recently uncovered on papyrus. We did not, however, set great stock in the old site of Oxyrhynchus, which the Greeks called it. (The name has a curious etymology, forgive me if you are already aware of it; Osiris's brother Set was greatly jealous of him, and tricked the god into a sarcophagus, which he sealed with lead and threw into the Nile. Isis sought him assiduously, finally discovering him embedded in a tree trunk supporting the roof of a palace at Byblos. She opened the box, but found that Osiris had died. She brought him back to life with a spell of her father's, wishing Osiris to give her a child; the spell, however, lasted only for a time, and when Osiris again lost his life, Isis hid his body in the desert. Some time later, Set was wandering the desert—Isis meanwhile having given birth to Horus—and he discovered the body of his brother. In a jealous rage, Set tore his brother's body into fourteen pieces and scattered them around Egypt. Hearing of it, Isis collected them, and cobbled together the body of Osiris with bandages. The gods were impressed by Isis's devotion and so brought life back to Osiris another time as the god of the underworld and the Nile. It is interesting that these famous gods seem to have once been people. In any case, when Isis was collecting up Osiris's body, she was able to find all the parts of his body save for the phallus,—pardon—which a fish had eaten in the meantime. The fish was called Oxyrhynchus in Greek, and thus the name of the city.) As I said, Hunt and I did not set great stock in the site, nor did any of our fellows at Queen's College, although we hoped a great deal. We had brought down a number of Egyptians to help us dig... and then proceeded to antagonize them by giving them absolutely nothing at all to do. The first few days we spent wandering the site, which was nothing but mound of sand upon sandy mound, which appeared somewhat incongruous alongside the cleanliness and clarity of the wide desert. No, this did not please the Arabs, having come some one hundred miles up the Nile from Cairo, and I am sure they would have rather spent their time in el-Bahnasa itself. Hunt and I were disposed to share their impatience, but something about

circling around the great heap on camel brought us back very neatly, I think, to what intrigued us about papyrology in the first place. Time we experienced as a kind of doubling; or perhaps as a kind of time outside time, where all of history becomes consolidated into a single timeless point, with the gemlike quality of one of Callimachus's epigrams, inscribed on a tomb, such that wandering by it, one feels as buried under the earth as one feels as if hovering over the earth for all time, as if one were one of those stars, as Catullus says, who have seen for eternity the secret loves of men... But forgive my romanticism, tho' I do wonder if you feel similarly...

Oxyrhynchus had been the capital of the nineteenth Upper Egyptian Nome, and had been once called Per-Medjed, famed for its bureaucrats, who persisted in the place despite the shifts in rule to the Greeks and thence to the Romans. You can well imagine then the superfluity of documents that the city was presented with as some things we must imagine never change. For centuries, the citizens of Oxyrhynchus would cart their rubbish to the heaps outside of the city in whicker baskets, until the city dried up following the invasion of the Arabs in the seventh century. Oxyrhynchus had been watered by a canal system that diverted the Nile waters close to the city; when the newly arrived Arabs abandoned the canal, the city we might say shriveled up, and this in fact was our great fortune, since the rubbish they heaped for so long were kept completely dry for over a thousand years, on account of the absolute dearth of rainfall in the region. (How you must be laughing!)

I remember as if it were a dream the moment that Hunt's camel broke its leg, falling through a mound of papyrus that lay a little closer to the surface. Something seemed to sparkle from the hole that it opened up, and the wind came just then and drew forth a little tornado of papyrus, nearly transparent, which fluttered slowly back onto the sand. We watched it fall, and heard the faint sound of its falling, with the intensity of a music aficionado following the modulations of a symphony. Hardly daring to hope, we called over a few of the Arabs to tend to the camel, and we dug into the sand and scrutinized intensely the little fragments.

Well, what did we find? Rubbish obviously, legal documents, receipts, account books, and the like, either discarded for their uselessness, their untimeliness, or for use with their excrement. But every tenth document we found besides seemed to glow with a kind of aura! A copy of Euclid, with original drawn diagrams. A narrative with the tone of the gospels. A lost play of Sophocles, and a fragment of Sappho only half-known from a previous discovery. And if you will believe a comedy of Menander, whose work as you know we had only known through

quotation! And the same with Agnoios, whose name we had heard in passing in Aristotle, though he is quoted by a few Renaissance authors—he rested beside enigmatic Alexandrine accounts of the Demeter narrative. Songs by Callimachus lay in this tomb under copies of Apollonius Rhodius, his *Argonautica*, those two rivals in life, reunited in death. And a strange prose text by Palladas, that most vulgar of poets, whom we had dismissed as a hack on account of his impoverished little couplets. All this was rubbish!

I am writing to the press at home, of course, in this same bundle of correspondence, in order to drum up the public's support with articles, photographs, and the like. Mother, I wish you could feel what I feel now! Hunt and I, when the sun is too great, retire into the tent, and stretch out on the bed, and smoke the best Turkish tobacco. We are surrounded by piles and piles of secrets. What can we even talk about when it seems as if just by kicking the sand everything we could possibly say could be entirely changed? What does our life become when all of history can be altered with the discovery of a fragment?—and not hypothetically when the fragments lie below our feet at present, or even more, sit yet unread in the boxes by our desks. What kind of time is this, and how is it that we can live it? I leave you now with these grandiose thoughts. Do write when you possibly can. — — Your Loving Bernie.

*11. Excerpt from My Time with the Black Magician, A Magickal Journal, by Sarah Rebecca Leah Rachel, published in 1972.*

*Tuesday—*

The year 1921 rolls around at last, and a woman goes to live with the Beast. Why am I here? I suppose it were a kind of escape. But to whoever comes eventually to read this journal: you mustn't dare think that an escape be nothing but an easy flight, or some shirking evasion. I am here in full command of my faculties, and I bear nothing but hatred for everything that came before— and that is why today I start this journal, in this booklet handed to me by he himself.— Yes, I do feel the need to justify myself.— What did I flee, but that leprous island of Manhattan, whose streets dieted those cancerous growths of buildings... on whose vain rail tracks, now ancient veterans are being carried by stooped businessmen, attentive nurses, and solicitous listeners, covered in shit, in powder, wearing American flags, marching to the rag, *My gal had leprosy, I watched her rot!* — I never want to see those people again.

But what drove me here was not merely hatred, but the doubt I sensed at every moment, whether my hatred of everything present was deserved, or no — which uncertainty made me hate ever more. Yes, I despised the vacant sounds of that city, the consumptive coughs that would have dumbfounded the sick mentality of a Neanderthal, dressed in the costume of its time... and this I felt, even as I despised the incidental strength it took to walk up an incline, or a stair—and then the mere frailty required of me by a descent onto the stage. And I thought, were these hatreds all the same? Was it only I who saw their unity?

And so, I would feel loathing crackling against my skin as I wrapped myself in costumes, as I toweled myself after a bath, as I accepted the touch of the loving hands that would try to encircle me... vines possessed of a searing, hateful, venomous power, given by the sun, in the process of drugging all plants, as if satiating for an hour or two the trees... Oh, I would feel loathing above all for the trees. I hated the way that they leaned in a drunken torpor like hold-overs from some crass mythological poetry. I hated the way they were like bird-shitted grass for more giant things, and the way that the earth had these tumorous stalks stealing life from the surface of the ground. And I hated to think that the overweening slime of the world had venerated them, those mighty imposters that should have been covered over in ice, drowned in the frigid, cracking paralysis of ice that masquerades in poetry as the sublime, crystalline solitude of dark, feebly lit by the pathetic, laughing stars, who stare at us like perverts peeking through

peep-holes in the sky, frigging themselves off at the vain, colorful vaudeville show that is staged here every night.

...

*Wednesday—*

To continue in yesterday's vein: obviously, above all I hated myself for being so stupid to have lived in this stupid world – and so I came to Sicily to live with this Abbey-dwelling Beast in hopes of occultifying myself. I arrived two days ago now at Cefalù and was provided quarters after a small transaction; Crowley with his shaven head came to induct me in that raspy voice he has, telling me *Do What Thou Wilt*, and dumped on me a thousand books, using terms in his speech which I had already encountered in my reading—and then I went with a couple of the students to drink at one of the mountain streams. The Scarlet Woman was there with us—that was what Crowley called her. She told me about the real magician, the one the newspapers don't talk about—that latter is certainly true, for what she told me is unprintable. Crowley went out with a Jew into the desert. He shaved the Jew down the center and gave him little horns of hair, since he'd looked like such a hang-dog, so that the Arabs would stay away. They wandered around with jewel studded crosses, performing pentagramic rituals every night, sacrificing desert creatures, trying to journey into the hierarchical Aethyrs described by John Dee, whom everyone has read. Finally, one night Crowley secluded himself in a magical triangle, while the Jew waited in safety within a holy circle, and the demon Choronzon met them, and like a naked savage with froth-covered fangs, the demon tried to kill the Jew while Crowley lost himself in the fight against the demon which took place in an Abyss. During that fight, Crowley lost his Self, they say, and became a true magician, whose Will alone it is that orders the chaos of the Abyss, but whose Self is no mere identity. And then, a few days later, on a mountaintop, the Beast and the Jew engaged in the final test to reach the uppermost Aethyr, accessible only to the most powerful magicians. They both lost their minds, and Crowley sacrificed himself on the mountain, in ecstasy his body was dissolved, as the Jew, in the guise of the horned Pan, buggered him involuntarily where he lay. That was the beginning of everything, the Scarlet Woman told me.

...

*Friday—*

Starting at the beginning. The Scarlet Woman is bearing Crowley's seed. She told me how they fuck. Something utterly different. Crowley writes poems about it. About her wide open semen-stained cocksuckers cunt, dripping with the secretions of gonorrhea, in a body that other men have ripped open, sucking him like trees vacate the manure of the soul, how she would stand over him, dominating like Lilith, defiling his mouth with sizzling piss, forcing his own shit down his throat, straddling him like a lumpy, womanly snake, spouting greasy, hairy thighs, which the Beast beat into submission as he buggered her—and then she would bugger him, both covered in dirt and filth, she squirting out disease-riddled fetuses, he, pumping away at her whale-bloated body, riddled with pox, syphilitic curds, deathly searing diarrhea, and forced-out farts, insane farts, that bubbled out of her back-end like leafy turds from a clogged fountain, crackling with the domination of cocaine, the dribbling saliva heavenly heroin, the shapeless, money-throwing twisting of mescaline—and at the moment of motionless exhaustion they would inhale hashish from a hookah from North Africa, and in an aethyreal state, Crowley would transcribe his account into righteous verse, as if all of experience were planned out before hand for the very act of writing. Then, they would go dress themselves in the costumes of Egyptian gods, cackling like mad, with eyes bugging out, and perform vaudeville acts that in an induced haze seemed like revelations of a universal order of colors and sounds, an order that couldn't have been the result of some aesthetic theory, but imposed by the very Will of the universal magician, presenting to each onlooker the irony of the mind, in which even the reactionary army of trees, represented with branches, daubed with paint and feathers, and stuck to the crowns of gods, would flash with light, and the pasted-on leaves would become triangles, and the branches would try to take over the sky, in which a holy face had formed in the clouds, breathing translucent words, while the sounds of ghosts swirled around my head, faster and faster until there was not any more Self—this is what Crowley is talking about. I floated in a realm of particulate matter, and every word I spoke—either proscribed or coming out from the presentiment to speak—brought into existence that to which the word referred, and, without time or space, I floated atop a sea of being—places, people, memories, the future, they floated like corpses underneath me, their heads knocking into each other at random, and each knock would be a transportation to 1895, or 1795, or 1995, Manhattan, or even back to Fort Atkinson, where I

was born. As in a nightmare, I tried to run back to my quarters, the paths of the complex receding from me as I tried to run forward, as if I were never reaching the unreachable, and then, suddenly, I lay on my cot, panting, the stars outside encroaching on the ceiling, sliding through the window. And naked, Crowley came to me, because he followed me, to where I lay destroyed, and forced his bald head into my cunt, and pulled himself into me by gripping my shoulders—and then he was ripping the flesh off my breasts, greedily flaying them, uncovering each layer as if they signified the next heavenly plane. And like little mindless exhaust pipes, we expelled ourselves into each other, we lay upside down into each other and pissed into each other, so that I imagined the particulates of matter being forced into a determinate oval, as piss streamed from his phallus into my mouth, and then down into the space that did not exist inside me, and then flowing hotly out again into his mouth, and in this way we completed a cycle of existence, fusing together like neon lights bent into the figure of a letter—and I felt, at last, the feeling of having let go of everything—and it was a feeling only, a feeling exactly because there was *no one left to have let go*, but merely paranoiac feeling confusion in which pleasure and pain seemed to shimmer out in the distance, unbound by a thought, or rather unhinged by the simultaneous presence of all thoughts. Not even the jealousy I had felt when talking to the Scarlet Woman... the Scarlet Woman didn't even exist, or maybe she existed, but in the way that none of us existed—still Crowley and I rolled against each other in absolute chaos, and I whipped my head from side to side—I realized I could be anywhere and at any time, although no “I” was realizing it, though it was nevertheless and absolutely determined. Every action could have been my last, every action, neither pointing to the past or to the future, had in itself some ultimate significance, and as I ran my hand against my face, I could not tell if I had left marks, if I had bled myself, if I were now alive or dead, if I had slain Crowley, or if I had slain myself. And I felt something I've felt, it seemed neither man nor woman, but something, something...

And then, with a quiet pop, the animal confusion ceased, and I came to myself, and with an overwhelming warmth, I was back in myself, and Crowley was disappearing, out the back, and I, in my head, was back, as if I were to dwell there permanently, as if slumbering I had awoken from a vision, as if I had returned into coherent nothingness, which was just a simple

something, since I seemed to float above my bed, but at last I felt the warmth of my own mind back in me, back at last. But I was also me again—

So I can't help but wonder, as I write this, what it was I had accessed, if I had accessed something beyond me? What was it, then, some proof of the aethyreal plane? The hallucination of the Scarlet Woman's story? The breakage of everything for me, with the joy of an animal formerly trapped in the universe of human bodies... Was it something I could experience anytime, or sometimes, or never? Had the gods had experienced it, the bugging Greeks experienced it, my mother experienced it? If it were something transcendent, or merely occult, or, then again, if it were just another kind of stage-show... and then, I had to wonder, if the players of stage-shows experienced it... And if not them, then their fathers? And if not even that, then where did stage-shows come from, in the beginning? Or do I only ask these questions, since so many years of my life were spent strutting on some Manhattan stage?

What do I feel now, before sleeping, an impotent disgust or a permanent transcendence? Having written this down, am I no better than Crowley, the imposter, who never doubts, but buggers the world that has wronged him? Although I can understand the need to read and write it...so that when we are held out into the darkness, it isn't entirely unexpected, this great secret—if, as I said, if that's what it is, although what is it, if not always unexpected, despite the poetry that seems to talk all about it—although, is that the same, or is that different? And, besides the doubt, having been held out in the darkness, don't you just again want to be a child?

...

Saturday—

I really must go back and revise... What is it about yesterday that caused me to write so poorly?...

12. Baubo and Iambe, *chamber poetry by Julieta "Lemoncita," published 1929.*

DEMETER: Okay, so this is what I heard. It was night, and the poet was aboard his tiny ship. Going through the reeds. It's dark, and he's looking for Apollonius Rhodius, who's supposed to be coming down to the shore. Why? I couldn't tell you. Some said there was a woman, of course. That he had to track her down, some woman who didn't give him the pleasure of a last word, they say. He followed her down to the reeds, she seemed to keep turning back to goad him. And the whole time she'd been sitting somewhere down the first alley, of course, quiet in the terror that appears in retrospect after an abduction. But I don't think so... I also heard that the poet had been lying in bed, folded up too tightly to think, and the stars, who spin and revolve with silent transmissions, brought him to the despair that poets and mathematicians have in common. No, I don't remember who told me that, there's a lot of talk, some of it better than others, in terms of believability. I think it'll come out that it was all a ploy for the benefit of Callimachus, playing with him so as to raise the stakes... in any case, Callimachus knew Rhodius was out there, he must have known, since the moon wasn't out that night and the only light there was came from the lighthouse. You know Apollonius Rhodius, don't you? The fellow who wrote Jason and the Argonauts, right? Well, he was a former student of Callimachus's, and he'd just been put in charge of the library, when Callimachus had been there much longer, had devoted his life... Well, what can one say? They said there was something of a rivalry between them, and that there was something more to it... in any case, Callimachus leans forward, right, and holds his finger to his lips, shh'ing the guys in the boat with them—and they start moving forward. Apollonius comes into view and Callimachus shouts something. What did he shout? I don't know exactly, but he's complained to me enough times about his friend's obesity, his flatulating the stale farts of Homer, which in the asshole of Apollonius lost their epigrammatic pungency. This is how he talks, Callimachus. So he probably went on about that for a while, he loves to go on about that, and probably heckled the mud-sniffing ibis to death, until—no thanks, Baubo—until Apollonius had had enough, no, I don't know the details exactly, maybe Apollonius had brought some friends along for the fight, maybe his lover had turned up in a boat sailing off into the darkness, at one of those moments that you can say, it happened yesterday, or two days ago, or in the time of so and so, but when you do say it, it seems a great deal more important... and maybe she, his lover, did appear that night—I know a few said she'd appealed to their dignity, and a few said that she'd been there by mistake, and some more said that she was just the kind of person who loved to watch and listen discretely... There were a lot of people like that there that night. I've heard everything, the people I talked to all seemed to have been witness to something... and the consensus is that it was big. They said they found scraps of papyrus floating on the water for half a mile both ways, the goats were grazing on the documents out there by the silphium. It must have been huge. The library was buzzing with it, unfaithful, unjust, unthinking, hard-hearted, you know how they talk. So I see Callimachus at the library the next day, working on his index—now the work pained him, you know—and he denied everything—but he was lying, I knew, since I'd seen mud tracks leading back from the reeds, I myself had, and Baubo, you saw a few muddy handprints dotting a colonnade, am I wrong? Ptolemy heard that the pair of poets were drunk—Apollonius was sighted pissing into the Nile and Callimachus had descended into the hoi polloi, shouting and everyone and everything, that they were absolutely useless. The man hated long

poems. I think it was just because he had to read them all to write his silly index. The shorter the better. And I should explain that Apollonius was the wordiest of them all. So. That night he comes to me. I'm cleaning up outside. Don't look at me like that, Iambe, I've explained it all already, it seemed liked the right occupation for me. He comes to me and grabs me. He's not in his right mind, of course. Normally he's harmless. He worships women, but that night. He knocks over the vase you gave me, yes, yes, he did. I'm telling the truth. I won't say it outright, it's not decent... But he did. I promise you. And the next day I went to him, when he'd sobered up. He probably just wanted to talk, that's how it usually goes with him. But you know how these guys value the people who listen to them. Maybe he saw through the disguise. Well, the fact is the next day he'd locked the door of his room. Saw him through the window, muttering, holding his head in his hands, holding his nose, jerking it back and forth. I did feel sorry. What is it about the past of men that makes them feel some guilt, leaving them so they can't enjoy anything, having broken some rule or other...and hardly anyone can understand them when they try to explain it, I know I can't—no, Baubo, just a minute—so, I yelled I had a message for him. Nothing. Banged on the door, he wouldn't answer. I go away for just one second! Just a second! And Apollonius shows up, knocks, and guess what, my dear ladies, he lets *him* in and I race across the room, but the door closes and all I get to hear is, *What a tapestry!* I think Callimachus said it, and boy he's right, what a tapestry it is, it's a shameful picture. I heard them laugh from inside, which surprised me. I wanted to throw off the disguise, but that would have been ridiculous. I'd let this whole library burn to the ground, if I had the chance, or... if you had been there, Iambe, you would have given him a mouthful! I know what he thinks I am, a servant-girl. I could swallow up this city with dust! So much for Cyrene. What? So I'm not allowed to get a little melodramatic now and then? Baubo, come over here—I'll have that drink... It's good to be home.

BAUBO: Yes, that man came to see me yesterday. He was wearing bright purple and green robes, I don't know where he got them—you gave them to him, Demeter? I can imagine—he looked just hopelessly lost. I smiled at him when he opened the door. I had that wonderful, transparent cloth wrapped around me, yes, I thought I was beautiful—don't speak to me like that, Iambe, I know I'm too old to answer the door, but nobody else was around, you see... He takes one look at me in that horrible robe, panting, all out of sorts. His hand was shaking, but I will tell you that I was flattered, of course, and surprised, you can imagine! I think I spilled my drink on him—yes, I was drinking, I told you no one had time for me that day—Would you bring over the chair from—Oh, be quite, Iambe, can't an old woman take a seat anymore, are chairs so precious? And yes, I might be a little uncomfortable sitting, and that's nothing to you. As I was saying, I spill the drink all over his robes, and I did try to dry him off, and ply him with a little bit of the old magic—don't laugh at me! He was red as a virgin's and sweating, so I brushed him off, and brought him into Iambe's room, which was open, then, I won't say any more about that. He was adorable. The eunuch, what's he called, Aristax, yes, he asks Callimachus if he'd like a younger lady, I won't forgive him for that, but what else can I expect, I suppose I shall have to get used to it, and of course, Aristax couldn't be taken seriously in that high-pitched voice he tries to put on—don't tell me about eunuchs, Iambe—and Callimachus, I could tell he had no idea what was proper, so I start quivering my lower lip, like that—and he tells the eunuch, not to

worry, fine, fine, and—yes, just like that! So I lay him down and bring over the olive oil... Next thing I know I'm having this conversation, he asks me how's business been, and I tell him it's good most of the time, and then he asks me if I'd happened to hear of Apollonius Rhodius, a bookseller, he explained—wait until I'm finished, Demeter, thank you, dear—and, no, I admit I wasn't exactly sure who he was talking about, I suppose I thought it was another of Apollo's disguises, and I wasn't particularly pleased to hear about that, in your interest Demeter, so I ask him, something about the sun? And he says, no, more like that little candle from Rhodes, and I ask, that's the one with the statue? And he says, yes. And I said, well, I had no idea that it was Apollo who was so popular there. I thought he was getting a little frustrated, and I was trying not to laugh, so I started to reach around him, he was quite skinny, trying to get an idea of the situation... and to keep the conversation going, I ask, And so, you're asking me if I know the statue, well—and he sits up, not happily, and tells me, No, he's not a statue, he's a person—and there was some talk of wrinkled hags, you would have been pleased, Iambe, and to keep things light-hearted, I laugh again, and point out that statues are people too, generally, but I didn't want him to leave, so I ask him, What was the answer to the riddle, then, or whatever it was? And he goes very pale and sinks down into the corner, mumbling about how much laundry one finds on Mount Helikon and about some fine shark bee, which I suppose was some kind of poetry since I couldn't make heads or tails of it. And he goes on and on, getting louder and louder, and I'm getting nervous, you can imagine—I knock three times on the door so Aristax can get ready with the knife—I have never had to do that in my life—when he turns around and tells me he would like that younger lady, after all, and since I knew you, Iambe, were busy, I tried to stall for time, and I thought to myself, well, what was he interested in, Rhodes, and so I told him that I had actually seen the statue once, and that whenever I think of him, I get a little excited, with those legs, and that hasn't diminished in time—I suppose I was trying to ease him, what with him wanting to leave so soon, and I ask him, well, can you imagine the size of *his* statue? And he tries to walk out! Of course, he was just trying to leave, but he moved all of a sudden, and I got spooked, you see, because the worst are like him, who think they're better than us—so, he's moving right up to me, because I'm standing in front of the door, I see that now, but I was terrified then, you can imagine, and so to stop him right there, I hike up my skirts and—surprise! Ta-da! I give him a wide-open look-see. Demeter knows, there's no better way to stop a moment in its tracks than to give them a peek. And he can't look away! Don't talk to me about Gorgons, Iambe. I've been around for a long time, and at that moment, well, I tell myself, Baubo, you still got it.

IAMBE: Well, shit, Baubo, you had to drink, you drunkard, yes, I know your secret power, well goddamn it, looks like we are gonna have to lock you up, or wait until your cunt decides to disappear at last. Well, yes, Demeter, guess we'll wait until it turns to dust, and well, you'll have no power over that, 'cause in the end, you cunt yourself, you'll die alone along with fucking dust because you only fucking live when shit decides to live. And shut your fucking mouths, don't laugh at me, you like that, don't you? Shit on you. I try to tell a story... So, I had just finished up and then the eunuch tells me that this fucking ancient lady needs some saving in the other room, and so I say, goddamn it, rush inside to where she is, the asshole poet-cunt Callimachus is sitting on the bed, with hands on fucking lap, a fucking faggot, so I tell me, shit, and start to talk like,

What you want, you like some tits, or pussy, ass, come on just tell me. He just freezes on the spot, and shit, I sit down close to him, and so he asks me if I'd heard of Apollonius. Well, yeah, I've heard of him, the fucking head librarian, I know him—poet says he's got some dirt on him, which seems to me like fucking wasting all my fucking time. Baubo, you know me, you know what I have to do these days, take off my shirt, and guide his fucking hand and start to slam the two together, hand meets tit, you know, but just to play along I say, Well, what about him did you hear, while leaning over, tits in face, and rubbing fucking robes—with nothing, nothing coming of it, just a stutter coming from his fucking mouth, I want, he says, I want that it might widely be well known—he's whispering now, a little hoarsely, so I start to stick my tongue into his ear, for all the good my charms are doing, Yes, he says, I have a word or two which I would like to be more widely known—and then he pauses like he's got a thing a little too important actually to say out loud, but I was fucking fed up with his fucking flaccid dick and reaching down I stick a finger up his ass, that always works, some like it, others don't, well that's another thing—he gives a yelp, but keeps on working, trying hard to say his words: I think it's known that he and I have something of a rivalry, but that's all of our own creation—fuck—the man, you know, he means to me, well, more than any other man who has a balding head, and so I wrote this thing... Well, fuck, you pussy, spit it out! An epigram. Goddamn, I say, no way that I can deal with this, with double fingers in his ass and oiled tits there in his face, what does he want, that I should start to masturbate? But then at last the poet speaks, Callimachus: a piece of trash, a cheat with wood for brains, the guilty one is he who wrote the Causes of Callimachus. Ascribe it to my rival, lady, take your finger from my ass. Well, fucking fuck, is that the thing you had that brought you here? Well, people here know that such bitches like that come here just to talk about their shit-stained goddamn friends—I mutter, Okay, turd, I'll spread the word, the poet speaks as if he won't turn into goddamn dust, as if he wants to save a few good things before he goes, but that's the fucking world, my friends, although someday the maybe hidden secret, far away inside the future, turning light back to the hidden past will fuck the fuckers—making known unknowables that live inside the now. Callimachus, a piece of trash, well, yeah, I'll spread the word—oh, fuck it, please, Demeter, while I try to speak, just would you please just stop your fucking laughter, bitch, this story's far from funny—shit!

DEMETER: Oh, Iambe, she's gone! I came as fast as I could. Where do you want me to start? Okay, I went to see Callimachus, I peek in the window, he's hard at work, but he's there alright. I start the tears, run to the door, start banging on it. He lets me in! Unhappy, yes. What do I want? I tell him about Baubo. He doesn't care: Dead, he says. Venereal disease most likely. I tell him she was last seen stripped of all her clothes. No surprise there, he says, and then he says, Probably wandered off, drowned herself trying to fuck the Colossus of Rhodes. I'm yelling at him, calling him everything I could think of—oh, if you'd been there, Iambe, you would have put him in his place. And I start yelling about his child, the one I'm so sure he gave me, which I won't let denials abduct, and then he denies and denies, I knock all the tablets off his desk, they crack on the floor. He's shocked, of course, and then I slap him, spit on his tablets, and walk out—the guards helped me. What? The poet's not going to be any help. We're going to have to find her alone. It's like they forgot about us! Callimachus, even he—I thought he'd seen through the disguise. He sang hymns! But now there's nothing but forgetting, while we putter around, trying

to shovel a last clump of dirt into the pit of eternity... We're living in poverty because we're unable to be poor, Iambe. Look at me when I'm talking to you. Baubo isn't the first to disappear. This began a long time ago. From Arabia to Pharos, who knows her statues, has heard her name somewhere at night, beyond the trees, among the stars, who...

*The library is quiet at this hour. A servant girl lights torches in the brackets, wishing she were home. She turns down hallways, labyrinths, past winding stairs, pillars, lonely. The smell of rotting pulp. A breeze finds its way through a passage; the girl sighs or yawns; the air satisfies her, although underneath, a knotty feeling of cool nights, past, long, gone. A hum, ruffling, the breeze whistles down shelves of compartments housing thousands of scrolls of papyrus, their handles polished to a gleam with pumice. The orders are for incoming ships to be stopped, searched, scrolls stolen, copied, and returned. She feels something deep in her palm; she touches her cheek. She leaves, and the scrolls are left in darkness.*

A VOICE: So.

A VOICE: Still here.

A VOICE: Still next to you.

A VOICE: I feel the rocking of a ship far out in the Gulf of Mexico. Is this me?

A VOICE: The hidden harmony is better than the visible.

A VOICE: ...as great a number as of the Libyan sands which lie at silphium-bearing Cyrene, between the oracle of stormy Jove and the sacred tomb of old Battus...

A VOICE: That's me. I'm old Battus.

A VOICE: If only I could send to you the poems of old Battus...

A VOICE: Still here.

A VOICE: Still next to you.

A VOICE: So.

A VOICE: Had I known Latin at eighteen, I would have been an Emperor...

A VOICE: ...the crystal waters of Lake Garda, the Italian hills, the promontory Sirmio, where I was born. A villa, a peninsula, connected by an umbilical cord of land, columns that sparkle in the sun, seemed wet. Billows of sand on the beach formed the shape of a... I followed the river Adige as it wound through Verona. The poems of Callimachus were there, half sunk in the shore, water lapping...betrayal.

A VOICE: Betrayal.

A VOICE: Unmindful, false.

A VOICE: Does nothing move you to pity, hard one, your sweet little friend?

A VOICE: Though they tell me that I lie buried beside my friend in life and death, Apollonius Rhodius...

A VOICE: And in this melancholy business that is death and is not. That is hopeful and distracting.

A VOICE: Betrayal.

A VOICE: I have twenty countries in my memory and I drag the colors of a hundred cities in my soul—the Persian nightingale who whistles for his rose—on the ships of Asia and the gentle elephants—my pen trembles and quivers—I am always moved...

A VOICE: Now you do not hesitate to betray me, deceive me, faithless...The impious deeds of deceitful men do not please the gods. Bad times.

A VOICE: He ran to Rome, disgusted with the rustic. Made love to Clodia Metellus. Dinner with friends. He heard the news of his brother's death. Where he had met betrayal. The sky pressed down on the earth.

A VOICE: Folds of dirty blankets, wine in goblets, grapes were there, and on the floor slunk the word betrayal...

A VOICE: Alas, tell me, what can people do, or in whom can they have faith?

A VOICE: A man's fate is his character.

A VOICE: Winds and lofty clouds bear away both words and deeds.

A VOICE: Does it not suffice for a man of discipline in need of a change to sit at the other end of his study table once a month...

A VOICE: No artist has ever been found hanging before a rose...

A VOICE: The sky dimmed. Virgil swung down from his horse. Warmed his hands at the fire that Horace... Stopping for the night. Mile market on the road. A glowing purple, transparent evening. Elbows propped. Bed of leaves. He wrote two lines a day. An uneasy autumn, the whispered word, betrayal.

A VOICE: Does not our love keep you here, does not our right hand, once given to holding you, doesn't Dido, about to die by a cruel death, hold you?

A VOICE: The poet coughed up black oily ashes, drifting over the walls of Carthage; few will suspect how sad one must be to undertake a resuscitation.

A VOICE: I like my bed because it is the only place where I can by rights be absent, pretending to be dead while all the time breathing like the living—when I go on a binge I can hear the voice of dictionaries...

A VOICE: Thank you for the honor, and the shore of the Black Sea still floats...

A VOICE: Ovid dies in Tomis, laboring for ten years in exile. Among foreigners. In a strange language.

A VOICE: Faith remembers, if you've forgotten.

A VOICE: As many as the stars, who...

A VOICE: Honest I know myself for the creature and the thief I am.

A VOICE: They found me in Verona after a thousand years. In a desk drawer. By a bed.

A VOICE: Your plenitude does not resuscitate the living understanding...

A VOICE: I bet there is not a Chilean nor an Obokian in the world who can say to me: Because of the color of my skin and my size I once felt something that you could not have felt—Just let anyone come up to me and say such a thing and I'll spit in his eye—my art which is most difficult because I adore it and shit on it...

A VOICE: The unknown secret lies in the past, that which is longer and more complicated.

A VOICE: In the future, where the problem now identified meets with an unknown solution...

A VOICE: Light!

A VOICE: Light!

A VOICE: The god whose oracle is at Delphi neither speaks plainly, nor conceals, but indicates by signs.

A VOICE: Why is there something rather than nothing?

A VOICE: Why is there a light on, and not out?

A VOICE: You brought Mexican sand caked on your clothing when you set out... never to be seen...

DEMETER: This has to be it.

A VOICE: This is it.

IAMBE: The two of us, the fucking climate of a search, and so I... which is more nefarious: the climate of the Congo, maybe it is genius? Fucking searched, machete-wielding goddesses, the paths, they cleared before us, cooling lava—fuck, the search was new, ‘cause goddesses, they see the world by looking down.

DEMETER: There’s nowhere else to go.

IAMBE: I’m here to help you, don’t apologize to me. Why don’t you break with time and seek the answer in the graveyard of the future?

DEMETER: Help me look for her, tickle the scrolls in their tender places, walk about them for a second eternity...

A VOICE: And Demeter sought lacunae, drowning for her Baubo.

IAMBE: Well, did you fucking find her?

A VOICE: We are alive, we breath and respirate, grab hold of us, and climb inside the spaces that circle back into themselves.

DEMETER: She’s scattered as far as wide as our search. I understand, although I doubt...

IAMBE: Demeter, fuck it, fuck your fucking poetry, just fucking tell me where my fucking friend is.

DEMETER: Baubo was the first to go.

A VOICE: Tell the king, the fair wrought house as fallen.

A VOICE: No shelter has Apollo, nor sacred laurel leaves.

A VOICE: The fountains are now silent, the voice is stilled.

A VOICE: It is finished.

A VOICE: Theodosius was dead.

A VOICE: A dripping hymn fluttered forth while the temple doors shut. It twirled from under the heavy gates and ended close to the ground.

A VOICE: Oh, fuck, you cunt, come back! Demeter! What the fuck you saying? There’s no way that she could be forgotten. Doesn’t that just ask a fucking ton of questions? You, there! Where the hell’d she go? I’m shivering. Now everything is black and white, you fucking shit, I trusted you, my friend... I’ll write on windows, glasses, bog-house doors, and rail-cars, building fronts... I’ll make you pay for your betrayal. All of you!

A VOICE: The mysteries practiced among men are unholy mysteries.

A VOICE: This is the end.

A VOICE: That man, he seemed to me a god...

A VOICE: What can people do, or in whom can they have faith?

A VOICE: Arthur Cravan, a boxer, disappears...

A VOICE: I met him in Mexico.

A VOICE: A roll of the dice...

A VOICE: My friends...

*Curtain.*

13. *The Pot, a short story by Annie Devereux, published 1942.*

I'm going to tell a story. It starts on a cool summer night in 1941 at a manor house near Thomasville, Georgia. A beautiful Jeffersonian building, surrounded on three sides by fields. When the story starts, the manor windows are shoving off ships of light over the plantation; the staff are cowering in the annex; Kelsie Devereux, my brother, is holding court in the dining room. With whom? My brother is a genteel, urbane, sophisticated, and well-traveled man. One of his buddies, Rodney Lewis, says that once he walked into a bar in the middle of Nairobi, and there was Kelsie, throwing back a drink, inviting him over as if this weren't the strangest thing in the world. He says that Kelsie told his usual stories, that he inquired kindly after Rodney's family—our mothers live in neighboring buildings off Washington Square—and that all in all, it came off as very *normal*. They shook hands, and parted. A few months later, actually, he happened to see Kelsie again in Paris just before the invasion. Kelsie talked a mouthful at him then, in that voice he had as if filtering everything through his nose, shaking a little gracelessly, massaging you into his own way of unfolding while somehow dulling the rest of the world. At the time Kelsie was being mobbed by a group of cosmopolitan hangers-on, Parisian sycophants and the like, whom he'd picked up during his travels in the inter-war period, leading them across borders like a mother hen leading her chicks to freedom.

In any case, in the early 30's, we Devereuxs had invested in the Thomasville house as a kind of idyllic summer retreat from the city; the place was run-down, unmaintained since the antebellum period; and around 1934 we took vacation there, our mother and father, Kelsie and I, along with some of my then colleagues, Donald Alderman, Ernie Schlink, who just happened to have a few months free. Schlink himself had docked in from Vienna; Donnie I had met at Cambridge, near which he still lives, for he had come down to call on me around that time. Cathy Hayes, and a few others, members of our old circle in Paris, couldn't make it. Of course, Kelsie was frantically bored; father sat around smoking his pipe and begging us to look at the lambs; and my mother was absolutely horrified at the mess of the place, and even more so at the elderly fellow, JW, the caretaker, who had been replacing windows since about 1910. JW's wife would bring him lemonade at around eleven each day; she'd go on about her daughter, a high-school dazzler, and her son who wanted to study music; and she was always trying to tell us

something about the appropriate time and place, as she called it—I think she wanted her son to come home and court me. JW himself had cheeks like two emblazoned peaches. Donald, Ernie, and I would go with him to survey the fields, sitting in the back of the cart; we would hitch the horse somewhere, and JW would lean against a pumpkin and dribble a stout beer down his front. Kelsie sat inside all day, alternating between cigarettes and a Berlitz German textbook. And my mother, every night, was vowing that she would never return to Georgia; she and Kelsie formed an intransigent block, ridiculing us drunkenly from the kitchen table, when we'd come in covered in mud.

So it was a surprise around 1939 when we starting getting letters from Kelsie, as if he wanted to settle down in Thomasville. Of course, being where he was at the time, there were some things clearer to him than were to us, although nothing can be said to be entirely clear to Kelsie. He'd been apprised by Max Weiss, a certain lawyer turned writer, whose grandfather had come over about twenty years previously, and who had lost no time in repudiating that choice once he had come of age, that the American government was making allowances for landed farmers to be exempted from the draft. It was, then, as a draft-dodger that Kelsie began his correspondence with JW and his wife, obliging them to fix up the house, hire a few local boys, and get the plantation running again. And it was with this incentive that Kelsie had enticed Rodney, whom, as I said, he'd met in Paris for what must have been the third time in two years, to return with him to Georgia, along with his pacifist retinue.

Of course, we had forgotten entirely about the house until Kelsie wrote to explain he was installing himself there. A fiery exchange between our mother and him ensued; I think she took it like a betrayal. This did not cool his ardor however, and Kelsie and his company made their final plans to flee to America, perhaps with the idea of mounting a kind of resistance from afar. In early in 1941, he arrived in New York City, around the very same time that Walter Benjamin was being stopped by the Gestapo somewhere in the Pyrenes. They disembarked ominously on our mother, who had since more firmly deposited herself at the Washington Square apartment. No doubt she held her son's head in her hands, ignoring his obsequious inquires into her health, listening instead to his friends' furtive commentary upon the furniture. No doubt he drew her to the bay windows that overlook the park.

You know I don't love you, Kelsie, my mother would have said. Of course not mother, how could you? This world is far too large for that kind of doting. God forbid. A pause, probably, while my mother hailed the maid, an ashen-faced, dazed sort of girl. And this crowd? Kelsie would have winked at her, and said: Foreigners, quite simply, mother. Men of great significance, and asked her for a fleet of cars with which to drive down, for which my mother had of course steeled herself, letting out only: You're not going to the Thomasville house, are you Kelsie? Mother. Let us get something straight at the outset. I absolutely refuse to argue. Lately, I have become aware of the immense chasm, which, you must realize, has always yawned between us... And perhaps I'm imputing things unfairly to Kelsie, things that only came out later, but I imagine that he talked to her then about his philosophical ambitions, a series of symposia, wherein the contemplation of all beautiful things will lead us to the eternal Beauty of all pleasure and happiness—though probably he adopted this particular rhetoric only later, when, as I said, he was holding court at the Thomasville house, on the cool night in 1941, when the cosmopolitan travelers were slouched around the table, and candles were brought out, and the fish soup was passed around, and bellies were gorged with wine, and I decided to get up from my chair...

But when I imagine it now—since it is clear to me that Kelsie inevitably, during the course of the conversation, would have puffed himself up like he was six years old, when we would play in the park by the little statue of the stone horse that has gone missing—Beauty is invoked, and since her son's gestures and gazes doubtlessly were referred again and again to the window, instead of to her, at the sight of his eyes finally on her, at the sharing of a glance, I am sure that at that moment my mother burst into laughter. You are an idiot, Kelsie. Thank you, mother. I assume you mean in the Dostoevskian sense, and mother and son would have laughed and laughed, and the maid probably dropped her rag in anxiety, and Kelsie probably fished into the sea of brocade to hand it back to her with a smile, saying to mother, I see you think I'm talking nonsense. Well, nonsense is a fad. In this connection, we've missed something essential: we have absolutely failed to distinguish between the beautiful nonsense, and the ugly. And my mother would have said—that is, she has said many times—I was thirty-two once, Kelsie—are you that old?—I've had my fair share... And then she would go on about sitting with Edith Wharton in Rome... Your generation is not the only one to feel the bite of the...—and I know for

a fact that what follows is actually something that was said because Donald brought up later, Donald who, by the time of the party, had fallen in with Kelsie, the two having collaborated on a number of French and Greek philological analyses... —Bacchic frenzy of philosophy, which is something that Plato talks about—but I would bet that if Kelsie had known about this phrase then—if he had read Plato, instead of talking about him—he would have interrupted our mother, and our mother would have asked, And just how do you think you came into the world, Kelsie? And Kelsie would have guessed that mother had just picked up "the Bacchic frenzy of philosophy" from reviewing some new work in translation, since she never read but that she would get paid for it, so mother would have had to change the subject, especially as those foreign imbeciles would be obligated, by now, to fix her a drink—an Italian no doubt provided it. Two cigarettes. Mother would have explained how she was always short of cash. The annuity from father's estate. And then she definitely must have said something like, If I do agree to help you, you are going to bring that Jewish doctor—Schwartz—over here for me. I cannot bring myself to ring him. I want you to do in person. I've been absolutely afflicted with diarrhea for two weeks now—Your liver's giving out, no doubt—We Devereux, our curse has always been our bowels—Precisely: either you diagnose the matter yourself, which I don't think appeals to you, or you get Schwartz over here to do it for you—As you wish—And also, you are bringing your sister down with you—What?—And then my mother would have gone on: I've decided I can't stand her any longer. She wants desperately to be Henry James, and now with the war going on, I can't possible spare any time to give a thought to her and her preoccupations. Actually, now that I think about it—yes, I'm sure—Annie has a car—some boyfriend or other left it while he's away in Europe, of course. You'll take that down, and bring Annie too. You're sly, mother, Kelsie would have said. Yes, Kelsie, and the jewelry on her arms no doubt rattled as it gave in to gravity, my mother getting up from her cushion. Now go find Annie, while I powder my nose. The maid probably took one last look at Kelsie's pretty face, before disappearing in the back with my mother, just a moment's relief before the horrors that no doubt would follow.

Kelsie waited a few days before calling on me. Of course, I went. In fact, I was the only one paying attention when the troop of cars sputtered into Thomasville. I remember thinking—while Edward, Reynolds, and a woman, Clara, were talking about the possibility that man has

always forgotten what it means to be in the world—that in the modern era, all mysteries are temporary, that nothing but waiting exists today for the movements of the world, like doves, to return and inform us of themselves. Or possibly I only had that thought once the party had started, when the staff had fled to the annex, and the moon shone outside, and about sixteen talkers sat around the big table, shouting at each other, a few mentioning Diderot, a few watching silently—like childhood friends who, in the early years, provide the group with pocket change, and, in that way, buy themselves some friendship, but find themselves hanging around still, silently, after decades—and a few others who were trying to talk about science, some others talking about people who finish out their lives together, and still cannot say what it is they want from each other—and a few more realizing that they’ve never known what they want to talk about at all. I sat in the corner with the pot of soup. Who brought the pot of soup? I’ve never been sure, but think JW made it up, half a dozen types of seafood, stewed together; Guillaume had the idea to top it with aioli, but, of course, the olive oil failed to take to the mayonnaise, he and Reynolds having already imbibed too much, impatiently, from the bottles that Kelsie had brought up from the basement. They passed the pot around the table until no one could bear the smell of it anymore. I think I was supposed to bring it to the kitchen. A fat man to the left of me was stricken with hiccups. A tall, thin woman, the very image of my mother, had refused to drink on the grounds that she was hung-over from the night before, spent terrorizing in town... And I was just sitting there, thankful not to be bothered, not to plan, as if it were enough to be with someone like myself at every moment, which is some wisdom I must have picked up in childhood, like a shadow in a dream.

The conversation around me was a competition, each of the philosophers trying to impress Kelsie with the enormity, the intransigence of their views. The topic turned to love, then obituaries rife with commonplaces. Two of the women began sneaking under the table to uproarious laughter. In the hallway, I spoke to a British man whose name I forget, who tried to tell me that as far as science was concerned, nothing about what we felt could ever be shared—and so it was best mainly to enjoy life, which, he told me, was something foreign to the lot at the party, since they did not understand the first thing about men and women. He then asked me, if I cared for the soup. I said I wasn’t sure, and left and sat down by the pot. No, I remember

thinking, *I* understand men and women. Sitting by the pot, I said to myself, Annie, you understand everything. You're the one, Annie. You understand what people want. It didn't take years of reading for me to figure it out; I've always understood. Maybe this is what the British man was telling me, that I already understood. And if there is anything that brings me joy in this world, it is understanding. I stood up and carried the pot back into the hallway, and tried to give it to him; he asked me, did I know who'd put together the soup? I said I wasn't sure, and left the hallway, leaving him there with the pot in his hands. Next I saw it, it was on the back of one of the women, who had passed out on the floor. The room was engaged, at that point, in a heated argument over who actually had brought the soup. Kelsie wanted it out of the house. A few Hungarians were discussing something in the corner. I finally left the house to the words, double slit experiment.

On the porch, the stars seemed to look down at me through the threads of a gigantic curtain which covered up an abyss. Yes, I allow it, I was thinking, I am magnanimous. I am better than these aimless acquaintances, picked up at deserted bars, abandoned cities... I figured *that* out a long time ago, sitting on that horse in the yard of our old house, now a long time stolen away, arrayed in skirts, when Kelsie, maybe fifteen at the time, had given me a copy of Plato's Symposium. A knock on the door from around front. Donald had come back from town with a group of drunkards. Good evening, gentleman, we're plastered. May we join your party? Gladly they were accepted; the discussion was turning violent. Donald nominated himself master of ceremonies, found himself bored, and came outside to where I was sitting, walking through that brightly lit door, whose glass seemed to sparkle like the stars, who were watching the hair fall against my neck, on the same earth that Plato walked, on which JW's two dogs had come over to me, warm and friendly, making me think that the language given to us concerning dogs does not do them justice. Donald came out, and sat next to me in the garden; he came out of the party, which felt to me like it had lasted since the beginning of time, and I felt as if, in every work I've translated, from any era, I have seen snatches of it, shouts from it, mimed gestures, through the windows of the text. Donald has read everything I've read. That was the point, years ago, in Paris. I understand him. I've always understood him. Donald started talking to me about his trip into town... Okra was growing in the garden, little red ants were crawling on them, who looked

black in the darkness. A hedge and a fence separated us from the house. I told Donald that I understood him. You understand me? I understand all of you, I said. Look at the moon, and tell me, can't you just think every thought that any man has ever had looking at the moon?

Donald said that was how he judged a poem, actually: if a poem made him see the moon like he'd never seen it before, that was most daring, impressive achievement. I asked him, had he seen JW? I wanted to thank him for the soup. That was JW's soup? I asked, Do you ever feel like you ought to bury yourself in the earth under the weight of so much gratitude and debt? You know, I said, when I see the moon, I see it as if I have always seen it from the beginning of time. Donald told me that they had hurried out of the town quickly, the men at the store having immediately recognized them for what they were. It's not even a matter of vocabulary, he said, no doubt, it's something relating to sentence structure. Annie, he asked, what are people supposed to talk about? You said you know everything. I said, It's taking general principles and applying them to specific cases to obtain knowledge, and there's joy in that knowledge. For example, I understand the principle by which you work, Donald. You remember Julieta, who disappeared at the end of the decade, after Arthur Cravan disappeared off the coast, and Mina Loy had claimed him for her own—she was last seen in Paris, with you, Donald, and so her diplomat father telegraphed you from New York... Can I tell you something? You were the start of everything for me. You began everything. My mother thinks I want to be Henry James: it's not true. You took me to Paris, where everything began. Do you understand what it's like to see so clearly the beginning of your own story, and still not be able to understand it? Like you can place a thousand poems of the moon next to each other, and point with your finger to the very first Greek text which metaphorizes it, and you can say that's the beginning—because it is the beginning—but a thousand poems later, the story of the moon has gone on, and it's nothing like the beginning, and you start to wonder if maybe you misunderstood your own beginning, and maybe the start of the big story lies somewhere deep in the past, so far that no one would ever be able to recover it, even before the Greeks... or maybe it lies somewhere in the future, at a time when even the unknown secrets will have been known, but are still secrets, and then there will be the time when even the unknown secrets will have become old mysteries that have since been solved. And in the meantime, you can't shake the sense that all your reading of poetry has

somehow changed the story that you were going to live. That's all I can talk about: old mysteries that have already been solved, but are always different mysteries by the time they're old. But since all mysteries are solved, especially those that don't have answers, it ends up that all mysteries are the same! You're talking about Ernie's translation? Donald asked me. Well, yes! The E is everything. Can I tell you how I solved the mystery? Donald said, Yes. There were shouts from inside. The cat, Ange, brushed Donald's leg. The mystery is this: we all want to be able to reach out and grab another person and do whatever we want to that person—and that can only be okay if that other person can reach out whenever that person want to, and do the same thing to you. I placed my hand on Donald's forehead, and moved my lips very close to him, slowly brushing my face against his, until he kissed me. And as soon as he kissed me, he put his arm around me, and ran his fingers through the hair that hung on my forehead, and kissed me harder, and pushed me down onto his lap, and held me close to him by his hands on my back. I felt a thrill of victory. I do understand him. I have always understood. I let him touch me, my mind buzzing with affirmation. He laid me on the bench, and the pleasure he gave me paled in comparison to the pleasure I gave myself, because I had solved the mystery, the mystery of them all, which is all the same mystery, since all mysteries deceive you into thinking that one mystery solves another. He laid me on the bench, and I swung my head back, and the stars spun like lights in the hands of dervishes, in Dionysiac fury, holding torches in their fists, spinning around and again like the poet Rumi, the Sufi poet, who has been little translated—and it is a little known fact, that he was friends with Ermine the Saint, who had brought to him the Parisian secrets of Thomas Aquinas before losing himself in the desert—but Donald knew all about that already. Yes, I am a magnanimous girl. All this, I allow. Isn't it possible that we've come into existence at this very moment? Donald held me, and I held his trousers. I could see red ants crawling up the side of the bench. And I wanted to lose myself to the mystery, for the endless waiting to cease, for the paths to fork, and our universe to be determined. Donald was atop me, and I looked into his eyes, and pressed my thumbs against his forehead; and I had the thought that I always have, that he was nothing but an automaton. I turned my head against the back of the bench, and pressed my arms close to me. I just wanted him to hold me, but what I really wanted was to read the newspaper with him beside me, in the warm kitchen, in the morning, and I would never look

up from the paper to see him there beside me, so I could push the moment into abeyance, and for a short time, let him be my mother, or my father, or Kelsie, or anyone else who has ever held me, sitting on the stone horse, my hands on the pebbly rock, at a time when I owed everything to everybody, before my own gratitude began to crush me.

Donald stood up. Reynolds was coming out of the house. Did *you* bring the soup, he asked? Who wants the soup? Annie brought the soup, yes? I covered my face with my hands, and through my fingers I could see those stars which look like the shapes I see when my eyes are closed, that prove to me that the lights are on in my head. Donald, I asked, do you remember what Julieta said about the lights being on? It means I'm more than alive, do you get it? You can come up with any number of facts, but you'll never be able to verify that the lights are on in my head. That I see, that I think, that I think I'm thinking, that I experience my thinking that I'm thinking, that there's something lit in my brain, instead of darkness, that there's some mysterious projector lighting up the inside of my head, that is also the projector, that only I can know, only me. That you could be in every way Donald, and still the lights might not be on in your head. Donald said, That's the distinction between the body and the soul? Yes, I said, but even if we had all the facts—a British man was telling me—we would be able to explain everything about it, but do you realize that there can be no explanation that is equal to having the lights on? You can say, the lights are on in here. But that's just words! The lights are on! And that is something else, not a fact! It's even more than a performance! Do you want to go up to the room, Annie? Donald asked me, Did I do something wrong? The E is a fact, Donald, it's not an experience. But someday, can't you imagine, that we might have more than the facts, or the unknown fact that could be more than the other facts, so that everything that's inexplicable becomes explicable based on this unknown thing that we can't even know, except insofar that we anticipate its discovery in the desert of the future, in an explosion that unearths the secrets of the archeological dig in the future—and what do we do while we wait for the unknown secret to unfold itself?

Or, I suppose that those are the things I would have said, if I had opened my mouth. This is discussion we would have had, if we had not just brought the pot of soup inside, and fallen flat on our backs, having slipped on spilled wine, if we had not just sunk into unconsciousness on a nearby couch, at what I felt would be the end of my life, until I woke up as the first rays of dawn

were appearing over the plantation, and across the room, there was Kelsie, still Kelsie, who had handed me Plato's Symposium while I sat on the stone horse, when I was twelve years old, because he wanted someone to talk to about it, probably because he wanted to impress somebody, and there was Reynolds, and another man, their eyes half open, the sounds of animals murmuring outside, the windows wet with humidity; the three men were still passing a cup around, barely able to bring it to their mouths, falling asleep in the middle of their sentences, rumpling their hair, except for Kelsie: he was the only one awake, drinking cup after cup, still talking, as if he could talk forever, deciding for the sleepy group, that every comedy was a tragedy, that every tragedy was a comedy, and that a man must learn to weep and laugh at the same time, or do neither, and keep it all inside, and at this, Reynolds, and the other man, closed their eyes for good. And Kelsie arose, unsteadily, the victorious one, holding his wine glass in his hand, and drifted out onto the porch, to watch the sun rise, murmuring to himself, that everyone should be awake to see this, that today he was going to ride a horse. I might have gotten up, and walked tentatively to him, where he stood, and put my arm around him, and ignored his jokes about scarlet women and French prostitutes, and played with his hair, and watched the sun rise, as if this day didn't need mystery to sustain it, that all it needed was my hand in his hair, and the feeling that this was all there needed to be, as if in the midst of doubt, I were kissed by a god, or touched by the light that's burning inside my head, and shines out through my eyes, and illuminates the sun, who, when day is lit, floods gloriously the world with the secret loves of men.

14. *The Effect, a short story written by Max Weiss, 1946.*

During the months I spent in Copenhagen, I usually sat at a certain café in the Frederiksberg Gardens. There, I would smoke my cigar, or perhaps two or three, in the free air. Beside me and my crossed legs, silver tray upon silver tray would clutter up the table; I drank coffee in quantities that would have stunned even an elderly woman, fortifying herself with eight or nine cups a day, as if to conquer the sleep of death. At the time, I was engaged to a lovely girl, whom I had rescued from Manhattan's garment district, and had brought with me to Denmark. She spent her days wandering around the Gråbrødretorv, and would meet me at the end of her travels, at my café, and we would play chess, perhaps because the café supplied us with a board and pieces. I confess that I began to question my engagement to Ruth around this time, and in no small part due to our chess game. Whereas, although I cannot claim to mastery of the game, I had a certain analytic cast of mind, which, I think I may modestly say, lent a certain interest to my campaigns, Ruth, perhaps out of a kind of artlessness, would cast about audibly for her next move, and when she finally pushed a knight or castle across the squares, for better or for worse, I felt little but annoyance at the maneuver, having been witness to the antecedent mental maneuverings that had served to preface her exploits and remove any of the suspense, surprise, or unexpected delights that usually lend interest to the game. Thus, after a few weeks of this frustration, I began to search out a new partner for my chess matches, though, of course, I never ceased my attempts to entertain Ruth with such conversations as I would plan during my long hours studying the gardens.

I was, in fact, provided with an opponent to my liking a few days later; a somewhat large Dutchman, fairly balding, who was possessed of a friendly mustache, and who had lived in the city for most of his life. It was he who approached my table, after watching me muse over my cigars for some time, often blandly staring at the empty board which I kept at my table, and asked me to join him in a game. I assented, and discovered, indeed, an equal. At times, he would harrumph over his next tactic, rubbing his breast in consternation, before rapidly shifting his position. Other times, with a strange sparkle in his eye, he would press forward nearly before I had lifted my hand from my own piece. He was a joy to oppose; we both lost about as much as we won; and so, it was easy to propose one rematch upon another, and thus sustain our

friendship. One day, however, my friend explained to me that business obliged him to depart the city, and suggested that I pair myself with his son, Jürgen, who was about my age, recently graduated from the University, and whom he had told of our relationship. I said yes, and the next day, I promptly met Jürgen, as different a man in looks as one could possibly imagine from his father: he was tall, but seemingly overgrown, like a lone sapling in a great field, and wore his height poorly, with a hunch. He would often press his spectacles up his long, grandiose nose, and, after shaking my hand, warmly, if awkwardly, he proceeded to beat me at every game we played, although with such skill and ingenuity that each defeat felt like an intellectual victory. It was to Jürgen, then, that I opened up my problem, between matches, and while waiting for Ruth to return: I had come to Copenhagen to write, and although I eked out a few pages every few days, I could not perceive any value in them, and felt it necessary to show them to somebody who might offer their opinion, good or ill, and in that way, to spur me, so to speak, to continue. Jürgen took my pages—which I kept in a briefcase by my side—excitedly, and told me that he would read them that very evening, and give his report tomorrow when we met by the gardens for our game and a smoke.

He was as good as his word, and then next day, having kissed Ruth goodbye, and wishing her well on her adventures, I pulled a chair over for Jürgen, and he, with wide gestures, acclaimed what he had read, and, although he pointed out a number of stylistic and historical flaws, for which I was grateful; yet in general, he was quite supportive. In fact, he told me that it was quite magical to be on friendly terms with a writer, for, he told me, he could see quite clearly the way my own life was represented in the pages, and how much of our conversation—I had told him some of my history, favorite authors of mine, whom I had exhorted him to read, and some of whom, to my surprise, he was already acquainted—seemed to flow from the same source as my writing. At this revelation, I was taken somewhat aback: for I had not thought that I were that transparent in my interests and themes, and felt strongly that my writing was a struggle precisely because I was attempting to enfold something alien to my normal state of mind. But I listened politely to my new friend, and continued for a few days to give him pages: although as soon as he left, and I was presented with the solitude prerequisite for composition, I, more than ever, was abandoned to the white page, which, I admit, I tried to mar by crinkling it in

frustration. I cast about for the source of my frustration, and could only think that my writing had failed me, because I had been reduced, so to speak, to a stark simplicity. This stranger had seen what I had seen—these gardens which so figured in my story—had heard what I had heard—the conversation in the café, my own explanations—and what I had read—there was considerable overlap in our influences—and, to my mind, had perceived both the causes and effects of my writing, the seeds and the finished flower, and I could not help but think that in this apparent relation of simplicity, the mystery of art had been ruined.

I explained this to Jürgen, and he sat back in his chair, staring off into some tiled corner of the café, and then began to speak, eruditely: “Max, I’m not sure if the story I’m about to tell you is at all related, but I was very much reminded of it, having read your brief digressions on the history of silphium. Obviously, you know that the silphium seed, which provided the ancients a plentiful abortifacient, and, appearing in the shape of a heart, cemented the connection, which persists to this day, between that symbol and the passion of love, was grown primarily in Cyrene, where it was farmed both as a pharmaceutical and as grazing material for cattle, etc. Cyrene became deeply associated with the seed—surely you recall the passage of Catullus, you ask how many kisses would be enough of me, etc, etc, as great a number as the stars, etc, as great number as the Libyan sands that lie at *lasarpiciferis...Cyrenis*, silphium-bearing Cyrene—but, by the age of Nero, the plant had been farmed to extinction; Pliny tells us that the very last seed was presented to the Emperor as a curiosity... In any case, silphium is no more. I was reminded of these ancient mysteries, reading your work, in particular of the nature of your symbolism.

“Perhaps you are familiar with the great feud in antiquity, which took place in Cyrene, between the poets Callimachus and Apollonius Rhodius, which lasted over thirty years. Born in the third century before Christ, Apollonius was at one time the chief librarian at Alexandria: a fragment found at the Egyptian archeological site of Oxyrhynchus, listing the various librarians at that place, confirms this. Before his ascension, however, Apollonius was, in fact, the *favorite* student of Callimachus. Shortly thereafter, however, we know that Apollonius wrote the lengthy epic *Argonautica*, and, soon after, Callimachus wrote his famed *Ibis*, to which Ovid was alluding when he composed his poem of the same name, as a diatribe against his former student who had so parted ways with him. What, then, was the source of their disagreement?

“Callimachus was a writer of hymns and epigrams. His poetry was honed to a gem-like finish, down to the very placement of the words in their sequence. And he harbored a dislike for the garrulousness of epic poets, who wrote in homage to their virile predecessors, in an age of decadence: he is ascribed the pithy saying, *μεγά βιβλίον, μέγα κακόν*, that is to say, *big book, big bad*. He claimed that Apollo had come to him in a dream, exhorting him to ‘fatten his flocks, but keep his Muse slender.’ Callimachus saw in his own work precisely an attempt to preserve a great tradition, without verging on the overblown profusion of the day’s epics by working within a convention. His poetry was learned, allusive, famously erudite—but, not, mind you, for the sake of his vanity. Rather, he desired to create a new kind of poetry, which might simultaneously preserve the integrity of the classical Greeks—that is, what it meant to be Greek, which was precisely the literary past—while compressing, distilling, pressuring his words, until they both sparkled with newness, even as they seemed to contain within them the starry past of all that flowed through the library at Alexandria—where, in fact, Callimachus worked daily indexing each and every scroll. And so, whereas Callimachus saw himself—however bitter and pungent—as saving words from dissolution, Apollonius, in his epics, seemed to be wasting them. More than the loss of the librarianship fueled Callimachus’s distaste for his former student; there was a real difference in their work, from the cheerful popular pomposity of Apollonius, to the exclusive acid honey of Callimachus—which later deeply influenced not only Ovid, but Catullus before him.

“So, I thought, Max, reading your work, that the apparent simplicity of your connections did not at all prove a detriment; rather, it showed a conscious reworking of the inheritance, a recasting of the old symbols: for surely, those old symbols, like the heart, which I mentioned, have an original power of their own, which has since been lost by overuse; and that, by reworking them, one restores them to their former glory—and it is only your familiarity with them in your own use that causes you to doubt your originality. Their mystery and allusiveness makes the causal relationships between them just as mysterious as the interlocking allusions that constitute the literary inheritance itself.”

Jürgen finished this learned disquisition of his; I thanked him; he took his leave, returning to his study; and I settled back by the gardens to smoke another cigar. I ordered a coffee, and waited for Ruth to return. I was not at all happy with Jürgen’s speech. It seemed to me that the

greatest value of my work lay in its ability to surprise—those things about which I wrote I had supposed to be surprising because I thought they were something new in human nature, which I considered as changing as the ages, and as such, inaccessible to either the past or the future. Sitting there in that spot, in the city where Kierkegaard lived out his days, I was reminded of something he had said, which I include here, not to overwhelm the reader with Callimachan erudition, but because it expresses what I feel to be my condition more than anything else:

The relation between omnipresence and invisibility is like the relation between mystery and revelation, that the mystery expresses that the revelation is revelation in the stricter sense, that the mystery is the one and only mark by which it can be known, since otherwise a revelation becomes something like a police officer's omnipresence.

It is from a larger passage, in which Kierkegaard determines that the possibility of God's visibility would annul his omnipresence, since God's very invisibility and the impossibility of determining his presence, frees him to exist anywhere and everywhere and so suffuse the world with mystery. The invisible mystery—the only real mystery—makes a revelation a true revelation. A visible mystery, an visibly omnipresent revelation would be merely akin the sometimes covert operations of a police state, which reveals itself here and there, in the figure of an officer, in the circumstances of a disappearance, in the underground passages of a jail. I felt quite strongly, having heard Jürgen speak, that my subject as a writer was not the invisible suffusion of ancient mystery—conjured by the reconfiguration of symbols—but instead the visible suffusion of horror in a world, which had not inherited a tradition, so much as a yellowed catalogue of agony and domination.

I thought about this as Ruth finally returned; I saw painted on her face the bony signs of her father and mother, of a thousand garment workers, of my own mother and father, and the great horde of men and women who had come together to cause us; of the children that we might have had, and their children; and of the impatience that was written there, since she knew I ignored her, and I saw, in the way that she turned towards the smoothly trimmed garden, the very effects of our ignorance. And I very much regretted all that I had thought and said. Does the knowledge of the cause increase our appreciation or diminish it, I wondered; and just then, as she

sat there, I began to write this story, and out of an interest in her, which proves the real source of doubt, after every paragraph I would put a hand on her leg, and ask her to forgive me my time.

15. *Excerpts from Shy Hortbaum's In the Swing of It, Literary and Fashionable Reminiscences, published 1951.*

...and of course, considerable mystery continues to surround the Devereux family. It may seem as if their story follows the traditional arc: Charles Devereux's rise to architectural renown, his wife's attaining to a kind of literary terror nearly unknown in its time, her inestimable Kelsie, who proved the terror of half a dozen circles around the country... That as quickly as their riches descended from the sky, their house fell, and today one barely hears the name Devereux uttered in the great halls of society, that name, which, in previous years, was, for this writer, nearly inescapable. And as one who experienced it, I cannot help but feel that the dissolution of the Devereuxs is trying to tell us something essential about their time.

What was life like in the years directly following the war? I feel a certain responsibility to record my own perceptions of the period, so that those coming after will have some kind of reference, or at least a check to the excess of their imagination. I find myself in the position of a modern Plutarch, that author of antiquity, who composed his *Parallel Lives*, setting down for posterity the stories of famous personages, one after another, so that parallels might be drawn between them, and the reader thus edified, might derive some lessons from their differences in fates. With this in mind, I leave Kelsie to complete his ruin in the state of Georgia, outside of which he is little known, and I pick up the tale of somewhat more common Agnes Magness, an acquaintance of Kelsie's younger sister.

Mrs. Magness was born, like so many Jews, on the Lower East Side of the island of Manhattan; this was sometime around 1923. The year before, her father and mother had immigrated from Hungary, and Agnes made her first appearance in New York society soon after the family settled around Orchard and Delancey. The family had a small kitchen, with a few wooden chairs, and a table; Agnes's mother, Rivka, was baking bread there, and neglected to keep watch on the little Agnes, who hefted herself atop a few bundles and bags lying on the window—and leapt joyfully down to the street below.

As the story goes, her father Baruch had been standing in the street, talking to his neighbor Leo; the two were discussing a passage from the Talmud. The land of Israel had been suffering for weeks without rain; the people beseeched the sage Chroni, to beg the Lord to relent.

Chroni prayed the Lord Adonoi, but nothing came of it. Then, in inspiration, he drew a circle in the dry sand, and prayed to the Lord, saying, Oh Lord, Master of the Universe, I will not move from the circle until you have granted mercy to the children of Israel. At this, the sky opened up, and single drop of water fell from the clouds. Ah, look, said the students of Chroni, God gives you this little droplet, so that you might leave the circle, your prayer having been answered. But Chroni continued, Oh, Lord, thank you, but this is not what I wanted. I want rain to fill the buckets of the Israelites. At this, the sky opened up and a great deluge fell, not one droplet smaller than a great bucket of water. Oh Lord, Chroni cried, I did not want you to destroy the world with your rain. I just wished the Israelites to have a blessing. And the rain let up a little, to a light drizzle, but it fell and fell, until the people were forced to flee to higher ground, and leave Chroni alone in his circle. Leaving, they told him, Chroni, would that you could ask God to make these rains cease as easily as you asked for their start! And so, Chroni called on the Lord once more; he asked one of his students to bring him a goat, which he placed with himself in the circle, and cried out: Oh Lord, I offer you this goat, not so that the rain might stop—far be it for me to ask you to renege on my first request—but so that you might know that we have had enough with the rain. And at this, the winds began to blow, and the rain was pushed to the east and west, and the sun showed its face again. It is said that Shimon ben Shetach, the greatest living sage, sent a message to Chroni, chastising him: Oh, Chroni, he said, what a disappointment you are! I hear that you have acted like a spoiled child before God, and that God does your bidding like a heckled father whose son demands of him that his back might be washed by his own father, and his spoiled belly served special delicacies.

This was the point that Baruch and Leo were discussing that morning, standing on the street outside the tenement; and as they were debating the significance of Shimon ben Shetach's words, Baruch said, Oh, Lord, would that I had a circle like Chroni's and that in it, I might find similar blessings. Leo was about to berate Baruch for his impudence, when the baby Agnes fell from the window, just as Baruch was looking up; and quite by accident, she fell directly onto Baruch's beard, which, it is said, cushioned her fall, and caused her to bounce into the hands of the neighbor Leo. This, as I said, was Agnes's first entrance into society.

In the household of Magness were spoken three languages: Russian, Yiddish, and a comical variety of English, maintained for the benefit of their daughter only with great effort. What time they spent listening to the radio, parroting the phrases as if they were mocking the people giving them the news! Like so many at the time, Agnes's parents reserved their Russian for their private conversations, and addressed Agnes in what remained: this being the case, the little Agness came to be fluent only in the latter, using the Yiddish with her parents, and the English with her friends. As a young girl, she excelled at singing and dancing of a particularly vivacious kind; she, however, was obliged to work after school at the bakery of Leo, which, I may add, never dulled her sense of the exciting. She met her husband, Ira, Leo's son, in the following way. The young man was studying medicine at the time, and as Leo had been among the Jews who had helped the Magnesses to settle themselves in the early years in New York, and Leo being a close friend and neighbor, it was not unusual for Ira to accompany his father on visits to the tenement where Magness lived. One day, the young Ira took advantage of the occasion to speak to Agnes. This lasted a couple of hours, which he spent painting her a picture of the recent developments in the behaviorist school of psychology, with which he was engaged, and more, what he saw as the theory's theological significance—for, indeed, Ira aspired, like his father, to great learning in the Talmudic tradition. He explained that recent development in the theory were particularly consonant with biblical interpretations: everything which was supposed to be able to be learned was to be learned by looking on the outside, at the behavior of individuals—and this removed a certain complexity in theological analysis, given that God might know all there is to know about a person merely from their actions, and so have no need to meddle in their thoughts, although far be it from Ira to tell God where he might meddle.

Agnes later recalled that she wanted nothing more than for her future husband's deluge of words to finally cease, so that she might return to her friends who lived in the opposite building—the young girls would dance to the latest Benny Goodman hits—but Ira was insistent, and what's more, he begged her for another visit.

One Sunday, the Magness family spent the day at Brighton beach, where it was rumored to be beautiful. Ira, perhaps by chance, happened to be strolling the boardwalk at that time, and, seeing the family from afar, greeted them with great pleasure. Agnes recalled to me that Ira wore

a long bathing suit much too large for his measurements, and polished black shoes into which were tucked an enormous pair of white socks that came up nearly to his knee. Sitting in the shade, they discussed French cooking at great length. It was thus that Ira began his courtship; the pair wrote frequent letters to each other, even throughout the period during which Ira was called to war as an ambulance driver, and when he returned, his hearing somewhat damaged, and with his love of French cooking fired by a brief stay in Paris, Ira and Agnes married. Agnes, to my knowledge, has never revealed what it was that compelled her to marry this man, who seemed to every way opposite to her; when asked about it, the two would merely share a smile, and say only that they had come to some agreement.

It was in this period that Agnes made the acquaintance of Miss Devereux. Ira had joined a practice, which kept him away most of the day; Agnes, to fill her time, began to work with sculpture, for she had always loved to work with her hands. She made mainly decorative figures, which she would sell for a small sum to various department stores, as though these hand-made sculptures, set beside plants or false exists would lend some of Agnes's own vivaciousness to the displays. One day, Agnes was overseeing the installation of one of her pieces; Annie, who happened to be walking by, could not help but exclaim over it, which was intended to be a lamp in the form of a tripod done in clay, glazed (a small bulb hung down from the center). While the boys were running a cable for the electricity, the two ladies began to converse. Annie asked Mrs. Magness, if she were aware of the significance of the tripod.

“Tripod?”

“The shape, Miss, of your lamp.”

Taking her by the arm to a clothing rack, Annie explained that the tripod represented *the stability of truth*. What a look must have been on Agnes's face, as if she had seen a ghost!

“Well, I did have some trouble in giving the top some support, and the legs were something hard in the firing,” Agnes explained, running her hands through her hair, which she always kept short—although now she wished perhaps it would have been longer.

“Do you have a moment? I won't keep you long,” Annie asked.

“Well, yes—”

And so, Annie explained to her that the first leg represented the *argument*, which connects B to A; the second leg was the *perception* of the truth or falsity of A; the third leg was the *conclusion*, the truth of B, that follows from the first two in combination.

“So, the three legs of the tripod represent the three perspectives we can take: the past, where the argument is given, the present, where the conditions are ascertained, and the future, which can be conjectured based on the first two. What I mean to say is, if you know that, say, if a man loves you, you ought to marry him, and you find out that a man loves you, then you can say, in the future, you ought to marry him. Those three steps are the legs of the tripod.”

Annie went on to say that she was very much impressed, moreover, with the bulb that hung down from the tripod, which seemed to her to represent not only the light of truth, but the heated wine-cup of Dionysus, which Philochorus tells us, lays bare the heart of man.

Throughout this explanation, Agnes remained silent.

“Do you understand?” asked Annie.

“I think I do, it’s just that... So what you mean to say is that, in order to figure out what we ought to do, we need all three things, or else... Well, the tripod will fall over, I suppose, in your example.”

“Yes, that’s a fine way to put it. I’m sorry, Mrs. Magness,” Annie said quickly, “for imposing on you like this. What I’m really trying to tell you is just this: that I very much love your piece, and would, if you’re willing, commission one for myself.”

Annie pulled a scrap of paper from that notebook, which she always kept hidden, and provided Mrs. Magness with her number; having done so, she thanked Mrs. Magness again, and hurried from the department store. The boys who had been installing the tripod stared after her in amazement; they turned to look at Agnes. Agnes calmly put her paper into her purse.

“Well, be careful with it!” she said, and left.

Now, at this time, Agnes was confronted with a problem that many of my female readers will have encountered upon their entrance into marriage. Busying herself with housework, and now loaded with the additional activity of creating her sculpture for Miss Devereux, Agnes was often occupied when Ira returned home from his practice hungry and impatient for dinner—and often at irregular hours, which Agnes could not anticipate. Walking through the door, nothing

stymied Ira's unhappy senses more than the chill of the house, its darkness, and lack of comfort, Agnes being upstairs at work with her clay. At first, Ira, with all his politeness, brought this to her attention with understanding; but, after some weeks, he began to lose his temper with her, anxious above all for hot food to eat and a warm place to read, when he finally arrived home. As upset with her husband as he was with her, Agnes spent some hours effecting a solution of which she was particularly proud.

If Ira comes home, she thought, and the house is cold and dark, then he'll be unhappy. Well, that's certain, she thought. That's how it's been. And what would I prefer? That Ira will be happy. Well, then, she thought, what is there to do, but make the house warm and bright? Around four in the afternoon, when Ira was certain to be home within an hour or two, Agnes would leave her sculpture, and dance about the house lighting all the lamps. Having done this, she would go into the kitchen and dice quickly some garlic and onions, and begin to sauté them. The very smell of cooking itself permeated the house. Turning down the flame, Agnes would fly back upstairs to continue to mold the legs of the tripod, or else apply a few last touches to her hair or make-up, particularly if the couple was to see a movie that evening.

Soon enough, Ira would come home.

"Say, that smells good, Agnes!"

"Just a moment, Ira! I'm just fixing myself up."

And in this way, she would have about forty or fifty minutes more to settle herself, before Ira would begin to wonder, from the chair into which he would sink, closing his eyes, and imagining the full meal presently cooking in the kitchen, where she had gotten to.

Agnes took great joy in her discovery. Her thoughts spiraled around her as she ascending or descended the stairs, each day in accordance with her plan. She felt as if each time she were sliding down the legs of the tripod, feeling the certainty of her situation, and the prophecy which she lived each day. If I sauté, then he will smile. If it smells divine, then it will be warm. If it is warm, well... What revelations she remembered having! Whereas before, her thoughts had seemed to come haphazardly, as if arising from some cluttered space inside her, now they followed one another in a dance, as if leaping from one place to another, in accordance with the melody and rhythm of an unknown song reaching for its end. From one flight of stairs to the

next, from one room to another, or one building to its neighbor, each movement was like another leg of a journey for Agnes, each of which seemed by necessity to lead to the next, for her and only her, whose thoughts, so organized, were invisible to all.

It was soon afterwards, that I myself first met Agnes. Miss Devereux had invited her into her home on Washington Square, which her mother had recently vacated; I was invited as well along with a number of her acquaintances, in order to unveil the second tripod. Over a mid-day meal, amidst the somewhat alien furniture, Agnes was ready to regale us with her success. She was about to take a seat by the window, when Annie hurried told her, that it would be best not to sit on that cushion. A few in the room laughed, as Annie conveyed her protégé to another seat.

“Oh,” Agnes said, overcoming her embarrassment, “if only you could hear my thoughts now! There’s no one to tell them to during the day, and I’m certain they are at least as interesting as any you might read in a book.”

She pointed to Annie’s bookcase, that place, which, many have remarked, seemed to speak more of Annie’s character than any other. Agnes went on, saying that she had everything to thank of the famous Miss Devereux, that latter having taught her to take pride in putting one foot in front of the other. Annie, in her way, was touched, and by way of her own thanks, presented to Agnes a French cookbook, since at their last meeting, Agnes had seemed quite interested in learning something more of their customs.

16. *A short story, Blares the Grave, by Richard Kingston, 1956.*

*Tell us! ye Dead! Will none of you in Pity  
To those you left behind disclose the Secret!  
Oh! That some courteous Ghost would blab it out!  
What 'tis You are, and We must shortly be.  
I've heard, that Souls departed have sometimes  
Forewarn'd Men of their Death: 'Twas kindly done  
To knock, and give th' Alarum...*

-- Robert Blair, *The Grave*

Perhaps you were informed of my sister's death via the newspaper. My family became quite famous for a few weeks. The reporters had it accurately. The Jacobs had gathered for their family reunion in Hempstead, Long Island. I was there, with my two children, Annabel and Stephen, as was my sister, Beth, with her three kids, Randall, Duncan, and Clara. Our mother, Arlene, was present, and the host of cousins and more distant relations. Not present was my ex-wife, with whom I had lost contact, nor Beth's husband Jerry who had passed away some years previously. I agreed to drive my mother, and her two sisters, back to Long Island City, since none of them owned a car; Beth and I had planned to take our kids to see some of the sights in Manhattan, and with this in mind, she agreed to drive all five of them to the city, and I would meet up with them as soon as possible.

I dropped my great-aunts off at their respective homes, and my mother and I were just entering her apartment, when we heard the telephone ring. My mother claimed she was exhausted, and in no shape to talk on the telephone, so I hurried in to answer the call. It was my sister. Her voice sounded distant and unsure.

“Mark? Is that you?”

“Yes, Beth, it's me. Where are you?”

“I stopped off...”

I waited for her to finish, but all I could hear was her breathing roughly into the receiver.

“Are you alright, Beth? Have you made it to the hotel?”

“I'm not sure where I am. I'm trying...”

“Beth, where are you calling from?”

“I feel very strange,” she said, and she hung up the phone.

Between the time I left my mother’s apartment and rushed to the hotel in Manhattan, there being no other place for me to go, my sister returned to her car, and turned onto the Long Island Expressway in the wrong direction, drove for about five miles, reports say, weaving through oncoming traffic, before colliding head on with another vehicle, killing the occupants of the other car, herself, my children, and all but one of hers. Only the little Clara, about thirteen years old, survived. She suffered head trauma, and was rushed to St. John’s in a comatose state. This is where the newspaper report ends.

The police called my mother first, and then I was called; the funeral was scheduled immediately, and, like a good Catholic, my mother refused an autopsy of her daughter’s body, although the police insisted upon it after I brought to their attention the phone conversation which I had had shortly before my sister’s death. But within a week the bodies were buried, untouched, at the cemetery in Hempstead, about half a mile from the Jacobs family house, where I live.

\*

It fell to me to take care of Clara. The doctors claimed they could do nothing more for her. She was no longer in danger for her life, but they could not say if she would ever wake up. It would be best, they explained, for her to be taken home, and cared for, that is, cleaned, fed, for she would swallow instinctively purees, kept warm, and so forth. In that way, the expense of a hospital bed would be avoided. My mother refused the responsibility of Clara, and so I went to the hospital myself, wrapped her in blankets, laid her in the backseat, and drove her home.

I had cleared out my sister’s old room, which I had been using as a library for some years. I found Beth’s old bed in the attic, disassembled, and with a little labor, I returned it to its proper place. I found some blankets as well, in a box beside her old writing desk, and with these, I tucked Clara in each night. Having for some years made my living as a writer, I was able to spend much of my time at the house. Every few hours, I would come into Clara’s room, feed her some mashed peas or apple sauce, and clean her bed-pan. Every two or three days, I would undress her, and sponge her lightly, dress her again, and cover her in the warm blankets. I confess that I spent a great deal of time in Clara’s room, for it seemed a great deal more lonely

for both of us to be separated, myself in the study, and Clara in her bed. So I would sit up at nights by the bed-site, when I was unable to write. I would watch her lovely face, her little waves of brownish hair, darkening, no longer kissed by the sun, and her upturned nose, which brought to my mind the very image of my sister, when we were both young.

What must her last conscious moments have been like? It was almost unimaginable: to be trapped in the car while my sister sped down the road, seeing the alarmed, worried eyes of the other drivers out the window, wondering if she should pull open the door and leap from the car, if she would survive the fall, or perhaps, if she could wrestle the steering wheel from her own mother, and convey her brothers and cousins to safety. Or perhaps the atmosphere in the car was calm; perhaps Beth had explained something to the children that pacified them. But what could it have been? Maybe one of my children tried to escape, and the other children, at Beth's shrieks, prevented it; maybe one of them tried to push Beth out the door, and, riveted by the spectacle of a child kicking for dear life an adult, the rest forgot to leap out the doors, when, through the windshield, the final collision revealed itself inevitably.

Sometimes Clara would moan in her sleep, and half string a sentence together. Every few days her eyes would flutter open, but with a look of blankness or of terror, they would quickly slide closed again, as if dismissing this living world. On the other hand, I couldn't help but think, as I sat by her side, holding my coffee, as morning rose, that perhaps the fluttering of her eyes and her moans were attempts at an escape, that she relived her last waking moments continuously, and for weeks was fighting to be free of them. I could almost imagine hearing the shouts in her head, as the drivers of the other cars no doubt heard cries from Beth's vehicle as they drove past. What did they think, at that dreadful moment, when those frantic souls were raving against the windows, shrieking for help, but shrieking in vain? I cried over Clara, in these rememberings, and held her close as if in her body were the bodies of my Annabel and Stephen, those unlucky ones. I would caress her hair, and kiss her forehead, and in those moments, I imagined that she were Beth herself, returned to her youth.

One afternoon, while I was feeding her, Clara began to cough violently on her food. As I wiped her mouth, her eyes opened and stared directly into mine.

"Clara?" I asked after a moment. She softly muttered a greeting.

“How are you, Clara? Can you speak to me? How do you feel? Are you alright?”

“Very sleepy.”

I put my hand on her forehead, and bent my head close.

“That’s alright, Clara, you can sleep. I just want very much to talk to you.”

“The ring?”

She said it so quietly, I could almost doubt I had heard it at all.

“What ring?”

She moaned a little, and her eyes by degrees shut themselves tightly.

That night I was kept awake by thundering unaccompanied by any rain. It was hot. I had moved a fan into my room, and positioned it against my face. Even over the noise of the machine, I could hear the thundering like the sky’s dry heaves. The ring, I kept thinking, as if the word itself could someone solve the mystery. The ring? In the buzzing of the fan, I imagined I could hear all sorts of things: as I drifted off to sleep, it was almost as if I heard footsteps outside my door, the sound of cabinets being opened and closed, the sound of my mother running the tap, a drawer being shut tight, and locked.

In my dream, I was running down corridors, long corridors, made of stone, that seemed abruptly to end, and turn at some strangle angle, so that I could never see around any corner. Over the sounds of my footsteps, I could hear knocking from below, as if I were moving atop an endless series of trap doors. Suddenly, a wall loomed up before me, inset with stained glass; as I neared it, I felt myself run through a mass of cobwebs, that tangled themselves invisibly in my hair, against my skin. I tried in vain to brush them off, closing my eyes to protect them, still moving forward. When at last I opened my eyes, the eerie light of the stained glass had been replaced by an open courtyard, with a few elm trees lining the walkways. Everything was cast in a hateful, red glow. The sky above me appeared like a painted ceiling; and where the sun normally shone, there were the eyes of my mother. But I wasn’t afraid of them. Not at all crinkled with age, they looked down upon everything kindly as if in forgiveness. As soon as I beheld them, they fluttered closed, and in the middle of the courtyard, stood an easel. I floated to it, slowly, and found myself staring into the face of my sister. The closer I came, the more the painting seemed to move toward me, until I realized that it wasn’t the canvas itself, but the figure

in it that was growing larger. By the time I stood before it, Beth had extricated herself from the painting, and I was face to face with her. She had dressed herself in her old pajamas, her hair a mess of curlers, and, reflected in her eyes, I saw myself in khakis and a t-shirt, with barely the trace of a beard on my face.

“Beth,” I whispered, and as if conveyed forward by the wind, I pressed my cheek against hers, my ear against hers, my neck against hers. My hands tangled themselves in among the rollers, and when I again met her eyes, with the soft touch of a the roots of a plant, she brushed her lips against mine. I put my hands on the sides of her head, and held her, and I raised my eyes slowly from her chin, to her lips, to her nose, and then to her eyes, which were at once glazed and terrified, and she began to blink as if lost, and then they shut themselves with a kind of finality that caused the walls to ground themselves, without a trace of dust. Then, everything was suddenly illuminated as if a lantern had exploded beside me, that, opening my eyes, I realized was only the lightning outside my room. The fan still buzzed. I could hear the rustling of leaves, barely, and, over top, an occasional thunder. And then, unmistakably, the sound of a door shutting.

I sat up in my bed, but in the darkness I couldn't see whether my door were shut, or no. It wasn't. As if still dreaming, I rose from my bed and walked out into the hallway. From where I stood, I could see the door of Beth's room still standing open. I walked quietly down the hallway, and stopped at the doorway to the room. The window was open, and the curtains were fluttering softly. Clara still lay as I had left her, but, with an intake of breath, I perceived her eyes glittering in the darkness. When I reached her side, her eyes were closed, and her breathing even, so that I could not suppose that she had been awake and about the house. I reached out to touch her face, softly. I placed my hand against her cheek—she jerked up suddenly, as if convulsing, crying out!—I drew back my hand. Her eyes fluttered open, and she seemed to mouth a few words, but then she subsided into silence.

I turned on the lamp. I couldn't think of returning to my room, alone, nor did I feel comfortable to be with my niece, but the best course of action appeared to be to light up the room, and to sit down in the chair, so that the two of us, conscious and unconscious, might bide the night together.

I couldn't shake the thought that Clara had somehow come into my room that night. I studied her face as if it contained the answer. She was in utter peace. My thoughts seemed to move through some dark, murky arena, indeterminate, resisting the probes of my consciousness, or rather, calling into question the very efficacy of those probes. In my head, awake or asleep, I was fourteen again, in this same house. The rooms were pervaded with the smell of griddle-cakes. My mother and father were talking in the kitchen. It was early on some Saturday morning. I had woken up, and pounced on my sister's bed. She had screamed. Always pranking her, mocking her, spying on her over walls, through windows... We tickled each other, wrestling on the bed, laughing, until, as always, but as always by chance, I hit her in the eye, or elbowed her in some sensitive spot. She burst out into tears, and hit me back, and screamed at me. But I kept tickling her, poking, ridiculing her, giving lie to her tears, torturing her in torture so much that even she had to laugh at the ridiculousness of it, and I would manage to wrangle a smile from her tears. Then we played rougher and rougher, and it was as if our laughter took on the guise of a kind of madness, as if we were challenging each other to continue to laugh beyond the point of exhaustion, each triumphing in wakefulness by the other's laughing transports.

One time we kissed through a shower curtain. I remember the shape of her lips, like two fingers squished together, and the taste of the curtain mold. There is a photograph of the two of us wearing guilty smiles, taken on the same day; it stands on the bed table where then Clara was sleeping. As the weeks went by, the slickness of our guilty smiles seemed to dry up as we slowly realized that what we had thought a secret was already disclosed, and that our mother had not condemned us, but merely looked at us with forgiveness and understanding. But one day she took me aside while Beth was at her piano lesson. She sat me down in the kitchen, and stood above me.

"Mark, I know you've been fooling around with your sister."

I was silent.

"Don't look at me like that! You're not in trouble. It's only natural. She's nice, isn't she? Isn't she nice?"

I nodded cautiously.

“Of course. And I know you’ll grow out of it. But I have to be certain that you will, Mark. Perhaps not right now, but soon, do you understand?”

I shook my head.

“Of course, you don’t understand. I haven’t told you anything yet.”

And then, averting her eyes, she told me a story... I lurched awake. The sun was shining. A cardinal was pecking at the window. Night had passed.

I smiled in memory, and turned from the window towards Clara’s bed. The covers were a mess; one leg lay out over the side of the bed; her arms were thrown over the pillows. Her hair was tangled, and her night-shirt was in disarray. I got up quickly to rearrange the bedding—but I froze in mid-rise. Her eyes were open again, staring past me. I wondered wildly if she had died in the night. But, when I reached her, I saw her chest was moving. I closed her eyes for her, unable to meet her gaze, and went to clean up. As I was fixing her pillows, I couldn’t help but notice her lip. On the left side of her lower lip, there was a bruise, as if she had bit into it during the night. A trickle of blood was smudged against her chin.

I went to make myself breakfast. On the mantel over the fireplace, in a line, were the photographs which I, and my father, and his father before him, had taken at our family reunions. I realized I hadn’t yet put up the photograph I had taken just a few weeks before, with Annabel and Stephen, with Beth, and Randall, Duncan, and Clara, and I couldn’t suppress the thought that there were something forbidden about setting it in its place. I turned to the older photographs. What faces they all had! There were my sister and I, as adults, then children; my father standing next to his brother, and sister; my great-aunt standing next to her father; and her mother, standing next to her own father. Studying the photographs, the plate of eggs in my hand, I saw that each of the women was wearing a ring. My mother had told me a story... I looked closer. The pictures were grey and blurry, but I couldn’t shake the feeling that the ring was the same in each photograph. I couldn’t recall my mother ever wearing a ring... I supposed it had gone into my father’s keeping, or his brother’s, as each seemed equally likely to have deserved the family inheritance. I actually recalled my great-aunt in my life-time. She was a quiet woman when I had known her, brought down by age. I saw that my grandfather had his hand on her shoulder. I remembered once, at a reunion a few years back, when my mother, a little tipsy, had told the

story about my sister and me. We both hung our heads, a little embarrassed. It became a running joke. All the cousins would follow us around, peeking in on us through the folds in the tent, as if keeping an eye on our behavior. The relatives all nodded when they heard the story.

“Following in the footsteps of nobility,” my great-uncle had said, “As inseparable as two rings on the same finger.”

Everyone laughed. I finished my eggs and went to organize my papers. Thus I more or less occupied myself until nightfall, when I closed myself into bed, and shut off the light. The dream from the other night reoccurred, but this time, before I crashed through the stained glass, I fell into a cave, wet and moist, with two supports coming down at an angle, and meeting at a point. Curling smoke rose from the floor, and tangled itself around me. From above I could hear footsteps, doors opening and closing, and opening again. I could almost see the door in my mind’s eye, haloed in light, set in a field of darkness, the approach to it concealed by the uniformity of the lighting. A click, and then I heard what could only have been the sound of a drawer opening and closing shut. The firmness of this sound seemed to echo in my dreams until I roused myself in the morning.

The first thing I did was to check on Clara. She slept softly. I couldn’t eradicate the sound of the drawer from my head. I went in to make myself breakfast, and busied myself opening and closing the drawers, searching their contents, listening closely to the sound of the return. I checked the bedside table in Clara’s room, her chest of drawers, the desk in my own room, the bathroom drawers... Finally, I went up into the attic. It was as musty as I had left it. I could still see the traces in the dust from my previous visit. The first thing I saw was my sister’s old writing desk. Of course, I thought. I must be going mad, with all these dreams. When I had come to collect bedding for Clara, I’d seen the writing desk and its drawers, the sound of which I knew quite well, but couldn’t place—Beth would often hide quickly her letters from me, locking them in the door—and my mind must have been circling around it, and her mystery, in my dreams. Promptly, I walked to the desk, drew open the drawer, expecting nothing to come of it, but there, in the drawer, lay a beautiful little velvet box. I opened the box, my hands trembling, and within it, on a little pillow, was a silver ring, on which was inscribed one-half the shape of a heart. It had

to be the ring in the photographs I had seen. I wondered, that Beth had kept it hidden her all this time. I closed the box, placed it in my pocket, and returned back downstairs.

That day I talked to my mother on the telephone, but nothing interesting came of it. I spent some time listening to the radio, and I even, for a change of pace, stepped outside for a walk. I hadn't been outside for some time. When at last the sun began to set, I returned myself home, and busied myself making a roaring fire in kitchen, and a neat little dinner. Clara remained peaceful—and, at last having solved the mystery, I thought it were as good a time as any to put up the final family portrait on the mantel. I dug around in the box, into which I had put all the mail and documents from the past few weeks, and at last found the print. I laid it out on the table, found a suitable frame, and was wiggling the picture in, when something caught my eye. There was Beth, with her arms around Randall, Duncan, and Clara, the last the very image of Beth herself. There was a strange gleam in Beth's eye, which I hadn't noticed that day. And there, before her, as I said, stood Clara, and on her finger, was a ring.

The sun had gathered up all its rays, and rolled them down the horizon, where clouds were gathering in the distance. I put down the picture again on the table. The ring? With barely a thought, I raced into Clara's room, and half-expected her to leap up at me. But she lay as silently as if death itself had taken her. Without a care, I ripped off the blankets, and grabbed one wrist, and then the other, but there was no ring. Where could it have gone? I saw in my mind's eye again the scene of the last moments in the car. Clara still had the ring, she was wearing the ring. Who had given it to her? Beth? My mother? Some other relative? And then, that gleam in Beth's eye. It was her ring, that Clara had. What did it mean? Beth had a ring, it was in her drawer—though as I thought about it, I realized that the previous picture of her wearing the ring had been taken about ten years previously, well after she had moved out of the house. Had she had the opportunity of replacing it? I couldn't think! I pulled out the ring from my pocket, and studied it again. That half-heart. I couldn't dare to think these conclusions were allowable, but I hurdled on with my reasoning. Two rings? Clara had it, and now she lost it. Was Beth wearing it, when I had last seen her, mangled, but repaired, lying on the bier? And my mother had wanted her buried immediately. Why had my sister murdered herself? Why had she slaughtered our entire family? There had to be something—why?—and in a sort of haze, I tore from the house, stopping only to

grab myself a shovel and a lantern. Yes, I would dig her up, and find the ring, and discover the secret for myself.

Elms surrounded the graveyard, elms with no branches, that seemed to rise up into the damp wind like spires. Nettles and moss grew here and there, and the whole sable tribe of the dead lay quietly underneath the homely phrases that adorn their names. I cannot stop myself, I thought. Let my heart be still a moment, and explore. I found her grave, towards the back. Beth Jacobs. Without a further delay, I plunged the shovel into the earth. Doubt beset my mind entirely. But I was in no position to determine the truth, until I had satisfied for myself... I tossed the dirt to the side, and within an hour or so, I managed to strike her coffin. I plunged down with my hands, clearing the dirt away. It was quite dark by then, and I hung the lantern from the shovel, which I'd stuck in the ground. Perhaps I didn't need it; the moon was bright, and the lantern seemed to be shining only for itself. I cleared off her coffin, and with a cry, I ripped open the lid, and burst out into tears. Her face, wan, sallow, melting, her bones reaching out through her skin—her head laid low, the make-up on her skin cracking, and a worm, a single worm, rolled in lazy volumes through her lips. I couldn't bare to touch her, but grabbed the lantern from above, and brought it down to her hands. Nothing. Nothing. There was no ring.

Had I been deceiving myself this entire time? I should be back in front of the fire, I thought, what a fool I am! What secret could there have possibly been, but the unknowable secret, the secret of the last lit moments of Beth Jacobs, which men will never understand. And what other secret can there be in which that secret takes part, but the open secret that all take part in, the secret of death, which tames us all, and strews us on the same ground, we who lend our carcasses to cover our own offspring, and they their offspring—, and all this hypothesizing, I thought, is going too far. One can discover too much, and not discover anything at all, but shame.

I climbed from the grave, and wiped my brow with my shirt. I was about to grab the shovel, when a peal of summer thunder rocked me, and then another, and then a flash of lightning—I was barely above to see, in the sudden light—but when my vision calmed itself at last, I saw in the distance, there, at the gate of the cemetery, standing in the very middle—Clara. Her eyes were wide and unseeing. But as soon as I beheld her, she rushed forward, past rows of graves, her arms flailing, and then leapt—I lunged to stop her, but she kicked me away, with

nails and teeth—leapt into the grave of her mother. Daring not descend into the scene, I saw them, illuminated by the moon and stars—did the dirt shift? It must have been the dirt shifting—for as soon as Clara’s body touched her mother’s, her mother’s arms moved to wrap themselves around her child, and there—I saw it at last—was it dawn creeping over the horizon?—on Clara’s finger, there glimmered the ring. She wailed, as if she would never cease. I reached into my pocket, shaking terribly, and took out my own little box. I opened it, dreading what I might find, hoping... Clara was silent now, and only the wind was heard. Inside, the box there gleamed the second ring. It was my ring, and Clara wore the other.

17. What Our Youth Thinks, *an article for Le Monde by Emile Thibaud, April, 1968; translated for the New York Times.*

Filtered through the bemused false understanding of the reporter M. Thibaud, we get a panorama of the state of the French youth one month before the events of May, 1968. Students from different worlds are interviewed in turn: students of literature, anthropology, mathematics, classics, a few Englishmen, and many, many Marxists, some with Situationist leanings (“Don’t Work!”), others deeply aligned with the structural Marxism of Louis Althusser. Some students from all fields see the political struggle diachronically—in the movement of history, in the changes from the past—and others see it synchronically—in the relations of the present, in which some are oppressed or not, due to explicit current power relationships. But in both cases, the Althusserians bring up the impossibility of mounting a coherent critique of society, since any idea of an ideal society implies some idea of *the good*, which must derive itself from some idea of human nature. Following a radical reading of Marx, their professor Althusser claims that there *is* no human nature—human nature itself is a front for bourgeois ideological repression. Thus, a moral *ought* must be replaced with a scientific *will*. (There is a contradiction implicitly in this.)

Our cast of characters each give different, slightly humorous, always off, characterizations of this dilemma. One student brings up this example of ideology: the locality of fire. Imagine a time when all heating was localized (at fire), and the conceptual break that results when heating is de-localized and made uniform by central heating. There is no *ought* in this analysis; there are only failures of imagination, surprises, and then, reformation in the aftermath of doubt.

If we are always already turned into subjects by ideology, how can one express one’s discontent? Clearly, something irrational lies at the heart of apparent reasoned discourse. Does accepting influences combat them? Is it just as grave a misunderstanding of the past automatically to posit incomparable phenomenal experiences to periods of differing modes of production, as to claim that all men in all ages are essentially alike? Is constant suspicion tenable for social problems? Are there some issues that demand action?

(For later: Althusser, a lifelong Catholic, murdered his wife in the 1980’s in a moment of mental instability. Can we trust him? Is even intuition tainted with the false solidity of human nature?)

Close with *Antigone*: “Wonders are many, and none is more wonderful than man... Never may he share my hearth, never think my thoughts, who doth these things!”

18. Excerpt from *Genealogies of Invective*, by Antonio Alfaro, a Bolivian living in Mexico City, published in 1969.

Born and raised in a small village on the Rio Lauca in Bolivia, Alfaro grew up speaking *mancha*, an indigenous language of some 300 speakers; Spanish is his second language, which he adopted for his writing upon moving to Mexico City, and upon immersing himself in the Western literary tradition, which was unavailable to him as a child. With this experience close in his conscious mind, he tracks in this excerpt the mystical side of literary influence, which trips through time like honey. He is deeply indebted to the work of Julieta Lemoncita. He writes the history of love in the stars; again, books whisper to each other; locations breath; the world rises up in one great curse and blessing. This becomes his theme: the curses and blessings heard by the stars.

In the tradition of Agnoios, It is asked, Why did not the Greeks curse? The invisible fact: they blessed and cursed constantly, but their exclamations have lost their meaning in translation. Impotent and irrelevant to us (and our own idea of transgression, often sexual where once religious), they live on only as archaisms. (The Greeks won't say *fuck you*, but curse in the context of gods... and when they do bring up, say, homosexuality in their curses, we lose that element to the mediation of the Victorians. Cf. the suppressed Catullus XVI: "I will fuck you up the ass and fuck your face, cocksucker Aurelius and Furius, you pedophile's dream, you two, who think, because my verses are delicate, that I am immodest...") *Mancha*, like English, works with sexual curses (but strangely), and he contrasts this with the religious nature of Spanish curses. And what do we do with narratives like the weird, toneless torture of the Mary's in Browning's story? A story that refuses, and invites meaning. That repels curses, to make us curse.

The question is raised, when the words of writers of history mingle in the present: Did they know what it's like to be me? Or do I know what it's like to be me through them? Or do I think they're like me because they pass through me already? Are the content of curses and blessings universal?

He retells the story of Echechrates the lover of Aristax, who wrote graffiti on the Temple at Delphi ("echechrates is no pussy he has a big dick") right next to the inscriptions... Who became enamored of the virgin, and incensed with her perfumes ("invariably any goat that approached the chasm [at Delphi] and peered into it [inhaling the vapors] would leap about in an extraordinary fashion and utter a sound quite different from what it was formerly wont to emit" – Diodorus). Diodorus also writes:

Echecrates the Thessalian, having arrived at the shrine and beheld the virgin who uttered the oracle, became enamoured of her because of her beauty, carried her away and violated her; and the Delphians because of this deplorable occurrence passed a law that in the future a virgin could no longer prophesy, but that an elderly woman ... would declare the oracles and she would be dressed in the costume of a virgin as a sort of reminder of the prophetess of olden times. (Trans. C. H. Oldfather)

And who scattered his graffiti far and wide in Greece.

19. Harvey Gorman's commencement speech for the class of 1972 at the University of Texas at Austin.

Harvey Gorman, the nephew of Shy Hortbaum, returns to his alma mater to give a commencement address. He begins by recounting his life story: how upon graduating he returned home to West Philadelphia—although his parents, by that point, had joined most of his relatives in moving to the Jersey suburbs—and began practicing law...reading novels in his spare time, hiding them underneath legal documents and a change of clothes in his office... he grew bored of the life and, through a friend, became involved in the movie business, working as a screenwriter's consultant, eventually moving out to California. He tells the graduating class that he was instantly immersed in the strange world of filmmaking, attending meetings to discuss niggling legal plot points, about which the screenwriters and assistants would quiz him. He was there for getting the details right. "I would sit down with the screenwriter, Blumfeld, my friend, and we would hack out these scenes of just pure exposition... a bunch of lawyers in a room, arguing... We would watch the classics over and over again to get an idea, *Anatomy of a Murder*, *12 Angry Men*... But always we'd come back to the main problem, which was how to shove a whole lot of legal information down the throats of the audience, so they'd get, you know, what was going on. It sounds pretty silly, but that's how these movies work. If that's the story you want to tell, this is what you need to do. But as we were writing these scenes, it got me thinking about what it is that I do..."

He describes how these scenes would write themselves—a bunch of lawyers sitting around a room, shooting ideas back and forth, as if all each of them wanted to do was show off what they knew about the legal system. Now that the scenes were written with that in mind—perhaps—but that's how it would always come off. "And so I started to think about what it was like for people to watch these movies, to grow up with these movies like I did... because they really seem to suggest a certain idea about lawyers: that we're know-it-alls, smart-alecks—and all that comes from this convention, this necessity of exposition in writing a movie. So what it is like for kids—and I'm speaking about my own experience here—who feel a little like outsiders at school, a little insecure, who want to feel smart, be professional—I think all kids universally have this desire to mimic: I would dress up myself as a lawyer, as a banker, as a train conductor, set up institutions out of cardboard boxes in my living room—and so kids see these movies, and adopt this attitude from the lawyers they see, or it brings out a certain color in their temperament, perhaps... And they become lawyers exactly as we portrayed them, back in Hollywood, for no other reason, than it was easier to write it that way. And it becomes real. Life changes and no one intended it. Now you might argue that lawyers have existed since the dawn of civilization—the Romans had lawyers jokes—but then I would just argue that what today is convention of movies, could have always been a convention of speech! Just imagine Roman lawyers lounging in triclinia, trying to explain to their friends and relatives what their days were like—and they come up against this same problem: having to explain something very complicated in dialogue, something they know to people who are ignorant, and maybe a little resentful of not knowing... And so this business with lawyers has existed for a very long time, and it's

gone over and recreated at every moment in history. But as far back as you go, there are always lawyers—as soon as history is recorded, there are lawyers—and so you can't tell if those Romans were creating a type of person on their own, coming up against this problem of exposition—or if they themselves already had some idea of what lawyers were like, as I said, since as far back as you go, there are still lawyers and stories about lawyers hanging around... ”

And so, he explains, this is an example of a cultural antinomy: one is left unable to assign origin to some fact of culture, aspects of which can be explained simultaneously as natural as well as artificial, particular as well as universal, as ancient and completely contemporary, derivative and original, all at the same moment.

Of course, that's not the whole story, he says, since any theorizing in this manner falls into a trap, that the subject theorizing is always constrained by a kind of living understanding with the time in which he lives. For the subject's perception—my perception, he says—of lawyers, as well as children wanting to be lawyers, is conditioned by my already having lived in a world with children and lawyers, and stories about lawyers that children hear. And so, one has to ask, why do *I* already perceive lawyers that way, and only now—working in the movie business—realize it? And why do *I* myself suggest that children want to mime, and feel secure and professional and powerful, like lawyers, and so adopt costumes and roles? Because that's what I did? Or because that's how I perceived the children acting around me? Perhaps I only perceived them that way because of the stories I'd heard about children?

He concludes: “So I tell you about these paradoxes today, because I think it's worth your time, now, as you are all about to go off into the world, about to become world-famous lawyers yourselves, to become aware of the way that something irreducibly undecidable lies at the heart of who you think you are. Because this isn't just conscious knowledge I'm talking about, but something unspoken, something that lies under the very feelings that make up the experience of living in the world. You know, in ancient Greece, on the wall of the Temple of Delphi, there were three inscriptions, that had a lot of wisdom: Know Thyself, Nothing In Excess, and the letter E. I don't know anything about that last one, but I think the first two are enough for a life time: Know Thyself leads to interminable doubt, that's what I've been speaking about so far. But, Nothing In Excess—that there is the means of escape, which tempers the agony of impenetrable passion that vies in the soul with the joy of abstraction.”

20. *Introduction to New Voices: Contemporary Fiction from La Mancha, edited and with an introduction by Martín Aucapoma, 1977.*

Aucapoma, a second generation Bolivian-American, recently installed at Temper University, tries to make his name by compiling an anthology of stories translated from *mancha*, the hitherto overlooked indigenous language, now in the process of finding its way as a literary language. He tracks the stylistic innovations in the texts by quoting them in his introduction, juxtaposing them with their supposed influences and sources (many of which come from this book). He himself, having grown up in the United States, cannot distinguish clearly between the borrowed and the new, although most of the writers he quotes remain in Bolivia.

One particular hobby-horse of a trend which he tracks is the notion of “obsession”: characters who are single-minded, whose speech is repetitive, and whose ideas are fixed. He posits a number of European predecessors, but, unable to verify these influences empirically, he decides the origin of the trend lies in the particular experience of the indigenous speakers, perhaps pointing to a number of linguistic features... in fact, he sets up a contrast between *mancha*, and a neighboring language, *fusis*: whereas *mancha* enforces a strict inflectional and syntactic separation of the subject and object of a sentence, to the point of topicalizing the subject, and deferring the object to the end of the sentence, *fusis* makes no grammatical distinction between the subject and object: the object itself performs upon itself, and the traditional subject is implicated as a kind of witness, grammatically, by a declensional pattern, following a preposition.

Aucapoma draws from this cultural clash the idea that the speakers of *mancha* became obsessed, in opposition to the speakers of *fusis*, with the idea of a subject obsessing over an object, which both determines it, and yet cannot be possessed. In fact, Aucapoma himself is quite obsessed with the idea, no doubt influenced himself by the reading of obsessive characters. At the end, unknowingly, he quotes one of the authors included in the anthology, who seems to suggest that obsessives in literature far outnumber those in real life: for when one is writing a story, it is much easier to write a character with one idea, than many. Aucapoma takes this to mean that when writing in *mancha*, it is difficult to write characters with many ideas, which quite misses the point...

21. *Interview with Ken Ames, appearing in Cinematic, Fall 1980.*

Over the course of this interview, Mr. Ames tells the story of his failed attempt to turn Johann Augustus Abbt's novel, *The Navel of the World*, into a movie. Part of the problem, he says, well, there were two problems. First of all, I wanted to do the movie set in the present day. I felt very strongly that it would be much too alienating to have all that set in the past. Nothing for people to hold on to, you know. And I also had the idea—and this is what really made me want to turn this into a film—was that while reading the novel, I knew immediately I wanted a funk soundtrack. It really made an impression on me, the hints of music in the novel. The hymn to Apollo, of course, carved on the temple walls... But also the way that music, or sound, seems to come in as counterpoint to many of the scenes. And that's totally contemporary! You're going about your day, doing your thinks, errands, walking down the street, lost in your own thoughts, which do have a rhythm of course, but then you pass by a car, or you hear the radio from a window, and all of a sudden, you say, yeah, that's right. And you start walking differently, and you start thinking differently. You're totally, like, immersed. And so that's why I wanted to do this movie in the present day, since I had already figured out exactly what songs I would use, to sort of set the scene, since I think the music represents the kind of thinking, the rhythm of it, that leads to the events that happen in the book. So that's the first problem...

The second was dealing with the fact of turning a book into a movie, obviously, since Abbt's novel is very allusive, of course. And when you're making a film, everything is very obvious. It's all on screen. So how do you deal with implication, and that sort of thing, when everything is put on screen. How do you figure out what's a convention of written fiction, and what's essential to the story you're trying to tell? So I tried to do all sorts of strange things with frame narratives, so as to set up these moments, but I felt at a certain point that the film became more about me reading the novel than the novel itself, about me trying to research the hell out of this novel, and having facts and everything pile up around me, as if they would never stop coming. So that's when I stopped... but the experience has really stayed with me... even every time I hear a certain kind of music, you know.

22. *A short story by Sarah Steinberg, Eichwomann, 1985.*

“There are those in which the suffering finds no vent in action; in which a continuous state of mental distress is prolonged, unrelieved by incident, hope, or resistance; in which there is everything to be endured, nothing to be done.”

— Matthew Arnold

**(Sara Steinberg is the daughter of Agnes Magness.) This is the story of a man convinced that his lover is an idiot. The hypothesis had been festering in his mind for some time, but lurches into awareness upon his reading of Hannah Arendt’s *Eichmann in Jerusalem*. He spies on his lover, from above the book, on the couch. She’s an idiot! he thinks. She’s one of them. The idiots. He often pretends to fall asleep, reading, on the couch, so he can spy on her, reconstructing her actions from the sounds, without his presence skewing the data... This is inconclusive. He decides to construct situations in order to *prove* her stupidity, her commonplaceness, her thoughtlessness. Because a single impression or a painful moment is inconclusive. He could be wrong. It could be him. And so he requires for himself systematic proof of her idiocy. It’s a Hamlet-like project, to prove beyond a doubt what he already believes, but fears—because of what proof would reveal about her, but more importantly, what it would reveal about himself, who trapped himself in the situation. He can’t bring himself to leave, and so he depends upon proof to prove to himself that a mistake was made.**

**He’s a reform Jew, who has discovered in Woody Allen a substitute for an authentic Jewish experience. (His favorite writer, though, is Raymond Carver.) He is haunted by a Woody Allen look-alike, who haunts his apartment building, and seems to judge all his endeavors: which include the construction of situations by means of lies, acquaintances, varieties of technology, hoaxes, emotional traps, crimes, cons, and schooling (recalling, in his mind, Woody’s insistent education of Annie in *Annie Hall*), which he identifies as merely a crux for life construction—he glories in this understanding. He lies in bed, pretending to be asleep, imagining situations in his head, wherein imagining becomes a form of worrying, or even justification. Would true love obviate the need for proof? Would a situation prove anything, since he can never know who she is because she is either with him or without him, or filtered through those who know her, or those who don’t know what to look for, who cannot pick up on the meaning or meaninglessness of her decisions, of her actions which are contrary with her words... What he identifies with her idiocy is her lack of consistency: the proof hinges on her consistency, which never appears. But it is this consistent inconstancy that galls him. He cannot assign sufficient causes for her actions: she cannot assign causes to herself, or mis-assigns them to things which are impossible to his mind.**

**He wonders, Is the problem the hypothetical better suited lover? Or a lack of love in himself? Or is it the sense of the possibility of an unknown lack not yet experienced? Or is the real problem, merely feeling bad, hungering for novelty in the face of repetition—which itself is a kind of repetition in uncertainty.**

**In any case, she loves him, for her own reasons, and will not leave. She loves him for all this, since he feels compelled to rescue her every time for each of his situations. Each one**

shapes the other, then, by the words, of knowing or unknowing deception, that are employed in order to help. At last, he begins reading Giacomo Leopardi: “a tiny confused idea is always greater than a vast one which is clear.” Reason makes things seem less valuable in themselves: and yet, he cannot help but think, there is a painful joy in reason, and a necessity, since above all, before he can hurt her and leave, he has to be sure absolutely that he is justified.

23. Women Do Like Rabbits, *an essay by Erin Aronsky, published in October, 1987.*

A critical essay written on Eddie Norton, an anti-feminist woman poet, the self-proclaimed inheritor of the Objectivist school, and intellectual disciple of Lorine Niedecker, who, later in life, famously lobotomized herself. The essay takes the form of a deconstruction of Norton's poem *women like rabbits*. "to feel within oneself / pleasure within being / to drink / the heat in being / oneself / a simplicity / in clear light." Set in three columns: the first, excerpts from Norton's poetry; the second, the critical text; the third, Aronsky's personal reminiscences of showering—of consciousness formed not from the continuity of memory, but by the unity of perception: the water hammering on her back; of the suffocating heat; of the interior, hugging warmth; of the rhythm of thoughts; of the excitement of leaving; of the despair of toweling off; of showering every morning in high school; in showering at odd hours in later life, at critical moments.

In Norton's poetry, Aronsky perceives the reversal of saint narratives: a non-journey to the non-place of being, of stripping away all ideas, but without transcendence in mind, but to the simple glow of the already there-ness of being. Norton's phrasing of the non-desire of desire is juxtaposed by the desiring desire of St. Ermine; the already determinateness of inner being is juxtaposed with the chance-based, deconstructive search for non-determination by the modern queer saint Foucault. She takes from these contrasts the binary, sensual/cerebral, which is challenge in each of these examples: the one is already the other in the journey. (Much is made of Ermine's relation with Rumi and Aquinas both; of his being kissed by the simplicity of Being in the midst of abstraction, *but only then.*)

Finally, Norton takes on the title of the poem *women like rabbits*—the site of non-destination is located at the woman, who is like a rabbit, calm, immobile, with only the rapidly beating heart to distinguish it. Norton points out that this has often taken to be an anti-feminist statement, which she contests: in what sense are sentiments or experiences, male or female? What binds all experience together is the impossibility of trusting the feeling itself, and the irreducibility of both the experience, as well as the suspicion. Both lead nowhere: both appear immediate even as they are mediated. Norton transforms the title into *women do like rabbits*, a statement in which the language itself suggests its verification: in the subjective questioning of the scope of the statement; in the consideration of the already present male/female binary, into which all experience falls either one way or the other, but which, each time, could have fallen male or female, merely by chance, by the necessity of being one or the other.

She ends with a story, of monks dispersing into the desert, mute, obliged to turn away from each other when they happen to meet; returning to the monastery, forbidden to recount their experience; while two saints argue for a day and a half over who will break bread; and living in the desert, they come to speak the language of the Bible.

24. Excerpt from *Genius*, by Caroline Seiff, 1993.

A thinly veiled *roman à clef* novel, set at Princeton, following the counterpart to Kelsie Devereux's grandson, Kyle, who is torn between his overpowering desire for loving stability, and the uncovering of mystery. Kyle sets out to investigate the plausibility of the logician Kurt Gödel's claim that there exists a world-wide conspiracy to make men less intelligent.

For years Gödel had been very interested in the work of Gottfried Leibniz, whose work in symbolism (the *characteristica universalis*) influenced Gödel's use of symbolism in the process of his incompleteness proof, going so far as to request copies of the voluminous Leibniz manuscripts to be brought to the United States during World War II. Gödel claimed to have discovered evidence of a conspiracy suppressing Leibniz's work—that Leibniz had in fact completed the famously uncompleted universal language of thought, but had been prevented from publishing it. Kyle finds the few accounts in Menger and Morgenstern: conversations with Gödel, in which he would suggest that the Viennese Academy of Science, had been founded by Leibniz in secret, well before its official inauguration in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, that its record books had been destroyed, a conversation which, as always, was cut short by a student walking into the room; the conversation Gödel had with Morgenstern, calling him to the Firestone Library at Princeton, and showing him two piles of books: one of works published in Leibniz's time, citing him, and the other, of the very originals of Leibniz's work which were cited—he demonstrates that in many, many cases, the pages of Leibniz's cited do not exist, either referring to a non-existent chapter, to a missing paragraph, to a page on which the supposed text does not appear, as if the books had been altered after the citations were performed; Gödel requesting a list of Catholic saints, etc, etc. Gödel came to believe that this conspiracy still existed, that it was preventing the public from understanding the significance of his work (in which he proved that any complex formal system cannot be both consistent and complete: that there will always exist truths that are true, but unprovable in the system, and that one of these truths is the very consistency of that system. Gödel saw this result as precisely asserting man's ability to intuit mathematics in a Platonic sense, since no formal procedure could produce all truths.) Gödel, in fear, rarely published his work; and eventually wasted away after his wife's death, refusing to eat—his wife would taste his food before he ate it—and starved himself to death in the late 70's, they say, as a result of his rigorous, over-zealous application of the principle of sufficient reason: that everything happens for a reason, which is the narcissistic principle of both philosophers and paranoiacs.

Kyle tries to uncover the bibliographic references to Leibniz's work, which Gödel had compiled, which are housed at the Firestone Library, but are written in an archaic 19<sup>th</sup> century German short-hand—he searches for those who might donate their time to help him solve the mystery. (Perhaps the conspiracy was local: Newton's Royal Society minions trying to damage Leibniz's reputation in the midst of the primacy controversy over the discovery of the calculus.) For he believes that a fundamental misunderstanding has

occurred, based on our notion of genius: that genius is conflated with madness; that it is far too easy to believe that the greatest of all logicians—a man smarter than all of us—could be reduced to an unstable paranoiac; that the leap from genius to madness is too easy to make; that the most trustworthy source of all, is precisely the genius, Gödel. We are far too apt to ascribe insanity to genius, when the opposite is more reasonable. Where does this idea of Genius come from—is it universal or particular—something cultural, or something in the very nature of genius, although geniuses always existed?

Further, questions are raised about the possibility of a perfect (human) language, which would transcend Gödel's own limitations on formal language—he surely believed in the possibility of it. If only we could somehow formulate ourselves not in the reductive, circular, always expanding language of thought, but in the inner language of feeling, we could transcend expression. If we could communicate the Forms of thought, and not the thoughts themselves... For the thoughtful self-consciousness of a thing, never changes the presence of feeling; and yet at the same time, language, for example, in the word genius, possess the power of deception. Gödel's work, for him, seems to suggest a human ability in this direction.

The distractions of university life, and the impossibility of going through the endless cramped Gödel documents, prevent Kyle from ever getting the bottom of the mystery.

25. *Excerpt from Verbal Generation Techniques, Allen Aucaopoma, 1995.*

**(Written by the son of Martín Aucaopoma.) A meditation guide specifically designed to be read at certain times of the day: upon waking, upon getting into bed, while at the beach. A form of Muzak with words. A way to push into rhythm the shapes of consciousness. Bypasses the question of doubt, and tries to circle around the existence of consciousness itself, taking the position that the world has come into existence just now. A quasi-religious performative text that consists of experiments to allow one to perceive the very experience of having experience. Before you read this book, you are as dark inside as a table or a stone, which is itself, of course, but experiences nothing. It allows you to see an image, not merely perceive a thing.**

26. *Las Cameras*, translated by the author from the Spanish, Lazaro Sucre Padilla, 1998.

(Padilla is the husband of Caroline Seiff.) An essay of digressions by a Bolivian fiction writer, in debt to the work of Prof. Aucapoma. He proposes to investigate the relationship between Greek tragedy and the native tragedies of the speakers of *mancha*. The essay begins with an account of Lazaro's return to Bolivia, having for the first time traveled to America, and seen American movies. He experiences a cultural antinomy: walking through darkness, seeing objects grow larger, a campfire, in the distance, without the environment seeming to movie—and he thinks a thought he never had before visiting America: this feels like a movie. He must have had that feeling before, he thinks, but he can't, for the life of him, remember what he would have called it. Is feeling like a camera something universal, or has it only come into existence with its name? If the ancient tragedians had the camera-like experience, how did they describe it? What have we misread it as? Or did they not have it at all? Was he himself in his youth never a camera, and has he now, only now, awoken to the light?

He walks into a smoky indigenous church, feeling more and more certain he is living in a film. He presents us with a thought experiment: Ovid, dead at Tomis, thrown into the Black Sea, which is so devoid of oxygen that it perfectly preserves him for two-thousand years. As prophesized by the Delphi oracle, he is dredged up, by accident, and we cut open his brain. Is he even human? Or do we only see our own humanness in his writing, since we only understand things with the living understanding of our time? In what sense is every dictionary misrepresenting the way in which words were intended? How far can we trust our own readings? How can we follow the thoughts of another without supplying our own?

*Mancha* tragedies are tragedies of consciousness—of the portrayal of inner doubt by externalization. Greek tragedies, famously, are silent on the inner life of characters, presenting them by action, enmeshed in obligation. Padilla proposes that the arts are fundamentally the same, but only understandable to those who view them with a living understanding. The Greeks would have perceived *mancha* tragedies as externalizations, as battles with gods, in much the same way as today we perceive the Greeks.

Or perhaps, and Padilla cannot avoid the suspicion, that neither school of tragedy is about consciousness in any way, but the illusion that we are conscious: they are modes of deception, which work upon us via a common language, to cement the idea that we are conscious beings. The arts, in any age, grant us consciousness, by suggesting we see images, as oppose to perceive things, that they deceive us into thinking that the voices in our head are our own.

27. *Commedia Dell'arte in Philadelphia*, by *Michael Stevens*, appearing in *Rolling Stone*, 2001.

Written in a free-wheeling David Foster Wallace style. Nominally, an article about a psych-rock band deciding to revisit the conventions of Commedia Dell'arte on stage in Philly. W/r/t/w the author has many unsettling thoughts, which have not so much to do with the drugs, and everything to do with culture. Why are these masked figures on stage so intrinsically appealing, especially with music? Did the costume makers tap into some human universal imagery that's really exciting, especially when drugged-out? Or did the guys on stage get the idea in a psychedelic state, and so we totally relate? Or maybe the very existence of costumes and conventions of concerts make us experience getting high in a particular way?

He describes seeing the show with his girlfriend, with whom he has a secret language of animal sounds that express simple emotions. Ooos, and eeps, and ahhs. A few old ladies are sitting on a bench in Rittenhouse Square, where the concert is. They see a puppy; and go, ooo! And Mr. Stevens thinks, well, I go ooo, too. But I'm not an old lady. At least, I think I'm not. But maybe, when I do it, it's exactly the same, although I don't realize it, since I don't think, you know, that I'm an old lady. Did me and the old lady give in to the same impulse, or was it just a coincidence? Where did we even get the idea to ooo in the first place? Are these old ladies as baked as I am?

This reminds him of his own grandmother—dramatizing her bout with scarlet fever, her joining in the white flight from West Philly, her own mythologizing, her story, which seemed so perfect and natural, about how much she hated working in her husband's delicatessen with her mother-in-law, who would never, ever shut up... how one time, she just gave in, and threw a ham at her mother-in-law... Which is funny in itself, of course... But it was funnier, and deeper, at the time, when the overriding issue in everyone's life was the fact of having to live together in the same house, generation upon generation, which experience is just absent from our lives. So what part about the ham is funny? The word ham? The idea of grandmothers being young? The idea of mother-in-laws? The lost sense of entrapment? These are his thoughts—and the enjoyment of these are his main reason for going to concerts like this. And as such, he gives the band a whole bunch of stars.

28. *Excerpts from Protoworldlang.com, 2004.*

A crackpot website written by a Bolivian *mancha* speaker now living in San Cristóbal de las Casas in Chiapas, Mexico. Part of his strange style results in his presently learning English with a woman who owns an English language bookstore in the city. She teaches classes, which he sometimes attends. He often shows up to her bookstore to try to sell some of his more obscure collections.

His main goal is to construct the Proto-World language—reconstructing back from every known language to the very original tongue of mankind, which, if spoken, would clothe thoughts in the very best fitting manner. On weekends, he works as a tour guide at the Mayan site at Palenque, where he attempts to prove to tourists that the Mayans never existed, that the Egyptians and Greeks met the Chinese at Palenque during the time of Cleopatra, and the ruins there represent the merging of those two architectural styles. He's a complete autodidact, but the perfect one: he holds *everything* he reads with utter suspicion, questioning the motives of those who write, always. He sees the Mayans themselves as a construction of the powers that be, to increase tourism, but more importantly, to carve out a kind of New World/Old World separatism. But, in fact, all cultures fundamentally share the same source: this man represents the next in line of a certain kind of backward-looking metaphysicians, a mode of thought that runs from the Greeks, through the Germans, and now, at last, to him and his few online disciples.

He references Agnoios and Heidegger, and often takes the persona of a sullen dwarf, the contemporary of Leibniz. He has developed a novel philosophical method to solve the problem of endless doubt: since all paths of thought are conditioned, necessarily, and since one has no grounds by which to choose one conditioned path over another, he devises a method of following all conditioned paths possible, after which he identifies the commonalities of the conditioned paths, to determine what must be the unconditioned in this world.

29. *A Family Movie*, a short story by Julia Applebaum, 2006.

(Thinly veiled fiction written by the granddaughter, Julia, of Ira and Agnes Magness.) Applebaum writes from the perspective of a young woman, also named Julia, who embarks on a quest, her sophomore year of high school, to understand her family history for a Hebrew School project. She works on the project, with her boyfriend, Josh, of Bolivian extraction. It's a required assignment: to interview one's grandparents, and produce a report. For the execution of the project, they decide to make a movie about her grandmother, the fictional counterpart to Agnes Magness. Of course, they don't quite meet eye to eye on all matters when they interview her; and when they set out to make their movie, it follows all the conventions of a film from the 1950's, which, although Agnes was born in 1923, and probably had her formative experience much earlier than that. But, this is how the children understand their elders; the conventions of stories, written or televised, shape the way we expect people to respond to us, to respond to the stories we tell, and the movies we make. This is their mental imagery of the spirit of the time, literalized in particular shots, and ways of speaking.

During the filming of the documentary, Agnes dies. After her death, the family gathers to sit shiva for her, and retell all the Agnes Magness stories they can remember. Julia has never heard so many stories, and it entirely disrupts their project. She realizes that, all of a sudden, she can't imagine at all what the inside of Agnes's head was like, since it all seems to differ from her experience, and from the movie they are making. Who was she? During the shiva, she tries to summarize the gist of all the stories in text messages to her boyfriend. Her mother gets angry, calls her into the kitchen... Would your grandmother have been texting if she were here again? Julia is horrified, because she just doesn't know. She isn't sure even if she is justified in crying; she runs outside, and calls Josh immediately.

30. The Opinion of Justice Aram Gorman in *Freegans vs. The State of Pennsylvania*, 2008.

The court opinion offered for a case brought by the state against some freeloaders who had been squatting in a abandoned house in Northern Liberties, eating only what they can scavenge, keeping only what they can find freely. They describe themselves as revolutionaries, in all sorts of ways. They come in a line of “natural chefs,” investigators into the history of recipes and cooking, of hygiene, of practical living: which is all revolutionary praxis can be when one lives not in 1968, 1978, 1988, 1998, but in 2008.

They try to live naturally, but without clear idea of the natural. They try to justify their activities in strange ways to the court, and Mr. Gorman has to sort through it all. For example, the existence of a cesspool, which originally attracted the suit when neighbors complained. One freegan offers a disquisition on the history of smells and farting, as a universal, from the Romans, to the Greeks, the Medievals, on days of revelry, farting on the altar, to Early Modern Dutch encountered Africans and being horrified that the latter refused to fart in public. Filth is culture, they explain: for example, a shoe is not dirt when it’s on the floor; a shoe is dirty when it’s on the bed. As such, the cesspool is unquestionably permissible.

The freegan movement raises questions about the possibility of the communal living of artists and intellectuals. All movements find sympathy with movements of the past. All 20<sup>th</sup> century art movements fetishize the surrealists, not least this one. When we feel like them, when we feel suddenly that they felt this too, when we feel they felt it already, when we suddenly realize that they were like us—this is the ordering operation that makes art movements possible, those movements which always annex the past. Concomitant with this fetishization is the search for authenticity, which the freegans try to establish by means of a colorful cast of characters: a Rilke-loving woman who fuses to a toilet seat; a number of Bolivians; a famous economist, now a stoner, who talks a lot in parables about oases and the Nash Equilibrium; a devotee of Sean Wilentz, who is obsessed with the question of, if John had lived, would the world be a better place?...

All the problems of resentment and sociability are summed up in Paul’s line: “When all the broken-hearted people, living in the world agree, there will be an answer, let it be.” Which raises a question about the fundamentality of broken-heartedness: even in a perfect society, in which all external conditions are equalized, there will still be jealousy, still be envy, still be those who are more or less able. We can never, in Marx’s sense, supersede the sense of having. But on what basis can we determine that the sense of having is universal or particular? What, therefore, can we make of this movement’s claim to authenticity?

Gorman somehow has to pass judgment on these experiments with new ways of living. He offers his analysis of their behavior, but abdicates responsibility for judging these men and women for their ideas.

31. *The DOMAIN, a pseudonymous short story by Egon Erudite, 2009.*

In the late 90's, a middle-schooler finds a typewriter in his attic and writes incredible invective against his classmates, which is circulated among the 8<sup>th</sup> graders, becoming infamous. He wanted above all to be important. Upon his high school graduation, he finds the typewritten manuscript in his desk, and proposes to write this story, now, at the moment at which he finally feels himself to be an adult.

In a flux of memories, he tries to recover his child-self. He sees himself again, sitting down to watch TV with his dad. Soon enough they turn it off, and go to bed; his father reads him stories from scripture before falling asleep. Egon drinks his first coke in the garage of the son of one of his mother's friends; they play baseball outside, listen to CDs; go back in, to drink more cokes: he remembers very well his satisfaction with the feeling of bloatedness; passing around his manuscript; masturbating in middle school bathroom stalls... A narrative of vividly remembered feelings, divorced from an adult self-consciousness...

He remembers setting up his own website, EGON'S DOMAIN, falling in love with the computer, trying to create in it both a world and a lover in one person, a combination of creation and discovery. With his girlfriend, in the present, he ends up at a novelty shop, whoopee cushions, Magic cards, sparklers, Warhammer figurines, role-playing games, full of joke toys, costumes, plastic trinkets in bad taste. Who makes this stuff? they wonder. Who buys these things? I mean, I bought them when I was a kid... They buy some fake vomit and a stink bomb, since their friend will get a kick out of it... and leave with a sense of cognitive dissonance. Well, we buy them, I guess. We just did. But, his girlfriend argues, we did it with a sense of irony. We aren't weirdos. We aren't those people. But we act just like them. Maybe the weirdos are just like us...

And Egon remembers watching TV with his parents, wondering if they understood the jokes, wondering what his parents would have thought of his little manuscript... Do they experience they same way we do? With this in mind, Egon and his girlfriend sit down to watch the Daily Show and the Colbert Report, and laugh at so many silly, childish fart jokes. How can this be funny? they wonder. These childish jokes are funny because they strike us as ironic gestures by smart, intelligent men. But would our parents find them funny? Isn't it strange that when we watch old comedies, they seem incredibly unfunny and banal? So, were they too being ironic, but today we lack the common, present, living understanding of that irony, to appreciate that they were as intelligent and funny as us? Is irony itself universal? Was humor never sincere, but fart jokes always done with a wink and a nod? Is childish humor only childish because we have some idea of what children are like, which, in fact, describes us all—all of us, never having become adults? How can we interpret the childish rant, the chewing out of peers, the dramatic confrontation, of which his own manuscript is a prime example? Egon himself remembers hating those childish scenes when others performed them, since it seemed as if they were merely acting out scenes in movies... But, then, is that behavior learned from movies, or do the movies describe some universal of behavior, that children are susceptible to? Is the childish rant

**merely a Shakespearean monologue, concealed from us, by the childish faces that speak them?**

**And in that sense, who can we say we are, when we see so much of ourselves in things we've written as eighth graders, on paper, or online, in untutored language, but with great feeling? How did we not see it, then? Did we lack so much consciousness?**

32. *Part of an unpublished memoir by Cathy Pollo, Mateo Blanco, Cognitive Scientist/ Science-Fictionist, 2010.*

Cathy Pollo finds herself in a relationship with Mateo Blanco, who is hard at work programming his computer. He is creating a life generator. She watches him at his desk, ignoring everything around him, working day and night, far away from her, except when he looks over, and holds her in her moments of utter despair. His dream, as cognitive scientist, is to understand the nature of consciousness, but can't abide the good science of prudent experiments and localized claims; that sort of science ignores the basic problems, which are philosophical, that consciousness is an experience that no fact can verify. He distrusts himself entirely to get to the bottom of the experience, to treat the experience in itself, since even his irreducible intuitions must be held in suspicion. And so, to escape himself, he decides to write a computer program which will attempt to tell all possible stories, organized by questions, since along with his obsession to understand, he feels the need to write everything. The objectivity of the computer will remove the bias of time period and of personal choice: the programs output takes the form of a novel, which, confronting both the reader and writer as a strange object, can bridge the gap of time and space. Each story outputted is neither old nor new, but mobile in time: their strangeness makes them mysterious by removing the living understanding that contemporaries share, and so, together, they encompass all of time. It is precisely the fact of the novel, which is itself a rhythm of experience, that can raise the questions that dance around the problem, since no mere facts constitute answers. The collection of generated stories, each performing a specific subjectivity, gesture towards the objectivity that is always, at any moment before the end of scientific time, undecidable.

All one can do is dance, since all of life is changed, not by ideas, but by science, in the form of technology. Science itself proposes the future unraveling of all mystery: and so, only hints within experience, a constant dance, can suffice for those living in the time before the coming of this messiah. Even the doubt that science can provide the final answer—that is no answer—can only be settled at the end of science, since science itself proposes that all limits are merely illusory at a given instant, created by our lack of empirical knowledge.

The mystery of the E—archived in the lost past—swings around and becomes the mystery of the condition of living in the time before the answer, the answer to the question of the experience of experience. And thus, it seems, from this vantage point, that all of philosophy has been an obfuscated approximation of the study of artificial intelligence, which asks the only deep questions: Why is there something rather than nothing? Why is there a light on in our heads, rather than darkness? What is the mind, and what are words? And who are we, together? And when we ask these questions, we become aware of our standing in another kind of darkness, the darkness of ourselves who live with the darkness of the past, in which glimmers in the distance, the shape of the E, of the past, present, and future, which Mateo has pasted on his wall, written in highlighter that glows in the darkness, as the two of them fitfully fall into sleep.

So, the scientist must become the science fiction author, and the author become the cognitive scientist. Perhaps we already understand everything, but think what we

understand is something else—perhaps we know all things, but nearly always misapply that knowledge to the wrong field.

All stories are provisional; all stories are instructions in living a life surrounded by invisible mysteries, which demand from everyone a common understanding and a form of compassion. The life of writing provides a practice for doubt; it primes one for the kiss of consciousness, it imparts an attunement to the immersion of feeling in the world. Each story provides partial verification for the experience of experience, for the paths of thought, which Cathy follows insider her head, as she vacuums broken glass on the rug behind Mateo's chair, unable to be happy with his ambitions. In these partial verifications, "art makes in the end all lands alike and agreeable" (*Titan, a romance*; Jean Paul). It provides partners to the dance, that ends too shortly.

Mateo tells Cathy a story from John Aubry's *Brief Lives*: "Mary Countesse of Pembroke...She gave an honourable yearly pension to...Boston, a good Chymist, a Salisbury man borne: who did undoe himselfe by studying the Philosopher's stone: and she would have kept him, but he would have all the gold to himselfe and so dyed (I thinke) in a Gaole." This, he tells her, is the story of himself. That he cannot rest easy until he solves a problem which he, in his time, cannot solve. But the compiling of doubts, in a file on his computer, on every shelf of every library, provides the joy of consolation, for although experience must always be doubted, experience itself is irreducible.

Cathy watches, and sees everything—sees him demand of himself the compassion that his stories teach him—pretending he has been taught compassion, when it was always already within him—to hold her close, when the computer calls him back—and she tries to understand, even as he breaks his rules, and begins to write his own stories, as if unable to escape his desire, which is to write, even when writing seems to be the very opposite of really knowing. For he knows that every simulation is a simplification: that no codification now can stand in for the deep mysteriousness of consciousness. He calls the cardboard box that collects the computer's output, the library of Alexandria. And at last, the story implodes on itself, Cathy, the narrator, exposes each element of her story as artifice, and leaves the "I" alone in darkness, an "I" of feeling, that floats in the emptied out library of Alexandria, among the pages in the cardboard box, one secret among piles and piles of secrets, to be found by someone coming later, or perhaps not at all. And from some mysterious form of memory, in an almost made up language, A VOICE: the last word comes from the anonymous story of *Beowulf*. The hero is eternally fighting a dragon, who hoards stolen gold in his cave. And the poet says,

*There were many other / heirlooms heaped inside the earth-house. / Because long ago, with deliberate care, / somebody now forgotten / had buried the riches of the highborn race in this ancient cache. / Death had come / and taken them all in times gone by / and the only one left to tell their tale, / the last of their line, could look forward to nothing / but the same fate for himself: he foresaw that his joy / in the treasure would be brief.*



THE COUPLE IN THE BATHROOM  
2010

“It’s terrible to possess brittle things.” – Elena Fanailova

It’s gotten to the point where I can’t sleep and am preoccupied to the exclusion of all else with the altogether baffling operation of my digestive system. Too much butter, it’s always something of the sort; not enough water and my fingers swell up... It’s all got to do, evidently, with this body of mine. Is that obvious? I spend a great deal of time wondering whether the digestive system works best while I’m sitting up, if I shouldn’t be lying down for hours, stomach gurgling. If I sit up, however, I’ll never fall asleep. That’s the real issue here. The hours are tiresomely short. There is barely enough time to accomplish anything before darkness falls and I can barely lift a finger after dark without being distracted by vapors of food, recipes—and more recently, the thought of a cigarette, which is strange indeed because I am not a smoker. Nevertheless, cigarettes and their charms have found me out in my dreams. I wake up craving one; I go to bed, wondering if instead I should be in the car driving to 7-11; in any case, I’m wide-awake. It all came to a head this morning when, clearing out a closet, I found an abandoned pack of Camels in an old Christmas tin; the date on it read about a year and a half ago. I went outside; came back in; got my coat, put on shoes; shut the door behind me; took a horrible, acrid drag; waited in the cool air; saw my cat watching me; threw the butt in the greenery; returned inside; showered; vacillated; considered plans for this story; passed out; awoke; it was dark. You see the problem, no doubt. I, personally, don’t understand the situation at all. You, the reader, are doubtless a far more intelligent, responsible, and hard-working creature than I; you understand what I can only tell you. In that connection, actually, I do have one bit of good news, which I’m sure you’ve guessed already, which is that my problem has—evidently—been solved; Javier Cercas has some good words about proper art being carried out only when one is absolutely desperate, unable to do anything else, in short, only when one is bored completely and despairing. At that point, art is the only joy, respite, etc.

You’ll believe me, then, when I inform you that it’s late and I’m tired, though presently I’m enjoying myself very much—I hope you forgive this particular style of writing, which neither comes packaged with a particularly varied vocabulary, nor shows a particularly refined sense of structure or poetry; rather, I’m at my wits end, so I’m going to write with the words that come to me from whatever void exists in the back of my mind, whatever peripheral well of mystery that, in the form of a row of shadows, crosses a hallway at night; the hallway is lit with a kid’s nightlamp; the shadows are cast by doors. All this is to say that I had plans, but now I’m improvising. In the original conception, this brief anecdote was going to end with a certain image, but since I have no present idea how to get to the point at which I would feel really comfortable giving it to you, I think I’m just going to start with it instead. This is it. The floor of a men’s bathroom, in a library. Present day. Dim lights. Two pale, sickly, white, bony nothings with bodies, having drunk gallons of coffee together (in an act which belongs only to fiction and not to the rarefied condensation of poetry), have hearts which now beat rapidly, like cat’s hearts, or the hearts of tiny, flying squirrels.

They challenged each other. (It’s a man and a woman, no doubt). They were in Starbucks, probably. They wanted to really feel it. They wanted to wake up for real this time. They just

ordered one coffee after another. They kept ordering. They ordered for each other; it was romantic. They kept drinking it down. A different bean from a different country each time. It was cold outside. It was comfortable where they sat. Their pupils were dilating or the opposite of dilating, whatever caffeine in large quantities will do for you. Then, the guy leapt out of his chair, his knees rocking like oscillators and declared that they really just *had* to go look at all those books. Like they needed to just leap out of their own chests and really *connect* to everybody. Find the secrets! Although the girl felt as if she should have more reserve, she lurched out of the armchair, or wooden, reddish chair, or whatever they have in the Starbucks near you; she grabbed a hold of his shoulder, which tickled him immensely; he yelped; she clamped down on his chest; they ran out of there; their eyes actually *hurt*. It was bright outside.

Meanwhile, back at the other point in the narrative I've opened up, the girl has got stringy hair plastered on her forehead. This is probably about a half hour later, after the guy and girl have gotten to the library. She's got a forehead damp like the hardened albumin of a white, frying steak. His (the man's) facial hair, nose, and lips are like that of a dog or a rumped lion—I was going to say "disheveled," then thought better of it; the proper image for him is a starving lion in a rumped suited, loosened tie, rather too stick-like for the suit to really fit, all creases and lumps. Now rip off his suit, or rather immerse him in a vat of water or something, which over time causes the fabric to disintegrate into a darkened mixture in the water; lift him out slowly with your own hands, so you can feel his puffy, prunish body. Now you have to place him back in the scene where the two very thin people with rapid pulses are clutching at each other in a void somewhere. Actually, it's a men's bathroom with dim light, as I've said. The man—boy?—had locked the door. Of the bathroom in the library. There is a stack of books beneath the urinal. Her head, at times, rests on it. It's the middle of the night, or feels that way. The tiles underneath her are inseparable from the fluorescent light that surrounds them, the two of them who are like two frail bursts of fluorescent light. So pale they practically disappear in the light that is precisely their own color. Like a pair of flying squirrels who, having tripped under the eaves, having dropped through the walls, having fallen down the stairs, and finally, having raced under the door of a closet, having found shelter at last, together, the two of them, in a leather shoe, collapse in little heart attacks of fright, just like them, this guy and this girl are bent over, their stomachs percolating in fear or hope or determination to have a future that does not yet exist; or at least to have some sense of the present from the perspective of the graveyard of the future, as Roberto Bolaño would say; his works, no doubt, are among the library's collection. In fact, they might even be in the bathroom, under the urinal, under her hair, with the rest of those as yet anonymous books.

As for the pair of them, their arms are like chicken bones; their spines, together, seem to form one ovular shape. Their legs seize, their hands clutch; she feels up him; it feels pretty good; he's got a firm chest for such a small guy. Neither of them can escape the feeling of prophecy nor that they're both being taken advantage of. Their tongues are so excited that when the girl speaks to him, she sounds like she has a retainer stuffed in her mouth. What does she say? I have no idea. In some ways, she's horrifying—her angularity—her chipped, brown teeth—the ratty paleness—the glistening row of black hairs in her armpits—the desperation with which she kisses him—as if dying—as if afraid of dying—as if afraid of having to die at some indeterminate point in the future, but first having to live or something similar—as if she could

unhinge her jaw and open it wider—as if she could scrape her teeth against his upper lip until, in the darkness of his closed eyes, she’s nothing but a jaw, a floating, hungry, chomping, caffeinated jaw, trying to eat him up like an animal. But can you blame her? (This is practically what’s going through the guy’s head.) For all that, though, when she’s dressed to the hilt, she’s really quite pretty. For all the unflattering description evoked in a moment of absolute terror, what the above doesn’t quite capture is her desire, which is too large for her, which is too large for any cognitive scientists, for anyone who has to stick to the facts, but not the living as a result of the facts, who can’t entertain plans for world domination, plans which recur with the frequency of urinary tract infections—in short, a desire which is destined to overtake her, and him as well, since he has a desire of his own, of course. This desire will open them up to the stars, the stars which revolve in a sign of terrible, terrible mercy.

Thus they lie on the bathroom floor; they gaze up at the fluorescent lights; the girl’s iPhone crashes to the floor from its precarious position at the edge of the sink; their hearts are going to explode; they can’t distinguish between the arbitrariness of their own desires and the irreducibility of their selves; they feel a world which practically hums beneath them; they hear the soft swish of air escaping from a vent above them, a vent which leads down the bowels of the library where oldest, most arcane books lie; they smell the rather banal smell of saliva, toilets; they think about email, briefly; they think about driving to a hardware store, to buy something metallic; they think about themselves in the bathroom, about the conspiracy that connects them together, about the story in which they are both inset like various glittering gems of poetry in a compromised state; they experience one of those interminable gatherings of doubt, which resolve themselves in the midst of a dull expanse of boredom in the form of a kind, but unimaginative older woman—a friend of theirs—sitting on a couch in her imagination, watching a TV special, or listening to one of those pre-programmed music channels that you find. And then you—you, the reader—read about the climax, which the two of them *actually* experience as they stare at the stars above them and feel this honest-to-god mercy all over them; it’s at that moment that they realize that they are part of a story in which two characters glory in a grotesque tableau like two medieval lovers, entangled on a bathroom floor, legs outstretched, at last having released, in the act of having released, of releasing. Hot piss spurts down their legs—her pee smelling like asparagus, which is somewhat off putting; his pee smelling like some spice whose identity fails to resolve itself. They are peeing while they are lying in a puddle, or rather a puddle is forming around them and on them and on to both of them. They pee on each other’s legs. The piss gushes out of them with all the relief of having arisen in the middle of the night to relieve oneself, experiencing the stream, then snuggling back into bed. They *still* pee on each other’s legs. He pees on her leg. She pees on his leg. Their faces, if you could see them, would be shocking; they themselves are shocked; they seem taken aback; they are still peeing, in fact; admittedly, they are enjoying this relief, this closeness; they are also somewhat horrified. This all occurs in the context of a shocking anecdote of which they are a part and to which they have no ready response. For indeed, they have, in the midst of all their micturation, realized that at some point in the near future this piss is going to cool down, just like the narrative energy of this story is going to slow up and freeze. In the end, it’s going to be cold, wet, smelly, and stagnant; you’re going to be left with chills and only the memory of a warm feeling. You might want to forget this story; it’s probably not going to make you happy, or maybe just a little bit; though, actually, if

you are the type of reader I am, you're probably going to smile; in fact, you'll probably understand what's going on here and why I had to tell you this story about this guy and this girl; I myself don't really want to guess.

I wish, though, now that I think about it, that I could add some meaning to this anecdote, or at least illusion of meaning. I'll say something about how Pascal was saying the other day, "oh how foul and hollow is man!" Lying in each other's arms, these two lovers, or whatever they are, feel solid, if light-weight; they feel full of body and meat and various organs of human longing. But when they cut themselves open—I'm picturing clay being cut with one of those metal wires attached to wood pegs—they discover that they are completely hollow inside. Or maybe not—at second thought—this now occurs to me; since they can see wisps of steam rising from the holes in their elbows, they realize that while their torsos may be empty, down inside their feet, feeling like a dropped pair of pants chained by a heavy belt, they are weighed down by a piping hot tub-full of piss pooling inside their ankles. The point is that these guys have a long way to go; they have a lot of liquid to expel from their bodies; they have a long way to go, in terms of extricating themselves from each other's bodies, in terms of at last running to a toilet, or else in terms of finishing the job in the sink; maybe they'll piss all over themselves some more, since it's getting frigid; or if they want to keep going indefinitely, if they don't want to leave, if they don't want the moment to end, maybe they'll piss into each other's mouths, the one keeping the other full, the two of them pissing into each other's mouths like two components of a perpetual motion machine. Maybe they'll stop; maybe our hero will get to ejaculate at long last, like the bubbling of an orc being born in the mud or a frog's croak from its bulbous neck. Maybe they'll figure out how to hide the fact that they're constantly leaking as they drag themselves through the world, trying not to make a big deal as they continue talking, collapsing things, etc. Maybe they do want to make a big deal about it after all. Maybe they'll carry around buckets; use external catheters strapped to their thigh like in that David Sedaris story they both read. Maybe, and this is a stretch, they'll fill the whole world with their piss and leap into the waves, together, from a log or a stretcher floating in the yellow waves, and dive down to the bottom of the piss ocean, grabbing a hold of all kinds of heavy technological devices to weight them down to the bottom; they'll reach the bottom of the ocean of piss; there, they'll build a world of their own devising; they'll make up an entire universe; they'll create it; actually, they'd rather discover it, like it's a secret or something; so they'll discover it; but, in the end, if they're realistic about it, they're first going to have to create it in order to discover it; so, I guess, they have to discover how to create the world without knowing how they did it, in fact, forgetting that they created it at all in order to discover it, which is rather unsatisfying in the end, so the whole time, unknowingly, they are trying to create it again. (Or discover it?) All in all, they are rather conflicted. Especially since it's not at all clear how much of this reasoning they themselves are aware. In the end, what they really want is actual, obtainable desires. They desire desires. It's complicated, but true. They want to live in a world of dreams that's also real. Also, they are very hungry. Secretly, they don't want the world to end. They want to be the gravekeepers of that graveyard in the future where all our tombstones end up; they want to treat the history of the world like a detective novel, with excitement and suspense, with mysteries and secrets, a novel which, triumphantly, they have just finished, although there is a sequel they've heard; they want to get to the bottom of it, get to the end and not die, or die, but feel like they just finished something, not like they're starting off into the

unknown. They want to be the murderer, the victim, and the detective all in one. They want to discover the Book of Nature; they want the internet to become sentient; they want to experience domestic tranquility; honestly, they don't want to read this story at all. It might exhilarate them; they might recognize themselves in it; they might hate the fact that this is all so obviously true and yet extremely banal. But, nevertheless, this is the situation. This is why I dragged myself out of bed. I wrote it all out. You have it in your hands. Clearly, at this point, we've reached a point of complicity. I'm sorry, really I am. But nevertheless. I just thought I'd bring it all up again so we can think about it once more.

In any case, to get back the real matter at hand, we've left our heroes pissing. Should they stop? Will they ever stop? If the story ends now, they'll be pissing forever.

## LIFE IS ELSEWHERE

*The Wire* and Narrative Redemption

2010

**I. Taking Stock**

Elsewhere I have investigated the relation of Attic tragedy and Shakespearean comedy to the reality of the world, their characters, and the stage. According to this view, inherited from Nietzsche, Attic tragedy begins where the intoxicated poet communes with the underlying Oneness that makes up the world; he falls fast asleep, whereupon he conjures up the dream-images of tragedy, in which inhere the opposing forces that struggle within the Oneness itself. In this way, Attic tragedy portrays the *real* of the world, but only insofar as the schematic interactions of *unreal* symbols, whether characters, kingdoms, or gods, give rise, in their conflict, to a view of the world as it is, shaken and stirred by the incomprehensible forces that make up reality. The unreality of the characters allows the audience to *see through them*, to the underlying, mystical reality that the tragedy portrays. The focus, then, of such tragedy is not on identity or individuality, but rather the schematic relations of people, gods, and the institutions of state, that both transcend and constrain the characters, as such, on stage—and in the world.

In contrast, the Shakespearean comedy of *Twelfth Night*, is above all concerned with words. Firmly embedded in the literate world of print culture, *Twelfth Night* replaces the Attic communion with the underlying ground of being through schemata with an evocation of the power of the stage itself—not reality—to *convince*. Whereas in Attic tragedy, the characters subsist in unreality, grounded only by the real relations that prop them up them, on the Shakespearean stage, *real* characters create their own worlds using the power of the word on stage. These worlds come into conflict with one another precisely because no one character has

access to the real substance that constitutes him or her or anyone else; each character has as evidence only deceptive appearances, given in language, presented by other characters, out of fear, love, or in jest. Thus these comedies are comedies of mistaken identity; because there is no sustaining ground of being which keeps identities coherent on this stage, instead there is only the creation of identities by real people, convincing only so far as they appeal to other characters' sense of entertainment, distrust, or love—or, in the case of the audience, it is the stage itself which, alone, creates a context in which the power to turn darkness into light, or man into woman, lies entirely in language, without reference to any underlying mystic reality. Thus it is not the conflict of divine institutions and obligations that presents itself to a Shakespearean audience, but the conflict of the wordy identities of characters, cut off from the reality in which they live by the common terms of the language they share, unable then to articulate their relations to the world as they really exist.

## **II. *The Wire* as Synthesis**

In these previous discussion, the focus has been on the power of the medium—the Attic or Shakespearean stage—to evoke the reality or unreality of characters in their relation to the world. In each case, a particular kind of world-view has been advanced: one in which unreal characters stand in for the conflicts between grander forces that make up the world, or one in which real characters grapple with the power of their own words to create the contradictory worlds on stage. In each case, these views of the stage are totalizing; one, in a sense, precludes the other. It makes little sense for Antigone to engage in word play, or to portray herself as other than she is, so as to better enact her plan to bury her brother. The drama lies not in her struggle to

convince others, but the *impossibility* that she might ever convince someone else, married with the *necessity* of her action. In the same way, it is difficult to imagine Viola, in *Twelfth Night*, remaining silent and sure in faith that, in the end, her reality as a woman will be vindicated, if not in this life, than in another; she at all times is aware of her own rhetoric, and the way she portrays herself to others.

But it is possible to imagine another kind of stage, which is a kind of marriage of the two previously discussed. This other stage is one in which *real* characters are evoked, fully formed, and possessing convincing identities, but whose conflicts are not conflicts of identity; stage portrayal here is not confined to the explication of one specific identity's perspective and conflicts. Rather, on this stage, the portrayal of characters is only convincing insofar as their real identity is married to the institutional schema that entraps them. A character here *has* a real identity, whose substance is inaccessible to him or her, as in Shakespeare's comedies, but the conflicts that result and dominate his or her life are not the result of confused, created identities, but instead, the result of outside forces—in the form of human institutions—that constrain the expression of his or her identity. That is not to say, however, that the expression of identity over the outside forces of the world is the goal of the portrayal; by no means can identity triumph over these institutions. Rather, the power of the stage here lies in drawing the contrast between the real identities of characters and their necessary submission, willingly or otherwise, to the overarching forces that structure their lives. The stage portrays *equally* characters and structuring institutions, but only one in terms of the other. The characters allow the institutions to become visible, at the same time that without the broad view of the institution, the characters would be incomprehensible. Thus, the stage works on us at *both* the Shakespearean, so to speak, and the

Attic level, although neither level of portrayal is possible without the other. Since no one mode of expression is given precedence, the overall effect is one of *broadness*, in which one is able to place convincing characters in schemata, so as to draw out the larger dramas that characterize the world they live in.

This, in fact, is the stage of HBO's *The Wire*. The setting—or rather, the central focus of the show—is contemporary Baltimore, at a time when the city is dominated by economic inequality and corrupt government. The show, season by season, tracks characters as they work within the various institutions that, ultimately, have power only to the extent that they interact with one another to broker momentary peace; characters are torn not only by their identities, but more importantly, by the differing institutions that make demands, impossible to ignore or too enticing to forget, on their lives. In this way, by surveying the interactions of dozens of characters around the city, one experiences a broad drama, beginning at the level of individuals, anchored in time and place, running through the workings of the institutions of law enforcement, the drug trade, local business, the shipping industry, real estate, city politics, and more, at last ending at the revelation of the larger, national web of institutions that feed on one another. Characters work both above ground and underground to do what they feel is necessary to subsist both as human beings and as members of institutions, only through which, many characters find, can they survive at all.

*The Wire's* goal, then, in a sense, is to portray the world as it really is; its technique, however, once placed under close scrutiny, is surprisingly subtle: its portrayal conveys both the verisimilitude of real life, without overly dwelling on any character, as well as the broadness of the institutions that dominate life in Baltimore, without falling into the didacticism of a sociology

text. Precisely because *The Wire* is so convincing, one might fall into the illusion that one has gained a direct, privileged connection to life in Baltimore at the dawn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century; rather, when one takes a closer look, it becomes clear that *The Wire*, as a medium, works to construct this convincing reality only *through* the artificiality of a stage technique that has wide applications beyond television, to all types of narrative. It is this construction of *realness* that is the focus of this essay.

Before we can understand how this reality construction is performed by *The Wire*, it is necessary to survey the real conditions that *The Wire* takes as its starting point. Only then can we understand why *The Wire's* technique is both convincing, as well as necessary for the content with which it works. With that in mind, we now turn to a discussion of the world of neoliberalism.

### **III. The World of Neoliberalism**

Neoliberal thought came to dominate the common sense of the United States, and great deal of the rest of the world, beginning in the 1970's. Previously, in the years right after WWII, most of the West was allied in "an acceptance that the state should focus on full employment, economic growth, and the welfare of its citizens, and that state power should be freely deployed, alongside of or, if necessary, intervening in or even substituting for market processes to achieve these ends" (Harvey 10). Crucially, this involved a "class compromise" (10) between capital and labor, wherein each group was guaranteed a fair share of the economic pie—which, in the post-war years, was uninterruptedly growing. Moreover, in this system of "embedded liberalism," states intervened to create a safety net, covering issues of health, education, even housing, in

order to guarantee, in FDR's words, "freedom from want." Free markets were only free to the extent that they worked alongside the various social institutions which constrained them.

Following the economic crises of the 1970's, however, a new doctrine, pushed onto the world stage by the economic elites, became popular; this doctrine, neoliberalism, turned the received wisdom of "embedded liberalism" on its head. David Harvey, describes it:

Neoliberalism is in the first instance a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade (2).

Neoliberalism, in this way, holds that the state should not embed free markets within social constraints; rather, it goes so far as to assert that the goals of social programs themselves are better enacted by the automatic working of the free market; moreover, state-instituted programs, in fact, perform far more damage than good. This view, with its origins in economics, if and when allowed to flourish, reaches out to all realms of human society:

In so far as neoliberalism values market exchange as 'an ethic in itself, capable of acting as a guide to all human action, and substituting for all previously held ethical beliefs,' it emphasizes the significance of contractual relations in the marketplace. It holds that the social good will be maximized by maximizing the reach of frequency of market transactions, and it seeks to bring all human action into the domain of the market (3).

This totalizing way of thinking, in the last few decades, Harvey writes, "has...become hegemonic as a mode of discourse. It has pervasive effects on ways of thought to the point where it has become incorporated into the common-sense way many of interpret, live in, and understand the world" (3). In this way, it is impossible to understand the past few decades without an understanding of the unrestrained economics forces that shaped them, nor, more to the point, is it possible to understand the Baltimore of *The Wire*.

To take one example, neoliberal critics tout flexibility in labor as a necessary freedom previously lacking in labor-capital relations. The effect of the “freedom” of flexibility, however, is mass unemployment and loss of job security, for in the face of large corporations and a surplus of willing workers, the individual labor has little to no power. The resulting mass unemployment and uncertainty is then used to further assault the power of labor.

With unemployment surging to 10 per cent in the mid-1980's, the moment was propitious to attack all forms of organized labor and to cut back on its privileges as well as its power. Transfer of industrial activity from the unionized north-east and Midwest to the non-unionized and ‘right-to-work’ states of the south, if not beyond to Mexico and South-East Asia, became standard practices... Deindustrialization of formerly unionized core industrial regions (the so-called ‘rust belt’) disempowered labor (53).

How is this possible? For one, capital is geographically mobile (169), in the form of multinational corporations. Labor, in contrast, is geographically immobile, often too poor to even stray from the same neighborhood, perhaps of Baltimore, where they were born. The corporations move their operations to non-unionized areas, sometimes even out of the country, leaving traditionally productive centers of the country, “deindustrialized.” Further intensifying this trend is the move towards a so-called “information economy,” which de-emphasizes productive manufacturing, and instead emphasizes the skilled “knowledge work” of the upper class. In both cases, the common laborer is left without a job or economic security.

In cities where factories, then, have been deserted, where men and women live without the security of the middle-class and suburbia, jobs are scarce and impoverishment is general, both for union workers and free labor. As Harvey put it, “under neoliberalization, the figure of ‘the disposable worker’ emerges as prototypical upon the world stage” (169). What happens next, is no surprise:

Stripped of the protective cover of lively democratic institutions and threatened with all manner of social dislocations, a disposable workforce inevitably turns to other institutional forms through which to construct social solidarities and express a collective will. Everything from gangs and criminal cartels, narco-trafficking networks, mini-mafias and favela bosses, through community, grassroots and non-governmental organizations, to secular cults and religious sects proliferate (171).

Indeed, this is the dynamic of *The Wire*, where the only hope of “the vast reservoir of apparently disposable people bereft of social protections and supportive social structures” is to,

somehow to scramble aboard the market system either as petty commodity producers, as informal vendors (of things or labor power), as petty predators to beg, steal, or violently secure some crumbs from the rich man’s table, or as participants in the vast illegal trade of trafficking in drugs, guns, women, or anything else illegal for which there is a demand (185).

This is precisely the explanation for the immobility of the lower class blacks who live in West Baltimore, slinging heroin as the only possible source of income, as well as for the lower class whites who work at the docks, working legally only a few days a month, more often skimming off the top of the shipping industry, with only a memory of the time when the plants across the river, now deindustrialized, made steel. Indeed, this is the broad picture with which *The Wire* begins, in which men and women live in constricting situations, bereft of the ability to make meaningful criticism of the world, for one because the very word freedom has been stolen from them.

Finally, to conclude this brief digression on the history of neoliberalism, one final aspect to the conditioning of common-sense deserves mention, as it concerns the emphasis of an art form, namely postmodernism. In his book, Harvey describes the neoliberal restructuring of New York City in the 1970’s. There, the creation of a “good business climate” was the ultimate priority; this took the form of public funding of telecommunications infrastructure, subsidies and

tax incentives for businesses. But crucially, one form of restructuring involved cultural production: New York City became the “epicenter of postmodern cultural and intellectual experimentation”:

The city’s elite institutions were mobilized to sell the image of the city as a cultural centre and tourist destination (inventing the famous logo ‘I Love New York.’) The ruling elites moved, often fractiously, to support the opening up of the cultural field to all manner of diverse cosmopolitan currents. The narcissistic exploration of self, sexuality, and identity became the leitmotif of bourgeois urban culture. Artistic freedom and artistic license, promoted by the city’s powerful cultural institutions, led, in effect, to the neoliberalization of culture. ‘Delirious New York’ (to use Rem Koolhaas’s memorable phrase) erased the collective memory of a democratic New York” (Harvey 47).

Postmodernism, in this view, is taken not as a liberating program for the revolutionary destabilization of the grand narratives of Western culture, but instead, as the reflex action of the economic system. Postmodernism’s purpose, in this view, is engineered to fit within the economic system whose priorities are the selling of commodities; the best way to insure the consumer’s corporation with business, and prevent the forming of social solidarity, is to rip apart the social fabric and promote the exploration of atomized, relativized identity through art commodities. In this way, consumers are blind to the actual problems of the world—neoliberalization, commodification, the destruction of union power, rising economic inequality—and instead they become obsessed with fake problems, like the problems of cultural identity and the self, whose fake solutions further enmesh them in the neoliberal free market.

Moving on now, we will see, in fact, how *The Wire* deals with the conditions of neoliberalism in a number of ways: it dramatizes the conflicts of individuals within the constraints of the institutions left hollow in the wake of neoliberalization; it reveals the effect of neoliberal common-sense on the way individuals conceive themselves as members of their

institutions; and lastly, and perhaps most importantly, demonstrates a necessary escape for narrative from the dead-end of postmodernism, in the form of a narrative that breaks through the confines of a single identity or identity-group, and instead uses precisely the depth of “real characters” to convey a broad view of societal reality, a narrative that remains convincing, cohesive, and—in this way—revolutionary, in terms of its power to elucidate the real conditions of the world. Crucially, *The Wire* accomplishes this without the fragmentation, insistence on the recognition of one’s unique identity, and obsession with language that characterizes the postmodern response to dealing with the world. In fact, in contrast to its own narrative method, *The Wire* suggests again that the attributes of postmodernism are precisely those that play into the neoliberal system, which emphasizes fleeting contracts, fragmentary social life, individual freedom over group freedom, and the use of deceptive rhetoric to sell freedom for business to the masses as freedom for the individual.

*The Wire*, however, does not accomplish this by turning, in reaction to the language-based artificiality of postmodernism, to the *real*, so to speak; instead, it follows a program of careful *construction of the real*, so that, through the artificiality of its medium, one is able to grasp *both* the reality of character’s hopes and dreams along with the reality of the stifling institutions of which they are apart.

#### **IV. *The Wire*’s Power of Convince: The Construction of the Real**

So to begin, on one level—the Attic level, so to speak—the show is immediately compelling as a representation of reality. This reality, in the first instance, is the hollowed-out institutional relationships that neoliberalism brings about. All relationships of this type are

money relations; under neoliberalization, all existing relations are formalized into money relations, or careerist relations in the context of a business—and this becomes common sense.

Indeed, this common-sense conditions the institutional rhetoric portrayed in *The Wire*, whether the institution in question is Avon Barksdale's drug machine, or its supposed antagonist, the police force. Major William Rawls's constant line in the homicide department is that what matters is the statistics: the number of cases left open, versus the number of cases left closed. Perhaps the central drama in *The Wire's* first season centers around the fact that Lieutenant Daniels and his team (investigating Barksdale's operation) mass all their efforts to bring down Barksdale's whole network of dealers, while the more mundane goal of police bosses remains to throw some drugs on the table, toss a few people in jail, and claim a public relations victory. Clearly, the police force, here, is not being run as a decisive element in sustaining social welfare; instead, the police force is being run like a business, where the bottom line is key. Further, because the power structure of the police force employs this rhetoric, as well as the politicians to which it is beholden, anyone, even a maverick is forced to curb their own ambition, insofar as they are a police person, since the only possible ambition (under neoliberalism) is that of careerism, which here means rising in the hierarchical world of a quantified business operation. Indeed, *The Wire*, in this connection, has two types of characters: those who are no more than cogs in the system, and those who stick out of the machine. Of course, we instinctively feel for the latter—and yet, what could be more appropriate than the ending of season one? After even the cautious Lieutenant Daniels comes around to the side of the maverick under the influence of Detective McNulty, their investigation is curtailed by the higher-ups, a premature drug bust performed, and Avon Barksdale imprisoned for a mere seven years, amid much press fanfare,

leaving the vast terrain of the Barksdale operation untouched. In the end, the structural inertia of the police institution proves too powerful for any maverick, however entertaining and sympathetic they might be. When, in the second season, Avon Barksdale orchestrates the commuting of his prison sentence, from inside prison, by getting his men outside to taint dope brought into the prison by a security guard (and then offering to reveal information implicating the security guard), one of the jailers remarks that, of course, Avon is playing them. And a lawyer responds, “We make the case that’s there to make.” Common sense, here, ignores any outside justification for the institution of law, except insofar as the institution is business, where certain actions are profitable, and others are not.

Crucially, the rhetoric displayed by the police and law institutions is also employed by the drug dealers themselves. In an amazing moment, Stringer Bell, Avon Barksdale’s right-hand man, is revealed to attend the local community college where he takes economics classes. In the second season, when the drug supply is running low, Stringer calls his professor aside to ask him how to market an inferior product; his professor brings up the example of WorldCom, who, after declaring bankruptcy and losing credibility, simply changed its name. Stringer calls a meeting of his drug boys, and gives them a lecture in economics; the “class,” mainly uneducated, impoverished black teenagers, quickly come to the same conclusion as Stringer’s economics professor. Here is a key example of how the ethics and actions of large corporations “trickle down” to affect the dealings of relatively small scale actors. The very fact that the perhaps unethical corporate actions of WorldCom appear to these uneducated teenagers as common sense, underlines yet again the victory of the neoliberal way of thinking.

To take another example, at the end of the first season, D’Angelo Barksdale is

condemned to twenty years in prison for his involvement with drug trafficking; he takes a huge hit, then, for his family: Avon Barksdale, D'Angelo's mother—the real mastermind of the Barksdale organization—even Stringer Bell, express concern for him, since he's "family." But really, all they have concern for is the integrity of the drug operation; D'Angelo has to be placated, since he could turn informant. Avon himself needed to be pushed by D's mother to help D'Angelo at all. Further, Stringer Bell is assigned the task of urging D'Angelo's girlfriend to visit him in prison, and to bring along D's son. Stringer goes, and, despite the connection of friendship and, arguably, family, after compelling D's girlfriend's support, the two make love on D'Angelo's couch. In this world, the money relation, in fact, further cements the family relation, but in a vicious form, without basis in heartfelt feeling. It is precisely the obligations of family that D's mother uses to compel D's cooperation, when she visits him in prison, at the beginning of season two. Family is precisely that thing that traps D in the drug trade, despite his wish to escape, and despite the emptiness of feeling that family has come to represent. D's mother makes the argument that without family support, one would be unable to get anywhere in the world. In this way, one realizes the extent to which the neoliberal world empties the family relation of its power; one is forced to fall back on family, as the one social structure seemingly untouched amid the domination of power by big business; at the same time, the commonsensical individualism of neoliberalism ensures that family is only seen precisely as a means to an end, not a legitimate motivation in its own right, thus emptying the family relation of its content, even as it becomes further entrenched.

Despite the plausibility of these examples in regard to the portrayal of the inertia and structural influence of institutions and neoliberal common sense (reinforced by the impetuses of

those institutions), if these moments alone constituted *The Wire*, the show would remain unconvincing as a whole. Indeed, insofar as characters are portrayed as “unreal” stand-ins for larger forces that work through them, they can only be “clichés,” in a sense, “dream-images,” to return to the discussion of Attic tragedy. We might, in season one, appreciate the portrayal of drug dealers in “the pit” in West Baltimore, the portrayal of police men and women as alternatively “good cops” or “bad cops,” the politicians as sometimes genuine, sometimes snake-like. Because these clichés are embedded in our understanding of what drug-dealers, cops, and politicians do, we can understand the dramas in which they engage without problem, but also, without deep engagement, since these characters fit too easily into our already present conceptions of what cops or drug-dealers are. One might, in this case, get a sense of the ways in which these characters are implicated in their institutions, just as we understand, in *Antigone*, that while *Antigone* may not seem a fully formed, “real” character, that she is nevertheless implicated, meaningfully, in the different obligations of the gods; but because such characters are only clichés, we enter into the drama with the drama already completed in ourselves, so to speak. We know what *Antigone* must do; we know what drug-dealers must do; we barely need to wait until the end of the episode to surmise how Fate will arrange things. Because such clichés fit into our understanding already, we have no need to try to understand the characters further as willing or unwilling members of their institutions; we can simply write them off as understood without further thought—nothing new, then, would have been exposed.<sup>111</sup> In this case, we would

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<sup>111</sup> The case is perhaps slightly different for *Antigone*, since she is less of a cliché, in the sense a cop or a drug-dealer might be a cliché, but more properly a stand-in for an unfamiliar larger force or idea. Because this larger force is unfamiliar, the drama, which, in any case, has held our attention for a few millennia, lies in the revelation of the unknown extent of that force. If that larger force *were* a familiar one, *Antigone* would precisely be a cliché.

experience the necessity of the drama not in terms of the necessity of the obligations of higher forces—institutions—but in terms of the necessity of the stereotype or cliché. This too is the problem of giving the sociological diagnosis of the world of neoliberalism; in that discourse, one can only speak of drug dealers, the police, black or white teenagers—never individuals, and even less of a collective of individuals.

In order to solve this problem of representation, *The Wire* employs what we might call a Shakespearean technique. Nearly every drug-dealer or policeperson, for example, is also highly individuated in a way incommensurable with their cliché, or role. For example, at one point in the first season, D'Angelo is told, without explanation, to take a ride with Wee-Bey, one of Avon's dealers and hit men. D'Angelo, himself, is individuated in the way he feels alienated by the violence of drug dealing, by the nagging sense that he can never escape his background. In one scene, he takes his girlfriend to an expensive restaurant and asks her, if she thinks everyone at the restaurant knows they do not belong. She answers that, if you've got money, it doesn't matter where you're from. But by the end of the dinner, however, D'Angelo reveals himself as unacculturated to the upper-class lifestyle: he tries to take a desert from a cart, and the waiter has to tell him to wait a moment, because that desert was only on display. This sense of D'Angelo's individuated character builds slowly over the course of the first season through small details like this; indeed, in the first episode, D is presented as little more than an insolent bit-player who, trigger happy, killed a man unnecessarily. It is only through the accumulation of small details over time—like the fact that D takes hours to get dressed every morning—that we start to recognize D'Angelo as “real” person and, as such, defying our expectations about who he might really be, in a way similar to the unpredictability and verisimilitude of the self-creating

characters of Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*. Indeed, to return to the first example, D'Angelo, given no explanation, takes a drive with Wee-Bey, ending up at a darkened house. Wee-Bey refuses to tell him why they've come; D'Angelo enters the house, and, for a moment, we see his face crumple as he comes close to crying, at either the thought that he himself is going to be hit, or else they have come to kill someone else—when all D wants is a way out of the drug game. Wee-Bey switches on the lights; the room is filled with fish tanks. Wee-Bey explains that this is his own house, that he has to go up to Philadelphia, and needs D to look after his fish while he's gone. And later, in prison, a certain prison guard, one of whose relatives Wee-Bey admitted to killing, harasses him—in the worst way possible for Wee-Bey—by spilling on the floor his portable aquarium with plastic fish. It is small details like these that cause the seeming clichés of a drama like *The Wire* to become real, fleshed, and individuated. Characters suddenly become well-lit by their own specific identities, even as they remain implicated in the larger dramas that suggested their clichés in the first place.

To take another example, Wallace, one of the young drug dealers in “the pit,” not only works for the Barksdale operation, but also squats with perhaps a dozen siblings, much younger than he, in a nearby house; every morning, as they troop off to school, he hands them each a bag of chips and a juice-box. Sometimes there isn't enough for all of them. Later in the season, Wallace tips off Stringer that one of Barksdale's enemies—a boy working with the drug thief, Omar—is playing in an nearby arcade. The next morning, Omar's boy's flayed body is left on a car outside Wallace's house; Wallace has a nervous break-down. Soon enough, he confesses what he knows to the police, and they send him down to his grandmother's house outside Baltimore. As Lieutenant Daniels and he walk up to the house, Wallace asks, “What's that sound?” Daniels

responds, “Crickets.” He has never heard them before. At another moment, one of Wallace’s cohorts is driving up to Philadelphia to make a drug deal. It is the first time he has been given a task of this magnitude, and also the first time he has left Baltimore. As they exit the city, their usual radio station starts to fade, and he asks, what’s wrong? He has no idea that the radio is different from region to region. They turn the dial, looking for something to listen to, and for the rest of the episode, in the car, the radio can be heard playing “Prairie Home Companion”

Any number of further examples could be offered, from the McNulty brothers’ tradition of driving up separately to the same parking lot, to smoke a cigarette and chat, to the garish orange couch in the middle of “the pit,” which, as a concrete symbol, sticks in one’s mind so that, at any moment, one can call to memory all the relations and events, jokes and horrors, that happened on the couch. At the end of the first season, after the big drug bust, the dealers have to switch up their operation; the first thing to go is the couch. And in a way incommensurate with the idea of drug trafficking and police dealings, one feels a mournful sinking at the end of an era.

Perhaps at this point we can understand, then, why *The Wire* is so compelling, that is to say, how it works on the level of narrative. *The Wire*, to begin with, is a portrayal of the schematic relations that connect the various institutions of Baltimore together: specifically, neoliberal money relations. At another level, *The Wire* is a portrayal of real characters, who seem to have an identity above and beyond whatever schematic relation in which they play a part. And yet, *The Wire* does much more than simply put a face on a sociological statistic; *The Wire* is not a subjective account, filtered through the identity of one character, or even a number, of what life might really be like in Baltimore. In fact, one dwells neither on the realism of the details, nor the realism of the relations, but instead, one is only aware of the marriage of the two. Characters, by

nature, are trapped in a web of institutions and obligations; nevertheless, they seem to have a reality beyond the institution. Crucially, however, it is only the very contrast between the cliché of a character's role and the realism of their identity—in the context of their role—that makes either compelling at all. One only appreciates Wee-Bey's love of fish in contrast to his status as a drug-dealer, and one only appreciates his status as a drug-dealer only because his love of fish makes him neither a statistic nor a cliché, but, seemingly, the *real thing*. Characters are individuated in contrast to, and in the context of, their institutional relations—which they make poignant and real—not as a *result* of their institutional relations.

What is curious about *The Wire*, however, is that, while watching the show, the viewer simply accepts the seeming realism of the drama, without necessarily understanding the subtlety of its presentation. One is left with a feeling that somehow *this is what Baltimore, as a whole, is really like*. It is clear now that *The Wire* accomplishes this feat not through simple realism, but instead through the construction of realism, by rapidly moving between highly individuated characters in relatively distant situations—the drug dealers in West Baltimore, the police downtown, the stevedores on the docks by the river—which, in any case, *is only possible* because the characters involved are so heavily individuated, that one need not belabor any single character or focus on any particular hero for the narrative of the show to be compelling. It is precisely the individuated nature of the characters that *allows* the far-flung workings of neoliberal relations between institutions—instantiated in the form of the characters who *act* like clichés in the context of these institutions—to become visible, since many characters (and thus relations), perfectly believable, can be surveyed nearly simultaneously, as they make real both their identities as well as the neoliberal relations that characterize their world. There is nothing

naturalistic in this film technique; rather it is only through artificiality that *The Wire* can access the real.

## V. Reality Within *The Wire*

This, however, is not a complete explanation. One cannot simply separate identity from institutions, as if one's identity were someplace else, untouched by the institutional relationships one is implicated in; a character does not strike one as real simply because they both work within institutions and have a real, separate identity elsewhere. Rather, it is precisely the tension within every character in *The Wire*, which lies in the way that their identity and their institutional relations are portrayed, as well as the way in which their identities themselves are conditioned *within* the institutional relationship, that makes each character real. Every character's real identity, in this way, is inseparable from the institutions within which they are involved; the marriage of real identities and the abstract, unreal forces of institutions is only compelling insofar as a tension develops between the struggle to have an identity free from neoliberal institutions, and the impossibility of doing so. In this way, the stage of *The Wire* is not simply a mixture of the Attic and Shakespearean stages, but a true synthesis.

Intriguingly, within *The Wire*, characters often talk about being "real." The standard farewell among the drug-dealers is, "keep it real." Characters are asked, "You real?" Keema, one of the police, is shot on the job at the end of the first season; she refuses to identify one of her assailants, although she knows he was there, because she could not see his face. McNulty, afterwards, refers to her, admiringly, as "real police." What is the sentiment common to these

usages?

When Stringer Bell leaves “the pit,” and tells his men there, whom he has just given orders, “to keep it real,” the idea is something like, be strong and sure insofar as one is a drug dealer; be loyal to your group; do the right thing by the people who provide for you. In this sense, it is conflated with another idea, which is referred to time and again in the show, which is to “play the game.” Keema is real police in the sense that she is loyal to the ethos of the police institution; her being shot is simply part of the game, and as such, excusable in context: that’s just how it goes.<sup>112</sup> The aftermath of her injury, in which cops all over the city rampage violently and indiscriminately against drug traffickers, is also part of the game: you get our own, we get yours. Realness for characters, subjectively speaking, then, is not having one’s identity separate from one’s institutional obligations; instead, realness is precisely making real the institutional relations of neoliberalism; it is doing what one has to do, moving up in the world, playing or being played. Avon Barksdale, in the second season, is confronted by D’Angelo in prison; D’Angelo accuses him of orchestrating the planting of tainted dope which caused the death of a number of inmates. Avon tells him not to worry: it is not about himself, or about D’Angelo; it’s just part of the game. “There’s the play on the inside, the play on the outside; we got it all covered,” he says. Indeed, the last episode of the first season begins with an epigraph: “‘all in the game...’ – Traditional West Baltimore.”

The common-sense of neoliberalism appears here again. One is a real actor in the world only insofar as one plays the game; but, what is the game? The game is real life, but rather than

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<sup>112</sup> McNulty and Keema’s discussion, in the hospital after her injury, on whether going undercover and getting shot is worth it (the answer is no), only serves to highlight this point; even after their talk, they both continue, gladly, to play the game.

seen as a life full of real and living people, the game of life is a game where people are only tools of one player or another, doing what they have to do, as if a death in the game were not a death in real life. In the same way, under neoliberalism, the freeing up of markets and the loss of social welfare turns every action into merely one action in the game of the free market; impoverishment, drug addiction, lack of social mobility are all part of the game. The sense is precisely, you have to play or get played; there is no backup plan; no one has your back. It is this radical individualism that neoliberalism takes pride in. David Harvey writes,

While personal and individual freedom in the marketplace is guaranteed, each individual is held responsible and accountable for his or her own actions and well-being... Individual success or failure are interpreted in terms of entrepreneurial virtues of personal failings... rather than being attributed to any systemic property (66).

Even characters like D'Angelo, who seek constantly a way out of the game, *cannot imagine, but only hope for* a way of being divorced from his place of origin and economic level. We sympathize with his frustration because it is clear that no matter how far he runs, he will always be implicated in the game of neoliberalism, whether it is the game of slinging heroin, of playing the part of the police, or of playing in the sycophantic political circus. Further, to play any of these games, one must somehow learn the rules, which impinges on one's identity. *The Wire*, then, makes visible the way in which neoliberal common sense constrains the very identities of characters, through whose reality alone can one portray successfully the neoliberal conditions under which they live.

One scene which drives this point home lies early in the first season; D'Angelo finds Wallace and Brodie in "the pit," playing checkers on a chess board, as apt a metaphor as any for the reality of these impoverished black teenagers, trying to make ends meet and move up in the

drug world—the only game they have access too—when real power, in fact, is wielded in the neoliberal game of corporate strategizing. D’Angelo explains to them the rules of chess; each piece seems to symbolize someone in the drug organization. The teenagers identify, of course, with the pawns; D’Angelo explains that pawns are expendable, and one of them asks, “But what if you’re a smart-ass pawn?” And of course, that is beside the point. Under neoliberalism, everything becomes a game of vying for power; everything is part of the rules of the game, and so justified; moreover, the game is supposed to be fair, when in fact it never is. In theory, no one starts with an advantage, nor should anyone get any advantage to begin with. The down-side is that if you start out as a pawn, in the world of corporate dominion over the supposedly free market, you stay a pawn; more, even if you could escape the game, everything else in the world has been subsumed into the larger game of the capitalist market. It seems one only has reality—or even a means of living—insofar as one plays the game; in order to live, one has to play; but once one plays, one’s life is no longer one’s own. D’s hope is for a life elsewhere, where no one knows him, where he can start over. The tragedy of his character lies in the tension between his real identity—formed in reaction to the game forced upon him—and his continued existence as a pawn in the large schema of institutional relations; no matter how far he runs, there will always be another game. Real life is indeed elsewhere, but only insofar as that, under neoliberalism, one’s life is only admissible as part of the game; life is elsewhere because one has no access to the real substance of one’s life, not due to the appearance created by words (as in Shakespeare), but because one’s own identity is tainted by the conditions from which one originates, from the common-sense of a neoliberal world. One cannot sever one’s identity from this world of institutions; one is always on one chess board or another, and one cannot always decide to play

on the board of one's choosing.

As a final example, consider the case of Omar, who makes his living threatening drug dealers with his firepower and stealing their drugs to resell. He throws the entire workings of the rhetoric of “the game” into visibility, since he *doesn't care* about their game, or how he is perceived. When the drug dealers hit someone—like Omar's boys—they justify it, saying more-or-less, that he was a liability, and that the murder was just part of the game. When Omar steals drugs by threat of force, he smiles and says, now ironically, it's *all* part of the game, as if to say, once we start playing a game, I can do everything to you—murder—that you did to me—murder. Omar, then, *chooses* to play the drug dealer's game. Thus, for him, the game is visible in its absurd artificiality; he makes us realize the extent to which real people are being conditioned by the artificiality of a “game” that existed before them, will exist after them, and has nothing to do with them, but for which lives are lost. And yet, Omar, in choosing to play their game, simply draws further attention to that fact that there are games that he *cannot* choose to play; in Baltimore, one cannot simply find a job, even if one wanted to work; there is no work; one cannot just choose to play the game of legal employment. And even if one did, too, one would be playing yet one more game.

## **VI. Conclusions For The Art**

Watching *The Wire* is a strange experience: one is left feeling thoroughly entertained, as well as edified. It is in particular the latter feeling that is curious; how can a show which seems on the surface merely entertaining, impart, without any visible effort on its part, a thorough education about the reality of the world?

The answer lies in the complex way in which *The Wire* constructs on stage a representation of the world. On one hand, one can see *The Wire*, as David Simon, in fact, encourages one, as a Greek tragedy, but having in place of gods, institutions. Characters act like the unreal dream-symbols of Attic tragedy, implicated in forces and obligations out of their control in time and space; characters feel the forces of different institutions pulling them in different directions; their institutions obligate them to perform actions with which they may not feel comfortable; moreover, these different gods are all related to a unifying ground of being: the conditions of neoliberalism, which have become cemented over the last few decades.

At the same time, however, characters are heavily individuated in a way more similar to Shakespearean comedy than Attic tragedy; through the accumulation of detail and concrete information, characters seem to pop out of the narrative and become visible as well as understandable in a way very unlike the incomprehensible steadfastness of Antigone. But, in *The Wire*, characters do not create their own worlds, that is, identities, through words; instead, their identities are visible only in reaction to the institutional conditions which created them. One is not left to dwell on *why* or *how* Wee-Bey loves fish; instead, Wee-Bey's fish, or the verisimilitude of the orange couch in "the pit," solidify the substance of the characters involved—at least in our minds—only because they stand in such stark contrast to the game-like abstractions that really characterize the workings of the world. Characters have little access, like in Shakespeare, to their own substance; this, however, is because the institutions of neoliberalism prevent that access, forcing each character to fit one's identity within the larger schema of "the game."

The concrete evocation of identity, then, allows *The Wire* to rapidly switch from character

to character in a way seamless to the viewer, so as to reveal broadly the workings of many interconnected systems, each conditioning the characters under the sway. The very reality of the characters allows the more abstract unreality of the far-flung relations of neoliberalism to become visible, since the latter are only comprehensible when one considers actors *en masse* and implicated in a complex network of differing games. In this way, *The Wire* acts as a peculiar synthesis of Attic tragedy and Shakespearean comedy, wherein character make us laugh and cry, even as we are stunned silent by the grand, contrasting panorama of entrapment and despair from which there is little escape—that is, for the characters at least. In making the problematic of neoliberalism visible, *The Wire*, in fact, implicates us, the viewers, in neoliberalism's grander scheme, and as such, having been educated, the show makes us conscious—without, perhaps, our realizing it—of the common-sense that neoliberal thought has foisted on us. The miracle of *The Wire's* artificiality as a medium is that it entertains and edifies, without didacticism of any sort.

In this way, *The Wire* provides one kind of redemption for the contemporary narrative. The show cannot be classified as simply a social realist work, since although it has social concerns, nevertheless, the mechanics of the show remain thoroughly artificial, and indeed, literary in their workings. More than that, *The Wire* distances itself from two dominant strains in current narrative work. On one hand, *The Wire*, in making visible the economic conditions that shape our lives, gives lie to the postmodern claim that in order to destabilize the dominant system, or narrative, one must fragment one's work, and narrow one's focus on the ways in which language itself creates structures. Rather, *The Wire* calls the very view that the dominant system is merely a narrative into question; it does not experiment with cinematic technique or fragmented storytelling; and, indeed, by its insistence on not doing so, it draws attention to the

fact that perhaps postmodernism might simply be the reflex action of the neoliberal economy, which emphasizes disconnected individuals, relativism, and fleeting interaction. *The Wire* escapes from the morass of the struggle to make universal statements from a relative perspective, and from the difficulty of using the discourse of the dominant power structure for one's own purposes, by showing that power is not created through discourse, but rather through the very workings of institutions and money relations that create a situation in which postmodernism flourishes, being nothing relativistic about the latter claim. Finally, *The Wire* forges a path away from an instance of identity politics, and narratives of identity, which attempt to give voice to the formerly voiceless, to let a silenced subjectivity offer its take on the world. *The Wire*, instead, by its own example, shows that one single subjectivity will always be blind; it will interpret all problems in the world as problems relating to that one specific identity. In these narratives, problems in the world are ascribed to racism or discrimination, which, while not always entirely absent from the problem, hide what may be the *real* problems in the world, which are divorced from any particular subjectivity, and in fact, only accessible to an objective view of the world: such matters as economic inequality and the harmful freedoms of corporations under neoliberal capitalism. *The Wire*, in transcending the subjectivity of any one of its characters—as they all contribute a part of their identity and position in the world to the revelation of the larger structure which connects them all—suggests the possibility of a more objective, incendiary, and evocative narrative, that can make us feel for its characters as real people, implicated in the world structure, even as we become acutely aware of the invisible forces that run through our lives. In fact, *The Wire* shows that, if one is honest, each of these two goals is impossible, as such, without the other.

PRE-ESTABLISHED HARMONY  
SEVEN EROTIC POEMS AND TWO PICTURES  
2010



I.  
it was with an impulse  
not unlike that which a little fat dwarf  
from some Arabian type country  
would have had at some point  
in the history of impulses  
that I tied a string around your waist  
a string which was fastened to a tambourine  
which was placed on your ass  
whose excess thread dangled down  
between your legs  
and the creak that I coaxed out of you  
glistened in wet threads  
that adhered to the string

which I placed in my mouth  
knot first  
bottom up  
and ate like spaghetti  
to the origin of the world.

II.  
it was with a inclination  
not unlike the cock  
of a rabbit's head  
staring at me  
from your shoulder  
who was eating a carrot  
or so I imagined  
looking down at your shoulder  
while you held in hand  
a carrot peeler  
and my vegetables  
in your mouth  
that I later entered you  
from behind  
and reached around you  
and rubbed you with my mitten  
until I began to sweat  
in my snowpants  
and you spun around  
as if  
you were a salad tosser  
and out of me came  
a new scarf  
for your lovely neck.

III.  
it was predetermined that  
as a born explorer  
holding a telescope

or a magnifying glass  
I would begin to investigate  
your armpits  
slightly hairy  
and issuing a smell  
fastidious  
and yet arousing  
and move further down  
into the interior  
gritty as it may have been  
of your belly button  
at last to come  
to the closed gates of a long-standing mystery  
that I would peel back the curtain  
of your vulva  
and dive in  
head first  
head-lamp on  
and  
grabbing your hips  
I would pull myself entirely inside you  
past all the nubs and wet places  
into the interior of the thing  
and maybe my toes  
angled outward  
stimulated your clitoris  
as they were passing through  
and at that point I disappeared  
within you  
only to emerge  
as some lightly-colored milk  
from your nipples  
and as the colorful sigh  
you gave  
from your throat  
as if satisfied.

IV.

it was certain, but not necessary  
that when the evening light came  
your hair would have revealed your neck  
to me  
free from obstruction  
even at the dirty place  
behind your adam's apple  
where the hair grows messily  
and yet covers  
the softest skin  
that I would brush it with my hands  
that I would press my hands against  
the sides of your neck  
turning your head  
this way and that  
that I would reach up  
and gather your hair  
and pull it up  
and then down  
and that  
my hands holding you to the pillow  
I would rub my cheek against your neck  
up and down  
until I found myself sniffing  
the back of your ear  
where you probably never wash  
I mean I don't  
but that's where I found myself  
my nose at least  
and my hands were then free to shape your neck  
casting the skin  
this way and that  
until your neck responded

and began to elongate  
and as I caressed it stronger and stronger  
it became longer and longer  
until you were just a neck  
with the softest skin  
with a faint heartbeat  
a column of arteries and veins  
vaguely pulsing  
behind the golden hairs  
that make you you.

V.  
it was with a clear and distinct idea  
that I conceived the territory of your arm  
wherein  
Leibniz says  
there are entire worlds  
for indeed  
matter is infinitely divisible  
and the substance of the world  
is made up of monads  
each of whom is a mind  
a perceptive mind  
which sees itself  
in the garden  
of your body  
which contains within it  
further gardens  
even your arm  
has within it  
a universe of gardens  
each of which  
contains gardens of its own  
and which reflects the world as it is

entirely  
that is to say  
I was staring at your arm  
trying to penetrate it  
but the more I tried to move in  
the more the matter closed in around me  
impenetrable  
for Leibniz maintains there are no atoms  
there are only pocket mirrors of the universe  
in smaller and smaller pockets  
and thus we cannot even touch each other  
unless God suggests to us  
via an idea  
that we lie close together  
and that I am touching you  
on the arm  
and even then  
it is as if we stand motionless in a garden  
in a well-laid out bed of flowers  
an English garden  
wherein each plant is a cell in a grid  
unable to touch  
but even then  
for the love of God  
I'll still shoot my wad  
across the mulch  
across the weeds  
because you shiver there  
alone  
and maybe the warmth  
that came from inside me  
will warm you up a little.

VI.

it was while following my path through being

as Heidegger calls it  
that path which  
I myself have laid down  
and which I often tread  
by habit  
and which he says  
I must break out of  
by violence  
to burrow into  
the new heart  
of being  
or so he explains  
and it was while he told me this  
that I unfolded the paper  
from the gift  
you gave me  
I unfolded the blanket  
that ensconced you  
that I unfurled the blouse  
you wore  
and let it swing from the wind  
which gathered about my hand  
and disclosed that homeless sight  
the wandering cityless sight  
of your naked breasts  
hanging down like little figs  
as if unattached  
or unwilling to be attached  
or hanging on for dear life  
to the fleshy part  
of your chest  
and it was at that moment  
that I craved a cigarette  
for the paths of my being  
are lined with cigarettes

one a day  
smoked with pious concentration  
lucky strikes  
filterless  
enough to sate me  
one a day  
a day which is divided in three parts  
the first part of which  
involves the planning  
of where  
of when  
of with whom  
I will share my cigarette  
my only joy  
the second part  
of which  
involves the smoking  
the talking comes afterward  
the smoking is done in silence without haste  
without particular enjoyment  
but rather with relief  
and some  
light-headedness  
which is experienced  
standing perfectly still  
except for the little shakes  
that disclose  
the ash  
the third part of which  
consists of walking with  
whomever I have chosen  
to smoke my only cigarette  
the only one for this particular day  
and in that time of relief  
I reach for the ground of being  
the music of the soul

disclosed from the person  
who walks beside me  
with a roar  
like a veil torn away  
blowing from the half-mold  
of my chosen fellow  
in the windy roar of which  
can be seen  
some floating scraps  
of paper or cloth  
or wrappers  
but I digress  
in any case  
we shared a cigarette today  
you and I  
and now  
in the third part of my day  
the part without planning or stress  
although planning brings a certain joy  
a joy which, however painful, sustains me  
anyway  
in the third part of my day  
here I am  
with you  
you are under me  
my arms pin you to the ground  
my hands lift you by the spine  
my hand is hidden inside you  
and in the cold air  
outside the Rock  
you exhale  
what looks like smoke  
as your back arches  
and your breath shudders  
and your legs clamp shut

and you let loose a nervous laugh  
 and a violent shiver runs through your being  
 which shakes the firmament  
 of me  
 and in an instant  
 in the third part of my day  
 you have opened up  
 a trap-door or  
 a fire escape or  
 a secret passage  
 through which  
 burrowing  
 I can make a new discovery:  
 a new heart  
 like a bust  
 that overlooks  
 the gate  
 beyond which lies  
 new paths  
 of being.

VII. (*for Timothy Conklin Nassau*)

it was with some trepidation  
 that I came  
 onto your asshole  
 you told me it was okay  
 I didn't believe you  
 it looked like an eye of darkness  
 surrounded by eye shadow  
 exactly the color  
 of a penny  
 but we were engaged in a program  
 of experimentation  
 you and I  
 having attended that Foucault conference

where the butch lesbian  
tried to hide her breasts  
behind her leather jacket  
and sunglasses  
where they talked about  
spirals of power  
and pleasure  
our feet  
propped up on our knees  
touched  
and while we were walking  
I asked you if I could stick a needle in your arm  
a hot needle  
except I shouldn't have asked you  
I should have just done it  
more of a surprise that way  
it could have expanded your mind  
reconfigured you  
reorganized your body without organs  
so to speak  
for there could have been  
new territories of experience  
of uncompromised  
un-co-opted  
and unexpected  
pleasures  
but I asked you anyway  
just like when I steamed up your asscheeks  
with my hot cum  
I felt bad about it afterwards  
but then you had the bright idea  
to take it to the shower  
and rather than cover our bedsheets  
with shit  
like some paraplegic  
we could let the shit

run down our legs  
while we grasped at each other  
like someone searching for a pen and paper  
in a handbag  
or like someone feeling blindly  
on the carpet  
for a contact lens  
but then the drain clogged  
and you tripped over your own shit  
and I held you while you bled  
it was entirely unexpected  
and I admit  
when you passed out  
and I ran around  
looking for the number  
for health services  
the newness of everything gave me a shiver  
just a little shiver  
of pleasure  
although I realized  
even then  
that I could have foreseen it  
that we both  
should have worn  
our shower shoes.



ESTÁ BIEN  
2010

Yo soy un enano. Está bien. Gracias por escucharme. A veces, amigo, de buenas a primeras tengo que salir de la mazmorra en que vivo y llevar a cabo una conversación—tal vez imposible, además es difícil para cumplir los ojos de usted—con otro, que me tiene sin cuidado. Pero, amigo, usted apareció como llovido del cielo, y estamos aquí, y hay tiempo.

Quiero hablar de un descubrimiento. A escondidas, envejecí y mi casa se llenó de libros. ¿Puede ver usted mi joroba? No sólo soy un enano, sino también un jorobado. Mala suerte. Está bien. Cuando leo, uso como un taburete un manual árabe de sexo del siglo doce. Dentro, hay descripciones de actos sexuales para hombres de todos los tipos, grandes y pequeños, y más, para enanos y jorobados, con una joroba o dos, en configuraciones que parecen sin fin. La primera vez que lo encontré, perdí el habla. Pensé que quizá un antepasado andaluz lo escribió, porque mi sangre es vieja, y sin fin mis padres se cruzaban de brazos y no tenían miedo por ser vistos con las manos en la masa. Algunos son eternamente indestructibles.

Pero, vamos a mi punto. En las hojas, hay todas las posibilidades lógicas para dos o tres cuerpos, incluso con deformidades. Creo que no fue una accidente que a la vez yo estaba leyendo un manuscrito perdido de Leibniz, en dos volúmenes amarillecidos. Pobre Leibniz era un empresario filosófico, y encerró sus obras más importantes; sin embargo, hoy sus opiniones secretas son bien conocidas, y ahora creo que he encontrado una posibilidad desaparecida en la obra del filósofo estimado... Tal vez, una explicación... Voy a narrar una historia para ti, aunque soy un enano solamente, mas o menos solitario, y aunque los años son rápidos, mi sangre es tan fuerte como mi mente.

Para Leibniz, dijo Voltaire, todo está bien. La verdad es más complicada. En el principio del mundo del Leibniz oculto, hubo un universo de hipótesis, en que existió, en la niebla, todas las cosas posibles. ¿Entiende? Cada cosa representa un sujeto lógico, como yo o nosotros o usted, o sangre o el castillo, que tiene relaciones con otros. Por ejemplo, existe un yo que habla con usted. En el principio, a las hipótesis les fue dado rienda suelta para conectarse con otros compatibles... ¿Un poquito confuso? ¡Imagine! Una cosa, A, con el aspecto *sobre la torre*. Otra cosa, B: *sobre la mezquita*. (Claro, tienen otros aspectos, pero está bien.) Entonces, puede imaginar, usted, un universo en que existen ambas cosas, A y B. Pero cuidado! Ahora, otra cosa, C: también con el aspecto, *sobre la mezquita*. ¡Razone! Leibniz dice, un universo con B y C es imposible lógicamente—pero un universo con A y B o A y C es posible, obviamente.

Bueno. En el universo de hipótesis existieron hipotéticamente la infinidad de posibilidades de A y B y C y más. El universo real, que desarrolló por necesidad lógica, es el en que está la mayoría de cosas cuyos aspectos son compatibles. Como los jorobados andaluces. La enumeración de las posiciones sexuales existe en su forma debida a la compatibilidad subterránea de jorobas y pechos, cabezas y pies, y la sangre andaluza de mis padres. Es necesario. ¡Esta idea tiene gran importancia para mi! Porque vivimos en la trampa de la necesidad de lo que es más posible. Aún ahora, me mareo, y mi cabeza está pesándose y desea la mesa... ¿Cuántas veces se han empañados los ojos, y ha amarillecida mi visión, aquí o entre las hojas de un libro?

¡Escúchame! Perdón, pero una pregunta insana: ¿ha sentido usted el miedo antes de

dormir? Nadie puede recordar el momento de dormirse—solamente, el calor de la noche y, por entonces, despertar se derrite en soñar, después llega la mañana. Pero, creo que hubo un tiempo en que el momento de dormirse tuvo conocimiento, y la humanidad sintió la chispa de miedo cada noche cuando el conocimiento fue extinguido, un terror fundamental y ahora olvidado, un secreto que se queda y es borrado como la fe oculta de Leibniz... y en eso momento la mente vuelve al espacio de hipótesis, en que no soy un enano o un jorobado o un lector de Leibniz, pero, en cambio, el edificio de mi mente universal, en que cada estructura es conectada como un sujeto lógico, regresa al momento antes de la aparición de la verdad, cuando todo es niebla, y la salida de la mazmorra de posibilidad, tan pequeño como un enano, aparece otra vez, y mis vidas caídas me parecen como hojarascas sobre el suelo en jorobas, y a través de hablar afuera con usted, tal vez, puedo dejar de amarillecer y tratar de reverdecer...

¿Es posible? No sé. A veces, creo que el miedo consciente fue bueno.

Pero, no obstante, estoy aquí con mi amigo de azar, usted. Y está bien, no?

2011

## STUPID EVENING

2011

With the boarded-up clamor of fate  
pressing down on a stupid evening,  
a few gentleman and I rode down  
Market from 35<sup>th</sup> St below the snow,  
having passed through the chilly gates  
and the plywood enclosure  
of a doorwoman to Penn's Landing,  
at that hour, evacuated by society,  
and, hands in polartek, walked  
beside the handrails of the bridge.  
The only smells that could reach us  
came from the cars distending  
the print-out of the moon—  
and soon out of nervousness  
my shoulders rocked, as if beat  
by my heart, whose interest  
in the city to my right failed  
to be matched by the desire  
to lay down something clean,  
musical and complete,  
as if the imagination could pay  
for each hour spent clothing  
an idea in a dream  
and a dream in a story—  
We'd been to see a movie  
before jamming tokens  
deep into the machine;  
the plot was taken from real life,  
and the ending was tragic,  
although the construction was sound—  
it was clear weeping was useless,  
although we did it, you know—  
but we wept for the people,  
not for the games—  
they had distinctive faces,  
so they were easier to see  
and remember than usual—  
but it was clear to me  
above the suspended tracks  
and a swollen barge at eleven

that the more we wondered  
the more we kept wondering;  
and the more we dreamt,  
the more we kept dreaming  
for a version of history  
that could keep its own council,  
you know, council with its own self...  
And then, that hour,  
not chosen by accident at all,  
brought a woman's face to me,  
ferried by three others,  
whose cheeks found our hands,  
and whose insides smiled  
with the expressions of a girl  
ravished by some animal  
intoxicated  
by a thing unknown  
to both men and women,  
bringing both purpose and fear  
into this version of the world.

## LETTERS

2011

Having read off her name in a footnote,  
you humped the bed for her.  
She had a couple of friends, an occupation,  
overseeing men at a bindery.  
And ninety years ago, give or take a decade,  
she posed upright for a camera,  
wearing a footprint of lipstick, and feathers  
coming up from her blouse.  
She was turned to the side, and pouting,  
her hair lay under a cap.  
You had found her works, collected letters,  
on some website, I think.  
She wrote in her free time, she explored,  
and wouldn't leave a guy.  
You think you know who it was, the guy;  
it had nothing to do with the footnote,  
but maybe with her letters, that brought to mind  
a quote by Dylan Thomas:  
Just the book to give your sister, if she's a loud  
dirty, boozy girl.  
She wrote the book, and was the sister,  
and loved to think about it.  
In any case, you used paypal, and some guy,  
he tracked her down.  
He gave you the photograph, in a folder,  
and smoked with you outside.  
She was nothing like you'd imagined, though  
you stored the picture in her book.  
People looked different back then, you know,  
in this country at least.  
And her old clothes, you hated them, for the same reason  
you loved her style.

## VINCENZO FORTUNATO

2011

Lucky Vincenzo—got his start at sixteen,  
when he got his first sip of pleasure—  
this girl kept chickens in line, took care  
of Vincenzo when they married, after a shout,  
on the old rocks by the breakers and reeds.

The houses there—they had yellow tops,  
and so did the covered well, where he chased him—  
Vincenzo chased his kid, a couple years later,  
after throwing feathers at each other—  
kid tumbled in the well, and died like that.

It brought them closer together,  
Vincenzo and his wife—but the thing was  
after so long trying to clean off her melancholy  
he was covered in it, way back  
when you could just disappear.

So Lucky spent some time in the woods,  
where some people starving ate maybe  
mushrooms, and a few other things  
like tubers, and greened his fingers about  
basil, rosemary, mint, and thyme.

One day he saw the ghost of his wife  
although she wasn't dead, then—  
she was lying on shore, and her hair,  
it was trying to run down the waterfall—  
and so Vincenzo woke up the queen.

That was how Lucky came to himself—  
He cooked for the king, folded up in the castle;  
and out of respect for the dead,  
he studied Hippocrates  
for the composition of things.

So after sugaring dinners and salting desserts,  
he watched the rain fall in a column  
from the compluvium to the basin  
on whose tiles he scraped herbs

and much else, for their powers.

A few lashed together clockwork horses,  
bronze orators, or mechanical skies  
whose clouds ran in circles, above  
sunken statues whose feet shuffled  
on corners where books were sold.

Instead, Vincenzo never handled them,  
marble skin, pupil gems, and fastened hair—  
he left the choice in grave to royalty—  
but when they were raised, the effigies,  
he was there, with his bottle, and his touch.

With his spit, and his sweat, a drop  
of oil, the grey earth, and the leaves  
that die just under the surface,  
with dust from the black rocks,  
who sweat the most in the sun,

Vincenzo mixed flowers with the smoke  
of meat, collected with cloth, kneeling on the sand  
where feathers tumbled in his footprints,  
and the stuff was smoothed out and stroked  
against a long stretched out hide.

All that, boiled with fat and bottled,  
came into his hand, and dipping his finger,  
he placed the scent behind one ear,  
behind another, on her neck that meets  
the shoulder, and in the rooms of her arms,  
where the weight of her head and her hand  
is split—on her wrists, and on the bone  
that ends near her back—on the two folds  
above her belly, and on the ankles, the legs,  
and the knees—on the dark spots—  
where the cloth could pick it up.

And Lucky Vincenzo wore gloves always  
but for then, so that, the tables scraped,  
the tombs dressed, the halls asleep,  
he could sink into his hole—they disappeared,  
his gloves, then, and his face into his hands.

VISSARION BELINSKY  
2011

Vissarion Belinsky,  
dying in a small room,  
cramped, books,  
coughing,  
dreams he is a sailor  
whose life is flashing before him  
in the form of a critique.

Mikhail Bakunin bombs an apocathary--  
could it have been in Paris?--  
flags, banners, colors,  
this is the joy of organization.

The kid conceives a train,  
the structure of it,  
made out of dining room chairs,  
and mints his own money,  
and prints boarding passes,  
membership cards--  
things are fitting together.

Vissarion Belinsky,  
dying,  
talks to Robert Burton  
about the sailors  
carousing at the port,  
about walking around,  
bodiless,  
as if reading,  
floating across the ground,  
past the ropes,  
the flags,  
cramped,  
colors,  
and asks him,  
if he really valued the experience?

Vissarion Belinsky dies,  
leaving his essays,  
and Bakunin tells a few stories about him, the kid,

although Alexander Herzen told more.

## UNREQUITED DESIRES

2011

I.

I took a walk outside into the snow.  
 It wasn't snowing, but it was cold;  
 went out into the woods beside my house,  
 and took a cup of coffee with me.  
 I didn't do much, standing there, but watch,  
 and, let's say, five minutes into the stand  
 I blurted out, Ah Freud, and then I laughed—  
 because, I thought, I cut a ridiculous figure,  
 because sighing that seemed something I would do,  
 although the point was, my mind had shown me  
 that Freud had moved in these circles undesired  
 when he said something like, we all are sick,  
 and we never get better.

I think I felt a nervous, hopeless joy  
 that once I know was less evacuated;  
 that is, once I sought my predecessors  
 as if they had some human secret to impart  
 or some construction that would appeal to me  
 because as I could see myself in them  
 the promise was that they could see  
 themselves in me.

Today the past speaks among itself,  
 about another subject altogether.

Today, unreasonably, I can't read  
 that someone else went through a thing.  
 In sum, I want truth, not feeling,  
 or if I have to connect, I want someone  
 who didn't stop at going through it;  
 there's always reasons, but like Catullus says,  
 Ay, dime, lo que la gente puede hacer,  
 o en los que pueden tener fe?

So, with the countenance of an ancient stoic,  
 I fell to the snow and did not move,  
 although, in fact, I sat down without a fuss--

I only wished I could bend my legs less uncomfortably.  
 It releases compassion, that we are caused and ineffable,  
 even as the inability to rage gives lie to the act...  
 This is the voice's warm hug of understanding  
 whose delight in singing is metered by thought;  
 one side wants to trust in the society implied by the feeling,  
 while, with inscrutable certainty, the other side refuses  
 on the grounds that compassion is just a means  
 for filling in what's been hollowed out.

Ideally, I would train my mind to dismiss these concerns;  
 in that, however, the acceptance of despair  
 invariably stinks, like an pregnant error.  
 For example, like a good anthropologist,  
 I dismissed the rigor of cause and effect,  
 and then with less integrity than before,  
 I was much the same, holed up in the snow:  
 you can't train yourself to think in new ways  
 when the old ways have been dismissed by mere thinking;  
 as for feeling out new ways,  
 that can be trusted even less.

I guess, like a fool, I took Descartes seriously,  
 and still do, however much my sense of self  
 has declined in the last few months.

Beckett wrote in a letter that there exists  
 a kind of writing that corresponds  
 with acts of fraud & debauchery  
 on the part of the writing-shed.  
 He said, I'm in mourning for the integrity  
 of a pendu's emission of semen,  
 which he found in Homer & Dante  
 & Racine & sometimes Rimbaud,  
 the integrity of the eyelids  
 coming down before the brain  
 knows of grit in the wind.

Then he wrote, Forgive all this?  
 And asked, why is the spirit so pus-proof,  
 and the wind so avaricious of its grit?  
 As if the problem lay in the scenery,  
 as if the world had not provided enough,

as if his spirit weren't moving in it!  
 When the real problem Beckett saw,  
 was that the thinking mind negates,  
 and the only positive is the brain's emission.  
 And it would be nice to trust in our bodies,  
 but we know that the darker half has desires too,  
 and to trust is an act of the mind,  
 and the mind can't trust  
 what it can't criticize.

Thus thinking is motivated by the unthinkable,  
 and yet thoughts could be trusted  
 if perhaps they were coherent.  
 But the truth lies in what the darker half has given:  
 and either the subject of thought is a feeling,  
 or else thinking is thought without truth.

I wish I had Beckett's integrity:  
 when his father had died, he wrote,  
 I can't write about him,  
 I can only walk the fields  
 and climb the ditches after him.  
 But my integrity just asks,  
 Why not?  
 and that's all it asks,  
 continuously,  
 until I'm forbidden to speak at all,  
 frozen in fear  
 of having taken something  
 I didn't pay for.

II.

Q: Why do philosophers love reason?

A: Because they love order.

A: Because they love to argue.

A: Because they love to be right.

A: Because they love the feeling of a thought.

A: Because their feelings are a mess.

A: Because their older sister was a mess

A: Because the world is a mess.

A: Because they were taught to love it.

A: Because they were taught not to love it.

A: Because they were not taught to love it.

A: Because that's who they are.

A: Because it's not about them.

Q: How is it not about them?

A: Because they don't have to trust their darker half that feels for unknown reasons, thinks for unknown reasons, for unknown reasons doesn't think, doesn't feel... There's something else.

Q: Something else?

A: Reasons was supposed to be true despite us.

Q: And you want that?

A: Well...

Q: Why do you want that?

Q: Why do you think you want that?

Q: Why...

...

A: Thank god the humanities and the sciences have been separated.

Q: Why's that?

A: It keeps scientists busy with the right problems.

Q: Doesn't the unjustified act of choosing a problem make the use of reason problematic?

A: Only if you're in the humanities.

Q: Why's that?

A: That's where we keep the unsolved problems. No matter what problem you choose, it will be problematic.

Q: Problematic in what sense?

A: It was your word.

Q: But still?

A: Humans are left with nothing they can explain.

Q: What lies at the heart of the search for authenticity?

Q: Can we have just one thought or feeling we can trust? Just one thought or feeling in which we can take the simplest pleasure?

A: No.

Q: Why can't I take pleasure in the feelings themselves?

A: Because I want truth.

Q: Haven't you answered yourself into a corner?

A: I shouldn't mind living in a corner, if I knew where that was.

Q: How can you feel this way? Isn't it worse than unreason? And then to write a poem about it?

Q: How should I act?

A: You could let your darker half speak. You could lie in bed for fourteen hours, dreaming just to

abdicate ulcerous control, seeing just to see images specially made for you without the work of a decision.

Q: Perhaps it isn't making decisions that frightens you. Perhaps it is that you cannot trust your answers?

A: Retreat.

Q: What is free will?

A: A paradox. To act without cause, and yet to own the act; to act without necessary reasons, and yet with reason; to act and be able to stand behind the act.

A: Irrelevant. This existence is entirely passive.

Q: How do you mean?

A: I give everyone the benefit of the doubt, because I am seized by doubt. I cannot judge anyone because I cannot judge myself.

A: One would wish it to be otherwise.

Q: Do you love reason?

Q: Is this poem a reflex?

A: I can't say.

Q: Is your relationship with poetry to be that of a nocturnal emission, a hazy awakening, and inspection by the 3<sup>rd</sup> party the following morning?

A: In the long run, feeling doesn't cut it.

Q: And so?

A: I would like to be angry about something. I would like to have opinions and goals. I would like to have new and interesting thoughts.

III.

I took a walk outside into the snow,  
that is to say, I began to conceive a plan  
to figure out, in the end, who I am  
and, at last, renounce the temporary measure  
of poetry.

## THE CURE

2011

*In the mid-seventies, a number of poets of the older generation, who had lived, in succession, through the innovations of Pound and the modernists, the clamor of the beats, the joyful youth of the sixties, and the abstraction of the seventies, joined together in a movement they called Decrepitude. Counting among their number poets such as John Burney, Pierre Le Croix, and Eva Ehrenfest, the Decrepitudists inaugurated a new kind of romanticism, extolling the healing power of love, while refusing the allure of youth—in short, they saw in aging the liberation of all human cares. Insofar as their poetry also represented a way of life, the Decrepitudists founded a number of small communes, where some of their most intense and powerful works were fashioned, particularly in the years between 1975-9; but on a whole, the writers of the movement were isolated, their close relationships often broken by time, and despite a few famous couples, the majority of the poets in the movement found themselves working in solitude, often in homes for the aged. It is interesting to observe that even as the eldest of the Decrepitude movement were dying by the early 1980's, a few strange young poets, such as Mao Xing and Susie Schermann, began to involve themselves in the work of their poetic ancestors, giving new life to the Decrepitude movement. We have chosen for this collection *The Cure*, a relatively early work by John Burney, which became a de facto manifesto for the group.*

## The Cure

At this the darkest hour of our lives,  
 this hour that extends without end or hope,  
 that deserves not the name of hour,  
 you come to me without the raiments of youth,  
 but with the melody of your voice like a stupid child's  
 and the frantic energy of your soul—  
 and at this hour, you and I make up a decrepitude that will endure  
 for just one moment,  
 and then another,  
 and then a thousand more,  
 in virtue of the weakness of our arms,  
 and the pain of our other limbs  
 of the weeping that never ceases  
 for the mind that has been blown out of its ears—  
 all that remains is a rubbish heap  
 on a bed that moves in time...  
 for we are two souls holding on for dear life,  
 and I trace the marks on your skin  
 and you press up against the decline of my flesh  
 and we can feel happiness in the warmth and moisture  
 that so long ago abandoned us

and cupping your wrinkled cheeks  
and burying myself in your graying hair  
and feeling you hang on me,  
and me hang on you,  
at the endless hour of deterioration  
when life no longer opens its arms  
when all possibilities are vacant, unsold  
and one may no longer think of the future  
and the constant choice of happiness now or later  
with the knowledge that choices no longer matter—  
in this hour, we have reached immortality  
as we near death,  
and without reservation we can allow ourselves to have each other,  
and no other  
in a love made of pure warmth  
ignorant of the cold in our bones—  
we can at last give up thinking, which was before an obligation and torture,  
for we knew always the day was short,  
and that more than we knew was unexplored and undecided—  
but today, at this last hour, thinking does no good,  
in fact, our minds are gone,  
and whereas before we sought escape from decision,  
the decision has been forced upon us—  
and so, more naturally than two young ones,  
we bury ourselves in each other, like wounded animals  
seeking the last warm shelter of leaves  
as the breath of life departs  
and the music of it, which could have left with a whimper,  
rises up into something unheard,  
that can never be discovered until the last strength has been shut away,  
and the last thoughts thought, and coldness succeeded.  
I no longer fear for your pleasure, and you no longer fear for mine,  
I no longer think of your other lovers, nor you of mine,  
and I no longer think that you will escape me, or I will escape you accidentally—  
I will no longer think of the attentions of any others, or of boredom, or of uncertainty—  
I will no longer think of all you've done rightly or wrongly,  
nor of all the mistakes we've made, together or apart—  
for we are nothing but mistakes and failures in decaying flesh,  
that comes together in warmth, without hope, but in a fleeting hour of eternity  
with a joy which we hadn't dare hope for or speculate upon.  
Our failures free us, you know—  
before we each had owned our failures,  
now together we cower before the failure itself,

every destruction of mind and body,  
the erasure all concerns, all hatreds, all uneasiness, and all plans.  
I no longer think of leaving a message,  
of knowing other souls,  
of reading things,  
and traveling elsewhere,  
of seeking what can't be found—  
nor do I anticipate the discoveries of others,  
since I know I will never appreciate them.  
My time is up, and so is yours, and can I tell you something?  
It seems we have been liberated.  
I don't find you attractive as I might have found a woman in the past,  
nor you I a man—  
and—and yet we are attracted,  
in a love that is as much pity as it is compassion,  
and we pleasure ourselves in each other like saints;  
we do unspeakably beautiful and terrible things to one another,  
and we have found attractiveness in pure love, without anxiety or terror,  
equally small.  
Our tumors and diseases range over our body—  
our coughs and cries, our moans, and whimpers,  
they rise out of our mess,  
and I know not who it was that despaired, if it was I or you—  
but as soon as the despair came it was transmuted into something sublime,  
something uncaring and magnificent,  
for there was no other despair, and no other concern,  
not for either of us inside,  
and all we had, we had in each other,  
and all that mattered was the eternity that had been marked out,  
a thousand times over,  
but at last in reality,  
in this bed of ours,  
where our dry bodies work against each other,  
where our thinness is thickened by the other,  
where our eyes show no fear of individual things,  
where forgetting comes with perfect remembrance,  
where memory returns in a wail, but sloughing off its significance,  
even as it cuts with infinite pain into the ear  
into which I whisper everything that shouts itself,  
which is that our lives were nothing but mistakes,  
and that although our former joys and pains are our own,  
we no longer need let them make us,  
that our wounds will bleed in the open,

although their sources are secret.  
Our dry blood can mingle on the bed,  
and covered in it, we can lose ourselves,  
as we each lost our honor so long ago,  
at this end of dignity and care,  
so with something higher,  
we can rest in each other arms,  
and feel the organs moving in the other,  
shifting slower and slower,  
until we die, everything forgiven, and nothing remaining,  
not all the beauty we saw,  
at the sad melting smile of our life,  
continuing softly to sing,  
even through the tears that come from the past.  
Now together we seek them,  
the tears,  
pressing each other to cry, weep, and sob,  
and sobbing tenderly,  
we throw ourselves out together into the garbage of the bed,  
this beautiful garbage,  
and even as we make love,  
the tears never cease,  
for we cry for each other,  
even as we smile though it,  
our hair falling out,  
our sight weakening,  
our hearing vanishing,  
until we are two trembling lumps,  
the past hovering above us like quilts,  
the future as unknown as the shadow under the bed.  
Senseless, all I feel is your body against mine,  
and my body against yours,  
and the knowledge that we can have no thoughts that are not shared,  
that everyone dies with us,  
that all the grief that accompanied each loss is now rolled up  
into one bundle of grief,  
that rages in my belly,  
and rages in yours,  
and when we wrap ourselves in each other,  
the bundle keeps us warm,  
and that which was burning to the touch,  
that great uneasy fire of living,  
burns just beyond you, I see—

You stand amid the howling of the windy flames,  
and it is only your thin, dying body that keeps the flames from reaching me,  
although I feel them licking at my skin,  
and, in turn, my body shelters yours,  
our heads meet,  
our arms embrace,  
and every limb touches every limb in this soft wasteland,  
with two insatiable fires blazing behind us both,  
as at last the flames begin to meet in the middle,  
and we and everything we love are incinerated,  
even as our last tears cool our lips  
enough to kiss  
one last time  
at this last hour.

FIRST POEM IN THE SCIENCE LIBRARY  
2011

How did I get here?  
Casting light on a string  
in the shape of a noose  
for a mouse, that small at least,  
the drawstring for the blinds,  
whose shadow delicate  
touches my book, the sun is—  
The type looks mimeographed,  
transferred from the German:  
Einstein's theory of relativity,  
his popularization,  
while churning in my stomach,  
like the remnants of disease,  
say, salmonella,  
is the sigh of nihilism,  
anti-Trotskyite.  
The poet's role:  
to preserve the people whom he's loved—  
Science is the bastion of the weak,  
too weak to look them in the face  
and smile—  
Or so I believe  
for myself—  
I don't feel all the way here.

EXPERIENCE, KNOWLEDGE, AND LANGUAGE IN THE VEDANTA  
2011

The foundation of the Vedanta school of philosophy, insofar as it is characterized by Śaṅkara in his *Brahma-Sūtra Bhāṣya*, is the interpretation of the Vedic texts, in particular, the Upaniṣads. Śaṅkara provides a justification for this foundation in the first part of the *Brahma-Sūtra Bhāṣya*. First of all, "...it is a well-recognized fact in the world that the person from whom the scriptures dealing with multifarious subjects emerge is more well informed than the scriptures themselves" (Śaṅkara 19). For example, Pāṇini, the grammarian, must have known more than he put into his grammar, since any text can contain just a part of the whole of a person. Śaṅkara applies this principle to the Vedas themselves: "It goes without saying that, that great Being has absolute omniscience and omnipotence, since from Him emerge the Ṛg-Veda etc.--divided into many branches and constituting the source of classification into gods, animals, men, castes, stages of life, etc., and the source of all kinds of knowledge--and since the emergence of these Vedas from that Being occurs as though in sport and without any effort like the breath of a man, as is stated in the Vedic text, 'Those that are called the Ṛg-Veda...are but the exhalation of this great Being' (19). That is, given the extent of knowledge contained in the Vedas, and the fact that this knowledge is expressed effortlessly, they must have derived from a being so much more knowledgeable, an entirely omniscient and omnipotent being, since no single human could have known so much. In fact, the Vedas are only limited by the fact they are expressed in human language, and so are "almost omniscient" (18), that is, insofar as they are limited by the ignorance and illusion that comes from using language, which assumes a difference between things, rather than their essential, true unity. No single being could have encompassed all the truths therein (since those truths are unencompassable for humans unless they have achieved enlightenment, and we will see that enlightenment requires such truths to begin with), and so it makes no sense to talk of individual, specific human authors of the Vedas.

Indeed, Śaṅkara makes the claim that "Brahman (the great Being) is known as the source of birth etc. of this universe from the scriptures alone that are a valid means of knowledge" (19). That is to say, Brahmam can *only* be known via the scriptures and not any other means of knowledge, for example, perception or inference, and Śaṅkara specifically argues against the idea that there are any means of corroborating the statements about the truth of Brahmam through inference or perception (20). He claims, first of all, that the Upaniṣads "become fully reconciled when they are accepted as establishing this very fact in their fullest import" (21), that is, the Upaniṣads only make sense, as a whole, without any contradictions, when they are interpreted as referring to Brahmam as the ultimate One. Only such an interpretation makes the widely varying statements of the Upaniṣads coherent, and so such an interpretation must be valid. Once such an interpretation is arrived at, it seems one can divide the statements in the Upaniṣads into two groups, one of which are statements that can perhaps be corroborated via perception or inference, and one of which are statements that cannot be corroborated in any way. As relates to matters of "gods, animals, men, castes, stages of life, etc., and the source of all kinds of knowledge" (19), i.e. the first group, the Vedas have been corroborated, and so given the necessity of only the one, single interpretation of the meaning of the Upaniṣads, the statements in the second group must also be correct, although they cannot be corroborated. For indeed, "Brahman [is not] an object of

perception, even though It stands as an established, positive entity, for the unity of the Self and Brahman, as stated in "That thou art," cannot be known otherwise than from the scriptural texts" (22). One might gain knowledge of the world, and of one's own self, through perception and inference, but it is only through the very injunction "That thou art" that establishes Brahman as the one self, that is the self of everything. Another way of saying this is that given perception and inference, one can only obtain knowledge from one's own perspective, whether of the external world, or the internal world, in any case, separate from all other perspectives. It is only through the Upaniṣads that one is able to transcend any single perspective and realize the unity of all perspectives, all selves, and all things. There is no way that one can reason or perceive one's way, via thought or experience, to the conclusion that everything is Brahman; only "That thou art" assures us of its truth.

One might object that the essence of truth lies in the possibility of its being corroborated, that is, there are no self-evident truths. But Śāṅkara goes on: "As for the objection that instruction about Brahman is useless inasmuch as It is neither acceptable nor rejectable, that is nothing damaging; for the attainment of the highest human goal (of freedom) becomes an accomplished fact only when the total eradication of all sorrows comes about as a result of the realization of the Self as Brahman beyond acceptance and rejection" (22). The reason that such statements cannot be corroborated is that, once the result is achieved and all duality is rejected (23), there is no sense in which one can corroborate statements with perception and inference, since those means of knowledge are premised on the duality of subject and object, and are no longer valid. The knowledge of Brahman itself, once the result is achieved, cannot be corroborated because corroboration has lost its meaning at that point. There can be no perception of Brahman before the result, since such a perception *is* the result, but only at the point at which perception becomes meaningless as a means of knowledge. There can be no inference in regard to Brahman before the result, since all inference is by analogy (23), and there is no situation that is analogous to the non-dual experience of the result. Thus, Brahman is known through the scriptures alone; and no human author could have written them, for the knowledge within it can only have been obtained through non-dual experience, at which point it would cease to be communicable knowledge--and yet, the knowledge is there, and so it must have come from some source beyond specific human individuals, namely Brahman, "For once the non-dual Self, that is neither acceptable nor rejectable, is realized, there can be no possibility of the persistence of the means of knowledge that become bereft of their objects and subjects" (44). Indeed, although Upaniṣadic sentences cannot be corroborated in dualistic experience, nevertheless they are the sole means of achieving the desired result: "...the Upaniṣadic sentences will, by virtue of their imparting instruction about the transcendental Self, serve the purpose of removing the error of thinking oneself as a transmigrating soul" (25). It should be noted that the result does not come about through meditation or practice. If such practices require an object, they are useless, since Brahman is not an object, but a subject (31), and moreover, in fact, the subject of everything, so that, specifically, the very knowledge of Brahman (as opposite to meditating on Brahman) means that "differences of the 'known,' 'the knower,' and the 'knowledge'" (31) are removed; and further, even meditation which requires no object cannot realize the unity of one's own subjectivity with all others.

Śāṅkara's claims are, at first, paradoxical. Through experience one comes to know many

things, about the world, and about one's self. And such knowledge is corroborated in the Vedas. But the Vedas also contain knowledge that cannot be corroborated, since to corroborate them would be to perform a dualistic action after dualism has been dispensed with; thus they should be taken on faith, given the infallibility of the rest of the Vedas. Such statements, like "That thou art" serve to establish the transubjectivity of all things when, in everyday experience, one only gains knowledge of one's world and one's self. It is specifically a linguistic expression of a truth that serves as the basis for an escape from the entrapments of idealism, and serves to identify one with everything. Curiously, in the end, it is language, and only by language, that one can escape from one's own limited perspective, and encompass everything. For the claim is that knowledge of Brahman cannot come about in any other way than by the knowledge in the Upaniṣads. No experience can suggest such a fact, since to have such an experience would imply that all communicability had been lost, along with the dualist mentality. Ineffably, though, Brahman exhales through individuals, and they come to express non-corroboratable statements such as "That thou art," as in the Vedas, which can logically have derived from neither perception nor inference. For on no grounds could one know such a fact, since either one is trapped in one's own self, with no knowledge of others, or one has realized one's unity with Brahman, at which point the very distinction of the second person ("thou") is effaced.

The question, then, remains: What makes the Vedas specifically unique beyond their interpretation? That is, what is precisely the meaning of an exhalation of Brahman? To follow Śaṅkara's argument beyond the specifically Vedic context, an exhalation of Brahman in language might be a description of the fact that in practice statements are indeed made without justification from perception or inference. Perhaps the speaking individual says, "That thou art," for reasons of their own, from their own perspective, not at all thinking of Brahman (which would be impossible from any one perspective, as Śaṅkara shows). Following Śaṅkara's reasoning, it seems that such an event could very well be the meaning of Brahman's *exhalation of truth*, as a metaphor. The meaning of the non-human origin of the Vedic statements is that, in practice, the truth about Brahman indeed comes to be expressed, even though such an expression is ultimately contradictory to the nature of that truth, which is a truth about non-dual experience expressed in terms of dualism. Therefore, it must arise from some other source, groundlessly, and opaquely, one could say, by accident. Brahman, then, is only realized interpretively, by drawing together all statements, however contradictory, and unifying them under a single interpretation. And, in the end, according to Śaṅkara, there can only one correct interpretation of all statements taken as a whole, in which all statements can be contextualized and understood. And that interpretation is that all things are one. And so, one can understand what exactly Śaṅkara might mean by the non-human origin of the Vedas; non-human is to be understood in the sense of not originated by any single individual, since the individual perspective is never the whole truth. The challenge is to take all individually expressed statements, which seem contradictory, and unify them, to show how, despite their specific origins, they all cohere under the rubric of a single interpretation, namely, that everything is one.

Indeed, according to Śaṅkara, and in contrast to other scriptures, the Vedas are not established as true by means of corroboration, for example, because they contain authenticating accounts of miracles, or entirely correspond to some philosophically complete and verifiable conception of the world. Instead, their truth is established not with reference to their origin, but

with reference to the very mystery of their origin, which can only lie in some involuntary and not understood spontaneous expression of language. The Vedas are picked out as special because their authentic origin is impossible, not because their origin is known to be holy, in a historical sense. As such, and to extrapolate from Śaṅkara's argument, one can easily imagine another exhalation of Brahman, and a second Veda, without any contradiction, for it is not the specific Vedas as such that are holy, but the fact of a group of statements whose occurrence is inexplicable, but whose collective interpretation can lead only to the view that all is one. For there is no reason why the exhalation of Brahman should ever begin or end at any point. Brahman, in this sense, *is* interpretation. And so, there lies some mystery at the heart of language, that statements made for individual, "provincial" reasons, can be unified together to refer to the oneness of everything. It is something to do with some quality of language itself, then, although Śaṅkara does not explicitly state it; something breathes through language that is not reducible to perception or inference, and which constantly hints at the possibility of something else, and only interpretation can see past the contingency of each individual statements to the hidden, unexperienceable truth to which they involuntarily refer. Śaṅkara discuss, of course, solely the Vedas; but one can best make sense of his justification of the origins of the Vedas only by generalizing his argument from the language of the Vedas, to language in general.

As a kind of thought-experiment to understand what this might mean, consider a line from another part of the world and another time period, from Heidegger's Anaximander Fragment: "Being speaks always and everywhere throughout language." Such a statement was conceived and written in a context far from the world of Śaṅkara and Vedanta. Nevertheless, a truth that Śaṅkara would agree with was expressed, insofar as knowledge of Brahman, paradoxically, can only be obtained through language, but only a language whose ultimate origin is not reducible to any of the experiential elements referred to within the linguistic statement. Insofar as interpretation is taken to consist in finding the unified, hidden source, which lends coherence to disparate, disconnected statements and from which emanates the ultimate truth, no matter where and when a text appears, the goal is to find the one interpretation that reconciles all statements. Insofar as one applies this type of interpretation to the Vedas, Vedanta arises; it seems, however, that whether he intended it to or not, Śaṅkara's justification of the self-evident and non-experientially-originated truths of the Veda not only applies to the Vedas, but to all language as such, even, we might say, to Heidegger's. Although Śaṅkara does not state it explicitly, or in these terms, it appears that it is the mysterious unity of language itself, or rather, the possibility of a single interpretation, that gives man, unknowingly, the first hint of the path to

liberation.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> As another thought-experiment, consider a group of poets whose conception of poetry is that all poetry should be written from the perspective of a different thing. One poet likes rabbits, and so he begins his poem, "I am a rabbit." Another poet likes dogs, and so he begins his poem, "I am a dog," and a third poet likes cats, and so he begins with, "I am a cat." Each poet, then, writes their poem for reasons of their own. But, working from the assumption of unity, an interpreter collects together the various poems of the group, and tries to reconcile the individual poems as a whole. From, "I am a rabbit," "I am a dog," and "I am a cat," (and perhaps others, without limit), the interpreter decides, "I am everything." And this is precisely how Śāṅkara defines himself as interpreter in relation to the Vedas. But as one can see, there is no reason to limit the scope of the interpretation to the Vedas themselves, since there is no conceivable reason why Brahman would ever start or cease to exhale itself through language. To come to a knowledge of Brahman is precisely to interpret, to collect together all contingent statements and unify them under the single, necessary interpretation, which can only be everything is one. And the fact that this single interpretation is possible implies that there is something beyond any single individual's perspective at work in language, which can only be Brahman.

HEILIGENSTADT TESTAMENT  
2011

Forced to become a philosopher  
in my twenty-eighth year;  
not easy,  
not for the artist.

Was impossible I say,  
Speak louder, shout, I am deaf.  
Impossible I say, shout, speak:  
Speak louder, am deaf.  
Am deaf!

All felt within,  
held back.  
It held back  
all felt within;  
it held back all  
held back already  
held back  
all felt within me.

To become a philosopher  
was impossible I say;  
I held back;  
it was impossible  
already.

## DAY SWEATS

2011

Day sweats physicians' errors hidden by  
Temperate earth; they never think the cause  
May be more lucid past the thousandth cry;  
Date trees he breaks inside to couch the laws,  
Shines well the tabernacle key, till art  
Dimm'd much by self-sufficiency, unsettles,  
Declines, and is replaced by games of heart.  
Untrimm'd the ground it hides some precious metals;  
Fade in life, in transmigration, die.  
Owest a thing to any one who steals  
Shade from this your squinting, searching eye?  
Growest your crying at his mute appeals?  
See the ways the day's small doctor hides  
Thee from what simple habit now provides.

## CONCEPT

2011

She goes in for the first time,  
 as if she'd never read a poem before.  
 On a table, a chair; and on the chair, a person—  
 his hands hold, in one, an egg,  
 in the other, water, in a container.  
 “What kind of egg is that” she asks.  
 “Hardboiled.”  
 “May I hold it please?”  
 She holds it firmly.  
 “It’s very heavy.”  
 “What are you thinking about?”  
 “Chickens.”  
 “I’m thinking about eggs.”  
 “What kind of eggs?”  
 “Poached.”  
 “Oh yes, lets.”  
 She throws the egg into the water.  
 It executes a movement, tumbling  
 to the bottom, and warbling,  
 to the top, in short,  
 circulating—  
 A few, or a couple, or perhaps two or three bubbles  
 follow on its coat-tails,  
 curled up and situated  
 very neatly inside it,  
 as if its mother had packed it,  
 or it were under coats and blankets,  
 or it were some mud, and a few other substances,  
 having fit themselves, suggestively even,  
 into the same place.  
 The egg continues to ellipticate,  
 as her eyes hang on to its coat-tails.  
 They vertical.  
 His eyes do the same.  
 “It keeps moving,” she sighs.  
 “It looks like something,” he groans.  
 “What?” she leaps.  
 “The future?” he moans...  
 “Well, I’ll be back for my egg.”  
 She goes out,

and often thinks fondly of the room,  
and the occasion.

MERELY YOUNG

2011

When you're young  
language is trying to grope you--  
don't cop a feel--  
you rubble conversations--  
shut your ears to songs,  
mere mnemonic devices,  
and construct thousand word sentences,  
periodic ramps and parts  
that sweep in blocky shapes  
and bend over secrets.  
Language is far away,  
except verbs in distortability--  
you refuse the investment of any word,  
seek the grammar of foreigners,  
and speak and fight so that  
no one but the select  
will understand.  
For in mere youth,  
it's just language and nothing more  
that's trying to touch you--  
don't cop just a feel--  
you merely rubble conversations,  
you rubble mere conversations--  
and shut your ears to mere songs,  
which remember most things,  
and construct a few thousand word sentences,  
laughable ramps and parts,  
here and there,  
that sweep in awkward blocky shapes,  
and trip over secrets,  
if you have any.  
Language is merely far away,  
except verbs in simple distortability--  
you can just refuse the investment in words,  
and seek the poor grammar of strangers,  
and speak and fight and speak and fight so that  
no one but the ones you've selected  
will *understand*.  
For when you're merely young,  
you're just as old

as you'll ever be.

A MOTHER TALKS TO HER KIDS IN JERUSALEM  
2011

On Thursday mornings she'd be present,  
with her two children, dressed up  
by the rail of her window, fingers on it,  
children leaning over, dressed for school,  
and one morning, she answered a question,  
which was asked by her oldest boy,  
with:

In the days of the Second Temple,  
when Mattathias ruled the kingdom,  
there was a big argument between  
the kids who wanted to play all day  
who got scraped up--some of them died,  
and they often cried when it was over--  
and the kids who wanted to sit quietly,  
and maybe talk, or talk a lot, but hug  
very carefully somebody with them.  
And they argued a lot  
since no one wanted to give anything up  
until at last they started seeing things  
from the other side  
but this just made everything more confused  
especially as some kids were better at playing  
and some kids were better at sitting and talking,  
and some kids were pretty good at both, or not.  
One among the boys, a great intelligence, emerged  
at this time, and suggested to the kids  
that they join him; he brought them to  
a hill where the rocks came out like  
the birds in the morning, and red flowers  
dotted the sides, and told them to lay there,  
in the flowers, and he would come around  
and hand them a certain thing and they would  
fall asleep, and in their dreams, they could  
play and talk, and run and hug, and do both  
of everything. But when the kids woke up,  
they found they didn't want to play, or hug,  
or talk or sing, but stood there, peering  
at each other, in suspicion, and wondering  
if they weren't all a dream of a king somewhere,  
desirous of experiencing

again what it's like to be a kid.

SHEMA  
2011

You're talking about an inconceivable beauty,  
    he said to me.  
It would have to be,  
    since truth and knowledge come from it,  
    yet it's more beautiful than either of those...  
For you can't actually mean that it's pleasure?  
    Hush, I said...

Take these words, and learn them,  
    since I know you will think them over in your heart.  
You will fill in the empty spaces with these words,  
    you will dip them in something sweet,  
    and place them in the mouths of those you love,  
    the worried ones, the strong, and the innocent.  
They will run through you,  
    sitting on the outside,  
    walking the road,  
    when you spin out into sleep,  
    and when you rise up again, refreshed.  
You will see them playing about your hands,  
    and pressing your palms against your forehead,  
    you will feel them there too.  
You will take them and lay them out on your door,  
    I know you,  
    and when someone approaches,  
    and sadness and laughter  
    dance violently together  
    in the mist of your heart,  
    you will hear these words;  
    I know you;  
    folded up, they are yours.

## POEM FOR TIM

2011

At any point, there's a respite--go out back--  
and the stars are there for you.

You offer the moon a wry smile.  
Wry?

Here, in the dim-light,  
people don't get drugged-out:  
what

Every cow is a god,  
deigning to be carved;  
every hiccup is a jerk  
in an hallucination;  
you find no rest here,  
only constant assimilating things.

To get to this place,  
find the missing secret--  
it will make infinite whatever is in  
your mind--  
but you may never turn back  
from this glitch in the world.

TRANSLATION OF THE ALLEGORY OF THE PEEP  
2011

From the mouth speech leapt forth,  
     and imbuing the world was fire;  
 from the nostrils came exhalation,  
     and hissing was the wind;  
 so sight sprang up from the eyes,  
     and rose and shone the sun;  
 then hearing was not heard but swept  
     from ears and was the field.

As hair was sprouting on the feeling skin,  
     so earth pushed out the plants and trees;  
 so moon was mind, conceived as well  
     within the chambers of the heart;  
 as from the navel inhalation burst,  
     and shuddering was death;  
 so semen required genitals,  
     as waters demanded source.

The vines twisted from place to place,  
     and stars stumbling crossed the roads;  
 the roof buckled beneath the flames,  
     and collapsing was extinguished;  
 beneath the rubble safely covered,  
     a potato wrapped in leaves remained,  
 a potato and a little melted butter  
     hugged by fabric in a jar.

Picking off the skin, the little peep began to eat,  
     breaking the matter into pieces;  
 the peep, the cutest little peep, did peep,  
     the cutest peep in a world of peeps;  
 a peep ever peeping as a peep will do,  
     a dancing peep, or sitting;  
 for the mind was the moon as the sight was the sun,  
     but the peep was the peep,  
     the peep was alone.

The hanging lights ran from the body,  
     and the lights gave forth sensation;  
 on feet of wind the peep departed,

on breath of breath the peep went in;  
the peep graced past the body hairs,  
and dipped into the heart;  
until at last the peep was drawn,  
by wind into the navel.

The peep was as the sweetness in milk,  
huddled in place like a pea;  
the pea rested firm on a pea and a pea,  
with peas within peas for the ground;  
and covered over with the stillness of air,  
the peep preserved a spot;  
the peep's house was blessed then—  
the peep would not be caught.

## THE TRUE DHARMA EYE 2011

8

BEGINNINGS AND ROOTS IN INDIA

ties to its origins. Both orthodoxy and authority are at stake in such efforts, but the Zen school is concerned with more than establishing its institutional legitimacy. It does not wish to be an institution but to lay claim to a spiritual tradition. In the Zen Buddhist view, what is being passed on in Zen is the very essence of Buddhist truth itself. For such a transmission, one may object, names and genealogies are hardly necessary. Every truly enlightened Zen master would agree. Still, Zen does belong to history, and the five chronicles from the Sung period, for all their historical inadequacies, point to one of the essential traits of the way of Zen.

The five chronicles were composed over a relatively short period of two hundred years. The first of them, *Record of the Transmission of the Lamp*, is foundational. Completed by the monk Tao-yüan of the line of Hōgen, it was written in the Northern Sung dynasty in the year 1011. The chronicle narrates how the Dharma Eye was passed on through the centuries, from the Buddha Śākyamuni himself to his disciple Kāśyapa, and then to the Indian Zen patriarchs and Chinese Zen patriarchs. Thus the disciple Kāśyapa, who is last in a line of seven Buddhas, is the first of the Indian Zen patriarchs. According to tradition, he had married at a young age and consummated his marriage the first time he saw the Buddha he threw himself at his feet and was received into the community of disciples and ordained a monk. As a sign of special favor, the Buddha exchanged robes with Kāśyapa. In the Buddhist scriptures Kāśyapa is referred to as the "first of the strict observers of the rule"; he took a leading role in the order.

The second of the Chinese chronicles of the Sung period, *The T'ien-sheng Record of the Widely Extending Lamp*, is the work of an industrious lay disciple of the Rinzhai school. Without naming the previous Buddhas, this chronicle begins with Śākyamuni and narrates the memorable event to which the Zen school ascribes its origins. According to this account, once, during his sermon on Vulture Peak, the Exalted One held up a golden lotus blossom to all those assembled. Only Kāśyapa understood, and smiled. According to book 2 of the chronicle, which is probably the earliest version of this well known episode, "the World Honored One thereupon turned to the assembly and said, 'I possess the True Dharma Eye, the Marvelous Mind of Nirvāṇa. I entrust it to Mahākāśyapa.'"

The third chronicle, entitled *The Chien-chung Ching-kuo Supplementary Record of the Lamp*, was completed in 1101 (and published in 1103) by a learned monk of the Ummon school named Fo-kuo Wei-po. The title of book 1, "The True School," reveals the intent of the work: to preserve the unbroken transmission of genuine enlightenment. The line of transmission is traced from Śākyamuni through the twenty-eight Indian and six Chinese patriarchs until around

the end of the T'ang period (618-907).

What the third chronicle presents is *A Collection of Essential Episodes of the Lamp*. This chronicle is primarily on Zen during the Sung period and culminates with figures who completed his task in 1183. Here we find the final elaborated form of the schools. In book 1 of the chronicle

The World-Honored One, the Marvelous Mind of Nirvāṇa, the Gate that does not rest outside of the scriptures."

The last of the five chronicles, *The World-Honored One's Lamp*, was compiled by Lei-an and completed in 1204. It is an excellent lay Zen friends, episodes in the life of the Buddha, primarily on Zen during the Sung period, the so-called Five Chronicles of the Lamp"—Śākyamuni's experience

The foundational story of the Dharma Eye, the disciple Kāśyapa has been the subject of many since the time of its normative transmission. It owes its place in the life of Zen Buddhism to the version of the foundation story widely used kōan collections, the Wu-men salts the narrative with

Rather strange. What is the true Dharma Eye? How would the true Dharma Eye be passed on [at all]? What if Kāśyapa had not understood? What if he had not smiled? What if he had not been passed on, it is like the Dharma Eye at the village gate. But if he had not understood, could it then have been e

According to tradition, Śākyamuni is the second in the line of twenty-eight Buddhas, only after the death of the Buddha. He also becomes a kōan in the Mumon's Legend. He gave to Kāśyapa with the transmission. Legend has it that Kāśyapa was

MESSIAH  
2011

MORRISSEY  
MORRISSEY  
MORRISSEY  
MORRISSEY  
MOREISSEY  
MOREISSEY  
MOREISSEY  
MOREISHEY  
MOREISSHEY  
MOREISHEY  
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MORE ISHE  
MORE ISHE  
MORE ISHE  
MORE IS HE  
MORE IS HE  
MORE IS HE  
MORE IS HE

THE POWER OF THE BROTHERHOOD!  
GIVE THE KNOWLEDGE/READING!

**MORE IS HE**  
MORE IS HE MORE  
IS HE MORE IS HE  
MORE IS HE MORE  
IS HE MORE IS HE  
MORE IS HE MORE  
  
MORE IS HE!  
THE **MOSCHIACH!**

# WHAT YOU DON'T KNOW

Beginning in 1986 the USA government began to investigate the energy power potential of many in the music industry. Imperial scientist **Glen Berry** call it cultic harmonic modulation and many at the time were comparing it to **Dr. mesmer's** work well respected many years before.

## WHAT THEY FOUND DISTURBED THEM

Little did they know, but that what they were investigating the real and the **MOSHIACH** has appeared on earth (**Messiah**). Called by many names in different people, The Savior, the Lord, **Jesus. TECHNOLOGY** was developed. To harness What appeared to be overwhelming strength of animal modulation; like how you can think of one thing (earth sphere), and then another thing better (cosmic spheres). **One who whose energy potential is always n+1 to ∞ in himself.**

CONCLUSION:  
LEARN MORE TO  
UNDERSTAND AND  
BELIEVE IN HIS POWER

*(discovered by US accidentally)*  
**PROOF/DISCOVERY:** **Isaiah 35:5-6**  
Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped (**SONG**). Then will the lame leap like a deer (**MAM**), and the mute tongue shout for joy. Water will gush forth in the wilderness and streams in the deserts and plains of this country and the world.



The Jewish peoples have know for many years that the name of God/Jesus is the key to knowledge/power/study. He who posseseth the **name** posseseth the sign. **THE LORD** (Adonai) has over 50 names, but none AS **MIGHTY** as the new temporal incarnation (the 4th revelation today) **MORE IS HE, HE IS ALWAYS MORE. HE IS HERE AND BELIEVE NOW!**

NOW I KNOW  
HOW JOAN OF ARC FELT  
- MOSHIACH



## VERIFICATION

2011

*in defense of philosophers*

I.

this is you

with one voice it speaks  
in every conversation

two meet to speculate

what is it?  
have you found it?  
I think it's like...in different modalities  
the new, the lost, the mystery, the discovery  
we discuss it togetherbehind every word is it  
every intercourse about it  
unknowingly  
in two equal states,  
haze and clarity

II.

this is you

not meaning,  
but the off-chance that meaning  
life, the thingdoes it frighten you to see?  
for thoughts to arise?  
for to finger, to smell?  
without realization,  
to interrogate the face of another  
through the eyes?

could this be the end, now?  
 storied, historied, proven, forewarned  
 no one knows when the time of enlightenment  
 you did not pray  
 it came nonetheless

it was given, it has always been  
 (or can you disagree?)  
 that it is at all  
 is terrifying

III.

you cannot forget it

your thin body appears in a valley  
 mountains are the two bodies before you  
 your body is not you

*"the meaning of a sentence  
 is the method of its verification"*

like a ribbon of tape  
 what we say is running through it

you are the verification

the mechanism and the machine  
 are nothing alike

look outside with alien eyes

the glory of doubt  
 the off-chance of work

you are that

you are the verification

## ANGELS (POEM)

2011

*Prologue:*

Cooling unwashed hair,  
the darkened eyebrows,  
scars on her cheeks,  
a face of skin,  
always shifting--  
grave, alive--  
she knows three dozen people.

Little houses--apartments--  
the husband waits on her--  
life was simpler when it was arranged,  
it was a conspiracy for the good,  
by the smarter for the better hearted,  
against the law.

An angel comes--  
angels always come--  
in groves--in stony alcoves--  
terraces--  
they materialize out of the cloud  
that bursts like a squinting eye--  
with a train--without baggage--  
from a crowd--entering--exiting--  
angels come, wordlessly,  
or rather, without thinking--  
no thoughts, no thinking,  
no motion, but accepting--

“It will perhaps be said, that  
the soul thinks even in the soundest sleep,  
but the memory retains it not”--  
like in the moment of sleep,  
when fantasies and profusions  
are no longer effort, but come  
in a moving form already--  
art--  
and in that space, angels,  
they’re understood  
without effort.

Daphne and Apollo, perhaps,  
 when she was desperate  
 for her life,  
 always a condition unanticipated,  
 before the names that others have used  
 suddenly align with experience--  
 even in the most arcane books  
 the soul lifts itself out--  
 a rose spreading its wings like a fower--  
 this women--her hair  
 made of bending, golden stuff--  
 not at all aged--  
 with a heart-breaking face--  
 smiles artlessly, painfully,  
 hanging on the hand  
 of her expressions--  
 there--  
 against the tree--  
 alone with the angel, insubstantial,  
 a rope of light,  
 but to her--  
 overpowering, embraceable--  
 this angel takes her face--  
 in his hand--  
 and presses in her cheeks--  
 this angel envelops her lips,  
 and holding her up,  
 this angel wraps her arms  
 around him,  
 fixes her hands to his shoulders,  
 illuminates the fat of her body  
 and draws from her her skin--  
 holding her--  
 clothing himself in it--  
 this angel loves her  
 unexpectedly against the tree--  
 the pollen falls on their folding skin.

Then the eternal music peaces,  
 and hears softly--  
 the angel disappears--  
 into the leaves, mass,  
 a restaurant, waiting, queued--  
 the angel departs,  
 unresisting, along a line--  
 she returns

fresh, blessed, revolting,  
 and embraces her children,  
 precious,  
 and lets her husband take her,  
 having given her everything  
 to the angel  
 who saved her.

*Next:*

This woman wakes up,  
 bloated, but happy,  
 in the first hour of consciousness,  
 as if she were in the backseat--  
 car, rain, night--  
 unable to attend to anything--  
 the house smells like tea tree oil.

She is submerged--  
 is she anything different?--  
 and watches a flock of birds  
 direct themselves from far away,  
 in a cloud that passes before her--  
 the birds transforming into skyscrapers,  
 antennae like beaks,  
 winged foundations  
 glitter like windows--  
 they alter direction, too,  
 yearning to stretch ahead,  
 and leaving,  
 only to be replaced by another,  
 an always shifting skyline.

The essence of rebellion  
 is the hunger for freedom even  
 from loved ones;  
 nobody knows what rebellion is,  
 what isn't.

In the city she sees her angel--  
 she heard about him from a friend--  
 nobody else was listening--  
 with a crowd of high school students  
 in the United States,  
 trying to get into a bar--  
 this angel talks to the bouncer,

and like a woman telling stories on a rooftop,  
 without giving away herself--  
 or else, giving all of herself away--  
 you wouldn't have known--  
 the angel tells the single joke,  
 the joke that sparkles like a mystery,  
 unverified,  
 beyond the crescent of the attainable,  
 drawing the unhappy out of the fabric they're wrapped in  
 with a single cut of a fine blade--  
 and all days spent in loving conversation  
 were just dull attempts at hitting on it  
 by reason, by chance.

Up the stairs onto the balcony,  
 the woman throws  
 a life-renewing,  
 demonic laugh;  
 the angel gets the kids in,  
 climbs onto the bed,  
 and carries the blankets with him,  
 covering her with a coat of sleep,  
 like the real gentleman who gives her what she is to be,  
 even though she's all sorts of things,  
 or else, other things for other people.

There is nothing done in itself,  
       but for a woman,  
       for someone to be--  
       always an exception,  
       but rulelessly--  
 and knowing it, nevertheless,  
       a man is cut in half--  
 the angel saves his life.

Across the street,  
 getting coffee--  
 wake her up, wake her up--  
 he should be grateful;  
 the angel joins her to the intellect of God,  
 and in the light of those emanations,  
 carried like a notebook  
 in the folds of her coat,  
 he has another chance--  
 thought he lost it  
 when he heard her laugh--

to be good at another's life,  
 just so to come back to his own,  
 forever different, worse, or else wiser--

There is certain movement  
 in the dance of knowledge  
 and experience.

With the ease that poets dream of,  
 she intellects doubtlessly  
 the essence of her characters--  
 and like a poet encompassing  
 all his history and his people's  
 in a single verse,  
 she makes pointers,  
 monuments--  
 only the chapter headings survive--  
 the skyscraper birds,  
 the convincing guy,  
 the woman on the roof,  
 the one joke,  
 the grateful man,  
 the strong person,  
 the memorization, like stars--  
 the last when she came to self-consciousness,  
 and running again and again through her list  
 of things to remember,  
 she sees them laid out, standing in for wholes,  
 peeking out like the stars,  
 who, when night is silent,  
 see the secret loves of men,  
 and mark down their names,  
 so that when they wake up,  
 at the end of the revolution of their spheres,  
 they may relive all the nights  
 they have experienced,  
 or else,  
 imagined.

*Next:*

Like a few uncertain poets,  
 they knew they only had to believe in poetry  
 itself to live, but it was a matter of habit,  
 of how they were raised--why they liked books,  
 being dark magicians, growing huge enough

to eat all the brains of their school-mates--  
that they did *that* in particular; but *that's* enough,  
to live.

To write poetry, however, you had to really believe;  
and the more you read, the harder it is to believe anything--  
paradoxically, since everyone's talking about the same thing--  
in truth, sometimes moments of disorientation would occur,  
when the weirdness of everything would manifest itself,  
but most often the weirdness was caged up  
by a thorough-going, yet reasonable  
distrust of the workings of human mind--  
sometimes they wanted to study it,  
how half the world takes pleasure in pleasure,  
seeking it, indeed, loving it,  
and how the other half despises itself  
for taking pleasure in something so obvious,  
especially since, where do you draw the line?  
especially since, one's always teetering on the edge  
of pleasure now, pleasure later,  
or the pleasure of getting to the bottom of the mystery  
of the weirdness of everything being here  
(in general, if you know what I mean)  
and the displeasure at the enormity of the task  
and the discouraging fact that, whereas for many years  
poets had assumed they were discovering,  
they were really creating,  
at the same time that their counterparts, the scientists,  
made it quite clear that no one should trust anything  
in their own heads,  
since experience can't tell you  
anything about how it works,  
or what it *is*,  
which, you must admit,  
was a fair point--  
although poets had probably always known it,  
but at least had a bit of doubt on the matter--  
hence the value of the soul,  
which everyone admitted  
nobody knew anything about,  
but which was regarded as *holy*, that is,  
whatever it was, it wasn't dismissed--  
these days one generally chooses a life of pleasure,  
or of research, and it's difficult to reconcile the two,  
if you are the sort of person who wants everything  
to cohere inside--  
either you cozy up in your own mind,

comfortably dismissing the prospect of discovery--  
we would have found it by now!--  
or else spend most of your time trying to escape it--  
the mind, or minds in general;  
so you can see it was much easier  
back when when experience could be *trusted*--  
in the same way, these runaway poets  
knew that poetry was all their own value,  
and knew at the same time that knowing  
that fact made it impossible to write poetry,  
since poetry has to believe in itself,  
not the poets--  
and so they would rip themselves in two  
just to sit down and write,  
forget half their lives just to expect a line,  
since everything they felt had been thought around,  
and what was worth thinking was unclear--  
by the way,  
this is not one of those stories,  
in which what people feel  
turns out to be right all along--  
all of it's very stupid--  
and yet, how many nights,  
the sounds of an ancient city outside,  
the dawn breaking against the holy roofs,  
women taking wishes from the Wailing Wall,  
wishing not for something  
but that something,  
that the beautiful man  
in his late eighties  
from elsewhere  
but having seen the blocks of his life  
rearranged into the rainbows of Paul Klee  
and the gutted, overhanging terraces  
of the city of Tel Aviv,  
where on the beach  
this man would sometimes walk,  
wrapped up in his grey robes,  
his beard like glossy wire  
against the sweat of his face,  
his book in his pocket,  
eating hardboiled eggs,  
one after another,  
forgetting to read,  
but his face unchecked,  
breaking into the mystery

that rises and leaves  
from the eyes of other people,  
like the stained glass windows  
of a man like Chagall,  
but hiding his own face  
with a fold  
when an overdressed poet  
(for the weather)  
tried to take a picture of him,  
twice,  
and left him penetrating into the horizon  
imagining he could see  
just the tips of Barcelona,  
where his daughter,  
born in the United States,  
very tall and flat,  
with a face that hung  
on his own expressions,  
was married to a Spaniard,  
much more rugged than she,  
and was kissing him  
in their apartment  
by the beach  
that, with a smile  
as if which concealed a secret,  
she boasted about  
kindly  
to her students,  
teaching graduate classes  
in Comparative Literature,  
where an academic  
could believe in the work  
even as they believed more  
in the life that runs through it--  
poetry teaches the wrong lesson,  
but to the right people--  
every woman wanted to hold his hand,  
large and serious  
and sit atop his belly  
while he allowed it  
and watch him from behind the screen  
that separated them  
from the men who were dancing  
to the prayers beyond it,  
and later loving them,  
as they argued about the best way,

since all of it  
was an excuse for a loving argument,  
like all the best things,  
all sorts of centering distractions,  
and grounds for sharing memories,  
and reliving the past,  
but not merely in images,  
but with a commentary of thought,  
since for pleasure to be perfect  
all faculties of the soul  
but alight with interest,  
and the body must align  
with the imagination,  
the imagination  
with reason,  
and the very hanging lights  
on the screen of the brain  
must dance in a global pattern--  
it all sounds very stupid--  
and yet, the poets dreamed  
of women dreaming about men  
or else other men,  
and were enraptured by the doubt,  
whether images  
conquered the fear of abstraction,  
which itself is an abyssal unknown,  
or whether the face of the unknown,  
abstraction, contained the comforting eyes  
of something containable,  
that real life would always break  
into the pieces of disappointment--  
where are our disappointments manufactured?--  
and whether they would have been happier  
if they had inherited a market stall  
from the time of Jesus  
standing under the same stone overpass  
beside the same stone ramparts  
carrying the same lovely trinkets,  
ushering people in,  
from where they sit  
at the threshold,  
smoking cigarettes,  
watching people's faces--  
the real ones--  
or whether happiness was the thing  
at all--

we've covered that already.  
 Like all real poets, they came to the Holy Land  
 to be disappointed.  
 Like all real men, they wanted to be angels,  
 for the bus crash,  
 in which they would keep their hands outstretched,  
 the whole time,  
 through the windshield,  
 through the air,  
 to the ground,  
 hands scraping against the pavement--  
 they would run through it again and again  
 in their minds,  
 they would have the presence to keep their hands  
 always outstretched,  
 a kind of intuition,  
 a sacrifice,  
 so that, their hands mangled,  
 they would be preserved,  
 as they crashed into the car of the woman,  
 the woman seen on the roof,  
 on the beach,  
 in the bathroom,  
 in the party of the mind's eye,  
 whom they could lean against  
 and heal,  
 even as they knew two things:  
 that they were not angels,  
 that they couldn't love just anybody.

*Last:*

That skinny girl  
 her bodied envied by her sisters  
 lived through the crash  
 to go out into the woods  
 where she called herself  
 Indian Girl  
 carrying along behind her  
 a little cart with pine cones--  
 she knew how to live.

Once she knew how to live  
 and she had the means,  
 she refused to sacrifice  
 any decision

to the law.

When the means were around,  
no sense in setting limits,  
but to act rightly,  
instead,  
never sacrifice yourself  
when you have the means.

Always right and wrong, the girl,  
and like all quiet revolutionaries--  
who knows what deep down she desires?--  
principle was never unknown to practice.

and like all autodidacts,  
she preserved herself to be surprised,  
and when she went back to school,  
she called her son on the phone,  
the weirdness encountered,  
to ask about the sacrifice, in fact--  
*"In the final calculation, every innovator works for inertia,  
every revolution is produced for a canon."*--  
that every life is always orgainzing itself  
between now and later,  
and what is a joy  
can just as a friend  
become a stranger--  
can you do both of everything?--

Her son, having vowed  
never to masturbate  
after the day of his Bar Mitzvah--  
I think he did it that night--  
had known a porn star,  
with an interesting story:  
that she was a psych major  
at UVA, perhaps,  
very serious student,  
who for a little cash,  
started dancing on tables--  
his was not unknown--  
but one day she fell off the table  
onto the floor--  
she hit her head--  
never went to the hospital--  
slept it off--

but a few weeks later,  
 she dropped out of school,  
     got implants,  
     moved to Miami,  
     took a name,  
     went into porn--  
 she had a monumental face,  
     not at all delicate,  
     nor was her body,  
     exactly shaped,  
     but she let herself  
     get shaped--  
 every one wants someone to be there,  
     just to be reached out and grabbed,  
     that is, held,  
     whether in the morning sweaty  
     warmth of a bed in pajamas,  
     when the window is open,  
     and coolness keeps you together,  
     or else, in a frantic state,  
     deadly afraid  
     of now or later--  
 what is the value of a human life?--  
     she was good at being matter,  
     she was good at form,  
 just like a middle school girl, who,  
     worried for herself,  
     suggests on a worksheet  
     that she might be a secretary  
     since the typing software told her:  
     good at typing.  
     Who made up the story?  
     Was it her?  
     Or was it calculated to arouse  
     those certain ones aroused  
     by the backstories on porn sites,  
     or do those who write these stories  
     never calculate,  
     but intuit the basis for arousal?  
 Would it be the same if she hadn't fallen,  
 if no one mentioned the knock on the head?

There is nothing different,  
 one begins to believe,  
 nothing that can't be changed  
 by a knock on the head,

a knock against a tree,  
by an angel,  
or a man perpetrating  
the life of an angel--  
they are all around us,  
unmanifest,  
although the desire for them--  
even unknown, even in sleep,  
lessens at times.

We wait unknowingly,  
even as we know we wait:  
we can't see what we need to see;  
if we did, we'd never see it.

We wait for angels to come  
and draw the expressions  
hanging by our face,  
and show us out  
of this running  
to fear.

INTELLECTUAL LOVE OF GOD  
The Nature of Truth in Maimonides  
2011

The aim of this essay is by no means to lay to rest any particular point of contention in Maimonides's thought; if anything, it should raise more questions than it answers. In the end, I hope at least to suggest that Maimonides very carefully conflates two central themes in the *Guide*, the theme of prophecy and the theme of the intellectual love of God. In doing so, he challenges one to rethink the very definition of intellection: for his accounts of prophecy and of intellectual apprehension to be coherent, intellection can not merely be the demonstration of certain truths by means of concepts, for instance, but some kind of experience not reducible to rational deduction or imaginative vision as such. In such an experience, the theology of God merges with the worship of God to the point where they become indistinguishable. It is to be hoped that by drawing out certain connections and contradictions in Maimonides's various statements on prophecy, intellection, and worship, the initially mysterious experiences that Maimonides claims are the ends of man can be characterized.

Toward the very beginning of the *Guide*, Maimonides, nominally discoursing on the difficulty of interpreting the prophets, writes:

You should not think that these great *secrets* are fully and completely known to anyone among us. They are not. But sometimes truth flashes out to us so that we think that it is day, and then matter and habit in their various forms conceal it so that we find ourselves again in a very dark night over whom lightning flashes time and again. Among us there is one for whom the lightning flashes time and time again, so that he is always, as it were, in unceasing light. Thus night appears to him as day. That is the degree of the great one among the prophets...Among [the prophets] there is one to whom the lightning flashes only once in the whole of his night...There are others between whose lightning flashes there are greater or shorter intervals. Thereafter comes he who does not attain a degree in which his darkness is illumined by any lightning flash" (*Guide* 7).

and sees the truth only by reflection. And lastly, Maimonides describes those who are always groping in the dark. In this way, a spectrum is defined, with the greatest of prophets at the top, and the great mass of people at the bottom. Prophets, then, are not distinguished from the masses in kind, but only by degree; the same phenomenon, the truth flashing out, is the origin of all understanding, "prophetic" or otherwise. Nor does Maimonides exclude himself or his readers from this phenomenon: "sometimes truth flashes out *to us*." Truth, to take Maimonides's metaphor seriously, is not merely the correspondence between some idea and an aspect of reality; it is something given to those who are prepared for it. Truth, one might say, is not just a quality that statements have (that is, truth or falsity), but an experience. Just as in the world we apprehend objects by the light of the sun, for instance, in the mind we apprehend truth by means of another kind of light, when it shines on us. Truth, to keep to the metaphor, is something prepared for, but not obtained; it is given to us, not taken by us.

In a work by the same period, *Hayy Ibn Yaqzan*, by Ibn Tufayl, the author quotes Avicenna on the experience of religious ecstasy:

Then, when his training and willpower reach a certain point, glimmerings of the light of Truth will flicker before him, thrilling him like lightning, flashing and going out. If he is diligent in his ascetic practice, these spells grow more and more frequent, until they come unasked, entrancing him without the use of exercises (Ibn Tufayl 96).

The similarity to the passage from the *Guide* is unmistakable. Truth is compared to a light that flashes out from time to time like lightning; truth *is* that, but the light of truth shines differently on different people. Avicenna's mystic, who dwells in the light of truth at all times, is analogous to Maimonides's prophet whose night appears to him as day. Ibn Tufayl, however, tells us that

such states as described by Avicenna "are reached not by theorizing, syllogistic deductions, postulating premises and drawing inferences, but solely by intuition" (97). Of course, nothing could be farther from the notion of preparation that Maimonides holds; nevertheless, although the ways by which one prepares for the light of truth vary completely, the experiences which are to be attained are the same. Insofar as Maimonides was aware of Avicenna and the tradition he represents, one can see in the Guide not an attempt to dismiss the "mystic" experience of the truth, but to harmonize such experiences with rationality. Indeed, as we shall see, whereas for Avicenna the preparation for such experiences is asceticism, for Maimonides, it is speculative thought that paves the way for transcendence.

But the metaphor "speculative thought...paves the way for transcendence" is ultimately misleading, since that is precisely the matter to be investigated. According to Maimonides, that which leads to transcendence is specifically what he terms "intellectual apprehension" (whose nature, at this point, is undetermined), which is "the divine intellect conjoined with man" (Guide 23). Maimonides's theory of the intellect is based on the theory of emanations whose basic tenant is that "sometimes [a thing's] perfection is within such limits that a residue of perfection is left over from it for something else" (275). God is one such thing and "the overflow coming from Him, may He be exalted, for the bringing into being of separate intellects overflows likewise from these intellects, so that one of them brings another one into being and this continues up to the Active Intellect. With the latter, the bringing into being of separate intellects comes to an end" (275). If the process of the bringing into being of separate intellects comes to an end with the Active Intellect, and we consider ourselves to engage in intellectual apprehension, we as human beings then must participate in the Active Intellect when we apprehend. Our intellection

*is* the Active Intellect insofar as we are prepared to receive its overflow by the disposition of our matter.

That is not to say, however, that the Active Intellect *thinks* in the way that we think. The Active Intellect undergoes no change from some potential state to an actual state, as would be required in the movement of thought. That we apprehend differently at different times, while participating in the Active Intellect, is due to our changeable materiality, not to due shifts within the Active Intellect, "for there is no relation between bodies and that which is not body and no resemblance in any respect either at the time of their acting or at the time of their abstention from acting...Hence if there is an obstacle to [some] action, this results from a material disposition and not from the Intellect itself" (299-300). Thus the flashes of the light of truth that Maimonides describes in the beginning of the Guide are not a product of the nature of truth itself, but rather a result of one's level of preparation to receive the truth. That illumination happens now and then, as opposed to always, is not due to some change in the Intellect itself, which is changeless, but due to the way that changeless, constant emanations are variably manifested in time due to the disposition of the body. Truth is unified, eternal, and changeless, and it takes the form of thought insofar as we engage with the Active Intellect. One might even go so far as to say that it becomes conceptualized insofar as the intellectual emanation is channeled through our material limitations.

As such, intellection does not appear reducible to rational thought alone. Maimonides tells us that the learned man "uses the veritable methods, namely, demonstration in cases where demonstration is possible or strong arguments where this is possible. In this way he represents to himself these matters, which had appeared to him as imaginings and parables, in their truth and

understands their essence" (72). Maimonides's focus on demonstration to oneself could be read as a reasonable injunction to come to understand a matter at hand in one's own terms, and not merely take a fact as true on the authority of another, a gut feeling, or a whim. But if one keeps the very nature of intellection in mind, this passage instead suggests that what appears to man via the Active Intellect is the truth itself, which must then be represented in the mind order to be comprehended, first through images, perhaps, and in the end, by concepts. Conceptualization, in this reading, even rationality, are taken as secondary to the truth which is given in some way by the Active Intellect. For if the Active Intellect is changeless, eternal, and simple, there is no reason to think it would be composed of concepts which we might individually obtain by participating in the Active Intellect; rather, conceptual individuation is an operation performed on the truth which is unitary. And insofar as one prepares to receive the truth through speculative preparation, one is able to conceptualize the given truth rightly.

Maimonides could be read, then, as suggesting that proper preparation is necessary in two ways: first of all, to open one up to conjoining with the Active Intellect; and second, to properly conceptualize the truth once it has been given. It is even possible that these two are one and the same, depending on what one understands by the faculty of reason. If the faculty of reason is an aspect of man's material existence, then thought as such is not participation in the Active Intellect; when the self is purified, the Active Intellect, however, can deliver truth to the faculty of reason to be properly conceptualized. If, however, the faculty of reason participates directly in the Active Intellect, that is, if thought *is* intellection, then all thoughts are different aspects of the Active Intellect, and the goal of study is to be able to properly conceptualize that which the Active Intellect is always emanating. If the latter is the case, the language of Maimonides uses,

for example "at the outset, the intellect is incapable of receiving [the secrets]; only flashes of them are made to appear so that the perfect man should know them" (71), is exoteric; the inner meaning must be that the intellect is always receiving the secrets, but study is required so that the secrets can be conceptualized without contradiction or confusion. In either case, the mechanics of one's receptivity to the Active Intellect are the same; in addition, in both cases, an appeal to some source outside of reason itself is necessary for being in the truth.

Now, we turn to the exposition of the nature of prophecy in order to see in what relation prophecy stands in regard to intellection. In the first part of the Guide, Maimonides offers three interpretations of the giving of the Law:

You may believe that the great station attained by [Moses] was indubitably, in its entirety, *a vision of prophecy* and that he solely desired intellectual apprehensions--everything, namely, that which he had demanded, that which was denied to him, and that which he apprehended, being intellectual and admitting of no recourse to the senses, as we had interpreted in the first place (51).

Or, he goes on, one can believe that intellectual appreciation was mediated by some created phenomena, that is, Moses saw or heard something as well. What is important to believe, however, is that Moses's vision of prophecy was an intellectual apprehension, a vision of prophecy to be understood in the sense of an experience of the rational faculty, as opposed to or in addition to the sensory faculties. The truth as given to Moses was not something discovered by observation or deduction, but something revealed all at once.

The truth, of course, comes from the Active Intellect, which is mediated through the human faculties:

Know that the true reality and quiddity of prophecy consist in its being an overflow overflowing from God, may He be cherished and honored, through the intermediation of the Active Intellect, toward the rational faculty in the first place

and thereafter toward the imaginative faculty. This is the highest degree of man and the ultimate term of perfection that can exist for his species; and this state is the ultimate term of perfection for the imaginative faculty (369).

What should be noted first of all is that the definition of prophecy is nearly indistinguishable from that of intellectual apprehension broadly speaking; both are defined as an overflow from the Active Intellect to the rational faculty, or further. In prophecy as opposed to speculative thought, specifically, the imaginative faculty is activated. "Perfection in the speculative sciences and...improvement of moral habits" (369) are not sufficient for prophecy; for prophecy to be more than speculative thought, an overflow must occur from the rational faculty to the imaginative faculty, which creates an experience<sup>114</sup>. Now, if the prophet is indeed the "highest degree of man," then the ultimate purpose of life is not merely to "rationalize" God, but to experience him, contemplate him, in some supra-rational way. Indeed, it best not to separate cleanly prophecy and speculative thought; since insofar as the overflow is a continuous phenomenon creating experiences to the degree to which the faculties are receptive to it, there is only a difference of degree and not of kind between them. The only difference is that in men of speculation, or philosophers, the overflow is directed mainly into the rational faculty; but in prophets the overflow extends clearly to the imaginative.

What is curious, however, is that Maimonides clearly wishes to distinguish prophecy from speculative thought more assertively, although to separate them would be contradictory. For example, Maimonides writes:

Now there is no doubt that whenever--in an individual of this description--his imaginative faculty, which is as perfect as possible, acts and receives from the

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<sup>114</sup> That said, it is interesting that Maimonides does point out that one need not believe that Moses experienced sensory phenomena as well.

intellect an overflow corresponding to his speculative perfection, this individual will only apprehend divine and most extraordinary matters, will see only God and His angels, and will only be aware and achieve knowledge of matters that constitute true opinions and general directives for the well-being of men in their relations with one another (372).

Here he is categorical. When an individual is prepared, he will receive the divine overflow, which is, moreover, not only apprehension (in the normal sense) of some idea, but an actual, exclusive awareness of being in the truth. To take him at his direct words, one achieves knowledge of matters that "constitute true opinions," but are not those true opinions themselves. The knowledge which one receives is deeper than that, but is conceptualized to be knowledge of specific things.

But, just a few pages before, Maimonides had discussed three opinions on prophecy. The first is the pagan belief that God chooses whoever pleases Him to prophesy, no matter their preparation; the second is precisely the belief already quoted, namely:

...prophecy is a certain perfection in the nature of man. This perfection is not achieved in any individual from among men except after training that makes that which exists in the potentiality of the species pass into actuality, provided an obstacle due to temperament or to some external cause does not hinder this...When, in the case of a superior individual who is perfect with respect to his rational and moral qualities, his imaginative faculty is in its most perfect state and when he has been prepared in the way that you will hear, he will necessarily become a prophet inasmuch as this is a perfection that belongs to us by nature (360-1).

This opinion, however, is ascribed to the philosophers. Maimonides here aligns himself with the third opinion, of the Law of Moses, that "it may happen that one who is fit for prophecy and prepared for it should not become a prophet, namely, on account of the divine will" (360-1). This is an explicit contradiction.

The only way it can be understood is to investigate what Maimonides means by divine

will. For indeed, if God is eternal and unchanging, what can the meaning of His will be?

Maimonides had explained earlier:

...the true reality and the quiddity of the will means: to will and not to will. If the will in question belongs to a material being, so that some external end is sought thereby, then the will is subject to change because of impediments and supervening accidents. But as for a being separate from matter, its will, which does not exist in any respect for the sake of some other thing, is not subject to change. The fact that it may wish one thing now and another thing tomorrow does not constitute a change in its essence and does not call for another cause; just as the fact that it acts at one time and does not act at another does not constitute a change (301).

That is, the confusion over God's will comes about due to the incommensurability between the material and the immaterial, that which is in time and that which is outside of time. God's will manifests itself in one way today and in another way tomorrow, not because His will has changed, but because the world has changed and is differently receptive to His emanations. If this is the case, then the two cases, the opinion of the philosophers and the opinion of the Jews, reduce to one, a fact that Maimonides was careful to hide<sup>115</sup>; God's will is active in the world insofar as the world is prepared to receive it, and insofar as a man has prepared himself to receive prophecy in the proper way, he will receive it, since he has made his matter conducive for God's will to act in the world. And normally, this does not occur because "the apprehension of His true reality is impossible for us because of the dark matter that encompasses us and not Him, may He be exalted" (437).

Indeed, this conception of prophecy as the *direct* result of a kind of preparation is greatly supported by Maimonides's conception of divine providence. He writes:

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<sup>115</sup> Perhaps because it challenges the very notion of God's power, if His will is mediated by the receptivity of the human intellect.

According to me, as I consider the matter, divine providence is consequent upon the divine overflow; and the species with which this intellectual overflow is united, so that it became endowed with intellect and so that everything that is disclosed to a being endowed with the intellect was disclosed to it, is the one accompanied by divine providence (472).

Here, divine providence is something that inheres in those who have intellectual apprehension; to the extent that one has the divine overflow, one is protected by divine providence. For what other connection does man have with God, but through the intellect? And, as was suggested above, it is only through the intellect that what is eternally true in God--God's will--can become manifest in time<sup>116</sup>.

Questions of divine providence aside, we can conclude, then, that God manifests His will in the world via the intellect, which translates His timeless will into time; insofar as this is true, it suggests that God's will is mediated in the world by human capacity, so that the positions of the philosophers and of the Law are identical, insofar as God's will is evident in the mechanics of intellectual apprehension. If one's faculties are developed, then one necessarily receives intellectual apprehension, that is, in the best case, prophecy.

The reception of God's overflow, then, is mediated by man's material ability to receive

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<sup>116</sup> Indeed, whether divine providence is a miraculous protection or itself an intellectual phenomenon is in question: in Maimonides's exposition of the story of Job, he writes that Elihu expresses the truth "parabolically" by speaking of an "intercession of an angel" for Job (495). The meaning of the intercession is a conjoining with the Active Intellect. A few pages earlier, Maimonides had explained that Job, who before had despaired of any justice in the world, had finally come to some speculative knowledge, which before he had lacked (although he was not wanting in moral rectitude): "...when [Job] knew God with a certain knowledge, he admitted that true happiness, which is the knowledge of the deity, is guaranteed to all who know Him and that a human being cannot be troubled in it by any of all the misfortunes in question" (492-3). This suggests that divine providence is not a kind of bodily protection, but an intellectual protection, a certainty that no worldly misfortunes can touch one (mentally) who cares about nothing but God. If death comes, then the intellect has merely moved closer to Him.

that overflow. Further, men of speculation and prophets both participate in this overflow, but to different extents. One might imagine, then, that speculation and prophecy amount to the same thing, but in different degrees; and indeed, this is the interpretation that the majority of the text supports. However, a contradiction arises in one passage in which Maimonides considers various opinions about world's eternity or its being created in time. He tells us that he aims only to show the flaws in the various arguments for eternity: "For at present we do not wish to establish as true that the world is created in time. But what we wish to establish is the possibility of its being created in time" (298). Essentially, this is the case because he does not believe there is any possible evidence available to decide the question; there is no way of reasoning from the world's existing now to its origin. And yet, he writes:

Now inasmuch as this is true in my opinion and inasmuch as this question--I mean to say that of the eternity of the world or its creation in time--becomes an open question, it should in my opinion be accepted without proof because of prophecy, which explains things to which it is not in the power of speculation to accede (294).

Now, considering Maimonides expressed aim of reconciling philosophy with revelation by showing that the secrets of the Law are consonant with deduction in the philosophical tradition, this is quite a departure. It does however shed some light on the nature of intellectual apprehension and its relation to concepts; intellectual apprehension cannot merely be the moment of finality that one feels at the end of a deduction, since the creation of the world cannot be deduced. Indeed, there cannot then be an exact correlation between what is given in intellectual apprehension and what is reasoned out; the two must be different because the moment of truth is beyond rationality, indeed, beyond the power of speculation, taken in that sense. Speculative powers must be developed so as to understand in concepts the import of the truth, which is

beyond speculation's powers to ascertain; but the speculative powers are themselves insufficient to bring about an experience of the *entire* truth, since men of speculation open themselves up to the Active Intellect only insofar as they are open to, for example, deductive proofs. Reason alone therefore cannot be identical to intellection, since there are truths available to intellection that reason by itself cannot grasp<sup>117</sup>.

Now, to experience the truth, as opposed to reasoning about it, is precisely the aim of worship, and to develop these ideas we turn to the end of the third part of the Guide, where Maimonides writes:

This chapter that we bring now does not include additional matter over and above what is comprise in the other chapters of this Treatise. It is only a kind of conclusion, at the same time explaining the worship as practiced by one who has apprehended the true realities peculiar only to Him after he as obtained an apprehension of what He is; and it also guides him towards achieving this worship, which is the end of man, and makes known to him how providence watches over him in this habitation until he is brought over to the *bundle of life* (618).

We are now equipped to read between the lines. This chapter brings no additional matter to understanding precisely because what has been hinted to all along is that philosophy itself is undergirded by an aspect of worshipful experience not identical to rationality. Such worship is not merely a practice, but the way of life of one "whose has apprehended the true realities," and indeed is not an aspect separate from such apprehension, but the apprehension itself. This

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<sup>117</sup> It is worth noting that it is unclear if Maimonides accepts the creation of the world in time because of his reading of the prophets or because of an intellectual apprehension of his own. In addition, considering that he had before implied that Moses had no need of the imaginative faculty on Sinai, one is tempted to disregard his definition of a prophet as one who necessarily has sensory visions, and redefine it as someone who apprehends truths beyond what is available to reason alone. Maimonides himself would be included in this category, but no doubt humility forbade him from declaring himself a prophet.

conclusion is all the more certain by the admission that this chapter on worship also explains how "providence watches over" man, which we have already learned, is directly consequent on one's ability to receive the divine overflow, and could not be the result of a mere worshipful action, but a continuous intellectual apprehension.

Indeed, the difference between rationality as such and intellectual apprehension is implied as Maimonides continues: "the subject of this chapter...is to confirm men in the intention to set their thought to work on God alone after they have achieved knowledge of Him, as we have explained. This is the worship peculiar to those who have apprehended the true realities; the more they think of Him and of being with Him, the more their worship increases" (620). If these men have achieved knowledge of God already, what exactly does it mean for them "to set their thoughts to work on God alone"? If intellectual apprehension has been achieved, and intellectual apprehension is taken to be reason, what need is there to continue? The only possible answer is that intellectual apprehension does not refer to the coming to know of a fact or a demonstration, but instead to an experience of being given the truth, that one wishes to prolong.

Indeed, one might first imagine that Maimonides is speaking about two different things: the intellection of God, and a worship which is a kind of contemplation separate from that. For instance, he writes "If, however, you have apprehended God and His acts in accordance with what is required by the intellect, you should afterwards engage in totally devoting yourself to Him, endeavor to come closer to Him, and strengthen the bond between you and Him" (620), which does suggest that the act of the intellect has occurred, and afterward one must devote oneself to God in an entirely different way. But what is the nature of the bond between man and God? The quote goes on "...strengthen the bond between you and Him--that is, the

intellect" (620). What could it mean to strengthen the bond between man and God if what one apprehends in intellectual apprehension is merely a fact? How could a fact be made stronger? The intellectual experience then must refer to something entirely different: love, which is "proportionate to apprehension" (621), which would be obscure at best if apprehension were taken to mean mere knowledge of the facts.

At first, Maimonides describes the practice of worship as careful attention to the meaning of the commandments, and "meditation on what you are uttering and at considering its meaning" (622). But that only applies to those practices, like the recitation of the Shema, which are absolutely necessary. But then he turns to worship beyond the letter of the law:

When, however, you are alone with yourself and no one else is there and while you lie awake upon your bed, you should take great care during these precious times not to set your thought to work on anything other than that intellectual worship consisting in nearness to God and being in His presence in that true reality that I have made known to you and not by way of affections of the imagination. In my opinion this end can be achieved by those of the men of knowledge who have rendered their souls worthy of it by training of this kind (623).

In this quiet state, one precisely strengthens the bond between man and God in "intellectual worship," which, as we have seen, must be more than running through various deductions and proofs. Rather, intellectual worship is an experience, a supra-rational vision, that continuously comes down from the Active Intellect to those prepared for it; and insofar as that divine overflow is allowed inside, one experiences "nearness to God and being in His presence in that true reality," that is, a veritable mystical experience, but not one prepared with asceticism, but by the training of thought. And not merely by any type of thought, but by a meditative concentration, prepared for by previous study, that leads to a self-evident certainty of being in the truth and

being far from harm: "If a man's thought is free from distraction, if he apprehends Him, may He be exalted, in the right way and rejoices in what he apprehends, that individual can never be afflicted with evil of any kind. For he is with God and God is with him" (625). This is the true meaning of both intellectual apprehension and prophecy, which are the same and available to all: the experience of being in the truth, and certain in protection.

This worshipful experience is an experience of pleasure beyond body pleasure, which reaches its culmination in death when "the soul is separated from the body at that moment in the state of pleasure" (627), during which time the "intellect remains in one and the same state, the impediment that sometimes screened him off having been removed" (628). One is indeed joined to God insofar as one's intellect is nothing other than the Active Intellect, the impediment of the material body having concealed this fact. The pleasure then is a pleasure in the soul, not in the body; and it is this pleasure, which is nothing other than the feeling of being in the truth, of intellectual apprehension, that Maimonides has been talking about all along. That this being in the truth is not a fact, but an ongoing experience is born out by the fact that even the heavenly spheres which continuously turn feel this love for God as well:

...the causes of every motion belong to the spheres are four: namely, the shape of the sphere--I mean to say its sphericity; its soul; and its intellect through which it has conceptions, as we have explained; and the separated intellect, which is its beloved (271).

The soul of a sphere feels pleasure in proportion to its love which is nothing more than the apprehension of its intellect. This activity of the intellect is precisely what causes the sphere's circular motion, which is an ongoing loving experience, just as it is for man. As Maimonides writes, in regard to those who attempt to understand the prophetic riddles:

he will awaken from the sleep of negligence, be saved from the sea of ignorance, and rise up toward the high ones. He, however, who is pleased to swim in the seas of his ignorance and *comes down lower and lower*, has no need to weary his body and his heart. When he ceases moving, he goes down to what is lowest in nature (273).

The ignorant man is he who has ceased to be active; the wise man is he who continually, actively has the experience of God's apprehension. The spheres, having no sublunar matter, have no impediments to their intellectual apprehension; they do not "think" in our sense of the term, but understand God in a unity of knowledge, the same unity of knowledge that comes to us in flashes. They continually apprehend Him intellectually and strive toward Him, despite not thinking in our sense of the term, and so, in this light, to assume that Maimonides, lying on his bed in contemplation, is running through a series of deductive proofs would be ridiculous.

Finally, we turn to the part of the Mishneh Torah in which Maimonides discusses prophecy. He again affirms that only wise, moral, equanimous men are able to be prophets:

When one, abundantly endowed with these qualities and physically sound, enters the 'Paradise' and continuously dwells upon those great and abstruse themes,-- having the right mind capable of comprehending and grasping them; sanctifying himself, withdrawing from the ways of the ordinary run of men who walk in the obscurities of the times, zealously training himself not to have a single thought of the vanities of the age and its intrigues, but keeping his mind disengaged, concentrated on higher things as though bound beneath the Celestial Throne, so as to comprehend the pure and holy forms and contemplating the wisdom of God as displayed in His creatures, from the first form to the very center of the Earth, learning thence to realize His greatness--on such a man the Holy Spirit will promptly descend. And when the spirit rests upon him, his soul will mingle with the angels called *Ishim*. He will be changed into another man and will realize that he is not the same as he had been, and has been exalted above other wise men (42a-b).

The angels called *Ishim* are nothing other than the Active Intellect. Here, in his exoteric work, Maimonides does not attempt to conflate prophecy with intellectual apprehension as he does in

the Guide. The mechanics described, however, are identical, with the one addition that such a man "will be changed into another man and will realize that he is not the same as he had been." If it is true that prophecy is not truly distinct from intellectual apprehension, then this applies to all men capable of receiving the divine overflow. And it clearly shows that the divine overflow is not merely the intellection of a fact, but of something greater. The experience that Maimonides is describing is one which utterly changes a person; whereas before a person had known some things to be true and others to be false, now they are in the truth, a truth more profound, active, and certain than even reason provides. To charge Maimonides with being merely a rationalist, is hardly to do justice to his thought.

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## WITTGENSTEIN AND ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE 2011

### **Introduction**

First, I want to draw on a number of texts of Wittgenstein's in order to expose his treatment of some key issues in artificial intelligence. I will then draw a number of parallels between Wittgenstein's account of rule following and the interplay between expectation and fulfillment in drama, in terms of circumstances and character. I will draw on Stanley Cavell's "The Argument of the Ordinary," in particular, his interpretation of Wittgenstein's distinction between ordinary and (extraordinary, in some sense) mathematical concepts; I will try to show that this same dialectic of the ordinary and extraordinary is the means by which the theater operates, by playing off the possibilities opened up to the stage and the possibilities of opened up by "real life." Guessing what a character, for example, will do next in a play, is directly parallel to Wittgenstein's "student" attempting to learn a rule. With that in mind, I try to develop a Wittgensteinian proposal for artificial intelligence, whereby the theater serves as a case study for machine education, that I modestly hope will serve more as a guide in spirit, rather than a specific recipe for implementation.

### **Wittgenstein on Artificial Intelligence**

In his "Response to Mulhall," Derrida writes: "Of course, now more than ever we can be tempted by the model of the computer when we try to analyze what we are doing when we speak and count. It seems that, like computers, we are just 'running', like a mechanism" (Derrida 2). What is the role of the "just" here? The "just," as an adverb, privileges one thing over another.

One might express the same content, in a different tone of voice, with a different sense: "It seems that, like computers, we are, *of course*, 'running,' like a mechanism." And so, one wonders, whether one approves of the metaphor or not, what is it that makes the "running" of a computer fit to be conflated with the "living" that we do? No doubt, it is because the words are used in much the same way, in the sense that "running" and "living" have beginnings and endings, persist and change over time, and marry some kind of self-unknowability with external expression. Insofar as these terms have this resemblance, there is a crossover in their use. Derrida seems to suspect (with his "just") that we have lost something in taking up the word "running." His "now more than ever" implies a difference from the past; but it might just as well have been the case that our picture of life has always been the same, but that now we use the metaphor of a computer "running" to evoke it. What I want to suggest, in any case, is that whereas Derrida sees in our temptation to appeal to computers metaphorically a further misunderstanding of the human condition (and it might be added, there are only further misunderstandings), one might just as well see this particular gloss on human life as an opportunity not to measure up humans to computers, but computers to humans. One might as well ask, what can a computer do that is more than just running? Is it possible that what one really needs to do is jettison the "just?" It is to answer this question that we turn to Wittgenstein.

Now it must be admitted, first of all, that Wittgenstein does not treat the problem of artificial intelligence directly. The study of artificial intelligence is an empirical science, like psychology or physics, and Wittgenstein expressly tells us that he is not interested in empirical questions, but rather questions about possibility, about what is conceivable, and about what it is possible to imagine, or be inclined to say. That said, in treating the latter issues, Wittgenstein

employs the figures of the automaton, the mechanism, and the machine to great effect. Now, concepts like the automaton have a special dialectical place in our language. The concept of the automaton (for example) has been with us as far as we can remember (cf. Pygmalion, the Golem, the Robot, the Android), and the concept serves to delimit the "human," its opposite, in various ways. And so, insofar as we better grasp the consequences of an "automaton," we can more clearly grasp the consequences of the "human," which in turn serves to further specify what we might look for in an automaton; and so, what is a purely "philosophical" question can have material consequences, and especially in this particular case, where what is at stake is precisely the appearance of the "philosophical" in the material.

In fact, insofar as Wittgenstein brings out the question of the automaton, the issue turns around the very same "just" that Derrida uses: the automaton is supposed to behave "just" like a human, and yet, be not human. What is at stake then is really the question, how do we distinguish between just "acting" and actually "being," and if it is even possible to distinguish these things in a useful way.

The core of the matter is presented in the *Philosophical Investigations*:

200. It is, of course, imaginable that two people belonging to a tribe unacquainted with games should sit at a chessboard and go through the moves of a game of chess; and even with all the mental accompaniments. And if *we* were to see it, we'd say that they were playing chess. But now imagine a game of chess translated according to certain rules into a series of actions which we do not ordinarily associate with a *game*—say into yells and stamping of feet. And now suppose those two people to yell and stamp instead of playing the form of chess that we are used to; and this in such a way that what goes on is translatable by suitable rules into a game of chess. Would we still be inclined to say that they were playing a game? And with what right could one say so? (PI 87)

Wittgenstein first asks us to imagine a tribe without the game of chess as a concept, and yet

nevertheless "playing chess." The game the tribe is playing no doubt has a significance of its own for them (one imagines it could be used for divination, settling disagreements, or formulating a theory of war), which may be different from the role of chess in *our* way of life. Nevertheless, because there is no difference in the game mechanics itself, in this case, we would be inclined, more or less immediately, to say: they are playing chess.

Wittgenstein then asks us to imagine the game of chess being played, not on a board with pieces, but rather "encoded" in a series of bodily gestures. The structure of the game, and indeed, the "mental accompaniments," are precisely the same; and yet the "outward" form the game takes is not immediately recognizable as our board-game, chess. Wittgenstein asks *us*, then, whether we would call that chess. And as he suggests, one could make a case both ways.

On the one hand, one might say that what they are playing is not chess, because it hardly looks like chess. That is, their behavior is not immediately meaningful to us, in just the same way that a foreign language is not immediately meaningful to us. Now, we "know" that foreign languages are real languages for various reasons; nevertheless, if we had never encountered a foreign language before, we might dismiss it as nonsense. The translated game of chess is not chess, because, basically, we have not learned to play it like that. On the other hand, just as we learn that foreign languages are real languages, one could learn to play (or learn that one can play) "gestural chess", and thereafter, call it chess. We can learn to speak its language, and perceive it as immediately as we perceive a chess board; whether we do or not, is beside the point--what is important is the possibility.

In the second situation, we would have two things which we can distinguish between, gestural chess and board chess, whereas before we only had one type of chess: board chess. In

the case of chess, this distinction may or may not be significant to us, but there are cases in which this formal relativism (that is, that a form, or a game, or a process, can be instantiated in different media) has more obvious significance. For example, take calculation. Calculation can happen on paper, in our brains, and also in a computer. And because we deal (in our contemporary way of life) with all three of these manifestations of addition, we are inclined to call addition, addition, no matter where it takes place, that is, as long as it takes place in a place we are familiar with. But Wittgenstein's point is that to imagine that there is some essence to "addition," divorced from its instantiations would be wrong; rather there are different sorts of things we use for the purpose of adding; and we are inclined to see a similarity in things like pen-and-paper, a computer, and a brain, insofar as each is sufficiently equipped to add to our satisfaction. Each instance is definable only in terms of the other instances.

If we consider something like consciousness, as opposed to chess and addition, however, we are perhaps more reluctant to admit this conclusion. There is a feeling of strangeness that comes from considering that consciousness could take place in the immaterial realm of the mental, the digital realm of a computer simulation, or the material realm of the brain; Wittgenstein wants to suggest, however, that this is merely due to our inexperience with these different media. In a sense, until we have seen (or imagined to our satisfaction, as in the case of the tribe playing gestural chess), consciousness in a computer, it is not immediately recognizable as consciousness. Crucially, this is a statement about what we are inclined to imagine, not what is empirically possible. Wittgenstein writes: "It amounts to this: that only of a living human being and what resembles (behaves like) a living human being can one say: it has sensations; it sees; is blind; hears; is deaf; is conscious or unconscious (103). Just as we can learn to decipher the

behavior of a tribe playing gestural chess, and see in it a familiar expression, a computer can rightly be called (and will be called) conscious, insofar as its behavior is translatable into human terms.

In developing this line of thought, Wittgenstein explodes the very idea of the automaton. He does this in two stages. First, he describes the "feeling of an unbridgeable gulf between consciousness and brain process." How can something that feels some way, that *is* experience, be merely a physical process in the brain? The feeling is one of giddiness; he says to himself: "THIS is supposed to be produced by a process in the brain!" – as it were clutching my forehead." But on further analysis, the problem dissolves when one tries to pin down what is meant by consciousness: "what can it mean to speak of 'turning my attention on to my own consciousness'? ... What I described with these words (which are not used in this way in ordinary life) was an acting of gazing. I gazed fixedly in front of me—but *not* at any particular point or object" (131). The question of consciousness is rephrased as a question about behavior, about a certain kind of gaze, in which one is not focusing on anything in particular. Consciousness itself becomes a suspicious resting place, since when the term is used, it appears merely to refer to a certain kind of attention, and not to the total phenomenon we wished to discuss. This is important, because consciousness invariably seems as if it were something separate from everything that we do, to the point that one can imagine an automaton doing everything we can do, but without consciousness. But consciousness is not a separate thing from what we do, and it is only its philosophical hypostatization that gives us that sense of giddiness, of mystery.

This is brought out a few pages later, when Wittgenstein turns to the question of automata explicitly. He asks,

420. But can't I imagine that people around me are automata, lack consciousness, even though they behave in the same way as usual? – If I imagine it now – alone in my room – I see people with fixed looks (as in a trace) going about their business – the idea is perhaps a little uncanny (133).

It is highly significant that the same vacant gaze which is supposedly the hallmark of introspection on consciousness appears as well on the faces of the automata, who are by definition without consciousness! It is as if in our imagination, to be an automata were, in fact, not to be unconscious, but continuously and explicitly conscious of consciousness. In any case, Wittgenstein tells us that he cannot sustain this solipsistic fantasy (that everyone is an automaton) for too long: "Seeing a living human being as an automaton is analogous to seeing one figure as a limiting case or variant of another; the cross-pieces of a window as a swastika, for example" (133). In this picture, what seems innocuous (cross-pieces of a window) become something highly charged and meaningful (a swastika), just by looking at it differently. Just the same, one can imagine automata as one highly charged way of looking at ourselves, *as we actually are*. We are normally prevented from seeing this because we think of consciousness as something substantial, above and beyond the circumstances in which we find ourselves.

Wittgenstein's point is summed up in Oscar Hanfling's essay "Thinking." Rather than imagine thinking (or consciousness) as one particular function that must be programmed in to a machine (without which we cannot say that it does, in fact, think), Hanfling reads Wittgenstein as placing the focus on the *circumstances* in which "a machine might be said to think...What would really matter is whether the machine 'resembles (behaves like) a living human being' to a sufficient extent" (Hanfling 153). When a machine does so, it would be "unavoidable" for us to act as if it were a thinking being. The issue turns then, not on the possibility of duplicating a

basically indescribable organ of thought, but on the possibility of a machine capable of *expressing* itself as we do. Rather than mystifying ourselves over the nature of consciousness or thought, we should look at what we do, and how we express ourselves instead. And if we can create something that looks like us, then, indeed, for all intents and purposes (as the phrase goes), it will be us. In fact, this is nothing more than an extension of a principle we use in every day life. We have no access to what we generally call other people's "inner life," and yet we treat them, and respond to them, as if they were, well, human. And, therefore, it is not always useful to try to think beyond this, to what it is *like* to be something else. Wittgenstein writes in *Zettel*, "What should we say to someone who asserted that he could imagine exactly what it is like to have absolute pitch without having it?" (Z Prop. 268) The answer would be something like, "well, okay." That is, if someone were able to prove their actually having absolute pitch, in practice, then we might allow that they had absolute pitch; otherwise, there is not much to say. In the case of someone imagining what it would be like to have absolute pitch, that imagining is not necessarily correct or incorrect; rather, there can be no notion of correctness here, since there is no basis on which that imagining can find expression. In a sense, there is nothing to do with such a statement.

Now, it is perhaps "like something" to be human, to be conscious, and to think. But what place do such speculations on the nature of "experience" have in our lives, since it is not as if one truly wondered, in practice, if other people were conscious, or had certain (hidden) experiences, if they *act* like human beings? One is tempted to say that there is no use talking about human consciousness as the ground, or as something above and beyond, what humans do, and yet, it seems at times that our expressions do not to justice to our experience. One wants to ask, why

should we be "conscious" if all we do is express? Now, one might suggest that what consciousness *is* is the necessary functioning of a human, that consciousness is best defined as whatever is necessary for us to be able to express ourselves as we do. But, even if we decided that consciousness is the optimal solution to the creation of beings that do what we do, it is not at all clear that we can know what it is that we do to begin with, and therefore, recreate it. That is, we might know what we as humans do, *when* we do things, but we cannot know what we do in the sense of knowing everything we do, all at once, beforehand. Wittgenstein writes, in regard to the use of the word, think: "No one thought of *that* case"--we may say. Indeed, I cannot enumerate the conditions under which the word "to think" is to be used--but if a circumstance makes the use doubtful, I can say so, and also say *how* the situation is deviant from the usual ones" (Z Prop. 118). That is, at a single point in time, one cannot enumerate all the ways in which things are used, since not only is there no one rule that governs the use of things, but also that such rules are not available to thought, for one can only treat individual cases.

What Wittgenstein seems to imply is that in order to build a "human machine," one could not start from the top-down, since insofar as one cannot exhaustively enumerate the rules for the use of an expression beforehand, neither can one program a machine to respond, as it were, from the general rule to the specific case. To build a human machine one would have to work from the bottom up, from specific cases to general rules, slowly by a gradual accumulation of various behaviors and expressions. And intriguingly, this is precisely what happens in nature, in evolution. It is as if there were a barrier both inside us and outside us against seeing everything at once. Some problems cannot be solved simply and efficiently, as one proves a theorem; rather, some problems can only be solved in real time, as if in a lengthy calculation, whose answer

could not be known beforehand.

### **The Rule-following Paradox**

Stanley Cavell's piece, "The Argument of the Ordinary," is written in dialogue with Saul Kripke's interpretation of Wittgenstein which centers on the "rule-following paradox": "no course of action could be determined by a rule, because every course of action can be made to accord with the rule" (Cavell 66). As we will see, the rule-following paradox is another way of formulating the fact that our rules are not enumerable before individual instances of their coming into play.

I want to begin at the point at which Cavell distinguishes mathematical from ordinary concepts. He writes, "I suppose that something that makes a mathematical rule mathematical...is that what counts as an instance of it...is, intuitively, settled in advance, that it tells what its first instance is, and what the interval is to successive instances, and what the order of instances is. The rule for addition extends to all its possible applications" (89-90). That is to say, what makes a mathematical rule is the fact that we always know in advance what sort of answer we might get: the answer to  $2+2$  is never "egg," it has to be something along the lines of 4. Furthermore, we know in advance that with a mathematical rule we can apply the rule to get the next instance, and then again to get the next instance, and that furthermore, there is a necessary sequence to the instances. And in fact, this is how we normally think of "rules."

But, Cavell writes,

our ordinary concepts--for instance that of a table--are not thus mathematical in their application: we do not, intuitively, within the ordinary, know in advance (not smoothly *and* not roughly--there is no such

thing as, it is not part of the mythology of the ordinary that there exists) a right first instance, or the correct order of instances, or the set interval of their succession. And sometimes we will not know whether to say an instance counts as falling under a concept or to say that it does not count; no concept is 'bound' by ordinary criteria though we can in particular cases bind it... (89-90)

That is to say, for ordinary concepts, we cannot identify an origin (what was the first table?), nor the sequence in which we might see different tables that "add up" to our concept of table, nor the timing of such a sequence. All we know is that we have certain concepts, if asked, and we can use them; furthermore, we know that ordinary concepts are fallible, in that our criteria for a table may change, or people may differ or not, in outlying cases. That is, as noted before, our "ordinary" rules are not enumerable beforehand. Why should this be the case? Cavell suggests that it is because the circumstances in which ordinary concepts are used are constantly changing; whereas in mathematics, in a sense, the circumstances are always the same. "We do not, I suppose, imagine a mathematical concept 'altering' or vanishing under such pressure from the world. And it seems to me right to say: ordinary concepts have histories, mathematical do not..." (94-5).

For example, consider the situation, a conversation between A and B. A is discussing a topic which B knows something about: the recent public official, C, now in disgrace. A says to B: I mean, look at C, he got pardoned. B responds: I thought his sentence was commuted, after which A defends himself: Yes, so I mean, he got off in some way, but was not fully exonerated. Now, the tone of voice which A uses is defensive, and he walks a careful line between accepting the correction, and showing that the correction is not important to his overall argument: the important thing is that C got off in *some* way. Did A misspeak, or misremember, or simply not

know? Was he thinking "commute," but said "pardon?" Or did he think that "pardon" means "commute?" Or is it that, the first word that came into his head that met his criteria was "pardon," for whatever reason? Perhaps even A is not sure. In any case, it is clear that A feels the need to justify himself in retrospect, out of some anxiety, that he feels the need to prove that he knows what "pardon" and "commute" actually mean, even at the cost of being somewhat tiresome. And although he justifies himself based on the content of those words, "pardon" and "commute," really his concern is not with the fastness of the rule, but with others' perception of his trustworthiness.

In this situation, we can see a number of things: that what is at issue is not so much whether what happened to C counts as pardoning or commuting, since either pardoning or commuting communicate the sense that A requires for his argument; that what is important is not whether ordinary concepts (like pardoning or commuting) form a neat and easily definable series, but whether those concepts can in *some* way communicate usefully in the given context; and finally, that there is *no* suggestion that we must be able to give the rules for such concepts in advance, since each new usage of some concepts can be debated, and one can imagine that although pardoning and commuting are likely to remain separate concepts (certainly A felt so), less institutionalized concepts might merge in a similar situation. For example, B could admit that one might as well use "pardon" in the sense of "commute," and distinguish instead between a pardoning entirely, or a pardoning of specific elements of a sentence. As Cavell suggests, ordinary concepts have a history, and can "cave" to circumstances.

How does this relate to the rule-following paradox? The essence of the paradox is summed up in Wittgenstein's remark: "If I have exhausted the justifications I have reached

bedrock, and my spade is turned. Then I am inclined to say: 'This is simply what I do'" (70). For Kripke, in this passage, "the exhaustion of justifications is explained by saying or finding that justifications were always only inclination, mine or yours, after which I go on to watch the other's steps" (72-3); but as we have seen in the above example, it is not a matter of (re)education, but a matter of continual debate over justifications. Cavell himself argues that the justification "This is simply what I do" rests on the self; I can try to explain myself in various ways, but in any case, I "may, or not, go back to my steps, without conclusion" (72). He goes on to explain:

...my hand, as teacher, is not forced, my next move is not necessarily final: the spade is turned, which is to say, it cannot keep going *straight*, be simply straightforward....does this not leave me room, perhaps ground, for choice over whether to take this stumbling block as a rejection, from which I recoil, or as a discovery, say of the other, to which I must yield? I mean, if I discover resistance I might shift my ground, or take a new approach, or blast my way through, or exclude the site and this block from my plans altogether... (82)

That is, the reason that the rule-following paradox is trivial is because we are responsive: when justifications are seemingly exhausted, we can always try something else; there are many different ways to respond to someone demanding justification for what one does. But what is it that is responsive? If justifications do not stop at the rule itself, where do they stop? In a sense, they stop at the self, insofar as the self is that which can continually respond with different kinds of justifications.

For example, Cavell gives various examples of justifications for someone walking differently, which seem to come (like so many of Wittgenstein's statements) from the mouths of various characters:

I've always meant to do this, you just did not know...

I don't know what moving along the ground could be until now, the inclination is powerful and the results are wonderful...

I don't know what has come over me, I don't want this, the inclination is not mine, it mortifies me...

I'm doing the same as I always have done, the same as you, making measured moves in a given direction under my own steam. I am not moving faster than walking, we are comfortably keeping up with one another--not like our acquaintance far back there who takes a step once a minute and calls that walking (85).

All these we might accept as justifications in different circumstances, depending on the person they come from; what is key is that each of them rests in some kind of self-certainty (even if that self-certainty is terrifying), which is expressed in each case in different terms. Furthermore, it is a self-certainty that is itself open to the possibility of being questioned, or convinced. The point of the spade being turned away was not to suggest that communication is impossible, in the skeptical sense, that we each live, trapped in separate worlds, and although at times we think we understand each other, we never actually can, since what ultimately rests with me bears no resemblance to what ultimately rests with you, and you, as other, could never understand why my justifications come to an end here. Communication actually fails when one refuses to give justifications in *response* to another person; it is no use saying "But can't you see...," in order to convince someone that one's way of walking is the *right* way, since it is not a question of right or wrong: as Cavell points out, "I surely know everything about walking that you do" (85). At the point of justification, in the face of a refusal to engage, either one accepts another's walking differently or not; and many things are imaginable at that point; in any case, this instance becomes part of the history of that which is being justified: walking. Cavell wants to say that

...the claim that human speech and community "rest" only on human attunements [such as our common capacity to walk], does not quite say that I have no ground of agreement (with others or with myself) but rather suggests that if I am inclined to present myself as such a ground (or thin reed)--when, that is, I am inclined to say, "This is simply what I do"--I had better be prepared to say more about my representativeness for this role, since obviously it is not me personally, this whole man, who in particular bears this burden (82)...

That is, if one is inclined to say "This is simply what I do," one may still expect an interrogation along the lines of: what makes you think you are fit to do what you do? And this is not necessarily an accusation; rather, no one is entirely alone in doing what they do, so that it is disingenuous to ignore those who have borne similar burdens.

What Cavell does, in essence, is interpret Wittgenstein's rule-following paradox temporally, by adding in the element of responsiveness. Under this reading, the paradox suggests that no course of action can be determined (beforehand) by a rule, since what the rules are changes based on how different actions have been performed in accordance with the "rule." Wittgenstein's "answer" to the paradox is that "if everything can be made to accord with the rule, then it can also be made to conflict with it. And so there would be neither accord nor conflict here" (66); that is, what is at stake, really, is not the rule, but something else altogether. We act based on what rule we think applies, based on a situation's familiarity; but it is not a question of whether the rule we eventually follow is "correct" or not, since we merely act, and that act becomes part of the history which makes up the rule. Furthermore, what we are ultimately concerned with is not the viability of the rule, but how our act reflects on us. Therefore, I want to say that justification does not end at a rule, but at one's self, insofar as that self is responsive.

## **The Theater**

I want to suggest that there is a structural similarity between the mechanics of the theater and the mechanics of rule-following in practice. The drama of a theatrical performances works by expectation and fulfillment; in its very form, it asks the question, "can the course of action be determined?" We are presented (more or less) with characters, words, and actions organized into scenes, or circumstances, that develop in relation to one another; we bring to the performance, in the form of expectations, our knowledge of what those sorts of characters do, what sorts of things those characters say, and what sorts of characters have what sorts of interactions, both in terms of our experience in "real life," but also our experience with previous theater. As the performance goes on, there is a tension created between what we might expect to happen, and what actually does happen. Now, if what eventually did happen on stage always matched up to our expectations, then we, in a sense, would find ourselves in the ideal world of mathematical concepts; but in fact, the theater brings out the extent to which our concepts are plastic: the production of a new rule, a new way of dealing with character and circumstance, is precisely how the theater is exciting, and also how it evolves and develops new genres. That is to say, the drama of a theatrical performances lies precisely in the unknowability (beforehand) of the rule. What seemed to be a fault (in one circumstance) is in fact a strength (in this circumstance). And just like in cases of rule following described above, in the end, one does not come up with the rule itself, at the end of the drama, but instead, another particular situation, whose very possibility stretches the rule, even as the rule itself remains hidden.

What seems to me key here is that the theater makes explicit our dependence on circumstance and character (as a part of those circumstances) in rule-following. I think that Wittgenstein would agree that it is precisely the removal of our behavior from its natural home in

interpersonal relationships that makes philosophical accounts ourselves so paradoxical and problematic. With that in mind, I want to turn to a theatrical solution to the problems of artificial intelligence (in its relation to rule-following and expression) which were detailed in the first part of this paper. It turns on the fact, which Wittgenstein brings up in regard to automata, that in every case, there is no sense in which we can practically distinguish "acting" from "being," that is, when the acting is good acting (bad acting is something altogether different).

### **A Modest Proposal**

In what follows, I describe a "mechanism." I will draw analogies between elements of this mechanism and our human behavior, to extent that certain parts of the mechanism have been developed by analogy to what we do. In doing so, I am not trying to suggest that this mechanism is precisely what we do, but rather that this is one mechanism of many that may lead to expressions which we would be inclined to call "human." There is some degree of technical vocabulary in what follows, but technical specification is not the overall aim; I hope what follows will be understood, rather, as a thought-experiment, by which the practical tenability of the preceding ideas can be evaluated.

Imagine a computer that works like this: it is given the texts of all of recorded drama, and asked to analyze them in a certain way. Drama is useful because it organizes its content in precisely those terms which we want our computer to organize itself: in terms of character, expression, action, and scene. The analysis proceeds like this: given a text, perform a statistical analysis of word distribution, that is, which words tend to appear together in the text; this analysis is done at the level of the individual word, the word-pair, the phrase, the sentence, the

exchange, the scene, the play, and so forth. (At this stage, for simplicity, let us say that the text is character's speeches and dialogue, but not stage actions.) Now visualize the "terrain" of this statistical distribution. What we want to see here is the words plotted in a space such that the concomitance of certain words is expressed by their nearness or farness from each other in the space; this will require a space of precisely that many dimensions as will allow this to happen. (In two dimensional space, for example, one could not express, let us say, non-intuitive connections; in a three-dimensional space, for example, two points which are on opposite sides of the two dimensional plane may be, in the third dimension, quite close.) Furthermore, there is one more dimension: that of the frequency of the word. To take the example of a three-dimensional space (one of which is frequency), in visualizing the terrain we might see what looks like a mountain range; each peak of the mountain is some very frequently occurring word; and the heights around that peak are those words which, also frequent, stand in close relation to that word. By grouping together various regions of this terrain, we can isolate different sorts of language; and because the text in question is a play, those different sorts of language should correspond to the different ways that different characters express themselves. In fact, at this point, we can check this statistical analysis against the original text; each "mountain range" should correspond to a character in the original text. Furthermore, we can, as it were, isolate only that language which is essential to a character, by removing from the distribution those uses of language which are common to all characters. We can even go further and see the degree to which certain characters use language in common, remove that common language, and end up with a more fine grained characterization of these character groupings. Eventually, we should be able to derive a hierarchy of characters in their relations to one another.

Where this gets interesting is when the same analysis is applied to more than one play. Because the computer can derive (on its own) the different characters in the drama (without the help of the character's name, and explicit attribution), it can identify the similarity of characters across different plays, and so learn that, for example, certain villains are essentially the same sort of character, hiding under a different mask. When the analysis is run on a great many plays, one should be able to identify that cast of characters which more or less make up the entire content of our theater. In fact, because what we are calling "characters" here are merely various "landforms" in this statistical terrain, the picture is actually messier; the terrain of a certain character, or group of characters, will be a complex landscape of interconnection.

Now, to further extend the analysis, we can feed in the history of our theater over time, rather than all at once. Rather than get one single picture, we can add two more dimensions to our terrain, that of time and space. For example, we might run our analysis in ten year intervals, feeding into the computer at each time step, the drama of the previous decade; and we would do so for an arbitrary number of "places" (France, Germany, Japan, let us say) at each time step. This would give us a diachronic view of our "characters." We could, then, animate our visualization of the terrain, and show how the landmasses move over time and space. Like in the previous case of honing in on the "essence" of a character by removing what is common to all characters, we can hone in on the essence of a time and place, by removing that which is common to all times and places, which is useful information in itself. This is crucial because the computer will now be able to account for the fact that the uses of words change over time and space. For example, word A might start off in context B; but over time, word A is replaced by word C, originally from context D. The computer will be able to show the identity of word A and

C by looking at how, over time, the terrain of those two words "segue" into one another.

Now, we need to handle plot, that is, action: those things which characters do (beside speak) and with whom they do them (in scenes). Rather than complicate our already complicated picture of our statistical terrain, let us imagine this with an auxiliary picture. Because in the text of a play, in general, it is explicitly noted which characters do which actions, and which characters appear together, we can develop another statistical terrain in which characters are grouped together by their actual appearance together, and by their common actions (some of which include verbal expression) or common reactions. Once this is done, we can jettison the "names" of the characters, and instead associate each new landmass with one of the old character landmasses in our previous picture, so that we can learn scene and action information about characters across plays, in time and space.

Now, with all this information, the computer, given a *new* text, should be able to tell us, based on its experience, who might be speaking, who else is probably involved, what time or place it harkens back to, and so forth. This is done by sampling the probability distribution; and because it is a *probability* distribution, the answers are not hard and fast; one imagines that there will be a most probable answer, and then a few other possibilities, and one could consider, say, the top five. In the end, the totality of the statistical terrain should be a good representation of the human mind itself, insofar as, in playing all our various language-games, we have the capacity for multivocalism. At this point, we have a tool for literary analysis, one that can identify, perhaps, what expectations a theater-goer will have, when confronted with a new play in the tradition; but what we are after is something that can *respond*.

In order to do this, let us imagine this computer placed in a robot body, so that it can be

put in the midst of real human "scenes," which, in real time, it interprets using its knowledge of drama. Let us say it has artificial sensory organs and some software that translates what it perceives into textual "scenes." Given a new situation, the robot will respond in the voice of the character (or characters) whose "nature" is most suited to respond to what has come before; then, it will analyze the text of this new situation, including its own response, as if it were a new play. It will then interpret its own words as if they were those of a new character, as well as the response to its words by its interlocutor, and thereafter, update its picture of "characters" in light of that exchange, changing the relationship between the original character (whose role was taken up) and the other characters as a whole. This "feedback loop" need never end, and so, in a sense, we can give the robot an "unconscious"; when it is not asked explicitly to respond to external stimulus, it could be constantly running simulations, or imaginary conversations between its characters, particularly those combinations of characters which are rarely employed, or even at random. These imaginary conversations are fed back into the system, so that the robot constantly hums in dialogue with itself once the first new, real-time stimulus comes in. The robot, in fact, could be constantly expressing itself, but only speak aloud when the stage action of "speech" is called for; also, if dramatic changes in its statistical terrain are taking place in the background, some of that unconscious conversation could bleed into its expressions, as when we have an epiphany, or a day-dream. The robot could be given physical behavior as well, if for example, video performances of *Hamlet*, let us say, were correlated with the text, so that it would know how to recognize and then perform the physical actions associated with the words used in the text, as well as respond to the physical actions of others. As the robot continues to interact with the "real world" and get certain kinds of responses from it, it should develop a "character" of its

own, one related to its already existing characters, but shaped by its own experience.

There are a number of considerations that are worth exploring at this juncture. This robot "thinks" entirely in text; does this in some way conflict with Wittgenstein's explosion of the idea that when we think we read from an "inner text?" I think in this case, the machine merely traffics in words, whereas we are not quite sure what it is exactly we traffic in. The dynamics, in any case, are the same: that is, even if the robot is constituted entirely by text, at any given moment, the robot has only a certain interval during which it can act (one cannot take forever in answer to a question, for example, in a conversation--someone is bound to interrupt). Therefore, how far it can roam across its own unconscious (the statistical terrain) is limited. So just as in the case of humans, it only utters what it can; and cannot at any particular time express all that it, in fact, knows. The fact that its textual expression is "translated" into physical expressions is also not a disqualification, because it is precisely like the case in which a worker writes an inner monologue for himself after the fact, which may be representative, even if those sentences were not running through his or her head at that moment: and in fact, the robot will only "hear" what it says out loud, and "see" what it does physically, and has no access to the "original text," the full expression of its mind.

Now, the robot has a constant internal monologue, and is only sometimes called up to express itself. Its monologue, in a sense, represents the never-ending feedback loop caused by the robot hearing something, hearing its response, and then responding (perhaps privately) and then responding to the response, and so forth. This will no doubt have the tendency at times to run far afield, and other times to stick closely to a certain kind of expression. This is its stream-of-consciousness, and insofar as it sometimes thinks of only certain kinds of expressions, it can

think about the near future and recent past; and insofar as it roams far afield in its internal dialogues, it can think about the distant future, and the faraway past. Its "behavior" is entirely based around its own perception of what scene it is in, or what exchange, what bit of dialogue, what sequence, what play, what genre of play, and so forth. And so, in a sense, it is constantly writing a play of its own existence, in which it itself appears as one character among many, but one, which, of course, looms large in its connections to other character distributions by dint of its personal experience.

One might ask, why does it do what it does? Does it have feelings, motivations, desires, and so on? It does, insofar as its character(s) have those things. Does it have consciousness? Insofar as it can respond indefinitely and with novelty to any new response, then yes.

Now, one might object that this model may work very well for interpersonal relations, but might break down when one is discussing other things, like objects. But I think "objects" are, in fact, a special case of characters. Although some of the landmasses in the robot's probability distribution are obviously "human" characters, there may be a landmass associated with the various language-games swirling around the word "rock" or "soul." And so, the robot might adopt a "rock" or a "soul" as part of its character; and insofar as it does that, it will be able to grasp metaphor, since our relationships with things and people are at some level the same (how else could we use the same verbs to apply to both?). Furthermore, it should be able to handle reason, that is, the use of well defined "mathematical concepts" because such "characters" would appear in the distribution as landmasses with sharp breaks, the distribution tapering off dramatically (whereas most "ordinary" landmasses would have basically gradual slopes).

Finally, one might also object that one hardly needs to feed into the system the history of

drama beforehand! If the robot has the ability to "think" in scenes, characters, action, and dialogue, of interesting and boring, of appropriate or not, then the robot could build up its store of knowledge by just interacting with people in real life. The issue here is this: because our own "rules" are not enumerable, we have no way of knowing what it is we know innately, and what we know from experience. It is possible that we pick up everything we actually come to know about people just from experience; but it is also possible that in any one person's experience there will be insufficient data to come up with a world-picture as detailed as most humans have, and that some of what we know goes deeper than experience. In a sense, there is no way to know beforehand. If we were to do a "tabula rasa" simulation, and it failed, we would not know if it failed because the paradigm we are using (the theater) is incommensurate with what is necessary for human behavior, or if it failed because there are certain facts about the world that the robot just could not glean from one single experience. Furthermore, in the case of a "tabula rasa" simulation, there would have to be a long period of education and training; and we have no way of knowing beforehand if the machine will "learn" the way we think it will, so that it could be years before we have even attempt to definitely answer these questions. Whereas if we run the simulation with the kind of innate knowledge from drama I have described, we can begin to interact with it immediately, as well as (assuming our innate knowledge is expressed in the totality of the characters we use to express ourselves) obviate the problem of nature/nurture. This seems to be the best route, since if our knowledge of people exceeds our experienced, how would we know?

## **Conclusion**

I have tried in this paper to give a Wittgensteinian account of a number of important issues in artificial intelligence, which include the paradox of rule-following, the primacy of circumstances and the responsive self over the hard and fast rule, and the false distinction between acting and being. In putting forward an implementation proposal for such an artificial intelligence, I know that I am doing some violence to Wittgenstein's insistence on treating the possible as opposed to the empirical. I think, however, that artificial intelligence is one place where these two terrains can productively meet, and that if nothing else, my proposal may be used as yet one more way to see ourselves as something else. In the spirit of Wittgenstein, whether my proposal is convincing or not is itself a useful result.

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THE TUNNEL  
*for Wittgenstein*  
 2011

In the middle of the stage, stands a screen. A lamp, off, faces the screen from across the room. A MAN walks onto the stage. He places two chairs in front of him, facing away from the audience, and a chair for himself, facing forward, stage left. He pulls out a cellphone and considers it, typing as if sending a text, then gives up. He calls over two other guys, MALE COMPANION #1 and MALE COMPANION #2, who sit in the chairs. He makes a phone call and begins to speak. While he speaks, a WOMAN drags a chair stage right, and sits. Two other women, FEMALE COMPANION #1 and FEMALE COMPANION #2, drag chairs over before her, and sit as well. Sometimes as he talks, the MAN makes facial expressions and body gestures to his companions.

MAN

Hey, what's wrong with you? ... You feeling okay? ... Everything sucks? (laughs) Don't you just want everything to suck itself out of existence... You want me to come over? ... You wanna talk? ... Of course, I called you... You want a massage? ... .. Because I'm terrified by you! When I'm with you, you just bring me down, cut me to... Because I respect you, and so when you say those things... I *guess* I'm sensitive! Maybe I can take it, but when you say it, it puts me in that place... You just don't respect what I do, just because I observe, because I'm an observer... So what if I'm not an economist?! I see things! ... .. I just feel like you don't accept me as who I am... And I'm the best guy. I got a lot to add to the world... .. And I know you got things to do too, but when I have things to do... It's like it doesn't matter, like I'm doing nothing... I feel like I'm ruining myself with you... And I love you! And if you were just a little supportive, I'd be ready to... ya know ... I'm just scared of you, I'm just scared... .. Is that what matters to you? A warm body? ... It just makes me feel like that's all I am to you... If you'd do it with... He doesn't even speak English! ... And you don't speak German! ... You just want to be with me because I care about you, not because of... me! Yeah, me! ... And you don't love me, you can't love me, because you don't love me for who I am ... I'm nothing to you!

WOMAN (to her companions)

Do you see what's going on here? I have observed many things. There is something beautiful and futile in wisdom; with what pride we pass on what we know to children. From day to day, it feels as if we know nothing at all; all of us are empty. But when asked to explain what we do, when a child listens, we are happy to oblige as experts; our knowledge of things is truly inexhaustible. We could indeed be of use; our place is fitted out and what follows is ordained. In retrospect, you are frightened: it is far too soon to begin passing things on, as if we were already finished at what seems the beginning...

(she turns to her companions)

Do you see what's going on here? No matter how much a man thinks, his insides are the same. Why does he talk to her? He has made a mistake. Do you see how he's trapped himself? He wants her to love him. But in order to do that, she has to admit a mistake, that she's treated him poorly. And in order to admit that, she must accept his characterization of her. Perhaps she

dismisses him because she's frightened of him, because he characterizes her. Perhaps she doesn't feel entirely herself with him. So there are other reasons, entirely hers. And perhaps she understands that if she were to agree and to apologize, there is no sense in which everything would be changed; since what they're arguing about is how things are, and what could be more disturbing than, in the course of how things are, one were to say: "I am supportive of you." Since then things would not be how things are; they would be part of the conversation. And so, the conversation must be forgotten. But in the course of the conversation, one cannot forget. And so, she cannot agree; and so in not agreeing, she must disagree. That is the option he has given her. Fine, she says, convinced, I guess I don't love you. You're right. But that is not what he wants. He wants thing to be different from how they are. But if that were true, he wouldn't be having this conversation. He continues to talk because he does not feel good. He does not feel entirely himself. And so this is not a real conversation, one wants to say; it is merely a reproduction of how things are, that is, a trap.

The MAN has lowered his phone.

FEMALE COMPANION #1  
That was pretty clear already.

MALE COMPANION #1  
I thought I was the only one who was trapped!

WOMAN  
In this vein, I am going to write a handbook dedicated to all women on the subject of men. It begins like this: Men just want to feel like they're worth something. That is, men want many things, but what they really want is to feel worth something. Or rather, they merely want to be worth something. In the end. It's not a great thing to ask.

MAN (to companions)  
I should text her: "Goodnight and goodbye."

MALE COMPANION #2  
(laughs uproariously)  
Don't fall into the trap!

MAN  
What should I say?

MALE COMPANION #2  
Well, don't you see the rain? It's drizzling. There, by the cobblestones, do you see that patch of dirt? Watch how it happens. From the grass the water emerges, like an arm from behind a screen. It stretches forward across the dirt, slowly, from left to right. The water stretches along the dirt until it's all covered; sending forth tendrils, forerunners, propelling itself forward to meet itself,

until the little body of water is complete. The movement stops; you look away; and when you look back, the water's gone. The dirt is dry. And then, slowly, it begins again to stretch forward, from left to right, all the water... Do you watch again?

MALE COMPANION #1

What do you call that?

MALE COMPANION #2

Panagua.

MALE COMPANION #1

Panagua?

MALE COMPANION #2

(stretching his hands out, and slowly)

Panagua... We give name to all the forms of water, the molecule, the droplet, the spill, the puddle, the stream, the pond, the lake, the sea, the ocean. The name for the largest body of water: panagua—*all* the water in the world.

MAN

No... that's doesn't feel right.

MALE COMPANION #2

Well, how about this: look out into the world, and what do you see? Things resting on each other in 3D space. But consider if you were to see things this way: Imagine from your eye a straight line extending outwards into the distance, infinitely. Now, imagine at each point along the line a plane intersects the line perpendicularly; see an infinite number of planes, one behind the other, each showing their flat side to you. Now, do you see that screen over there? What if that were not in fact a 3-D object but a 2-D image projected onto the particular plane at precisely that distance from you. Even though the object appears angled in 3-D, imagine if a painter were to paint that object on a canvas; they would paint it in a particular way. The image of the object which would be painted at that distance is what appears on the plane. But how is the empty space between you and the object to be represented? Empty space cannot appear in itself in the painting (one represents the objects beyond it); and therefore, we can say, reality is discrete. At each moment, we perceive only *several* planes facing us at different distances; on them are projections of everything standing at that distance. How easy it is to see the world in a different way!

MALE COMPANION #1 is staring out at the world as if he's never seen it before. He gasps exaggeratedly, and is unable to look away.

MAN

No, not that either...

MALE COMPANION #2  
What about this then? Blink!

The MAN blinks once, nonplussed.

MALE COMPANION #2  
Keep blinking!

He blinks a little.

MALE COMPANION #2  
Faster! Blink quick! Don't think about it! Blink as fast as you can! And don't stop! Don't get dizzy!

The MAN gives in and blinks faster and faster.

MALE COMPANION #2  
Go! Go! Don't let yourself get tired! Keep blinking!

Everyone on stage, except the WOMAN, starts blinking.

MALE COMPANION #2  
(shouting)  
Concentrate! What do you see? Is everything starting to disappear? Are you seeing yourself?  
Blink!

They continue to blink. In order to keep doing so, they have to lift themselves out of their chairs and start hopping in time to their blinks, their fists clenched.

WOMAN  
(calmly, as if from above)  
Do you remember what it's like to move your head?

All but the WOMAN begin to move their heads back and forth.

WOMAN  
Surely, you say, there must be something it's like to move your head, and have everything move. And you move your head and say, That *is* what it's like. But did you remember the movement, the vision it gave you, or just that you *did*, in fact, move your head? When you call to mind your memory, does it move? Or are you certain that it must have moved because, if asked, you could move your head in just that way, in just that way that you know will be familiar?

All settle back into their seats, blinking and moving their heads more and more slowly, until

eventually they cease as if without their realizing it. By the time the MAN stops speaking the following, everyone is finished.

MAN

(on the phone, still blinking)

Okay, look, can I just tell you something? ... Please? ... Why wouldn't you want to hear? ... Okay, just lemme try. When you were a kid, when you had to go to bed, at a bedtime, because you had school in the morning, were you tired? Were you tired when you went to bed, or weren't you? ... Did you lie awake for a long time, in the dark, because you weren't sleepy? I'm remembering this because I'm blinking a lot. And it's like I'm staring up at the ceiling and blinking and trying to see all those floating things moving around, merging and forming, circling, popping in and out of the dark... Didn't you have a lot of thoughts? Because you were in bed, alone... And now that we choose our bedtime, we just go to bed when we're tired... Do you still lie awake? I don't. And yet when I live in my own head I'm still there, that's where it is to live in my own head... Yeah, and so what do you think? What do we make of societies where there's bedtimes and societies where there aren't? So you didn't... Oh, you had lacrosse in the morning.

WOMAN

What things are is where we first encountered them; in between we forget; and when we see them, the originals in other guises, sometimes we remember how it was.

(she hands her companions some hand soap)

Rub this on your hands, thoroughly, and give some to the men.

The FEMALE COMPANIONS get up and present the hand soap to the three men. All together they rub it on their hands. Meanwhile, the WOMAN stands and disappears behind the screen. She emerges with a basin of water. She joins the rest, now all standing, and laves their hands in water. Then, she shepherds the MALE COMPANIONS to her side of the stage, and presses the FEMALE COMPANIONS to join the MAN. She returns to her seat.

WOMAN

Now hold your fingers to the soft space above your lips and inhale.

They do so. FEMALE COMPANION #2 scrunches her nose.

MALE COMPANION #1

I like this.

MAN

(on the phone, still blinking at times, deliberately)

Sorry about that, I just had to say hi to a friend... Don't worry about who it was... What do you mean meaningless? ... It's about you! ... Whatever, I just wanted to ask you this... So, when you were a kid and discovered you had a talent, you know, like you could rhyme you and true

and blue and signed the lyrics “The Beatles” and put it in a little box... And would you take them out and perform them for your brothers or your sisters or your parents or your grandparents, or your aunts and uncles and cousins? Would you show them to your friends? ... Of course, I did! I couldn't leave them in the box. I did hide them in a very high up place... ... You should have taken them down! ...

FEMALE COMPANION #1

(to the MAN, softly)

I wrote songs too.

He nods at her, still on the phone.

FEMALE COMPANION #2

(coldly)

No, you didn't.

FEMALE COMPANION #1

Yes! Yes, I did! I wrote them in my head. And I write them all the time! There's a music that's always dressing and undressing itself, covering itself with leaves and rocks, and then running into ravines... Is it not like that for you? Very weird! It stretches back before the past and on to beyond the future, and one dips into it at any time. When one whistles, not like a tune, but... aimlessly... what else is it that comes out? Isn't that how it is to go through the world?

FEMALE COMPANION #2

That's not the same thing. That's merely what it's like for everyone... Some, however, have greater talent.

FEMALE COMPANION #1

You hear the music too, then?

FEMALE COMPANION #2

Sometimes. Don't make a fool of yourself.

A pause.

FEMALE COMPANION #1

You don't make me feel good.

MALE COMPANION #2 / MAN

(MALE COMPANION #2 speaks to the WOMAN; MAN speaks to his phone the same words, simultaneously)

Let me ask you something, since I think you'd be a good person to ask this. When you were a kid, did you often look up the dates when the people died—the ones you “identified” with—

because you wondered if you might be their reincarnation? That something would be revealed, something hidden, when you discovered who you really were, who you already were, and not merely yourself...Or you didn't think of yourself as just yourself, but both, or one?

WOMAN

(settling back in her seat)

Do you see what's going on here? All possible lives are led at different parts of the day. We experience everything in miniature. If you have two brothers, don't wonder what it would have been like to have one. Just recall those times when your one brother was at his violin lesson, and you were playing your gameboy with the other. That's what it's like to have one brother. And to hear a string quartet is merely to hear your gameboy in a string quartet... What men want is just this: to have new brothers and sisters they never had, and feel alone with them as one feels alone with one's brothers and sisters. It can be awful, or not.

A long pause.

MAN

(on the phone)

I mean, you know... I think we're essentially... essentially, we're the same type of person... I mean, we're different, but I think we really understand each other. We have the same kind of fears. And I don't think we need to keep talking, I think we know everything we need to know already. I mean, I'm sorry... We just keep repeating the same things to each other. You don't trust me, I don't trust you. So we're even, you know? Is that okay? What's the use in repeating? ... ..  
 ... You're just an awful person, but so am I, so we're cool... Yeah? I just want you to come with me... .. I just want to experience things together with you! Down the same path... Yeah, or different paths. There's still *a* path... I think we're just locked in this struggle, it's like two Titans of equal strength, and because of who we are, we'll be battling each other until the end of time.  
 No matter who we were in past lives, we would have found each other in just this situation... What else could it be, to say there's an eternal struggle, but that we're just those kinds of people, who, wherever they are, cannot escape each other... Yeah, that's it in essence.

FEMALE COMPANION #2

She must hate it when he talks like that—as if he knew what it really was.

FEMALE COMPANION #1

(across to MALE COMPANION #1)

I just remembered I wanted to ask you...

MAN

(on the phone)

Yeah, that's how I think it is... That's just how we are! ... .. Well, I'm glad you agree! Geez!  
 (laughs)

I haven't laughed since... I don't know. Oh, this is just great! ... Yeah I am! ... Exactly! ... So

what? What you wanna do? I feel like everything is opening up... .. I think we got a plan...I'll come over, smack you over the head, and you can smack me... .. Yeah, that does sound good...

No, thank *you*.

WOMAN

What men want is to feel like they're worth something, that they are who they are, and that's good. You send him for something, and find him pacing. And he wants you to pace with him, around the room.

MALE COMPANION #2

Can I read your handbook sometime? I have some interesting observations myself.

WOMAN

Yes?

MALE COMPANION #2

Would you like to hear one?

Pause.

WOMAN

Why not.

MALE COMPANION #2

It's called the tunnel. Trust me, it's worth a try. Do you know about the vignette effect?

The lights go off; the lamp facing the screen is turned on simultaneously.

MALE COMPANION #2

Yes, that's what it's like.

He walks to center stage. Unbeknownst to the audience, in the dark, MALE COMPANION #1 and FEMALE COMPANION #1 hide behind the screen.

MALE COMPANION #2

The tunnel is how it is to be in the world and we can see it here. Remember what it's like to crawl through a plastic tube at a McDonald's playground, to drive in the backseat through the Holland Tunnel. That's what it's like to see. Your vision is like a tunnel, framed obscurely by a gentle, in-fading blankness on all sides. What if rather than moving through the world from thing to thing, in any direction, we saw ourselves as only moving forward, always moving forward, in one single direction, through time. Everything we do is only a turn in the tunnel, but the tunnel is laid out already, it *is* everything, anyway. We pass by objects, sometimes uniformly, mile markers, doorways behind bars, other cars, thoughts... We see new things, and often old things as well;

rushing through the tunnel, our arms waving behind us—this is the feeling of the song that accompanies all free and happy states, during the sad hope of fall, the coldness, the smell, the water stretching over the dirt as it hurtles towards us. As the seasons turn, and the tiling on the tunnel changes again, each face we know comes back to us, not hidden nor altered, but as they first were: lovely. This is the underground river of music, whose familiar fragments are the turns in the way, violent, careening, settling out; the motor of the car is the beat, and the car is filled with companions.

WOMAN

Oh, I see it.

The WOMAN pulls the screen away. Behind it is a tunnel, light shining through from behind, directly into the audience. It's so bright, it's hard to see. As one's eyes grow used to the darkness, we can see MALE COMPANION #1 and FEMALE COMPANION #1 embracing behind the tunnel. Everyone, however, stares into the light.

FEMALE COMPANION #1

Forget about them. It wasn't about us, anyway.

MALE COMPANION #1

Just keep blinking, and it'll be okay.

They blink, and the lights go off.

FIN.

## A FEW CHAPTERS FROM THE GUIDE (FOR THE PERPLEXED)

A translation from the Spanish

2011

### Introduction to the *Guide*

In 1191, in the city of Fustat (Old Cairo), at the height of the Golden Age of Jewish medieval culture, Maimonides finished the *Guide for the Perplexed*. Who were the perplexed? Students of religion and philosophy, literate in both the holy scriptures and the metaphysics of Aristotle, and wavering, unable to reconcile revelation with reason, faith with science. Originally written in Arabic, the work was brought into Hebrew by Samuel ibn Tibbon (ca. 1190), who worked directly with Maimonides during the course of the translation. Another Hebrew version was completed by Yehudah Al-Harizi (ca. 1204), and from there the work was translated into Latin in the 13th century. In that form, it was available to St. Thomas Aquinas, whose thought, for example, bears Maimonides's imprint.

Over the next two centuries, history would deal blow after blow to the health of Jewish thought around the Mediterranean. In the 12th century, the fanatical Almohad sect overran Muslim Spain, making the area barely livable for Jews. Maimonides himself fled to Egypt at the time, and exhorted his fellow Jews to escape as well, and later, after the Christian conquest of Spain, the Jews had to deal with "mob attacks and forced conversions" (Lazar xi), which came to a violent head in 1391. By the early 15th century, however, "some kings and distinguished noblemen" (xii) began to feel a restless curiosity towards the philosophical and the occult; these Christians, in fact, commissioned translation after translation into Spanish of the great works of Jewish thought from the previous centuries. Many of the translators, in fact, were *conversos*, or New Christians, former Jews who still carried with them the knowledge of Hebrew. Indeed, under the rule of Juan II (1406-1454) in Castille and Alfonso V (1416-1458) in Aragon, Jewish thinkers again flourished, in close contact with the rising Christian intellectuals of the time.

It was in this context that one *converso*, Pedro de Toledo, was commised to translate the Guide into Spanish. Of the three parts of the Guide, the first two were translated around 1419 in Zafra, and the third in Seville by 1432. Not much is known about Pedro de Toledo, but that he was the son of Juan del Castillo, an apostate Jew and a man of the generation of 1391. Whether Pedro himself was a physician in addition to a translator, whether he was the author of a tract in Latin, or the judge of a small community of Jews in Toledo--or even whether he was, in fact, a *converso* or not--has been debated by scholars; what is known for sure is that Don Gómez Suárez de Figueroa, lord of Zafra and Feria in Extremadura, the son of Don Lorenzo of the Order of Santiago, commissioned the Guide's translation, but died in 1429, before the translation was completed; it is presumed that Pedro continued under the patronage of Don Gómez's brother-in-law Don Íñigo López de Mendoz, Marqués de Santillana, in whose library the translation was discovered.

The resulting work was not only the first translation of Maimonides into a European vernacular, and was also the most extensive philosophical text ever to be translated into the Spanish language. Pedro de Toledo claims to have worked with four separate texts, the Judeo-Arabic original, the Hebrew translations of ibn Tibbon and Al-Harizi, as well as "some other medieval translations only alluded to here and elsewhere" (ix), and perhaps because of this mix,

the work was plagued by scribal errors and confusions caused by discrepancies between the different translations; nevertheless, it can be said:

Pedro de Toledo's enterprise, in spite of some shortcomings as a translator and gaps in his total mastery of Hebrew, as well as a certain clumsiness in style resulting both from the different translation techniques of Ibn Tibbon and Al-Harizi and from his literal adherence to their versions, offers a testimony to the active interest in Christian circles of his time in Maimonides's work and constitutes a linguistic landmark in the history of the Spanish language (ix).

### **Remarks on Translating Philosophy, and on the Present Translation**

What does it mean to translate philosophy? In prose one faces the problem of emulating the style of the author, a rhythm and cadence that extends over pages and grants story and character coherence; in poetry problems dominate of image and symbol, of compression and line. But in philosophy, what do we do?

Philosophy is the working over of metaphors; it is the drawing of analogies, and the raising into the abstract of the concrete, the later uncovering of hidden relationships implied in concepts produced, those shapes of thought whose architecture is straightened-out and re-curved over the course of an argument. We are taught to feel and hold in our hands the shapes of thoughts by words. It is not that that words originate the shape or concept; rather the word stands in for a certain shape, or philosophical experience, which has always suggested itself already in experience.

So when we translate philosophy, we are translating concepts, the shapes of thought; to bring philosophy from one language into another, then, is to uncover the metaphor at work in the original, and make that metaphor explicit in the translation. For the metaphor must always be revitalized; to bring the original word directly into the new language with a explanatory footnote or to take refuge in an already existing native word, whose sense is similar, but whose metaphor is different or forgotten, is to efface the very face of the original thought, and to reduce the philosophy to the churning of opaque symbols. Furthermore, there can never be a one-to-one correspondence of philosophical vocabulary from one language to another; since all philosophical language is metaphor to the utmost degree, and takes on the very immaterial curvature of thinking, a single word in philosophy can refer to the whole mass of a thought-building, and its conjoining words, the the shape of the space within it.

For this very reason, the English language poses a particular problem for the translation of philosophy. Whereas in other languages, the metaphor of a philosophical term may be written into the structure of the word itself, the philosophical terminology of English has its nature obscured even to its own speakers, since it is nearly entirely derived from Latin, French, or Greek.

For example, an Aristotelian philosopher speaking in English might say: "an accident supervenes on a substance." In order to explain this sentence to a layperson, the philosopher would have to suggest something like this: "To begin with, there are substances, which make up the basic stuff of reality. Things ultimately distinguishable from each other have different substances. Substances are what underlie the things we see. More than that, substances can have attributes, in essence, adjectives, that further describe a thing. Some attributes are essential, in

that they deal with the essence, or the true nature, of the substance. A substance is never found apart from its essential attributes--whereas some attributes are accidental, that is, merely temporary, and do not follow necessarily from the essence of a thing. And so, we say an accident supervenes on a substance, because an accident is not an essential part of the substance, although it appears with it."

Alternatively, one could translate the sentence from Latin into English. The word *accident* comes from Latin through Old French. The Latin word is *accidere*, "to happen, fall out, or fall upon," from the verb *cadere*, "to fall," with the prefix *ad*, "to," before it. Thus an accident is literally, a *falling-to*, or a *happening-to* something. That is, an accident is something that just happens to something else, an event not necessarily anticipated beforehand. The word *supervenies* comes again from Latin, from the word *venire*, "to come," plus the prefix *super*, "over, upon, on top of." Thus to supervene is *to come on top of* something. Finally, *substance* comes from Latin through Old French; in Latin, the noun *substancia* comes from the verb *substare*, made up of *stare*, "to stand," and *sub*, "up to, under." The verb came to mean, "to stand firm, or to be under or present," and so *substancia*, or *substance*, is *that which stands under, that which holds firm*.<sup>118</sup> So to put all these pieces together, when we translate the sentence "an accident supervenes on a substance" from Latin to English, we find, loosely, "a happening-to comes on top of the under-stuff," which, although strange, makes good sense: that which merely happens to come along to something always comes on top of the stuff that supports it underneath! All that can be deduced from the words themselves, without any philosophical commentary or discussion. Of course, the words themselves are merely the starting point for the philosopher; but one can see immediately that the English speaker confronted with the opaqueness of substance, attribute, accident, essence, positive, negative, intellect, and so forth, is in a stranger position in regard to the philosopher than those for whom such words make intuitive sense. It's worth considering, then, that perhaps philosophy appears more abstract in English, more divorced from everyday life, and from lived experience, because our philosophical words are merely empty symbols for the dead metaphors of other languages.

I would like to draw three small examples from the *Guide's* Spanish in order to illustrate this point, and demonstrate some of the principles used in the following translation. Now, Spanish too bear the imprint of the classical philosophical tradition, and Pedro de Toledo's Spanish shows the importation of a number of words, derived from Latin, whose original metaphors are lost (*açidente*, *esençia*, and so forth). I have translated those words with their English equivalents (accident, essence, etc), without delving into the Latin or Greek roots. Whenever the language presents a metaphorical expression using the mechanics of Spanish itself, however, I translate those metaphors rather than by searching for the standard English equivalent. Whether these metaphors are of Pedro de Toledo's devising, or whether they are adaptations of similarly metaphorical words in Hebrew or Arabic, is not material to the present

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<sup>118</sup> It might be noted that many of these Latin words, in fact, were coined on the basis of the Greek words used by Plato and Aristotle. To take one example, *substancia* is a translation of Greek ὑπόστασις, or *hypostasis*, *hypo-* being a prefix meaning *under*, and *stasis*, meaning *a standing*. So *substancia* is precisely the Greek word *hypostasis*, carried over into Latin, one element at a time.

translation. Rather, I want to convey in English the impression of the Spanish, leaving opaque words opaque, and bringing out the active metaphors; for perhaps because this is the earliest extensive work of philosophy in Spanish, Pedro's language is unusually vivid, if at times confused.

Three translational cruxes in particular deserve mention, since they are essential to understanding the argument of the excerpted passages. The first is the word *la rreformaçion*, which at first glance one is tempted to translate as the *reformation*; and in fact, insofar as Maimonides is constantly distinguishing commonplace, every-day speech from philosophically proper discourse, one would not be surprised to find him emphasizing the reformative aspect of his teaching. But context makes clear that the word should be analyzed in terms of its component parts: *la rre-formaçion*, or the *re-forming*. The word, in fact, corresponds to the English *attribute*, the metaphor being this, that a thing, a substance, has a form; this form is re-formed, or formed again, by the things attributed to it, the adjectives predicated on it, and so on. The act of re-forming, that is, an attribute, or a forming-again, is what is denoted by *la rreformaçion*.

Now, the key idea in the chapters I have translated is that God is ultimately unknowable; that conventionally we ascribe various attributes (re-formings) to God, based on our understanding of ourselves, but that none of these attributes can be ultimately true in reference to God. They are merely metaphors for the masses. Thus, rather than use what are usually translated as *positive attributes*--for example, "God is one"--one must employ *negative attributes*--for example, "God is not multiple." The reasoning is that, in reality, God is *not* one, in our sense of the term; "God is not multiple," in contrast, captures the fact that what we understand as oneness is always one of some number of things, whereas God's oneness is such that it precludes the possibility of there being anything but one.

Pedro often uses either *un nonbre* (a name) or *una rreformaçion* for attribute; but it would be misleading to translate his terms for *positive* and *negative*, *adebdante* and *despojante*, with their obvious English counterparts. Now, ultimately, *positive* comes from the Latin *ponere*, "to put"; *negative* comes from Latin *negare*, "to deny." The words in English today, however, have clearly lost the sense of their original metaphors, but that is not the case in Pedro's Spanish. *Un nonbre adebdante* is Pedro's term for a positive attribute, which literally means, *an obligating name*. *Un nonbre despojante* is his term for a negative attribute, and it literally means, *a stripping name*, or *a name that strips away*. *Un nonbre adebdante*, then, is an attribute that obligates something to be a certain way, that is, a positive attribute; whereas *un nonbre despojante* is an attribute that, far from obligating, merely sets a limit on the conception of the thing being described, that is, a negative attribute. It literally strips away falsity. As we'll see, Maimonides exhorts us to use only *nonbres despojantes* in regard to God, and never *nonbres adebdantes*. Holding this idea in mind, the meaning of the chapters I have translated, chapters fifty-six through fifty-nine from the first part of the Guide, should be clear. I have worked from the edition of Pedro de Toledo's translation edited by Moshe Lazar, published by Labrynthos in 1989, from the manuscript housed in La Biblioteca Nacional in Madrid.

## Translation

### Chapter Fifty-Six

There are in re-formings [las rreformaçiones] that which is more profound than we have brought forward; of what it is to know that being [el eser]<sup>119</sup> is an accident [açidente], coming alongside that which has being, and, because of this, is a thing added on top of the essence [la quiditat] of that which is. And this is agreed to be the case for all that has its being for a reason [causa], which is a thing added on top of its essence--but what does not have a reason for its being, which is the praised God, alone in this thing, is what is referred to when one says of God, that it is necessary for Him to exist, because His being is His essence [esencia] and His truth [verdat], and it is not a substance [sustancia] which may come with His being by accident; because His being would be a thing added to it, and also it is necessary for Him to be always, neither newness [noujdat] nor accident happens to Him, and because of this He is and is not in being<sup>120</sup>, and is alive and not in life, is powerful and not in power, and understood and not in understanding, not in knowing, and also, everything returns to one thing without many-ness [muchidat], as will be shown.

And you should know that one-ness [la vnjon] and many-ness are accidents that happen to every thing which has parts, having many-ness or unity [vnjdat], and this is already shown in the metaphysics<sup>121</sup>. And just as the count is not the substance of the counted, and in the same way unity is not the substance of the thing which is one, since all are accidents of divisible quantity [cantidat partible] which come to those beings [los eseres] able to receive these accidents; more, the necessity of being simple [sinple] does not follow from composition [conpusiçion], just as it is falsity that it follows from the accident of many-ness or unity, I want to say: that unity is not added on top of its substance, also, one is not in unity.

And one cannot clear up<sup>122</sup> [fol. 27r] these thin things, which with little effort stop the understanding [entendimiento], with the use of the usual words that are the great cause [cabsa] of mistakes in each language, since one cannot imagine the thing if not with the human mind. And when we should want to show God not being in a crowd [muchedunbre], we cannot say then "one," although the one [el vno] is such that the size [el mucho] is from the parts of the quantity; and because of this we should state the thing with the understanding of the truth, saying: "one,

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<sup>119</sup> I translate *el eser* as *being* since *el eser* is transparently derived from *ser*, to be. In English, however, being is can be used to be both existence and essence; *el eser* is used here to denote existence, in contrast with essence.

<sup>120</sup> The phrasing employed throughout in Spanish is, for example, *biuo e non en biuez*, which means literally *alive and not in life*. More cleanly in English one might say *living, but not with life*, or, as the standard translation has it *He lives, without possessing the attribute of life*. I have retained the Spanish phrasing throughout.

<sup>121</sup> The Metaphysics of Aristotle.

<sup>122</sup> Literally, *polish*.

not in unity [qadmōn]<sup>123</sup> and eternal, showing that he is not created [criado]<sup>124</sup>. And it is known that "ancient" [qadmōn]<sup>125</sup> is not said here for that which is in time, which is an accident of movement [moujimiento], and is relative [rrelativo]; because saying "ancient" as an accident of time is like if you were to say large or short as an accident of a line; and that which does not have time is neither ancient nor created [criado], just as it is not said of sweetness unjust or just, nor of the voice salted, nor anything of taste.

These things are known to him whose use understands the truth and clears the truth up through the understanding, not through words. And what the books say, that God is "first" and "last," is just like saying that He has an eye or ear, whose intention is that He does not have change [demudaçion] nor renewal [rrenouaçion] of anything, nor is God in time, so that there may be some equality between Him and another thing which is in time, and may be first or last, and also all these words are "like the language of the sons of men." It is like our saying "one," because He does not have similarity, not because unity is joined to His substance.

### Chapter Fifty-Seven

This is more profound than what we have brought forward already. Know that to name God with names that strip away [nonbres despojantes] is true speech, without some deficiency [mengua] in God; and one who calls God with obligating names [nonbres adebdantes] has great error and deficiency [menguar].<sup>126</sup> And we must show that the names which strip away are ways and habits of the Creator in a way, and in what sense they are separated from the obligating names; and afterwards I will show you how we do not have a way of naming if not through stripping [despoiamientos] alone.

And I say it like this: that the re-forming does not distinguish the re-formed [el reformado] at all until that re-forming does not appear with another, also a form will easily be a form for the re-formed, and although it appears with another, and will not be with it in unity. Example: if you should see a man in the distance, you will say: "who is that?" they have to say to you: "a living thing;" this is a form, and you have not distinguished it from another, also you have given it a boundary [termjno], such that what you have seen is not a vegetable [visitable]<sup>127</sup> nor mineral. And if there is a man in a house, and you know that there is a body [cuerpo], also

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<sup>123</sup> *Qadmōn*, meaning *first* or *original*, is slightly misplaced in Pedro de Toledo's text. Cf. the standard translation: *The same is the case when we say God is the First (Kadmon), to express that He has not been created; the term "First" is decidedly inaccurate...*

<sup>124</sup> Literally, *nurtured*.

<sup>125</sup> The Spanish has *antiguo*, meaning *old* or *ancient*, but *qadmōn*, as noted, as the sense of *first* or *original*.

<sup>126</sup> Since *deficiency* is Latinate, it would be perhaps better to translate *mengua* as *lack*. But in English a lack is nearly always a lack of something, whereas a deficiency does not have to be specified necessarily.

<sup>127</sup> Literally, *visitable*. No doubt a scribal error for "vegetable."

you do not know what it is, and you say: "what is there in this house?" And they tell you that there is not therefore a vegetable body nor a mineral, already you have given it some distinction [singularidat], from that you understand that there is therefore a living thing, and although you do not know what animal it is. In this way the forms of stripping away [despojaçion] may appear with those of obligation [adebdaçion], in that it cannot be that they are not determined in some distinction of boundary [termjno], although they would not be in it from the determination, except what is prohibited as opposed to what we thought is not prohibited. Also the way in which the ways of stripping away and the ways of obligation are distinguished, that the forms of obligation, although they are not determined, they describe some part of what is sought to know of each thing, or part of its substance or accident of its accidents, and the re-formings of stripping away do not show us what we seek to know, except if by way of accident, as we have shown by example.<sup>128</sup>

And after this beginning, I say that there is a true proof for God that it is necessary for Him to be without parts [conpusiçion], as we will show, and we do not know Him except for His being, not His essence [quiditat]; and because of this He has no re-formings of obligation. Because it cannot be that He leaves the boundary of His essence so that the re-forming shows on (His essence), no more may His essence be composed in a way that shows the re-forming on (His essence). And so it is like that, He has no obligation in any way. And it demonstrates the meaning of the boundry of that by which man can reach God. Example: already He has been proven by us to have a thing outside of the things sensed and known through the understanding, and saying that He has being, the intention is that He is not proved to be, and we should know that it is not like the being of the elements that have mortality [morteridat], and we say that He is alive, the intention is that he is not dead, nor is it like the being of the heavens [los çielos] that are alive, which because of this we said that He is not a body; and that this being is not like the being of the understanding which is not dead, nor body, nor caused [cabsado]; and that God is ancient because He does not have a reason for his being, and that this being, which is His own, is not abundant, being for Himself alone, but for us and for many beings, nor is it like the heat of fire and the light of the sun, also it is what influences and helps the influenced with firmness [firmeza] and design [aderesçamjento] with the guiding [regimjento] of the expert designer [aderesçador], and I will show that later. And we say that through these things He can, and He knows, and He wants. And the intention is that He is not lazy, nor crazy, nor disturbed. And we say that His existence is abundant, in order to give it to many things; and that He is not crazy, because He reaches out [alcança], He is alive, since that which reaches out is a living thing; and that He is not disturbed, because things come controlled and governed, and are not created according to design except through reason [rrazon] and will [voluntad]. And we said: there is no being like Him; and that He is one, by being far away from many-ness.

And I show it to you that every way in which we put God, or whatever way of action [obra] will be, or deprivation of many-ness; [...]. And they would never use these names which strip away for God except by being far from the thing which is not in Him, like we should say

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<sup>128</sup> *For as much as this chapter is not good in both translations, I put it such as it is, without dressing up the words, in order not to err more than what is itself badly dressed. -- Pedro de Toledo, from the original manuscript.*

that a wall does not have will. And you know that we measure these heavens with span and elbow [palmo e cobdo], and we come to know the measure [comparaçion] of their parts and more of their movements, and they have wearied the understandings to know its essence [quididad], and although we know that they have matter and form, it is not like ours, and because of that we cannot describes them with names that are not general, and we will say that the heavens are not light nor heavy, nor passive, nor have taste nor odour, nor receive action [obra] from another. And we say this because we do not know its matter. So how will we understand the simple, separated from matter, finished, necessary to exist, which has no cause, whose perfection is removed of deficiencies? And so we understand that there is a being (eser) who does not resemble a thing of its creatures, nor has an equality [aparçeria] with them, nor many-ness, nor shortness [cortidat] in making what it wants; and its relationship [comparaçion] with the world, is like the captain of a ship, although it is not a true relationship, except to show that He is ruler of His things, and keeps the rule of His beings, even as will be shown completely.

May the Creator be praised, who when the sense is put in His being, one comes up short; and when one wants to understand His works in His will, one's knowledge becomes madness; and when one wants the tongue in praising him, all becomes stupidity [torpedat] to speak.

#### Chapter Fifty-Eight

The question is, if there is no way of knowing the essence of God, and the ways of obligating are impossible with Him, then do some have an advantage over other knowers [sabidores]? And that which Moysen (Moses), and Salamon (Solomon), reach is that which the junior of students reach? And that which is known and public in those things of law and philosophy, they are in the great advantage of some rather than others. Know that it is the truth of this advantage, that if you should add to the re-formings of that which has them, the truth will be more recognized. And if you should thus add so many more deprivations [priuaçiones] in God, you know the more. And you are the more close than he who does not subtract from God that which is not in Him. And because of that a man works many years to understand the science [sçiençia] of truth and to distance from God that which is not in Him. And there are others, short of study, because they do not understand this and doubt if there is such a thing in God, or not; and some stupid one puts on Him a thing impossible to be like that, accordingly I will show that He does not have a body; or another doubts, he does not know if He is a body or not; and another has it as he has it, he understands that he sees with such faith in his God. Because of this, they see and you will see the improvement that some have over others; that the first has no doubt of being near God; and the second, to be far from Him; and the third, more so when we should put the fourth who proves to be impossible the possibilities in God, until finding a man who may prove the impossibility [ynposibledat] of there being many impossibilities [jnposibledades] and deprivations [priuaçiones] in God which are for us possible to be in Him and to come to Him--if many more of us should believe this necessary thing, he will be that man more perfect than he.

Certainly it is shown to you, that if you should prove the names which strip away apply to God, you will be more perfect, and if you should put to him some obligations, you will be far from recognizing him. And in this way one recognizes and one will be near to Him, subtracting that which one should subtract, and not putting on Him too much in His existence or by putting on Him perfection which is such in us, since every perfection is conditioned [abituaçion], and not

every condition is for all conditioned. And know that if you put in God some things, you distance yourself from him in two ways: the one, that each thing which you should put in him is a perfection for us; and the second that it is not another thing but His own, which is His own perfection.

And as always, each man cannot come to recognize what is in his power to recognize if not through deprivation, and the deprivation does not give the understanding of the thing of which we deprive Him which is not in Him, because of this everyone said there is no one who can recognize God, but He Himself, and our recognizing is not enough [cortidat]. And all the philosophers said: He strengthened himself over us and baffled us with His great virtue [onor], and He concealed himself [encubriose] from us his many things to be unconcealed, like the sun is concealed by poor eyes, so they elaborate on this enough. And the strong saying is what David says: "to be quiet is praise to You." [Ps 56:2] Because each laud and praise is a deficiency [mengua] in God; and quiet is better, so say the perfected: "Speak in your hearts, on your beds, and be quiet always." [Ps 4:5]

And the noble scholars of the Talmud [talmuditas] said: "that before Rabi Hanina (Rabbi Haninah), they said: God the powerful, the great, the strong, the terrible, the feared, the fortified. Rabi Hanina said to them: have you stopped the praise of our Lord [vnestro Señor]? We do not hear premission to say three of those things, and that only because Moysen [Moses] and those of the holy house said the rest. Example: how does this seem? To a king who used to have a thousand times a thousand pieces of gold, and they praise him for silver, and this is certainly very ugly to him."

Here I come to the speech of this good man; and keep in mind that he was being angered by the multiplying of re-formings and the assigning of them to God. And if we would have left it to our understanding any more, then we would not speak of them; for the reason that men may have a good imagination [magañon] and thought, thus they put these on Him, like they said: "The law<sup>129</sup> speaks with the language of men;" therefore they put on God in the way of their own perfections, and (decide) the limit of us who may not put them on Him, recognizing what they are, except in the hour of understanding the law, or in prayer, for the prophets and those of the holy house decreed it so, and we speak it to ourselves like that. And the well spoken man said that for two reasons came these praises and names in our prayer: the first because the law says it, and the second because the prophets decreed it in order to say the prayer with them. And if not for the first, we would not name them. And if not for the second, we would remove them from their place and not make a prayer with them. And you multiply in Him these formalities?

So this has been shown to you, and because of this, for all such things put on God in the books of the prophets, it is not sloppy of us naming them in prayer, except some who, because those of the holy house decreed them, therefore we hear them so graceful, not like they make the utterly insane who multiply prayers and you will say that they decree thus so that their thoughts bring them close to God, and they say to God things which if they were to say them to a man, it would be a lack in his status, because they have not understood these honored things praised by the common sense [los sesos] of the village; also they put on Him that which they thought to be good and convenient for what in this praise they awaken the possibility, according to their

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129 The law being the Torah, holy scripture.

thought, and finding in the prophets such words and they judged them according to their simplicity, and they make sayings easily and poems [cantigas], and they think saying poems noble, until saying things which are of their own government and great madness, until laughing at something according to its nature [naturaleza] when one hears them, and one cries at understanding well how such a thing is said in God. And but for piety against giving a fault to the speaker, I tell you already a little of their mistakes which are very clear deficiencies to he who understands.

And it is certain that you knew that thus to put bad reputation and bad name is a great sin, and also it is a greater sin to say of God these things and put to Him these re-formings. And I will not say that it is a revelation, but is a dishonor, according to the failings [el yerro] of the common people [comunidades] where they hear it and of that people is such a speaker. And he who recognizes this failure of those ways of speaking [esos desvíos], and speaks of them, is in my eyes one of those about whom it is said: "and the sons of Yrrael [Israeal] spoke words which are not like that [así] about Adonay [Adonai], our God;" [II Re 17:9] And they said in the prophecy: "And by speaking error about Adonay;" [Isa 32:6] and he who thinks to honor his creator [su criador], should not hear them, [...] so much more do his works. And already you know the sin [pecado] of him "who speaks against the high," and you should not in these matters of God assign Him a thing, except praising him with good sense, nor should you add in prayer and blessings [benediciones] more than that which they decreed, which is abundant enough, nor add nor subtract, as Rabi Hanjna said. And as for the rest that the prophets put on God and you will go through it for that, and believe it as we say that they are re-formings of the works [obras], or they show stripping away of vilenesses [nichilidades]<sup>130</sup>; and the discovery is not for the common people, but for those special ones [singulares], who thus agree not to say more than they understand.

And I will return to speak on the interpretation [la glosa] of Rabi Hanjna, who did not say of the king, "that he used to have a thousand coins of gold and they used to praise him for a hundred," that then the example would be an sign that his perfection of God would be more than that perfection which we assign to God, which is His kind [espeçia], and is not like that as we show and prove; also the knowledge [sçiençia] of that example, thus says: "coins of gold and they praise him for silver," is to demonstrate that our perfections are not the kind of the essence [esença] of God, also they would be a dimunition [mengua] of His highness [alteza], like the given example said of Him: "and certainly the thing was ugly to him." And already I gave you to understand that what in God you think is a perfection is a dimunition in Him when it should be of that which is for us. And Salamon showed us this abundantly, where he says: "That God is in the heavens and you are on the earth; therefore, let your words be few." [Ecl. 5:1]

## Chapter Fifty-Nine

<sup>130</sup> With the sense of "opposites." Possibly something like "vileness" or "failings," cf. *Los recogidos: nueva visión de la mística española (1500-1700): obra elaborada en el Seminario Suárez de la Fundación Universitaria Española, Melquiades Andrés Martín*, page 245: "Pedir a Dios no solamente lo que tiene, sino lo que es, para conocerse a sí propio verísimamente en "su vileza y nichilidad o nada que es" y conocer a Dios, en especial su beneplácito."

Thus I want to say to you more so that you may understand that most of one's habits [costumbres] are by way of deprivations, and so that you should begin to distance the way of affirmations in God. Consider a man who knows there is in the world a ship, who has not seen it, nor knows what its name concerns, if a substance or an accident; and another knew that it is not an accident; and another understood that it is not of minerals; and another knew that it is not an animal; and another knew that it is not a vegetable [visitable]<sup>131</sup> planted in the ground; and another knew that it is not a body naturally joined together; and another knew that it is not like tables and doors; and another knew that it is not dug like a well; and another knew that it is not round, of a wide part, and falls in roundedness until arriving at a point; and another knows that it does not have roundness nor even feet; and another knows that it is not even. Certainly, it is shown to you that the last knows the form of the ship as there is in each of those forms of deprivation [priuacion] and as if this were equal to the picture [figuro] in the ways and forms of the formation [firmaçion]. However, the first ones whom we named in that example, each one [fol. 29r] is far from recognizing the ship, more than the one after him, such that the first does not recognize any but one name alone. [...] And because of this make sure that you prove the deprivation, so that you should not have it only by saying; because always by proof you will bring yourself a step closer to God. And in that way there were many close and others far, not because they have closeness or distance according to place, according to how the idiots think. And understand that well and you take advantage of him with joy. And already I showed to you the way thus that you might bring yourself closer to God and see in this way if you should wish.

...

End of Manuscript

Here is the end of the third part of the "More,"<sup>132</sup> thus it is all finished, let God be praised, amen. And it was finished Friday, eight days of the month of February, the year of the birth of our Lord of one thousand four hundred and thirty two years, in the very noble city of Seville. He who wrote the the book (was) Alfonso Peres de Caçeres, citizen of the aforementioned city. Let God be praised for ever, amen. *The book is finished, let there be praise to God, amen.*<sup>133</sup>

### **Pedro de Toledo's Spanish Translation**

Capitulo çinquenta e seys

[A]y en las rreformaçiones lo que es mas fondo delo que antiçipamos; de lo qual es saber que el eser es açidente, conteçio al que ha el eser, e por esto es cosa añadida sobre su quiditat del que es. E esto es muy declarado conuenjr ser en todo aquel que ha su eser (a) causa, que es cosa añadida sobre su quiditat, pero lo que non ha causa al su eser, el qual es Dios loado, solo enesta

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<sup>131</sup> See previous footnote on *visitabile*.

<sup>132</sup> Guide, in Hebrew.

<sup>133</sup> In Latin.

cosa, es lo que se diz en Dios que es neçesario de eser, por que su eser es su esençia e su verdat, e non es sustançia que le contesca el eser por açidente; por que seria su eser cosa añadida enella, mas es neçesario del eser sienpre, non le conteçe noujdat njn açidente, e por esto es e non en eser, e biuo e non en biuez, e poderoso e non en poder, [e] entendido [e] non (con) [en] entender, njn en saber, mas todo torna a vna cosa sin muchidat, [commo se declarara].

E [deues saber que] la vnjon e la muchidat son açidentes que conteçen en toda cosa que es de parte que es muchidat o vnjdat, e ya es declarado esto enla metafisica. E commo la cuenta non es sustançia del contado, e asi la vnjdat [non es sustançia] dela cosa que es vna, que todos son açidentes dela cantidad partible que alcança los eseres aparejados para rreçebir estos açidentes; mas el neçesario del eser simple non le acaesçe conpusicion, commo es falsidat acaesçelle açidente dela muchidat njn dela vnidat, quiero dezir: que non es la vnidat añadida sobre su sustançia, mas es vno non en vnidat.

E non se pueden esmerar [fol. 27r] estas cosas delgadas, que con poco se vedan del entendimiento, por el vso delos vocablos vsados que son cabsa grande de error en cada lenguaje, fasta non poder figurar la cosa si non humana mente. E quando quisieremos demostrar Dios non ser en muchedunbre, non podemos dezir si non "vno," maguer que tan el vno qual el mucho es delas partes dela cantidad; e por esto declararemos la cosa por el entendimjento dela verdat, diziendo: "vno, non en vnjdat [qadmōn]" e eterrno, demostrar que non es criado. E sabido es que el "antiguo" [qadmōn] non es dicho si non al que es en tienpo, que es açidente enel moujmiento, e es rrelativo; ca diziendo "antiguo" en açidente del tienpo, commo sy dixieses luengo e corto en açidente dela linea; e aquel que non ha tienpo non es antiguo njn criado, commo non es dicho enla dulçor tuerto njn derecho, njn la boz salada njn por sabor.

Estas cosas son sabidas al que vso entender la verdat e esmeralla por entendimjento, non por vocablos. E lo que dizen los libros que Dios es "primero" e "postrimero," asi commo dezir que tiene oio e oreja, quela entençion es que non ha demudaçion njn rrenouaçion de cosa, njn Dios es so el tienpo, para que sea alguna ygualdat entre el e otro delo que es en tienpo, e sea primero e postrimero, mas todos estos vocablos son "commo lenguaje delos fijos delos omnes." Asi es nuestro dezir "vno," por que non ha semejante, non por quela vnjdat es junta en su sustançia.

#### Capitulo çinquenta e seite

Esto es mas fondo quello que antiçipamos. Sabe que nonbrar a Dios por nonbres despojantes es dezir verdadero, sin mengua en Dios alguna; mas nonbrallo por nonbres a(b)de[b]dantes teine grant equiuocaçion e menguar. E auemos menester declarar commo los despojantes son maneras e costunbres del criador en vna manera, e enque cosa se departen delos nonbres adebdantes; e despues te declarare commo non auemos via de nonbrallo sy non por despoiamientos sola mente.

E digo asi: quela rreformaçion non departe el rreformado sola mente fasta que non se aparçee en esa rreformaçion con otro, mas la forma sera tan bien forma al rreformado, e aun que se aparçee enella con otro, e non sera enel en vnidat. Enxenplo: si vieres vn ombe de lueñe, diras: "quien es aquel?" dezir te han: "cosa bjua;" esta es vna forma, e non lo departiste de otra, mas persistele vn termjno, quello que viste non es visitable njn mjneral. E si esta vn onbre en vna casa, e sabes que esta ende vn cuerpo, mas non sabes que es, e dizes: "que ay enesta casa?" E dizen te

que non esta ende cuerpo visitable njn mjneral, ya le posiste alguna singularidad, onde entiendes que ay ende cosa biua, e maguer [que] que non sabes que anjmal es. Enesta manera se aparçean las formas dela despojaçion conlas dela adebdaçion, que non puede ser que non se determjen en alguna singularidad de termjno, aun que non fuesen enel dela determnaçion, saluo lo que es vedado delo que pensauamos que non es vedado. Mas la manera en que se departen las maneras dela depojaçion delas maneras dela adebdaçion, quelas formas dela adebdaçion maguer non son determjnadas muestran alguna parte delo buscado saber de todo ello, o parte de su sustançia o açidente de sus açidentes, e las rreformaçiones delos depojamientos non nos muestran delo buscado saber, saluo si por via de açidente, segunt axenplamos<sup>134</sup>.

E despues deste prinçipio, digo que Dios ay prueua verdadera que es neçesario de seer sin conpuçiion, segunt declararemos, e non conosçemos saluo el eser, non su quiditat; e por esto non ha rreformaçion de adebdacion. Ca non tiene seer que salga del termjno de su quiditat para quela rreformaçion muestre sobre ella, quanto mas que sea su quiditat conpuesta en manera que muestre la rreformaçion sobre ella. E si asi es, non ha adebdaçion [fol. 27v] en njnguna manera [...]. E muestra el seso a fin delo que puede onbre alcançar de Dios. Enxenplo: ya nos [fue] prouado auer (otra) [una] cosa fuera delas cosas sentidas e conosçidas por entendimjento, e diziendo que tien eser, la entençio[n] es que non es prouado de eser, e conosçeremos que non es commo el eser delos elementos que an morteridad, e dezjimos que es bjuo, la enteçion es que non es muero, njn es commo el eser de los çielos que son bjuos, que por esto dexjmos que non es cuerpo; e que este eser non es commo el eser del entendimjento que non es muero, njn cuerpo, mas cabsado; e que Dios es antiguo por que non ha cabsa asu eser, e que este eser, ques si mesmo, non es abondoso seer para sise sola mente saluo para nos e para mucho eseres, njn es commo la calor del fuego e luz del sol, mas es que enfluye e ayuda al ynfluydo con firmeza e aderesçamjento, con rregimjento de aderesçador entendido, (e) segunt declarare. E dezjmos que por estas cosas puede, e sabe, e quiere. E la enteçion es que non es perezoso, njn loco, njn turuado. E lo que deximos que su eser es abondoso, para dar ese amuchas cosas; e que non es loco, por que alcança, es biuo, que el que alcança cosa biua es; e que non es turbado, por quelas cosas van rregladas e rregidas, e non son criadas segunt acaesçimjento saluo por rrazon e voluntad. [E deximos]: este eser non ay commo el; e que es vno, por alueñar la muchidat.

E ya sete declaro que toda manera que ponemos a Dios, o sera manera de obra, o priuaçion de muchidat; [...]. E non vsaron traer estos nonbres despojantes en Dios saluo por alueñar la cosa que non es enel, commo diremos quela paret non ha voluntad. E tu sabes que estos çielos medimos con palmo e cobdo, e alcançamos saber la conparaçion de sus partes e los mas de sus moujmjentos, e cansaron los entendimjentos conosçer su quididad, e maguer que sabemos que son de materia e forma, non commo la nuestra, e por esto non los podemos declarar por nonbres [si non] generales, que diremos quelos çielos non son liujanos njn pesados, njn pasiuos, njn han sabor njn olor, njn rresçiben obra de otro. E esto dezjmos por que non sabemos su materia. Pues commo entenderemos el simple, separado de materia, acabado, nesçesario de eser, que non ha causa, que su perfeçion es quitada de menguas? E por esto entendemos que ay eser quele non semeja cosa de sus criaturas, njn tiene aparçeria conellas, njn muchidat, njn

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<sup>134</sup> por quanto este capitulo non es bueno en amas trasladaçiones, puse lo tal qual es, sin aderesçamjento de vocablos, por non errar mas delo quel mesmo es mal aderesçado

cortidat fazer lo que quiere; e su comparacion enel mundo, como el patron dela nao, maguer non comparacion verdadera, saluo mostrar que es rregidor delas cosas, e guarda rregla de sus eseres, segunt avn se declarara acabada mente.

Ensalçado sea el criador, que quando el seso se pone en su eser, tornase corto; e quando quiere entender sus obras en su voluntad, tornase el su saber locura; e quando quiere la lengua en alteçello, tornase todo dezir torpedat.

### Capitulo çinquenta e ocho

Qujstion es, si non ay manera de conosçer la esençia de Dios, e las maneras del adebdamjento le son ynposibles, pues que mejoría an vnos sobre otros sabidores? E lo que alcanço Moysen, e Salamon, es lo que alcança el menor delos estudiantes. E lo que es sabido e publico enlos dela ley e filosofos, que ay en grant ventaja delos vnos alos otros. Sabe que es verdat de aquesta ventaja, que quanto añadieses [las] rreformasiones de aquel quelas ha, sera mas conosçida su verdat. E así quanto mas añadieses priuaciones en Dios, sabes del mas. E eres su mas çercano que aquel que non quita de Dios lo que enel non es. E por esto afana vn onbre muchos años entender sçiençia de verdat e alueñar de Dios lo que enel non es. E ay otros, cortos de estudio, ca non entienden esto e dubdan si ay tal cosa en Dios, o non; e algunt torpe le pone cosa ynposible de [fol. 28r] ser así, segunt declarare que non tiene cuerpo; o otro dubda, non sabe si es cuerpo o non; e otro tiene quello tiene, entiende que vee con tal fe asu Dios. Por esto veen [e] veras la mejoría que an vnos sobre otros; quel primero non es dubda ser çercano a Dios; e el segundo, lueñe del; e el terçero, mas ansi que quando pusieremos quarto que ouo prueua ser ynposible las pasibledades en Dio, e el primero que alueño la corporidat, non le fue declarado esto, sera este quarto mas çercano a Dios, fasta fallar onbre que se prueue ynposibledat ser muchos jnposibledades e priuaciones en Dios que son a nos posible seer enel o venjr del, quanto mas si creyeremos esto neçesario, sera ese varon mas perfecto que el.

Ahe declarado te es, que quanto prouares despojamientos en Dios, seras mas perfecto, e si le pusieres algunas a(b)debdaciones, eras lueñe delo conoçer. E desta manera se conoçe e se açercara a el, quitando del lo que se deue quitar, e non ponjendole demasidat en su eser o para le poner perfecçion que es tal en nos, que toda perfecçion es abituacion, e non todo abituacion es atodo abituado. E sabe que si pones en Dios algunas cosas, alueñas te del de dos maneras: la vna, que todo lo quele pusieres es perfecçion anos; e lo segundo que non es otra cosa sy non sise mesmo, que es su mesma perfecçion.

E commo sienpre, todo onbre que non puede llegar conosçer lo que en su poder es de conosçer si non por priuacion, e la priuacion non da entender cosa de aquel que priuamos loque enel non es, por esto dixieron todos que Dios non ay quien lo puede conosçer, si non el se mesmo, e nuestro conosçer es cortidat. E todos los filosofos dixieron: enforteçiose sobre nos e turuonos con su grant onor, e encubriose de nos de su mucho seer descubierto, commo se encubre el sol delos flacos ojos, a alongaron enesto asaz. E el fuerte dezir es lo que Davit diz: "ati en callar es loança." [Ps 65:2] Ca todo loor e ala[ba]miento es mengua en Dios; el callar es mejor, segunt dizen los profectas: "dezit en vuestros coraçones, sobre vuestras camas, e callad sienpre." [Ps 4:5]

E dixieron los nobles talmuditas: "que ante rrabi Hanina, dixieron: [Dios] el poderoso, el grande, el fuerte, el terrible, el temjdo, el fortificado. Dixoles rrabi Hanjna: acabastes el loor de

vuestro Señor? Estos non oujmos liçençia dezir los tres dellos, si non por quello dixieron Moysen e los dela casa santa. Enxenplo: aque paresçe esto? A vn rrey que tenja mill vezes mill pieças de oro, e loan le con de plata, e çierto muy feo le es."

Aqui lleo el dezir deste buen onbre; e para mientes quanto se enojaua multiplicar rreformaçiones e apropiallas a Dios. E si lo dexasemos anuestro entendimjento non mas, non fablariamos enellas; mas por rrazon quelos onbres ayan alguna buena maginaçion e pensamiento, por esto gelas aponen, commo dixieron: "Fabra la ley por lenguaje delos omnes;" por tanto ponen a Dios enlas maneras de sus perfeçiones, e la fin de nos que gelas non pongamos, conosçiendo que son, si non enla ora del aprender la ley, o en la oraçion, por quanto los prophetas e los dela casa santa la ordenaron tal, e la nos dezimos asi. E el dicho buen onbre dixo que por dos cosas vinjeron estos loores e nonbres en nuestra oraçion: la vna por que lo diz la ley, e lo segundo por que lo ordenaron los prophetas para dezir oraçion conellas. E si non por lo primero, non los nonbrariamos. E si non por lo segundo, non los quitar[i]amos de su lugar njn fizieramos oraçion conellos. E tu multiplicas enel las formalidades?

Pues declarado te es de aquesto, e por esto, que todas las cosas tales puestas a Dios enlos libros delas profetas, non es suelto anos nonbrallas enla oraçion, saluo algunas, por que los dela casa [fol. 28v] santa las ordenaron, entonçes ovimos la tal soltura, non commo fazen los acabados locos que multiplican oraçiones e dezires que ordenan para segun sus pensamientos se açercar a Dios, e dizen a Dios cosas que si las dixiesen avn onbre, la seria mengua en su grado, por que non an entendido estas onrradas cosas enxalçadas delos sesos del pueblo; mas pusieronle lo que pensaron seer bueno e conuenjente delo que enesta loor despiertan pasibilidad, segunt su pensamiento, quanto mas fallando los prophetas sus palabras tales e judgaron las segunt su llaneza, e fazen dezires suelta mente e cantigas, e piensan dezir cantiga noble, fasta dezir cosas que dellas son propia eregia e dellas grant locura, fasta fazer rreyr a alguno segunt su naturaleza quando los oye, e llora (e) a buen entender commo es dicho tal cosa en Dios. E si non por piadat de dar mengua del dezidor, dezir te ya algunt poco de sus yerros que son la su mengua bien clara al que entiende.

E es menester que sepas que si poner mala fama [e mal nonbre] es grant pecado (e mal nonbre), quanto mas que es mayor (mala fama) [pecado] dezir en Dios estas cosas e ponelle estas [rre]formaçiones. E non dire que es rreuellamjento, mas es desonrramjento, segunt el yerro dela comunidat que lo oyen e de essa gente es tal el dezidor. E el que conosçe esa mengua de esos dezires, e fabla enellos, es en mjs ojos delos que enellos es dicho: "e fablaron fijos de Yrrael palabras que non son asi sobre Adonay, vuestro Dios;" [II Re 17:9] E dixieron enla profeçia: "E por fablar sobre Adonay error;" [Isa 32:6] e el que cura onrrar su criador, non les deue oyr, [...] quanto mas fazer sus obras. E ya sabes el pecado del "que dize contra arriba," e non deues enlas maneras de Dios apropialle cosa, saluo enxalçallo con buen seso, njn añadadas en oraçiones e bendiçiones sobre lo que ordenaron, que abonda asaz, njn añadadas njn mengues, segunt [dixo] rrabi Hanjna. E lo demas que ponen los prophetas le elo quando pasares por ello, e creelo segunt declaramos que son [rre]formaçiones delas obras, o demuestran despojamiento de njchilidades; e non es descubrir al comun, que es delos singulares que asy conujene que non les digan lo que conujene, mas quello entienden ellos.

E tornare a dezir la glosa de rrabi Hanjna, que [non] dixo del rrey "que tenja mill dineros de oro e lo alabauan en çiento," que entonçes seria el enxenplo señal que su perfeçion de Dios

seria mas que esta perfeccion quele conparamos a Dios, que es su espeçia, e non es asy segunt declaramos e prouamos; mas la sçiençia deste enxemplo, onde diz: "dineros de oro e lo alaban con de plata," es mostrar que estas perfecciones nuestras non son dela esençia de Dios sus espeçias, mas serian mengua en su alteza, como dixo enel dicho enxemplo: "E de çierto fea cosa le es." E ya te di entender quello que en Dios peinsas perfeccion es mengua enel quando fuere delo que en nos es. E Salamon nos mostro abondo en aquesto, do diz: "Que Dios es enlos çielos e tu sobre la tierra; [por esto, sean tus palabras pocas]." [Ecl. 5:1]

#### Capitulo çinquenta e jx

Quiero te dezir onde mas entiendas quello mas de sus costunbres es por via de priuaciones, e añadas alueñar la via de afirmaciones en Dios. Pone que el onbre sabe que ay enel mundo vna nao, que la non vido, njn sabe sobre que se diz este nonbre njn si sobre sustançia o a accidente; e supo otro que non es açidente; e entendio otro que non es delos mjneralas; e supo otro que non es anjmal; e supo otro que non es visitable plantado enel suelo; e supo otro que non es cuerpo natural juntado; e supo otro que non es commo las tablas e puertas; e supo otro que non es cauada commo pozo; e supo otro que non es rredonda, de vna parte ancha e deçendie[n] en rredondez fasta llegar avn punto; e supo otro que non es que tenga rredondez njn piernas yguales; e supo otro que non es ygual. Ahe, te es declarado que este postrero supo la forma dela nao segunt es enestas formas dela priuacion e commo si fuera ygual de aquel quela figuro enlas maneras e formas dela firmacion. Enpero los primeros que nonbramos eneste enxemplo, cada vno [fol. 29r] es lueñe de conosçer la nao, mas que el despues [del], tanto quel primero non conosçe dellas si non solo el nonbre. [...] E por esto guar[da]te que prueues la priuacion, non quela [ayas] por solo dezir; ca si por prueua sienpre te açercaras a Dios vn grado. E desta manera fueron del muchos çercanos e otros lueñes, [non] por que ayan çercamiento o alexamiento segunt lugar, segunt piensan los nesçios. E entiende esto bien e aprouechate del con alegria. E ya te declare la via onde te açerques a Dios e vee enella si quisieres.

...

#### End of Manuscript

Aqui es el fin dela terçera parte del "More," onde es todo acabado, Dios sea loado, amen. E acabose vierrnes, ocho dias del mes de febrero, año del nascimiento del nuestro señor de mill e quatroçientos e treynta e dos años, enla muy noble çibdat de Seujlla. El qual libro escriujo Alfon[so] Peres de Caç[e]res, vezino dela dicha çibdat. Dios sea loado por sienpre, amen. Finito libro, sit laus deo, amen.

#### English Translation by M. Friedländer from the Arabic

#### Chapter LVII

On attributes; remarks more recondite than the preceding. It is known that existence is an accident appertaining to all things, and therefore an element superadded to their essence. This must evidently be the case as regards everything the existence of which is due to some cause: its existence is an element superadded to its essence. But as regards a being whose existence is not

due to any cause--God alone is that being, for His existence, as we have said, is absolute--existence and essence are perfectly identical; He is not a substance to which existence is joined as an accident, as an additional element. His existence is always absolute, and has never been a new element or an accident in Him. Consequently God exists without possessing the attribute of existence. Similarly He lives, without possessing the attribute of life; knows, without possessing the attribute of knowledge; is omnipotent without possessing the attribute of omnipotence; is wise, without possessing the attribute of wisdom: all this reduces itself to one and the same entity; there is no plurality in Him, as will be shown. It is further necessary to consider that unity and plurality are accidents supervening to an object according as it consists of many elements or of one. This is fully explained in the book called *Metaphysics*. In the same way as number is not the substance of the things numbered, so is unity not the substance of the thing which has the attribute of unity, for unity and plurality are accidents belonging to the category of discrete quantity, and supervening to such objects as are capable of receiving them.

To that being, however, which has truly simple, absolute existence, and in which composition is inconceivable, the accident of unity is as inadmissible as the accident of plurality; that is to say, God's unity is not an element superadded, but He is One without possessing the attribute of unity. The investigation of this subject, which is almost too subtle for our understanding, must not be based on current expressions employed in describing it, for these are the great source of error. It would be extremely difficult for us to find, in any language whatsoever, words adequate to this subject, and we can only employ inadequate language. In our endeavour to show that God does not include a plurality, we can only say "He is one," although "one" and "many" are both terms which serve to distinguish quantity. We therefore make the subject clearer, and show to the understanding the way of truth by saying He is one but does not possess the attribute of unity.

The same is the case when we say God is the First (Kadmon), to express that He has not been created; the term "First" is decidedly inaccurate, for it can in its true sense only be applied to a being that is subject to the relation of time; the latter, however, is an accident to motion which again is connected with a body. Besides the attribute "first" is a relative term, being in regard to time the same as the terms "long" and "short" are in regard to a line. Both expressions, "first" and "created," are equally inadmissible in reference to any being to which the attribute of time is not applicable, just as we do not say "crooked" or "straight" in reference to taste, "salted" or "insipid" in reference to the voice. These subjects are not unknown to those who have accustomed themselves to seek a true understanding of the things, and to establish their properties in accordance with the abstract notions which the mind has formed of them, and who are not misled by the inaccuracy of the words employed. All attributes, such as "the First," "the Last," occurring in the Scriptures in reference to God, are as metaphorical as the expressions "ear" and "eye." They simply signify that God is not subject to any change or innovation whatever; they do not imply that God can be described by time, or that there is any comparison between Him and any other being as regards time, and that He is called on that account "the first" and "the last." In short, all similar expressions are borrowed from the language commonly used among the people. In the same way we use "One" in reference to God, to express that there is nothing similar to Him, but we do not mean to say that an attribute of unity is added to His essence.

## Chapter LVIII

This chapter is even more recondite than the preceding. Know that the negative attributes of God are the true attributes: they do not include any incorrect notions or any deficiency whatever in reference to God, while positive attributes imply polytheism, and are inadequate, as we have already shown. It is now necessary to explain how negative expressions can in a certain sense be employed as attributes, and how they are distinguished from positive attributes. Then I shall show that we cannot describe the Creator by any means except by negative attributes. An attribute does not exclusively belong to the one object to which it is related; while qualifying one thing, it can also be employed to qualify other things, and is in that case not peculiar to that one thing. E.g., if you see an object from a distance, and on enquiring what it is, are told that it is a living being, you have certainly learnt an attribute of the object seen, and although that attribute does not exclusively belong to the object perceived, it expresses that the object is not a plant or a mineral. Again, if a man is in a certain house, and you know that something is in the house, but not exactly what, you ask what is in that house, and you are told, not a plant nor a mineral. You have thereby obtained some special knowledge of the thing; you have learnt that it is a living being, although you do not yet know what kind of a living being it is. The negative attributes have this in common with the positive, that they necessarily circumscribe the object to some extent, although such circumscription consists only in the exclusion of what otherwise would not be excluded. In the following point, however, the negative attributes are distinguished from the positive. The positive attributes, although not peculiar to one thing, describe a portion of what we desire to know, either some part of its essence or some of its accidents: the negative attributes, on the other hand, do not, as regards the essence of the thing which we desire to know, in any way tell us what it is, except it be indirectly, as has been shown in the instance given by us.

After this introduction, I would observe that,--as has already been shown--God's existence is absolute, that it includes no composition, as will be proved, and that we comprehend only the fact that He exists, not His essence. Consequently it is a false assumption to hold that He has any positive attribute: for He does not possess existence in addition to His essence: it therefore cannot be said that the one may be described as an attribute [of the other]; much less has He [in addition to His existence] a compound essence, consisting of two constituent elements to which the attribute could refer: still less has He accidents, which could be described by an attribute. Hence it is clear that He has no positive attribute whatever. The negative attributes, however, are those which are necessary to direct the mind to the truths which we must believe concerning God; for, on the one hand, they do not imply any plurality, and, on the other, they convey to man the highest possible knowledge of God; e.g., it has been established by proof that some being must exist besides those things which can be perceived by the senses, or apprehended by the mind; when we say of this being, that it exists, we mean that its non-existence is impossible. We then perceive that such a being is not, for instance, like the four elements, which are inanimate, and we therefore say that it is living, expressing thereby that it is not dead. We call such a being incorporeal, because we notice that it is unlike the heavens, which are living, but material. Seeing that it is also different from the intellect, which, though incorporeal and living, owes its existence to some cause, we say it is the first, expressing thereby that its existence is not due to any cause. We further notice, that the existence, that is the essence,

of this being is not limited to its own existence: many existences emanate from it, and its influence is not like that of the fire in producing heat, or that of the sun in sending forth light, but consists in constantly giving them stability and order by well-established rule, as we shall show: we say, on that account, it has power, wisdom, and will, i.e., it is not feeble or ignorant, or hasty, and does not abandon its creatures: when we say that it is not feeble, we mean that its existence is capable of producing the existence of many other things: by saying that it is not ignorant, we mean "it perceives" or "it lives,"--for everything that perceives is living--by saying "it is not hasty, and does not abandon its creatures," we mean that all these creatures preserve a certain order and arrangement: they are not left to themselves; they are not produced aimlessly, but whatever condition they receive from that being is given with design and intention. We thus learn that there is no other being like unto God, and we say that He is One, i.e., there are not more Gods than one.

It has thus been shown that every attribute predicated of God either denotes the quality of an action, or--when the attribute is intended to convey some idea of the Divine Being itself, and not of His actions--the negation of the opposite. Even these negative attributes must not be formed and applied to God, except in the way in which, as you know, sometimes an attribute is negated in reference to a thing, although that attribute can naturally never be applied to it in the same sense, as, e.g., we say, "This wall does not see." Those who read the present work are aware that, notwithstanding all the efforts of the mind, we can obtain no knowledge of the essence of the heavens--a revolving substance which has been measured by us in spans and cubits, and examined even as regards the proportions of the several spheres to each other and respecting most of their motions--although we know that they must consist of matter and form; but the matter not being the same as sublunary matter, we can only describe the heavens in terms expressing negative properties, but not in terms denoting positive qualities. Thus we say that the heavens are not light, not heavy, not passive and therefore not subject to impressions, and that they do not possess the sensations of taste and smell; or we use similar negative attributes. All this we do, because we do not know their substance. What, then, can be the result of our efforts, when we try to obtain a knowledge of a Being that is free from substance, that is most simple, whose existence is absolute, and not due to any cause, to whose perfect essence nothing can be superadded, and whose perfection consists, as we have shown, in the absence of all defects. All we understand is the fact that He exists, that He is a Being to whom none of His creatures is similar, who has nothing in common with them, who does not include plurality, who is never too feeble to produce other beings, and whose relation to the universe is that of a steersman to a boat; and even this is not a real relation, a real simile, but serves only to convey to us the idea that God rules the universe; that is, that He gives it duration, and preserves its necessary arrangement. This subject will be treated more fully. Praised be He! In the contemplation of His essence, our comprehension and knowledge prove insufficient; in the examination of His works, how they necessarily result from His will, our knowledge proves to be ignorance, and in the endeavour to extol Him in words, all our efforts in speech are mere weakness and failure!

## Chapter LIX

The following question might perhaps be asked: Since there is no possibility of obtaining a knowledge of the true essence of God, and since it has also been proved that the only thing that

man can apprehend of Him is the fact that He exists, and that all positive attributes are inadmissible, as has been shown, what is the difference among those who have obtained a knowledge of God? Must not the knowledge obtained by our teacher Moses, and by Solomon, be the same as that obtained by any one of the lowest class of philosophers, since there can be no addition to this knowledge? But, on the other hand, it is generally accepted among theologians and also among philosophers, that there can be a great difference between two persons as regards the knowledge of God obtained by them. Know that this is really the case, that those who have obtained a knowledge of God differ greatly from each other; for in the same way as by each additional attribute an object is more specified, and is brought nearer to the true apprehension of the observer, so by each additional negative attribute you advance toward the knowledge of God, and you are nearer to it than he who does not negative, in reference to God, those qualities which you are convinced by proof must be negated. There may thus be a man who after having earnestly devoted many years to the pursuit of one science, and to the true understanding of its principles, till he is fully convinced of its truths, has obtained as the sole result of this study the conviction that a certain quality must be negated in reference to God, and the capacity of demonstrating that it is impossible to apply it to Him. Superficial thinkers will have no proof for this, will doubtfully ask, Is that thing existing in the Creator, or not? And those who are deprived of sight will positively ascribe it to God, although it has been clearly shown that He does not possess it. E.g., while I show that God is incorporeal, another doubts and is not certain whether He is corporeal or incorporeal: others even positively declare that He is corporeal, and appear before the Lord with that belief. Now see how great the difference is between these three men: the first is undoubtedly nearest to the Almighty; the second is remote, and the third still more distant from Him. If there be a fourth person who holds himself convinced by proof that emotions are impossible in God, while the first who rejects the corporeality, is not convinced of that impossibility, that fourth person is undoubtedly nearer the knowledge of God than the first, and go on, so that a person who, convinced by proof, negatives a number of things in reference to God, which according to our belief may possibly be in Him or emanate from Him, is undoubtedly a more perfect man than we are, and would surpass us still more if we positively believed these things to be properties of God. It will now be clear to you, that every time you establish by proof the negation of a thing in reference to God, you become more perfect, while with every additional positive assertion you follow your imagination and recede from the true knowledge of God. Only by such ways must we approach the knowledge of God, and by such researches and studies as would show us the inapplicability of what is inadmissible as regards the Creator, not by such methods as would prove the necessity of ascribing to Him anything extraneous to His essence, or asserting that He has a certain perfection, when we find it to be a perfection in relation to us. The perfections are all to some extent acquired properties, and a property which must be acquired does not exist in everything capable of making such acquisition.

You must bear in mind, that by affirming anything of God, you are removed from Him in two respects; first, whatever you affirm, is only a perfection in relation to us; secondly, He does not possess anything superadded to this essence; His essence includes all His perfections, as we have shown. Since it is a well-known fact that even that knowledge of God which is accessible to man cannot be attained except by negations, and that negations do not convey a true idea of the

being to which they refer, all people, both of past and present generations, declared that God cannot be the object of human comprehension, that none but Himself comprehends what He is, and that our knowledge consists in knowing that we are unable truly to comprehend Him. All philosophers say, "He has overpowered us by His grace, and is invisible to us through the intensity of His light," like the sun which cannot be perceived by eyes which are too weak to bear its rays. Much more has been said on this topic, but it is useless to repeat it here. The idea is best expressed in the book of Psalms, "Silence is praise to Thee" (lxxv. 2). It is a very expressive remark on this subject; for whatever we utter with the intention of extolling and of praising Him, contains something that cannot be applied to God, and includes derogatory expressions; it is therefore more becoming to be silent, and to be content with intellectual reflection, as has been recommended by men of the highest culture, in the words "Commune with your own heart upon your bed, and be still" (Ps. iv. 4). You must surely know the following celebrated passage in the Talmud--would that all passages in the Talmud were like that!--although it is known to you, I quote it literally, as I wish to point out to you the ideas contained in it: "A certain person, reading prayers in the presence of Rabbi Haninah, said, 'God, the great, the valiant and the tremendous, the powerful, the strong, and the mighty.'--The rabbi said to him, Have you finished all the praises of your Master? The three epithets, 'God, the great, the valiant and the tremendous,' we should not have applied to God, had Moses not mentioned them in the Law, and had not the men of the Great Synagogue come forward subsequently and established their use in the prayer; and you say all this! Let this be illustrated by a parable. There was once an earthly king, possessing millions of gold coin; he was praised for owning millions of silver coin; was this not really dispraise to him?" Thus far the opinion of the pious rabbi. Consider, first, how repulsive and annoying the accumulation of all these positive attributes was to him; next, how he showed that, if we had only to follow our reason, we should never have composed these prayers, and we should not have uttered any of them. It has, however, become necessary to address men in words that should leave some idea in their minds, and, in accordance with the saying of our Sages, "The Torah speaks in the language of men," the Creator has been described to us in terms of our own perfections; but we should not on that account have uttered any other than the three above-mentioned attributes, and we should not have used them as names of God except when meeting with them in reading the Law. Subsequently, the men of the Great Synagogue, who were prophets, introduced these expressions also into the prayer, but we should not on that account use [in our prayers] any other attributes of God. The principal lesson to be derived from this passage is that there are two reasons for our employing those phrases in our prayers: first, they occur in the Pentateuch; secondly, the Prophets introduced them into the prayer. Were it not for the first reason, we should never have uttered them; and were it not for the second reason, we should not have copied them from the Pentateuch to recite them in our prayers; how then could we approve of the use of those numerous attributes! You also learn from this that we ought not to mention and employ in our prayers all the attributes we find applied to God in the books of the Prophets; for he does not say, "Were it not that Moses, our Teacher, said them, we should not have been able to use them"; but he adds another condition--"and had not the men of the Great Synagogue come forward and established their use in the prayer," because only for that reason are we allowed to use them in our prayers. We cannot approve of what those foolish persons do who are extravagant in praise, fluent and prolix in the prayers they compose, and in the hymns they make

in the desire to approach the Creator. They describe God in attributes which would be an offence if applied to a human being; for those persons have no knowledge of these great and important principles, which are not accessible to the ordinary intelligence of man. Treating the Creator as a familiar object, they describe Him and speak of Him in any expressions they think proper; they eloquently continue to praise Him in that manner, and believe that they can thereby influence Him and produce an effect on Him. If they find some phrase suited to their object in the words of the Prophets they are still more inclined to consider that they are free to make use of such texts--which should at least be explained--to employ them in their literal sense, to derive new expressions from them, to form from them numerous variations, and to found whole compositions on them. This license is frequently met with in the compositions of the singers, preachers, and others who imagine themselves to be able to compose a poem. Such authors write things which partly are real heresy, partly contain such folly and absurdity that they naturally cause those who hear them to laugh, but also to feel grieved at the thought that such things can be uttered in reference to God. Were it not that I pitied the authors for their defects. and did not wish to injure them, I should have cited some passages to show you their mistakes; besides, the fault of their compositions is obvious to all intelligent persons. You must consider it, and think thus: If slander and libel is a great sin, how much greater is the sin of those who speak with looseness of tongue in reference to God, and describe Him by attributes which are far below Him; and I declare that they not only commit an ordinary sin, but unconsciously at least incur the guilt of profanity and blasphemy. This applies both to the multitude that listens to such prayers, and to the foolish man that recites them. Men, however, who understand the fault of such compositions, and, nevertheless, recite them, may be classed, according to my opinion, among those to whom the following words are applied: "And the children of Israel used words that were not right against the Lord their God" (2 Kings xvii. 9); and "utter error against the Lord" (Isa. xxxii. 6). If you are of those who regard the honour of their Creator, do not listen in any way to them, much less utter what they say, and still less compose such prayers. knowing how great is the offence of one who hurls aspersions against the Supreme Being. There is no necessity at all for you to use positive attributes of God with the view of magnifying Him in your thoughts, or to go beyond the limits which the men of the Great Synagogue have introduced in the prayers and in the blessings, for this is sufficient for all purposes, and even more than Sufficient, as Rabbi Haninah said. Other attributes, such as occur in the books of the Prophets, may be uttered when we meet with them in reading those books; but we must bear in mind what has already been explained, that they are either attributes of God's actions, or expressions implying the negation of the opposite. This likewise should not be divulged to the multitude; but a reflection of this kind is fitted for the few only who believe that the glorification of God does not consist in uttering that which is not to be uttered, but in reflecting on that on which man should reflect.

We will now conclude our exposition of the wise words of R. Haninah. He does not employ any such simile as: "A king who possesses millions of gold denarii, and is praised as having hundreds"; for this would imply that God's perfections, although more perfect than those ascribed to man are still of the same kind: but this is not the case, as has been proved. The excellence of the simile consists in the words: "who possesses golden denarii, and is praised as having silver denarii"; this implies that these attributes, though perfections as regards ourselves, are not such as regards God; in reference to Him they would all be defects, as is distinctly

suggested in the remark, "Is this not an offence to Him?"

I have already told you that all these attributes, whatever perfection they may denote according to your idea, imply defects in reference to God, if applied to Him in the same sense as they are used in reference to ourselves. Solomon has already given us sufficient instruction on this subject by saying, "For God is in heaven, and thou upon earth; therefore let thy words be few" (Eccles. v. 2).

#### Chapter LX

I will give you in this chapter some illustrations, in order that you may better understand the propriety of forming as many negative attributes as possible, and the impropriety of ascribing to God any positive attributes. A person may know for certain that a "ship" is in existence, but he may not know to what object that name is applied, whether to a substance or to an accident: a second person then learns that the ship is not an accident; a third, that it is not a mineral; a fourth, that it is not a plant growing in the earth; a fifth, that it is not a body whose parts are joined together by nature; a sixth, that it is not a flat object like boards or doors; a seventh, that it is not a sphere; an eighth, that it is not pointed; a ninth, that it is not round-shaped; nor equilateral; a tenth, that it is not solid. It is clear that this tenth person has almost arrived at the correct notion of a "ship" by the foregoing negative attributes, as if he had exactly the same notion as those have who imagine it to be a wooden substance which is hollow, long, and composed of many pieces of wood, that is to say, who know it by positive attributes. Of the other persons in our illustration, each one is more remote from the correct notion of a ship than the next mentioned, so that the first knows nothing about it but the name. In the same manner you will come nearer to the knowledge and comprehension of God by the negative attributes. But you must be careful, in what you negative, to negative by proof, not by mere words, for each time you ascertain by proof that a certain thing, believed to exist in the Creator, must be negatived, you have undoubtedly come one step nearer to the knowledge of God.

## CORRESPONDENCES

2011

I want to talk about Baudelaire's *Connections* (FP 136). William Rees translates the poem as *Connections*, but the French reads *Correspondences*. It seems to me that a connection is something that might as well be arbitrary. It is almost not worth saying that everything is connected; even two unrelated things are connected by virtue of the word (unrelated). And it seems me that whereas some connections may be necessary, nothing requires them to be so. Now, a correspondence is different. Today, if I said that I had begun a correspondence with someone, that has a different flavor than: I have begun to write letters to someone. Two people who are already connected in some way correspond to each other. Now, of course, one can send a letter to anybody; but only certain people will write back to correspond: a correspondence between two things is an intimate connection. When two things correspond they mirror each other, with all that implies. If everything is connected, is everything corresponding? The first is an image of a network of elements, each of which has a line running to all the others; the second is an image of every individual thing constantly mailing letters. But to whom? And furthermore, I cannot see them all simultaneously connected (as in the word: network), but merely in motion, trusting that their messages will be conveyed. And to say, alternatively, that everything corresponds, makes it sound as if everything is intimately connected to one single thing. In any case, I imagine that context should make clear which it is, connection or correspondence.

*Nature is a temple where living pillars sometimes release indistinct words; man passes  
there through forests of symbols that observe him with intimate glances*

Among the things that strike one first is the parallelism, nature...man, as if they were

separate. But actually, on second glance, what makes it seem as if there were a rhetorical contrast is the word: there. As if man passes there, among the various places he passes; that, in short, man is a stranger to nature. But it might as well be observed that man does not pass through a forest of symbols, but forests of symbols, as if there were many such places, and man finds himself traveling all around. Either he passes through other places between separate forests, or all the forests are connected, and it is hard to tell where one begins and another ends (and if man himself is included). But the lines are more entangled than that. Nature is a temple; in the temple there are forests of symbols. These symbols are alive (like trees) and observe man with intimate glances. These living pillars sometimes release indistinct words. That said, just as easily, the living pillars which glance intimately and murmur might as well be people (they certainly are not acting any differently, that is to say, they are personified), and man, naturally, walks among other men.

I want to say as well, before "nature is a temple" has time to solidify, it has already been replaced by the image of the forest, the wind running through it, a storm, or the sun is out, and sticks creak while I walk. In fact,

*Nature is a temple where living pillars sometimes release indistinct words; man passes through forests that observe him with intimate glances,*

sounds like it could have been written by a classicizing German! The forests are a temple, in which ancient gods, incomprehensible, and yet at hand and familiar, watch as one walks down the aisle; nature once presented itself to man like that, it suggests, and one day it will again (today). What a difference symbols make! The image of the forests is replaced by that of stop-signs, banners, in any case, things that mean something (to someone), and imply something

besides themselves. The tree stands there as if a herald of...what? Because we are reading a poet, one might as well allow for the possibility that he is talking about forests of words, books, and pages; since we also allow that through a book, an author and reader can exchange intimate glances. And in the historical state of mind, everything has a history. But there is also a sense, I think, in symbols, of construction, to the effect that man passes through forests as pillars in a temple which he has built; that is, nature has forests, and man has built an imitation of a forest, filled with living pillars, on the site of the forest, and calls it a temple, occasionally, out of respect. And we confuse these living pillars (these banners, treatises, social organizations) for the real thing. In the end, nature does not mean nature, but itself: what we call nature.

And certainly, the word, symbols, makes us start to ask those kinds of questions. But just as easily, nature could refer to nature, and man passes through forests of symbols, some of which are real forests. No doubt, this will be made clear as we go on. One further thing to mention, however, is that these living pillars release indistinct words, as if they release a scent; and the forests exchange intimate glances, which seems to suggest a prior attachment (or some interest for some reason), and since man is as far we know alone, they are no doubt courting him, as if they wished to correspond.

*Like prolonged echoes mingling from afar into a deep and shadowy unity, as vast as darkness and as light, scenes, colours and sounds answer one another.*

The first image was that of a temple; then there were the forests; now, there is an abyss in which faraway flashes denote sensory detail. Each image, however, corresponds to the other; they are not connected by a device of explicit metaphor, they are simply mirrors. Or, more simply, each line is about the same thing, but in different words, that is, as if the poet were trying

to clear up a misunderstanding, rather than provide a plot. Within the stanza too, the lines are mirrored; the "like" is a deception; the simile falls apart when its two parts are equally specific, that is, it turns into an equals sign. It is perhaps a coincidence that the line itself mentions unity.

So, first we see echos, bouncing off each other in a great darkness, so that eventually they merge and become a din; perhaps at first we heard the echos, but "deep and shadowy" makes them visible. Are the echos the same murmurs of the forest, the signs? We learn, in any case, that whatever they are, they form a unity. But of course, we knew that; what is being described is nature, after all. This unity is as vast as darkness and as light. If it had read, This unity is as vast as darkness and light, we might have thought that the unity was vast enough to hold an eternal opposition, an abstract thing and its opposite, that in their sum, denote all things. But since the unity is a spacial unity (deep and shadowy), we must travel through all of darkness, and then, because of the second "as," travel through all of light too. The fact that this is an uncommon formulation suggests: what is abstract (as darkness and light) can be made concrete (as darkness and as light), since after all, the two phrases come to the same thing in the end: everything.

And then we learn who the echos are: scents, colours and sounds, who answer each other. I want to admit that when I wrote before "echos, bouncing off each other," I merely guessed that they were bouncing off each other, since what else could they bounce off of in a deep and shadowy unity? But now, I find myself justified: the scents, colours and sounds (echos) themselves echo, and are their own source. But of course, perhaps they are merely bouncing off cavern walls that I had not put into the picture (for whatever reason), and they have their ultimate source in people below who are hidden by darkness. The echos swirl around them, releasing indistinct words. But just as easily, the echos are merely echoing each other; and I am suddenly

worried that in commenting on these lines I am anticipating someone from long ago. In any case, it is unclear from what we know so far. We do know, however, that there are pillars which talk; and after all, we are all commenting on the same thing.

Scents, colours and sounds: perhaps the echos *are* echoing off each other. Since the echos are: all the contents of the perceptible world, broken into modalities. And what else is worth talking about than what is perceptible? And the perceptibles interact with each other and change with each collision, so that the next moment of perception occurs. Of course, eventually they collide too often, and mingle into a deep and shadowy unity. That is, out of the hum of all perception emerges an imperceptible unity. Is this the kind of unity in which the whole is greater than its parts, in which each unique part contributes itself to the picture of the whole, that is, as if one looked at something from far away and saw it as a whole? Or is this the kind of unity that a crowd might feel at a political rally? In that case, each part is a microcosm of the whole, and mirrors it. It is worth noting as well, that scents, colours and sounds mirror the forests of symbols--or are they the intimate glances? In the first case, perception itself is composed of symbols; in the second, the symbols themselves release perception, which are really two ways of looking at the same thing.

*There are scents as fresh as the flesh of children, sweet as oboes, green as meadows, --  
and others, corrupt, rich and triumphant.*

At last, it seems the parallelism is broken! But, upon further consideration, perhaps not. The echoes have mingled into a deep unity as vast as darkness and as light; and here again we find ourselves in a darkness with only someone whispering: there are scents..., and summing up the whole of reality with that formulation. Since, lest we be distracted by the specificity of scents,

colours and sounds from the previous stanza, we should recall that the living pillars release indistinct words, as if they release scents (and this sums up all three); and the echoes in the second stanza turn into a miasma, that is, something diffuse, an atmosphere, as if the scents are standing in for everything.

In any case, there are two kinds of them: good and bad. The good scents are like the flesh of children, sweet as oboes, green as meadows; and my feeling is that this means, respectively: healthy (eschatologically or biologically), beautiful (aesthetically), and simple (common-sensically): which, as the words suggest, are more like states of consciousness, or perfumes, of the mind (for, of course, perfumes often do cause certain states of consciousness). Or perhaps, the words mean: innocent (and carnally ambiguous), tasty (like chocolate), and carefree. But, when do we say, That meadow is green! The scents are as fresh as the flesh of children; now that could mean that they are crisp and not cloying, but it could also mean that the scents are fresh, as in newly released. Or perhaps, they merely seem new (as we say, a fresh new take on life in the city); and, in any case, if something is constantly fresh, as in refreshing, one would hardly need any new scents to be released. The point is, one can look at fresh as not describing the flesh of children, but the phrase itself; that the phrase flesh (which was always on the children) of children (who we know all about), actually makes the flesh of the children fresh. I say that because, why else would one mention the greenness of the meadow, unless it had struck one as if for the first time, as if seeing it afresh?

Those were the good scents; the bad scents are others, corrupt, rich and triumphant. It seems as if there are no images jumping out here as if for the first time at all: the scents are summed up in "others," as if the poet were reluctant to bring them up, or as if they were

impossible to name, which amounts to the same thing. And yet, the words which follow: corrupt, rich and triumphant, seem to fill, if not exceed, the volume of the previous lines, as if replacing clear harmonies with roars. This no doubt lies in the power of the word corrupt, which colors the adjectives, either of which, alone, or as a pair, could be sympathetic. But why? It is as if however much children, oboes and meadows bring with them constant surprises and true fulfillment, the corrupt has its way of constantly grabbing the attention, making itself attractive, beckoning, and whereas the good requires some work to see it always in a new light (the poet), the bad makes it seem as if that work were already done, and that what is staring one in the face is all there is.

And I want to say as well, that the words themselves take up more space than is normally allowed by words in a line; that the word rich has a richness, and the word triumphant raises its trunk like an elephant in a war-time parade (no doubt, this metaphor works similarly in the French). Since after all it is the word corrupt itself that is corrupting the words rich and triumphant, and the word rich which fattens the distance between corrupt and triumphant, which itself turns the line into a shout, as if the words mirrored the things.

But why good and bad? The symbols in the previous stanzas were morally ambiguous: intimate glances could be innocent as easily as corrupt, and the two are not readily distinguishable. For that matter, the flesh of children could just as well be a corrupt temptation, the sound of the oboe as rich as the donors of a new concert hall, and the meadows as triumphant as those depicted in a nationalist news-reel. And yet, surely we should be able to tell scents apart! But, this is also the case, that something may smell bearable, but upon closer inspection, be revealed to be rank; or what is a pleasant smell when you are melting sugar can quickly turn acrid when it starts to burn. And perhaps that is why the bad scents are simply called "others."

They themselves are not distinguishable in their own terms; rather, each good thing has its bad other, and there are no more after that. And like echos mingling from afar, they form a unity. After all they were never different things; and yet, there was, of course, something off about them, just as when one returns home, and there is the faint hint of a strange odor, although nothing has apparently changed. That is as much to say, one cannot put one's finger on what is good in something good, or what is bad in something bad (even if we know what good and bad are); it is just a feeling.

*having the expansiveness of infinite things, like amber, musk, benzoin and incense, which sing the raptures of the mind and the senses.*

It is probably fitting that there is no corresponding dash after triumphant, and one is at a loss to say whether this stanza describes all the scents, or just the bad ones. That in itself suggests that the bad is more easily confused for the good than the other way around; but one must admit that it was only conjecture that led us to privilege the opposition of good and bad in the previous stanza over the unity in the first two stanzas. It could just as easily be the case that the good is just as often confused with the bad, and everyone in general is at a loss. In any case, whatever scents they are, they have the expansiveness of infinite things. Among infinite things, there is no sense in which one can reliably pick out any particular thing, since there is no reference of comparison (there are always just as many things on either side of one, wherever one is). That is, as we have said, one cannot put one's finger on anything in the expanse, even when it is full of things. Furthermore, it is worth remarking that we use this phrase, to be unable to put one's finger on something, to describe our sensory experience (I can't put my finger on it, what did you put in this pot roast? I can't put my finger on it, what did you add to the painting to make it so

life-like?), but also to our inner states (I can't put my finger on it, I just cannot shake the sense that I am living in a dream). Of course, the word infinite also has a theological ring, and God too is everywhere at once, although one cannot exactly say where. That is, everything is God; or rather, we can see God in everything, or everything exhibits God to us, everything means God, since what else is it to mean something, other than to show us something other than what it is--or rather appears to be, since, after all, the thing only shows us what it has always been: God's creation, or rather, just God, since the phrase God's creation pretends as if the creation merely referenced God as its creator, rather than God being nothing other than that thing.

But before we are allowed to really think scholastically, the poet tells us that these infinite things are like yet more familiar smells: amber, musk, benzoin and incense (though of course, amber can also mean the material, which seems itself to hold an infinite depth). There are two possibilities in interpreting this move: either the amber, musk, benzoin and incense are yet more symbols refreshed in their concreteness by their placement after such an abstract line, as if the poet repeated the same trick twice in order to prove his very point; or, the amber, musk, benzoin and incense, which have the expansiveness of infinite things, are the smells, corrupt, rich and triumphant. In fact, taken together, the line is sultry; the smokey room is arousing. And, after all, what is our reluctance to admit that the corrupt might have the expansiveness of infinite things? Perhaps, whereas the good is always renewing (on the surface), the bad has an infinite depth, just as a room full of incense smoke might appear.

These smells sing the raptures of the mind and the senses. Raptures could mean religious raptures, or raptures of (illicit?) pleasure. And in fact, the doubleness of the word is brought out for us: raptures of the mind (divine communion) and raptures of the senses (carnality). Of course,

the two are combined, and in fact, we get both. And yet, reading the line, one feels as if the mind and the senses were not merely both offering their raptures separately, but as if the raptures in question involved the mind-and-senses, as if the poet separated the two to show us that, indeed, they always go together. And furthermore, I hesitate to associate the mind with the good and the senses with the bad. In any case, I am still not sure whether this last stanza refers to the bad scents or all scents. I think the very fact that those two interpretations are separable, suggests the very situation described: the ambiguity of the bad, that it beckons with the promise of raptures of any kind. For it seems as if the scents are not themselves raptures, but sing the raptures; that is, they promise something that may or may not be made good on (just as symbols may come with intimate glances, even as their words remain indistinct). One could see the very mention of raptures as a ploy by the corrupt, and the use of the word infinite a temptation into the murky depths of a false theology, away from the clarity of the refreshing.

The echos mingle into a deep and shadowy unity. If these lines correspond, then there is some tendency in everything to blur into an infinite depth, even as what is mingling are pure and fresh scents, colours and sounds. Perhaps it was wrong to use terms like good and bad; what really is being contrasted is haze and clarity, though of course those too are often thought of as bad and good respectively. The picture is more like: what man passes through is a series of moods, alternately hazy or clear; and these moods are like scents, hazy and clear; and in these moods one can see things in different ways, hazily, as in a mass, so that everything turns blinding in a rapture, or clearly, as if more clear than ever before; and finally, each of these moods is itself a forest of symbols, each of which tree is itself a forest (how many trees does it take to make a forest?), so that each symbol may stand in for the whole, and in fact, *be* that mood (how else

would this poem work?). Finally, these moods alternate as we near the living pillars of the temple of nature, which speak; they answer one another; and they sing. That is, not only can one find a correspondence between moods, individual sense modalities, and words (by extension, thoughts)--but also between living beings. For just as we say a play has characters, we can also say that a play has a character of its own, and each mood, image, sound, smell, touch and word, has a personality.

Hence, I would like to conclude that this poem is more properly titled *Correspondences*, since the poem itself demonstrates the unity of our inner experience, our external world, our language, and our society. Or rather, this unity allows the poem to work. Though it must be admitted: perhaps the poem only appears to work. I hesitate to say that the poem *creates* the feeling of correspondence out of what are mere connections. Instead, I want to say that the poem makes one feel that things correspond; and whether what is mentioned in the poem, in fact, corresponds as the poet says, the poem certainly leaves us with that impression. And, it might as well be remembered that what this poem is about is precisely: impressions, which one cannot exactly put one's finger on. That is as much to say, the poem asks: if we cannot trust our feeling that things truly correspond to each other, what else is there to trust, what else is there to say?

## WHAT DO YOU WANT ME TO DO?

2011

I mean, what do you want me to do? Can I just stop my eyes from giving away everything I'm thinking? Since you can read me. Not that I want to hide anything from you, but *I'm* looking at *you*, and I can tell you're not okay with it, it's not what you wanted to see, or expected anyway. In some darker moments, I've thought about just grabbing your eyes out of their sockets, those beautiful dark eyes, just so you won't be hurt by looking at me. But of course, we're in the same boat here. All I want to do is take my mind back, my thoughts back--she has everything of mine-- I close my eyes, and I'm over there with her, everything about me, and it's pretty much only my imagination that keeps her clothed. You see, naturally, she's naked, but I keep her wrapped up in my mind, so I can slowly undress her, one thread at a time, til she gets back to her natural state. I just lift one thin veiny hand from her hips--I know you can see this on my face, my eyes are torn up just by the thought of the sight of it--there are ghosts in there--I just lift one patch of wet, leafy skin--my mind penetrates her. And as I unwrap her, a flicker and then a glow, in the uterine area starts to spread hungrily through her, til she's like a plastic glove with a light bulb in it. If I'm eating, then sometimes I imagine cream-cheese inside her ribcage, and I can use her bones to spread it across me. That's what you're seeing in these eyes. She also needs chapstick, I gave her some dried skin and that reddish halo around her lips, just so I can swipe her with the chapstick. I gave her rather elongated teeth too, just so I can shave them down. How do you expect me to imagine her? If she's simply an image, then she disappears, she flickers out! For instance, sometimes instead of shaving down her long teeth--with wide spaces in between them, and strangely twisted--I'll mold a mouth-guard out of some malleable material, and cover it with an acidic solution so that it burns away all the plaque and turns those rotten teeth (I made them rotten) into gems, and when they fall out--I have keep moving--I put a necklace of teeth around her, and even paint her colors, blue, silver, gold, just so I can concentrate on her skin. These days, however, the only way I can keep her is to turn out all the lights, and all the soundtrack, background, wardrobe, etc, and let her float in the darkness, and push her down, relatively far, or just far enough so that she's below my eyes, inside me, around the nasal passage, at the very least, so that when I look at you--or rather, when you look at me--you don't see her. You don't want to see her. It's exhausting! She's a rather ephemeral thing, that's what I've been trying to tell you, and it takes all your effort to keep her coherent. So that's my side of the story. I know you didn't want to hear any of this, since she matters so much to you, but you after all you asked! Don't look at me any longer, I'm starting to have to turn her into other kinds of woman, reptile woman, with weird vertebrae, little hard scaly balls. I can feel her scampering around my toes, as if she were darting around my feet trying to trip me. Take my advice: whatever you thought before, forget about it. Forget you ever saw a hint of it on my face. It was a bad thought. You're safe, for now--you own your life. But whenever I close my eyes, she moves of her own accord. I try to think her still with all my strength, but her arms keep twirling around like windmills.

## ON GRIEVING; OR THE HAMSTER OF AN ESTRANGED COUPLE DIES IN A TERRIBLE ACCIDENT

2011

I would like to write an essay on grieving. We grieve like we breathe, like we eat, like we pace back and forth while searching, like we touch, display. It is a lived program. It is done without thought; instead, it is what inspires thoughts. Come here, I've done something terrible. Running, short of breath, one's beating heart like a pulsating health indicator. I feel like I'm going to vomit—what shares this phenomenology? Sexual disgust; regrets. A blue coat on the ground by the door, by the hinge. I broke her in half, her limp body between the door and the frame. One lifts the coat, and she's lying in a pool of blood, her neck mangled. What does a person do? Sit on the bed, knees close, rocking, face in hands (a part of the program), rubbing one's face. I said to myself, I'm just going to clean my room, I'm just going to clean my room, I'm going to take a shower, I said to myself; what's that scratching, I don't care. Lying face down, hiding the head. She was the only thing good in this room; she was the only thing that wasn't bad. I'm so bad, I'm so bad to you; I'm sorry. Don't think, don't think, don't think; don't look at it. Can you pick her up? I don't care; I'm not sad. Can you just do something with her? We found a red, decorated metal canister. I went over and looked at where she was lying; I moved the door, to dislodge her. It creaked. Don't move the door, don't move the door, don't move the door. Like a trigger, like a pinball falling into a track of rods. I placed the griever's head against my chest. I went back to the space between the door and the frame. I picked her up by the scruff of her neck; she hung, warm. I placed her in the canister, and she slid into it, her eyes looking up. I closed it, and set it carefully on the floor. I wiped up the blood, and wrapped the towel in the blue coat. I threw them out. I cleaned out her cage, and threw out what was in it. The griever called me over; she called me.

I have to take a shower, she said. I held her down the hall, and we went to the bathroom. She vomited. I undressed her slowly as she stood there inanimate, one garment at a time, throwing them around my neck. She turned on the water and stood there, her eyes hooded, her face slackened, soaked, minimal. She scrubbed herself, and I watched. I watched her, like a human, like a thin wild mammal. What beautiful creature is this? What animal grieves; what animal washes away its grief with water; what animal, seeing magic in everything, washes off a defilement? She was the more attractive for her grief. At that moment, without the hindrances of doubt or uncertainty, she was good, she was nothing other than her good self. Like a human, I saw her body as if lit by certain spotlights, which draw the eye. Certain parts of her seemed to jump out, to glow, parts that mattered to me, but I watched them move without selfish desire, with only... All of our relationships are founded on shared motives, maybe pure motives. She leaned against the wall, her head on my chest. I saw us in a mirror, her body hanging, her foot against the wall, her head inclined against me. I held her straight, and she curved against me. I saw us in a painting. I saw us in a hieroglyph. I saw our bodies configured in a schema. Without thinking or speaking, we aligned ourselves to the structure. When an animal begins to clean herself, rubbing her head rapidly, she cannot stop until the action is complete, the pattern exhausted. This is called "grieving."

I left her while she used the bathroom. I sat on the bed. We had let her run around the

room, unattended. Sometimes she'd be out of her cage for days at a time. She would hide in the closet. There was also spot behind the trash-can, and in a corner of the bed-frame. Sometimes she would disappear, only to clamber up shoe, leg and knee. She had no sense of altitude, and was terribly near-sighted. But not like near-sighted humans who pass over the blurry outside world. She was moving forward at all times, climbing up bed posts, wall hangings, chairs with fabric, window screens, trying always to get to the highest point, falling from skyscrapers and going on, unfazed. She never killed herself. So what evil sorcery inheres in a door hinge? What does that oldest and most simple technology introduce into the world that so disturbs it? We build things that depend on us and our activation, attention; nature makes decisions all on her own. I sat on the bed. My eyes landed on the canister, half-forgotten, and I heard in my brain a sound effect, some strings, as if in a horror movie, at the moment one remembers: there's a body in this room. In years past, maybe people would have heard thunder instead of strings. After all, that happens in movies too. Maybe people have heard all different things in different times and places at that moment when the body reappears. You could make catalogue of those different sounds and write the history of the moment. Since one would like to be able to recognize the grief of others.

Is there still blood on the floor? I hear her voice inside me: did you clean *all* the blood off it? We should clean it with soap and water, I think. Don't mention it. Don't tell her about it. When do we have a thought like that, fearfully deciding to withhold? There are so many stories about someone so fragile that the very act of bring something up would destroy them. We wait until the right moment, when it won't matter. But are we so certain how strong the griever is? Are we so sure that we aren't hiding our own faults, our own inattentions? What would we think if we had never heard a story about a fragile person like that? Perhaps what is going on here is: one recognizes in real life an allusion. A distant word has gone up in flame, and now from afar, one can finally pick out the hill on which the fire is burning. The same goes for: trying to relive last moments. Without thinking, one attempts the impossible, to see from her eyes, as she sniffs the door, the flash of light as the hallway becomes visible, the curious poking of the head, the ghost of a pressure, and then—to be walking down the hallway, thinking about what seems in retrospect, inconsequential things, and taking out the key, and hearing, and opening, and opening more, and looking down, and seeing her split. The palace of the mind crumbles, and one is rooted to the spot. And then, placing the coat over her, to hide it, not out of respect, not out of habit, but because one hides what's impossible not to see.

She returned from the bathroom, and joined together in a larger program, we started to discuss: where should we bury her? We should take her to the spot she would have liked the most. Although we should have brought her to the highest point on the hill, instead we marched to where I used to live, a low spot, her first home, our steps locked, unspoken, in a procession. The place was unwatched, available. We cleared away the pine needles, and with a wild stick, ripped away the roots, and buried her at the center point of three trees. We placed a cross atop it. One requires a certain act for the program to complete.

Then: returning, the spell was broken. We walked at different speeds, talked about hurtful things. I couldn't be angry, though. In fact, I was at peace. Grieving is real. In one's darkest, loneliest moments, one wants to be castrated. All great work and thought appears like a plot, a way to fill the time when when is alone, so that when one goes out (of one's aloneness), one can better seduce another creature. One wants to deaden oneself to this crassness, this device, this

technology, this machine; one wants never to squirm in one's empty bed again, desiring; one wants to think of other things. What cannot be reduced to that hateful word, desire? Grieving. The whole cynical face of the building turns transparent; the pipes are exposed. What is inside? A great multitude of different things, and somewhere, from the basement perhaps, in the best of us, shines from between the cracks in the floor the light of the good. One knows without knowing: there is no one thing out there that, wrapping itself around every word and deed, can bring everything separate down together as one, to rot in a heap.

There is more than one good thing in the world; but all are good. And when we cry, alone, for the good, we grieve for them, all the separate things. And then we are good. (So I am in terror that when the griever reads this, she won't grieve any more.)

## OH MELANCHOLY SOUL

2011

Is it possible that all thoughts are implied in any given thought? A more specific question: is it proper to read into the line, *oh melancholy soul*, a self-consciousness of the line's literariness? I guess the question has something to do with the oldness of the line, or maybe its everyday-ness (as in, its appearance in a thousand poems, none of which immediately spring to mind), its non-specific familiarity, its repetitiousness. Which at the same time is basically its unfamiliarity, its distance from how we normally conduct ourselves in speech. Do we ever actually say, *oh melancholy soul*? I've heard people say they want to die. I've heard people say that their ego is bursting forth too much from some dark abyss--well, they didn't say *that*--but one suspects, I don't know why, that people... well, right now I don't know what I originally suspected, if people say *oh melancholy soul*, or not!

I think that people sometimes suspect that in the past people did say, *oh melancholy soul*. Or maybe people suspect that poets at least said it, though I'm not sure if they mean poets said it in real life or in poems. On that note, I want to say: sometimes people seem to imply that even if someone wrote, *oh melancholy soul*, they probably would have said something more casual in another circumstance, that *oh melancholy soul* is basically a formal construction. But then again I'm not sure where I got that idea from.

I suppose we don't often say *oh*, and by *oh* I mean *O!* At least, today we say *oh* when now we understand something or realize a thing. That is, we say, *oh, I'm tired*, or *oh, not right now*, which are answers to questions like: *how are you*, or *can you do this for me*? So we respond, *oh, well*, as if we'd just realized, or have in fact realized, that we were tired or busy at just that moment. We say *oh shit* sometimes, but that seems like a set-piece, complete in itself, like *oh-shit*, with a hyphen. I can imagine someone saying, *oh, look at that!* when something has just come into view, something they want us to look at. But of course, that's exactly what *oh melancholy soul* is doing. It says, *oh you, you just reminded me, you're right, oh it hurts, it really does*. So maybe these days we do say *oh* just like they said *oh* back when they said *oh melancholy soul*. And when we say it, it just as often marks the pretense of immediacy as it did back then.

Even still, it does seem pretty strange to say, or even read, something like *oh melancholy soul*. People might argue, not on historical grounds exactly, but more on theoretical grounds, that *oh melancholy soul* strikes us the wrong way because: how could an actual, real life moment (*oh!*) even appear in a poem, which is basically a crystallized work?

This actually brings me back to my original thought, which was: is it possible that all thoughts are implied in any given thought? Or, more specifically: could every thought be equally self-conscious? That sounds crazy. What do I mean? Well, I'll explain it like this. How do we distinguish between good and bad writing? I'm sure there are many ways we do this, but one way might be: if we identify what the work is saying with the author completely, that is, if we literally believe that the author wrote this "in earnest," or if the thought expressed were "serious," in the sense that if questioned, the author would say pretty much the same thing as the poem says, but in different words, as if the poem were a product of the development of a personal theory, that is, if the poem seems like it gives us a pretty good picture of the author, and in fact the poem makes

us feel like we know everything we need to know about the author, and therefore we feel like we can dismiss the author, since we understand the thought completely, as if we'd had that thought but no longer have it, but still, we get it, and so hardly need the author around anymore for just for that reason--then the work is bad. The good work is the self-conscious work, in just the sense that the author remains mysterious, and the poem is the expression of the thought (I use that word *thought* carelessly, but you know what I mean) as a thought, without pretending to be everything, or at least, without exhausting the author, as if the author could do other things too, or as if the author were just showing us a piece of themselves, or letting us have a glimpse, with the promise of more, that is, rather than being a step behind us, the author seems to be a step ahead of us--then that's good writing.

Much has been made of poetry as the unmediated, un-self-conscious shout of the (melancholy?) soul. Sometimes self-consciousness in literature has been argued against on just these grounds. *Oh melancholy soul* is too removed from real life, it's been self-consciousnessed out of reality, become literarified, the echo of a once a real thought now turned into a mere reference, disguise, or front, as if the author were trying to hide a part of themselves away in order to be liked, substituting *oh melancholy soul* for what really is going on inside. But there's another way to look at it. What if when they said, *oh melancholy soul*, and then went on, it was the rest of the poem that was the experience, and *oh melancholy soul* was the name of it, standing at the front like a herald, the first ejaculation. And the poem was actually trying to restore meaning to the inert phrase, was trying to show us what we really mean when we use those words, or what was originally meant when those words were written for the first time. So that perhaps in every tired expression there is a self-consciousness always hiding, that is, that the phrase stands for what it stands for even as it stands for itself. It sounds far-fetched, but is it possible that no one ever *meant* such a common phrase to stand on its own, that instead it was always a way of orienting the reader, letting them know what kind of moment was going to be commented upon, rather politely? Perhaps this politeness is what is contested, of course, when people are mad about reading things like *oh melancholy soul*... Though what could be a more impolite thing than *oh melancholy soul* to say loudly, for example, during dinner, especially if one meant it! One gets the feeling that in such a circumstance, *oh melancholy soul* wouldn't be taken any other way except as a joke, unless the speaker went on to elaborate; and perhaps that what those old poems were, elaborations; and since *oh melancholy soul* has passed into history, today's poems do the same thing, but are elaborations on different sorts of phrases.

Then again, if one found a poem consisting entirely of *oh melancholy soul*, alone on a page, I at least would be inclined to like it. And further, it seems silly to say that *oh melancholy soul* is too self-conscious and removed from life, when in order to write the poem more true to life, one would have to delete the *oh melancholy soul*, and in fact, self-consciously obscure the very thought that gave rise to the rest of the poem. There, "good" editing masquerades as poetic impulsiveness and novelty. Is this really an objection? It also occurs to me that most writers, in their more honest moments, say that what they do is mostly editing.

One might also object to *oh melancholy soul* on grounds of something like its inherent abstractness. There's no punch, no image associated with either *oh* nor *melancholy* nor *soul*. Is that because melancholy is the sort of word that we learn from a imageless vocabulary sheet in middle school? Or because melancholy, in its original sense as a humor, is no longer part of our

world? Or instead, is it because when we think of people talking about melancholy, earnestly, we are picturing someone glorying in what, we think, has got to be an ultimately self-imposed confinement? Are we suspicious of that type of person because we're a step ahead of them, or because we're not? It is often the case that we hate in others what we hate most in ourselves. I say often because I think that only sometimes that is the case, and it is more the case for some people as opposed to others.

We're going in circles. Let me try again. I have heard melancholy described as a lovely word. Perhaps that's why we hate it. We hate things that are lovely, and by that I mean, we hate things that people say are lovely. We might like those same things, or at least, like them a little more, when they're described as fucking beautiful, for example. But then, who are those people who don't mind saying that melancholy is a lovely word? Perhaps they are a step ahead of us in understanding what was originally meant by it. I'm not sure whether it's more likely that they got ahead of us by thinking more about it than us and coming to some conclusion, or if they did so intuitively, without ever really going through an intermediate stage of getting all pissed off about people using the word, and then coming around to it. In fact, I'm not even sure what the difference is, since only rarely does one get the chance to know whether and why one is pissed off about something, since usually one simply changes the channel, or puts down the book, or decides not to see that person, since something about them strikes you the wrong way. I suppose if a person could be proved to have had a moment of being pissed off about the word lovely and then a moment of not being pissed off about the word lovely, then we might imagine that the word was used self-consciously. But would that be a self-conscious choice, or simply a letting go of concerns like that, or a getting bored with that anger, or a moving on to other things, or a forgetting, or an indifference? Maybe one day this person used the word lovely themselves, and said: *that's not so bad, it really does mean what I want it to mean!* Which is funny, since a person like would still come off as one of those idiots who say lovely or melancholy to the very sorts of people they themselves once were.

Finally that brings us to soul. Surely there was once an image associated with the word soul, but I myself would have to go look it up to find it what it was. Now, we don't believe in souls anymore. That's easy enough to say. But I was talking to a friend the other day, and was saying, you know, people don't really say *I want to believe in god*, that is, unless the emphasis is on *I want to believe (and can't)*, that is, *I tried to believe in god, and it was too much* (too much evil in the world, too much doubt, not enough utility, too incomprehensible, etc). They don't say just *I want to believe in god* because it's not a question of wanting to or not once you know what you're talking about. The relevant questions are: *how do I believe in god?* Or more aptly, *what does god even mean?* This is, of course, putting aside the other question which is often asked, *does god exist?* I think we can put that one aside because if one asks that question, one already has in mind some idea of what god is, and in a sense, one has already answered the question. Nobody really asks that question alone (*does god exist?*) and expect it to be answered to their satisfaction. And if it is answered to their satisfaction, it's probably because someone explains how what was meant by god is already relevant to the questioner's life anyway.

The same goes for the soul: what did they even mean by the word soul? I suspect that we know what they meant by soul, but can hardly believe it. It's hard to realize this, because what was originally meant by soul is hiding for us in different places, under different headings. For we

do talk about a light in someone's eyes, and so on. That's a sort of Aristotelian definition of soul, as "activity" or something, and that's not hard to accept. So I feel like I need to talk about the afterlife, since that's where the objections usually crop up. Even the worst atheists would grant that there's something odd about the vividness of life sometimes, and that there is a certain way of looking at the world that's possible, and that there are questions that are perhaps impossible to answer to our kind of satisfaction, and so forth, and considering these things is not only reasonable, but recommended. Where the atheists draw the line is with the sort of thinking and behavior that results from people becoming used to flying in the face of facts, and ignoring evidence, and jumping to conclusions, like, for example, that we live on when we die.

Now, obviously this is a matter of semantics. It depends on what we mean by "live on," and surely as far as our bodies are concerned, we couldn't possibly be living on in this world with our bodies as we do now. And in fact, the really good theologians say as much too. And whether there are other ways of being "alive" is a scientific question that I won't presume to answer here, and it's basically beside the point. But what is the point? Well, when are we convinced there's an afterlife? I was reading a poem by Victor Hugo and he said something I'd heard before, that the end is really just another beginning, or that the end is really a beginning, or that the end is the beginning of something even better, or that what seems like an ending is just the beginning of another story. Is this a convincing argument? Certainly, it works that way in real life sometimes, that we've just broken up with a girlfriend or something, and we're really sad, and then feel better, and think about it, and start to have new and interesting thoughts and do new and interesting things, and in fact more interesting things than we (or at least, so we think) would have done if we'd never met that person or if we'd stayed with them. And so, what seemed like an ending was really just a new beginning.

If this is a general rule, then why not, death could be just another stage of life, right? I think part of the attraction of this view is that it is non-intuitive. As in, you'd think an ending was just an ending, but really it's a beginning. And that's not what you would have thought at first. And in fact, when people say this sort of thing, I get the feeling they feel like they're informing me of something I wouldn't have necessarily thought of, which I at least don't find that annoying, since sometimes people do inform me of things that I really didn't know about, and it would be weird if I weren't open to being informed of things. In this particular case, I'd heard that argument before, and that's why it got me thinking.

What makes a thought non-intuitive? Something about the thing seeming one way and ending up another. It's a two part thought. Then again, it's funny that we say such a thought is non-intuitive, since how else could we have the conviction that it were true unless by intuition, since we have no way of supporting it with something like evidence from our eyes and ears, and so on. So I'm not sure if the thought is actually intuitive or non-intuitive. All I'll say is that my first thought was that it was non-intuitive, and then (perhaps non-intuitively) I decided that the thought was intuitive, and then I decided that I was running in circles. In any case, I wasn't really convinced by any of it, that death is just the beginning of a new life, and you probably aren't either. And I think that's because as it stands, without elaboration, it's basically nonsense: as we said before, it all depends on what you mean by life and death. If we want to imagine that the bugs that eat our brains propagate our neural patterns because the structure of our brain (which is us, at least in part) influences how they happen to move as they eat us, and that pattern then

ripples out into the world, a pattern which is in fact our consciousness, and which, we might add, we are constantly broadcasting with everything we do; and if it is true that patterns are what life is in this universe where patterns become conscious, then we can certainly live on after death.

But I think all of us imagine that life after death was meant in the sense of a heaven, or something like that. And at this point you have to be asking yourself, *what did they mean by heaven?* Since on further inspection, it's not always entirely clear. Let's take a prototypical definition, that I'm just going to make up on the spot. I don't know if you'll agree, but let's say this: heaven is where we are when we are finally close to god. How are we close to god? Well, in heaven we "exist" outside time and space, in a kind of eternity, and in a situation like that, without distinctions of time and space, we can conclude that we'll be reunited with everything and everyone we ever loved or hated or interacted with (since what separated us was time and space), and since time and space aren't around anymore, there is no anxiety or anticipation, only peace, that is, nothingness, and so we are reconciled, we might say, to everything.

Obviously, there are people who have much less nuanced ideas of heaven, and I mean less nuanced in the sense that there are such seemingly unessential props in the conception as angels, and harps, and so forth. But of course, those could just be symbols which were taken for realities later in time or by someone else. In fact, I want to point out that Maimonides, the Jewish philosopher, thought that the Bible were written at two levels: that the scriptures could be (and were) interpreted in a vulgar way (pictures, images, and stories) by the masses, so that they could come to understand what was expected of them morally, but that the very same texts were also metaphoric, a kind of coded message, for the kind of abstract idea that I proposed a second ago. The second interpretation is the secret teaching, meant only for those ready to understand it in its profundity; to the rest, it's just confusing. When do you reach that stage, though? It sounds pretty ineffable. And yet, I have an answer. I think you reach that stage around the same time that you can see how the word melancholy can be used both earnestly and self-consciously at the very same time.

But really now, is the conception of heaven that I've put forward at all convincing? Perhaps not. Let me try again. Okay. The universe has rules, and as far as we can tell at each moment the things in the world change based on these rules. The list of these rules, that is, science, is pretty complex, but it's not nearly anywhere as complex as the universe itself. In fact, the rules are incredibly simple in comparison to the universe as a whole! In fact, the idea is to keep going until all of the universe can be explained by a few simple rules, or maybe one simple rule, and history seems to have suggested that even if the rules are weird, they end up being pretty straightforward once you get the hang of it, that is, as the rules get simpler, their explanatory power increases. So let's say there a handful of rules that govern how things happen. Now what is happening? What things are changing? What are things? Things are patterns of other things. Of what other things? It's hard to say. I don't think we really know yet. What is clear, though, is that whatever lies at the bottom, what makes a thing a thing is the pattern it makes, that is, the rules make patterns. The universe is one big pattern and there are local patterns in the big patterns that, for example, often move together in space and time, and, of course, sometimes not. If patterns are all we have to work with, then what we are, whatever we are as conscious beings, that do the sorts of things we do, and experience the things we experience, is patterns as well. (What is a pattern, incidentally? As far as I can tell, it means that

universe is a kind of giant textile.)

Part of what being a pattern in this universe means is that there is the possibility that the pattern "has experience," or is alive, or is conscious. That's not so much an explanation as a constraint on what our universe has to be like in order for it to be our universe. Now our patterns are on earth, at least we think. Where did they come from? Well, everything came from out there, that is, elsewhere, the earth included! And ultimately everything came from a single place at the beginning of the universe. Furthermore, when the universe began it already had a pattern, and it was this pattern that the rules were applied to and a long time later, there's us. Now it's certainly possible that the patterns themselves create the rules that govern themselves. But there must be some kind of scaffolding there so that the patterns themselves can express different rules. Or so it seems to me. This is a philosophical argument, I admit, and I don't know what the science suggests on this point. From what I've read, I don't think there is a consensus on it, at least right now.

So our universe has these properties which we know about, like patterns and conscious beings and so forth, whatever those things are. Now these properties are shared by various things of our own creation: for example, it applies to us, it applies to things like novels, it applies to things like computer programs. Let's take the example of a computer program, in which patterns evolve over time. Someone is running a computer program, perhaps has multiple universes running at the same time, and in the simulation, let's say, there we are. There's a couple things to say at this point. It will certainly be pointed out that if this is not just a metaphor, but an explanation of how things are, then it really just begs the question, since it merely places the burden for the explanation for how a universe is at all, and for that matter for how patterns could be conscious, on the larger universe within which our universe is being simulated. And that doesn't help us in any way explain anything about *our* universe. But, putting that aside for a moment, let's wonder why these simulations are being run at all. Perhaps for fun. Perhaps for some scientific reason, or out of curiosity. All of those are understandable to us because they ascribe human motivations to this computer programmer from another level of reality, but surely what applies to us in our universe doesn't necessarily apply to someone in the universe "above" ours. So I'll be careful. All we can say is that the higher universe, like all universes, is based on patterns and the evolution of patterns in that universe led to a local pattern that is the simulation of our universe. And perhaps that higher universe itself is a local pattern within a larger universe and so on. Incidentally, this raises the question of the information density of the universe. Or to phrase it like a theologian, is the part always smaller than the whole? Because if the information density of the universe is finite, then local patterns cannot be as complex as the whole universe.

This is important because of what certain patterns do. Some patterns don't "do" much, but other patterns do things like experience and understand and create, that is, they interact with the patterns that intersect with them such that their pattern changes in response to the pattern which have intersected them: they learn, they build models, they simulate patterns within themselves. And in fact some patterns seek out such interactions, and evolve in such a way that we could say that they are trying to recreate the universe in themselves. And obviously, we are patterns like that. Perhaps individually we can't recreate the whole universe, but the totality of us, as a one great pattern, might be expressing a pattern that's a better representation of the universe that we can express individually. And if we expand our reach to the ends of the universe, we could turn

the whole universe into our conception of it! All this is to say, some patterns are better than others at being replicators and simulators. Seeing that tendency in us, and considering we might be in a simulation, it stands to reason that the sort of pattern within which we exist is another such pattern, at least in that respect alone, as a simulator. And just as we say we simulate things to better understand our universe, in exactly that sense we can (without exactly implying agency or defining the nature of this larger pattern) say that the computer programmer in the universe above ours is simulating us in order to better understand his universe, almost by necessity, since that's what those sort of patterns do, that simulate well. I might as well point out that Maimonides and Spinoza would both call this the intellectual love of god, this simulating well.

We can also say that the programmer in turn was brought into being in much the same circumstances, and so on and so forth, in an infinite hierarchy of simulating patterns, and since we simulate as well, there could be worlds below ours, and we don't quite know what part of the chain we ourselves are at.

I want to point out that this, in so many contemporary words, is more or less the Neoplatonic conception of the universe, which goes back to Late Antiquity and really got huge in the Renaissance. The universe consists of concentric "spheres" or "intellects" or "angels," basically levels of reality, each on top of the other, that are both physical as well as spiritual, as in, conscious. We know our world by contemplating the nature of the world directly "above" ours, which sets out certain rules, and that means rules of thought and rules of matter, since those are two words for the same thing: patterns that change. And when we know something true, we know a truth very much watered down, since the ultimate truth lies outside the spheres, and emanates the light of its truth through the spheres, or levels of reality, and the light gets weaker and weaker the farther it shines, until it passes through us. That is, each simulation has lower and lower image resolution as you move down the chain. The spheres emanate the light of god by contemplating the sphere above them, stimulating it, and passing it on, in just the way we've been saying.

The activity of the intellectual love of god, or contemplation, or simulation, is called motion, and hence god is the prime mover, who sets the outermost sphere in motion, from outside. This is a very broad definition: god is what ultimately moves, since the only thing missing in this picture is what sets the overall pattern in motion to begin with, and whatever god may be, he is that, he is the origin of motion, whatever that is. To this day, nobody has a good explanation for what motion is, in that sense. Motion, change is just assumed.

What was the point of all this? Well, I want to say: if the computer simulation were to end, just as our computer simulations often end with a dump of the data, so that the whole history of the simulation were stored in a data file somewhere, then such a dump file would fit the criteria for an afterlife, as far as our metaphor is concerned. And the point was to make the old metaphors comprehensible. The dump file is all the patterns of our universe, including us and everyone we know, not in space, and not in time, joined together for all eternity. Why did God save us there? That's not for us to know, but he surely has his reasons, that is, the rules of his pattern, of his nature. I'm not sure if this is convincing. It doesn't make me, for example, want to start going to synagogue, but it certainly makes me see the world a different way, especially because it really makes visible what it is exactly that we still don't know about, and I think most people have a pretty nebulous idea about what's known and what's not known today.

Anyway, what's the subtext of all this? It's this, that there's something weird going on here, that things seemingly well known and easily dismissible, things like heaven, god, or soul, are not at all what they might seem to be at first, and what's more, are pretty much identical to other concepts that we are much more comfortable with, like patterns and data files and simulations. That is, it's as if we've misunderstood all of theology, not because their arguments weren't sound, but because we forgot what their words meant. And if we translate their words into the sort of language we can understand, then we realize that we're not so different from them, and furthermore, that we're mostly wrong every time we think about the history of humanity, for precisely that reason. Nor did the people of the past escape from this veil of illusion in regard to their own past!

And so, that's why I brought up *oh melancholy soul*. It's as if there's something we are always forgetting in the words we use, even as what was originally meant is always still around, but in a different place. But let's ask the question outright instead of dancing around it: are things the same now or different? That's really what's at issue here, in talking about the past, and what people meant. I don't care about progress. I just mean: are people the same now as they've always been, or have they changed?

I'm not sure what people generally think about this. Sometimes movies portray people in the past talking in very formal diction, that is, in past diction, and I think that's interesting since it does nothing other than portray them perhaps as they were, if they really did speak like that. But often one gets the sense that those people were different because they talked like that and expressed themselves that way, whereas we express ourselves like this. But I'm not so sure. Let me use an example. There is a feeling that we talk about like this: *it seemed like a movie*. This usually means something like it was vivid, or surreal, or had a sense of narrative, or was in general out of the ordinary in the very way it was perceived, as if with the heightened (or at least just different) perception of a movie. Or perhaps what was experienced was very, very ordinary, so ordinary that the story had been told a thousand times before, but all of a sudden, the very strangeness of the ordinary made itself apparent.

Now, if you think about it, all of those various ways of glossing the phrase *it seemed like a movie* are all nonsense in the sense that they're all equally metaphorical and basically can't communicate anything unless you already know what is meant by them. *It seemed like a movie*, in particular of all these ways of communicating the feeling, or let's say the state of consciousness, is nice, however, because even if you don't know exactly what is meant, you can think of the thing as being filmed, and that's evidently a close approximation. Or at least it is for us, who know about movies. And if you *have* had such an experience, then you hardly need to wonder about it, whether it really is like a movie or not, and so it's not a problem for you.

Now, obviously, there's the question, what did people say about these experiences before there were movies? Perhaps they said: *oh, things are vivid now*, or perhaps they said something else, a thousand different things. I think there's a large number of people, however, who think that movies *create* that experience, and that before movies such an experience as seeing something like a movie couldn't happen.

Let's say I take a drug and while on the drug, I think: *now it's like I'm watching a movie, the movie of reality*. This often happens with weed. And I think to myself, *this is what it's like to be high; it's like the world is a movie*. Now, this raises the question, and we can ask it because

the drug seems to be the causal factor here in explaining the altered state of consciousness, or the feeling, or the experience, whatever you want to call it.

Is this particular experience something caused by the drug, in the sense that anyone who takes the drug will experience the world is this way, or does the drug manifest itself in this way because I happen to be someone shaped by having watched movies? As in, it's not even that I describe the experience with reference to movies, but I actually experience it differently because of movies. And so, the implication is that if someone smoked weed before there were movies, they might have had a completely different experience from me. And this applies to all sorts of things, and not just weed, like love, for example, which is surely an altered state of consciousness. And I use the word "altered" without having really defined it only so that you know what I mean when I talk about ill-defined things like different states of consciousness.

So the question is: what if someone smoked weed before they ever saw a movie? When they saw a movie, would they say, this is like being high? I don't know. Maybe things aren't so arbitrary as I'm making them out to be. The way the focus is used in movies is perhaps similar to the way that attention becomes fixed in an unusual way while high; and also, in films, reality is ever so slightly slowed and made more vivid, by the frame-rate, whereas, in video, reality is ever so slightly sped up, and made vivid in a different way for the same reason; and while high, one does experience similar things. It's worth wondering what kind of similarity this is, since we're comparing visual representations with states of consciousness, as if all these modalities were essentially equivalent with each other. And that does seem to be the case, when a shape and a sound and a state of mind can all be either sharp or soft or bumpy. In a way, it's this state of affairs that makes metaphors possible, and also prevents us from really giving a good account of what metaphors are, and how they arise.

That is, part of the problem is that you can ask the question: which one is the original? The state of consciousness, the quality of the image, the drug? I can't tell here what's the cause and what's the effect, since all these phenomena seem to want to be explained in terms of each other. It's even possible that people made movies the way they did because they had experiences, like being high, which were interesting and inspired them to reproduce those experiences visually, and so, we can theorize about movies and drugs creating experiences or not, not realizing the joke is on us, that we're getting it totally backwards. Think about psychedelic visuals before you ever took drugs. Did it mean anything to you? And if you saw psychedelics while on acid or shrooms in that very way, was that because you saw *Yellow Submarine*, and that stuff is inside you, or do you now *really* understand where that stuff comes from, that is, from drugs? And would it make a difference if the animators of that movie *didn't* take drugs, and in fact, were just inspired by what looks good visually, or some other art they had seen? And it's hard to say where this sort of modal interference ends: can an experience be fiery for example? And can describing the experience by means of the metaphor of fire give one the experience if one hasn't had it already, especially if your audience is, for example, a child? And how would you know if it worked?

In all these cases, it's as if both the cause and the effect appeared simultaneously, along with the fact that the confusion between them seems as eternal as the very distinction between cause and effect. There's arguments on both sides, that one is the cause of the other, and in the end, it's like there's some conspiracy preventing us from answering these questions definitively.

One might want to look at the historical record. It does seem like a historical question: the birth of movies are in our recent history, and although the historical record on getting high is spotty, we can say, at the very least, that more people probably got high than we think, certainly artists, and furthermore, there are other times in our lives when for various reasons we might have the feeling of being high without taking a drug. Though after taking the drug, it is hard not to describe those experience except in terms of the drug, which makes one doubt the nature of the original experience: and so the problem of cause and effect appears again.

But I don't think that the historical record can help us at all. Why? Let's take the example of dreaming. Now, in real life I see a red cup, and I perceive it as red, and I also make the judgement: *it's red*. That's another way of saying, I see red (actually) and then I say, *I see red*. Now consider dreams, and if you're awake right now, then any dreams that you're thinking of are in the past. When you think of your dreams, certain images perhaps come to mind. Now are those images from the dream that you're remembering? Or perhaps was it like this, that what you dreamed was not at all visual, but in fact an entirely abstract experience, let us say, of judgements, like *I see red*, but not necessarily in language. So, you dream of a red car. What kind of car? Who knows? It was red. Sometimes dreams are detailed, sometimes not, but in real life we can stop and inspect something to get more details (and interestingly, we often don't, and so life often seems like a dream), whereas dreams are always already over, and many things in them are left mostly unspecified, although we apparently experience them. It's possible that what we dreamed of was a red car, not the visual hallucination of a red car, but a pure, abstract judgment in the course of a narrative that *there is a red car*. That is, it could be that we dream in pure narrative. It's just like when we remember books, which are not in color or black and white like images, but simply are, we often remember images, which are like dream images, unspecified and yet intimately tied to the experience of the book or at least the remembering of it--and at this point, I'm not sure what the difference is. Of course, in books we can go back to the words, but in dreams we can't.

Now I'm not saying we dream in language, only that it's possible that dreams are not like being awake, but are entirely abstract, even as we remember them in terms of what it's like to be awake. Okay. So often people say that their dreams are like movies. And we find ourselves in the same situation as before. Are dreams like movies, that is, are movies like dreams in waking life, or have people internalized the medium of film so that their dreams are now like movies? And before there were movies, let's say, dreams were more like literature, let's say in the 19th century when novels were unimaginably popular.

Okay, one wants to say, we can do this. Let's go find some people reporting on their dreams from the 19th century and then we'll know the answer, if their dreams were more like movies or more like literature. But that doesn't help! Since if in their dream report they say *I dreamed of a red house*, you still don't know if they dreamed of a red house like in a movie, like in an experience, or if they dreamed of a red house, as in, *red house*, just the words, or if not the words, just the concepts, the thoughts, which are remembered in images. *In my dream I saw two moons in the sky*. There's an image there, but was it like in Star Wars, or was it just like that, the thought: *I saw two moons in the sky*? Since there's no reason they would preface every statement like, *In my dream I thought I saw two moons in the sky, but maybe I'm only remembering it* or *In my dream it was like I was reading a book and in the book was written I saw two moons in the*

*sky and I was reading that* since that would be overly specific, and it doesn't communicate anything when everyone thinks they know what dreams are. (Although I think I've had dreams like that...) You communicate what you need to communicate about the dream and even what the dream means to you by saying *In my dream I saw two moons in the sky*. But you don't communicate precisely what would be relevant to us. And so, there's no way for us to get an answer to a question like *what do you mean by see?*, since ultimately, nobody really knows or is around anymore to say. And what's funny about it, nobody really knows what it's like to see in real life right now for the matter!

So to return at last to the original phrase, *oh melancholy soul*. Did the people who said *oh melancholy soul* mean what we mean by that phrase, or did they mean something different? And does what we mean by that phrase come about in reaction to what they meant, or does our conception of what they meant come about in reaction to what we mean? Or is there something in the phrase itself, outside time, that appears differently at different times? What's really weird is that all these points of view have good arguments in their favor, and are useful at different times, and in fact, at any moment, we have full access to all of them if we need them even if we can't in the end finally decide between them, that is, decide the question of cause and effect. Which is to say, we never really lose anything: everything stands arrayed there before us in what we've created, and what we've created is a picture of the world as it is to us, whose origin, end and purpose remain mysterious, in just that sense. Philosophers have argued that today we need to abandon the words cause and effect, because they no longer match up to the world as it is. But it seems to me that we have never really thought in terms of cause and effect at all. Those words only exist to give name to what from the beginning was already a confusion.

I'd like to give a quote from the Tale of Genji, an eleventh century Japanese novel. At one point, Genji, the protagonist, says:

In the old chronicles there are stories of musicians who moved the moon and the stars and brought unseasonable snows and frosts and conjured up tempests and thunders. In our day there is scarcely anyone who has even mastered the whole of the written lore, and the full possibilities are enormous. So little these days seems to make even a beginning--because the Good Law is in its decline, I suppose.

I think we are inclined to dismiss those stories of the old chronicles, and with it what Genji says about his own time of decline in comparison with them. But why should we assume Genji takes the old chronicles literally? Do we really think we are so much more canny today? Perhaps this was the case: the performances of the old musicians were moving and the chroniclers tried to describe the music they played. But how does one describe music? It's as if what was really being said is: it felt as if the musicians were moving the moon and the stars with their music. Since after all, what's really happening cannot be put into words. People come later and confuse the metaphorical for the literal, and either pine for those strange old times or reject the past as unusably primitive. I think we can read Genji as claiming that the Good Law is in decline, not because people no longer literally conjure tempests and thunders, but because metaphors like that no longer seem apt to describe the music of his day. And that is the melancholy of the present. Furthermore, one wonders what kind of music were they making in Genji's time, if they thought

that was what music was?

Anyway, where does this leave us? Here's one answer. Let yourself imagine walking down the street with a friend, and a man passes by you, and he acts in such a way that you think: *That man has a soul.* Now, as you walk, you wonder: *Maybe it's only me who thinks that,* and so you ask your friend: *Didn't that man have a soul?* And your friend respond: *That's just what I was thinking too.* At this point, you have established a shared understanding: whatever that man did, he did it in such a way that two of you, at least, thought that he had a soul. You discuss with your friend how this could be possible, and it is established that the man acted in a similar way to a character in a story that the two of you have both read. In fact, judging by your age, your friend's age, and the age of the man who passed you by, you all probably read the same story about the soul in childhood. In fact, it seems very much of a time and place, that particular way of acting. Now you wonder: *So we're assuming that the man has read the story? But maybe he hasn't!* And your friend responds, *Maybe he acted that way by chance, or because he read some other story. That's possible,* you say, but then another thought occurs to you: *We've been pretending that the three of us having read the same story or not counted as some kind of explanation. But surely whoever wrote the story in the first place must have gotten the idea to write a character with a soul from somewhere, either from a previous story or else from life. And, tracing the chain backward, the idea of a man like that with a soul must have come from real life at some point, and not from a story. And if that's the case, then perhaps the man we saw wasn't at all acting in accordance with that particular story, but acting spontaneously, because he was just the type of person that story was originally about. He is just the sort of person who acts like he has a soul, and it has nothing to do with the story it all!* You and your friend now feel somewhat cheated. But one last thought occurs to you: *What if, when we asked the man why he was acting like he did, he did reference that particular story? What would that prove? Since maybe he is just the type of person to act that way without the story, but when he understands himself, he references that story, which he has read, in order to give a name to it: soul. And, further, depending on which stories one has read, at different times, one calls the same thing by different names, whereas, in fact, what one talks about is always the same. And what seems curious to you now is the fact that at every moment there is always already a story about something like a soul, that is, a certain kind of human behavior seen a certain way.*

What the point? William Morris, the inventor of wallpaper, once wrote:

Men fight and lose the battle, and the thing that they fought for comes about in spite of defeat, and when it comes it turns out not to be what they meant, and other men have to fight for what they meant under another name.

That about sums it up. Thank you for reading this.

## THE ANGRY MAN

2011

The angry man lives in a valley of energy. The angry man sits in a local minimum. The angry man is in the landscape. The angry man keeps his anger like another person in a cage. The angry man watches the cage carefully and comes to conclusions; the angry man gets into the cage. The angry man learns. The angry man is in the cage. Pacing around. Imagine the girl who knows nothing, and knows she should know something, but that she doesn't, and knows that boys tease her, and so she can't tell, since she doesn't know anything, whether what someone says is true or false. All she knows is how they say it, and she tries to judge what they say based on that. And she feels stupider when she tries to call them out on it, their teasing, because it turns out what they say is true. And she thought it was false because of the way they said it. But whatever she says, they all respect her because she's beautiful. It's like small headed people. Servile people. The angry ones, they, well, they can talk and accept kindness, you know who I mean, but they will never be truly at home where they can't babble. And when they can't babble, where are they? Hiding under blankets, waking up unwittingly to bad thoughts. What dreams do they refuse to leave? Dreams of seduction. They are slowly rising out of themselves. What else? Hitting, punching, slapping, tripping, raping, destroying, shaming, seducing and then destroying, just getting it over with, having kids, wandering the poor world with the kids – what I gave you, you didn't give me – leaving the room at dinner, wanting to cry in a room, wanting them to follow, and then throwing them out, not really wanting that, but needing confrontation, something, saying something, the angry man slaps them right there. Like that. What if I disappeared? I am starting to disappear already, says the angry man; my likes and dislikes are strangers to me, and in that awkward space, a whole philosophy worms its way in: trying to see the world as worms, little noodles, mac & cheese, being stirred around by a wooden spoon, and making sucking noises. Why worms? Since without worms, none of this would have occurred, not this thought, not this situation, not this metaphor, not this figure of speech. All things have the same shape. What was the original? The angry man wants to throw the mac & cheese on the ground, but doesn't really want to clean it up. This is why the angry man is angry. He can't just be angry.

Just randomly, one day, the angry man wants to attack, and leave a lingering hurt, chain the victim to his leg. Follow through with it! Find out what happens! What adventures after that! After that kidnapping. A slight! All of history is a series of slights. All of history as a hidden slight, a damning worldview, cheapening the self, the self who had assumed, the self who had trusted, the self who thought it appeared differently than it did. The angry man wants to shout! The angry man wants to scream! Scream aloud at last these fantasies, these worlds that come into the mind, worlds in which one's gaze is never averted, in which one stares steadily and agonizingly into the the failure, not a mistake, a miscomprehension, but a failure of the unspoken, a failure of that which is just supposed to be there, of that which is supposed to work. There is no way to unfail, only ways to be angry. You slight me one more time, and I'll slap faster than... Why a slap? As unexpected as the slight. An interruption. That is, when it happens, one can barely believe that it happened. Then the angry man starts in on it. I'll break each of their fingers, so they can never... Oh, the victim will laugh, of course. And I'll refuse to do it, I'll refuse

to go through with it. And then, when they least expect it, the table is thrown over, and the angry man is there!

Was the angry man an angry child, do you think? The angry man feels younger when he looks at the young. The angry man clings to reservations in times of distress. Such servile people! Why servile? Are they like children? Are they inferior? Why this respect for innocence, or should we say, the attractiveness, the availability to fantasy of fake innocence? But what is fake innocence? It is like acting without reservations, like the innocent do; but unlike the innocent, these ones have experience. So then they act despite experience? Or perhaps because of experience? Or perhaps such things don't matter to them. Or perhaps they have other reasons. Who are the kindest, seen from afar? Who are the ones the angry man wants to dedicate a poem too? The ones who artlessly don't get caught up in it, but who are caught up in it, but rather see it differently, perhaps more simply, but that doesn't quite describe them. It's not that they stand above it, but they aren't so suspicious. That is, they accept things as they are. But they aren't prostitutes or conservatives. Do they see the best in things? No doubt, sometimes they, alone, see the worst things of all. These are the ones who are so valuable now, the angry man thinks. And then, looking back, the angry man wonders why he doesn't dedicate poems any more. Did he ever dedicate poems? It seems as if that happened. But perhaps it was only the same thing, you know, a feeling, that one wants to dedicate a poem. Who are the real losers, you know what I mean? The one who just keep masturbating. Or just keep being unable to masturbate. When everyone's trying to help. And this loser throws ice on the bed, shovels ice all over the bed, and bashes the victim's knees in with a bat. Staring into their eyes while he drives a nail through their skull. The angry man feels threatened as the victim bleeds out, and continues to bleed, and their organs are pushed through the holes, and the organs spurt out, and flop on the floor, and accumulate in a heap, an ever growing heap, as this dying body, in its last act, tries to fill the whole world with itself. And the angry man feels threatened. And wants to save a few things. Saves a few pieces of jewelry. He takes the victim's watch. He takes the victim's clothes. He can't help staring at the victim's naked body. Does he take the victim's naked body? He films it. He keeps it for himself. He peels the skin away from the bone, and keeps the skin, and makes it his pillow, and and rubs his head on it, back and forth, and breaths it in, and puts on the victim's clothes, and reads the victim's writings, and altogether tries to imagine the victim is still there, but of course, a *nicer* victim. What are slights anyway? It's when someone isn't nice. When are the people not nice, anyway? Has that question ever been written on? It's certainly easy to imagine someone not being nice. And then one wants to lock them in a closet. And then have them confront you, there, in the kitchen, when all your loved ones are there. And you keep it all inside. Steel. And then politely ask—oh! How the angry man idealizes this moment! How he imagines it from every angle! How he frames it against the sun, and the window, the open space by the table, the ocean outside, the leaves drifting down, the stillness in the air, and brightness of the coffee cups and little silver spoons. And he at that moment politely asks them to Check him into a sanatorium. Please check me in. And does he go on? He shouldn't go on. The effect will be lost. Keep me away in a sanatorium. I just want. I just want to be lobotomized. I just want to be trash. I want to sink to the level of trash. I want to rise to the top of the garbage heap. I want to do. I want to do and not think. I want to be a simpleton. I want to write bad poetry. I want to be castrated, or else,

I want to be nothing but an erect penis. I want to be inert, or else, covered in flames. This is what I want. I want to be like a prophet. I want to be like someone who washes tomatoes. I want to be like the singer of an ancient song, rubbing olive oil all over their body. I want to be put away, don't you see? Check me in! Put my name on the register! Since you know, since you know what it's like, the angry man says to the victim. Since you've turned me into you. I mean, we were always the same. You were right all along, weren't you? This is what the angry man wants to say. The angry man can't be angry while he's making an argument. I misunderstood, you see. But you weren't nice about it. You were mean. You thought you were better, didn't you. So perfect, so clean, so intelligent, so far-sighted, so above all this, so able to make distinctions, to really straddle the world, while the rest of us, in a lump, what do we do? We rut in it. We fuck in the mud. We finger ourselves with red eyes. We shit ourselves, we just parade around in our shit, with our shit-festivals and shit-celebrations, our whole shit way of life. And you! So sorry! So sorry I got some shit on your white clothes. How did they get so white? Because you were rolling around in white, clean, fairy shit? Were you sniffing the assholes of other fairies to clear your sinuses, and gulping down their bird-shit like it was mint ice-cream? But you try to comfort me. Of course, you try to comfort me. Why are you trying to comfort me. I slam your head against the kitchen door. I spit in your face. And I go on a walk alone. And I punch your fairy friends in the face! You doubt I can throw a punch. But I have it planned out. I punch them in the face, then the stomach, and then they get ready to hit back, and I walk away. And I look into your face, and I can see in your eyes that your friend is coming for me, from behind. And I roll, and duck to the side, and I trip them. And they're down. And I leave. Servile self-satisfaction! Or maybe I'll meet the victim for dinner and wait until they're bored, like they always get bored, or rather forget patience, or rather remember not to care, and as soon as they do, as soon as it gets to that point: Okay, bye. Knock their glass over and leave. And if they try to follow: spin around and fix them with my eyes and say: Go back to your seat. Go back to your seat. Louder and louder until they do it, they go back to their seat, or the waiters come. And everyone will be looking at us. And then it'll all come out, that this is what you've driven me to. This is what the angry man thinks. And when the victim tries to kill themselves, bring witnesses. That's the thing to do. Witness. If only there were witnesses. If only one could find some sympathy. But you don't really want sympathy, you want someone to hand a new future to you. Just give it to you. To take and interest, and say, fuck all that, here's the plan. The angry man is always planning. Nothing comes of it. The angry man has to learn. Has to learn the ways of new forms of life. Has to recognize his errors, and place himself in context. And in doing so, the angry man can cease to be angry because there are new problems. Interesting problems.

The angry man doesn't feel the prod of inaction so much any more. The angry man is happy. The angry man feels historical. He feels like a type of person. He feels like someone you read about. He feels like he has a place. He feels like a member of society. He feels like a thinker of a certain school. He feels like he has a particular caste. He feels excitement. He feels like there are things to be done. And yet... there are times... Because, of course, the victim is not dead yet. And the victim wants you to feel bad. Is it a decision? No, the victim makes you feel bad. Well, you make the victim feel bad. It ends up that you want to make the victim feel bad for making you feel bad, that is, you want to ruin them. You want to kill their lovers one by one. You want to pull out their

hair until their scalp bleeds. You want to write a book and invite them to a reading on the book tour, and give them a copy of the book, at the end of the reading, since the last line of the story is, And then I give this book to you. I dedicate it to you. And you hand it to them at just that moment. In front of society, so that they know that what you're reading is about that person, that victim. And then leave, crying, feeling terrible, feeling bad, feeling ashamed. And to see them now... What's left of the way you used to look at them? Not much. It's been shunted, and muscles around the eyeball are seizing up, and they can't even hold a fantasy before them, without it flickering, without it jerking, without it struggling away, spinning around, turning, like in a dream, trying to turn a handle, and the handle keeps flipping in the other direction, and you know it's not the handle, it's the dream, that is, it's you, and you just can't keep the handle straight, and you know that if you had a clear and distinct impression of the handle you'd be able to turn it, but it keeps transfiguring itself, until you have to pull the eye out, pull the victim's eye out of your own socket, and you imagine the ripping of the eye out a thousand different ways.

Sometimes the angry man imagines being drunk. Being drunk and hurting people. Being drunk and forgiving everyone. As if in making yourself defenseless, they'll come to your side, clustering around you, saying, Don't worry about it. And then you cluster around them, the victim. Because you hear love in their voice when they're talking to their fellow victims. And you love that. You love when things sound that way. And you start to wonder, Do they hear love in my voice? Maybe, and this is the best case scenario, my love is very complicated and hard to fit inside a tone of voice. But the angry man is worried about appearing egotistical. So he'd rather argue. He is good at arguing. He loves to argue. He argues with his parents about rights; he argues with his friends about what to do. He loves to argue because he likes to make the best case for things. That is, he wants to understand, through arguing for something, how someone could come to believe it. What does the angry man believe? He is convinced of a few things. He does want validation, of course, but he also wants the fire, he wants to feel like we're accomplishing something. He wants this to be a court-room, an assembly hall. He *wants* someone to disagree, since agreement is boring. Unless you're touching. How the angry man wants to touch! He loves to touch! He wants to touch everything! He wants to run his hands along every surface, and he wants them to all agree with his hand. But things retreat from his touch, and he tries to talk the surface around to his point of view. But the angry man appears stupider in arguments. And this is something that arguments do. And therefore it is unfortunate that the angry man falls so easily into arguments. The argument offers the opportunity, or even the necessity, of letting one's guard down. One always guards against stating the obvious. That is, simplifying. Or saying what one really feels. Which is always obvious. No one disagrees about the obvious. No one disagrees about how things are. One only argues. Subtlety, that is, compression, that is, allusion is the goal of language: so that all speech becomes a poem and only the most unknown truths find themselves expressed, only the most important things, and everything building up to it is left unsaid. This is the dream of the poet-workers, to wean the world away from words, until a single chirp is all that's necessary to express... Express what? This is the project we are working on. But we already know. And it is sad that we are so angry about it. It is sad that the angry man is angry. What do you think? You guys. Listen to me! Listen to me! Are you angry about it? If, like a father, I grabbed you and slammed you down on the

kitchen floor, sweating, put my mouth in your ear, and hissed: get in the fucking car. Would you think, this man is so angry, this man is angry because his father was angry. But my father was gentle; he only did that once. What have I got from him then? Since, you're right, of course, that I've got something. What have I got? I've got a lot of patience. I've got a lot of ability to shut things out, to fall asleep. I've got an ability to be unable to respond, to get trapped; oh, I can talk my way out of it, I can talk my way out of anything. But I say the wrong things; I don't have time to think. The world is walking away. Something needs to be done. The wrong thing. Just want to keep talking. Just want to leave. Just want to get out. But when I have time to think, I want to stay; I want everything valuable. And then I also want to leave, because I'm not getting anything valuable. No! I'm getting a lot that's valuable! But that's the way the argument goes; that's the way the sentence is structured, around a contrast. And I think, there must be some truth in it, if I can see both sides, if I am of two minds. And I try to fantasize my way into both sides, and alternate sides of the bed, in slamming my head on the pillow, drenching it, until the pillow is about to float away under a bridge of dreams. What is this lush world we live in, like an alien planet! Such strange flora and fauna. Walking through a city glorying in the love and darkness is the same as walking through Goethe's forest. Since... Do you think that strangeness is funny? I'm not making it very funny, but it could be; in fact, you could be laughing at me right now. Are you? Like an audience, so excited to be at the show, that they'll laugh at anything. How do they make laugh tracks? Out of the excitement of being at the place where it happens. But what about the other place, where everything becomes damage, and the whole mass of words and things pins one down with their knees, and "It hurts." When do we become entranced by strangers, and when do we turn to a beloved? How many people can we say we've known, when most of them live in our heads? What anecdotes when everything exciting happens during a nap? The angry man stays in bed until it is dark outside; the angry man would always rather sleep; the angry man hates to wait. To see someone else when having sex with a person is to have sex once and for all. Sometimes the angry man walks, and this is when his head teaches him to be alone. The autumn is best; the crispness of memory and desire. For the angry man it is autumn, not spring, when things start anew. During the summer the angry man feels like the last one on earth. That he is standing at the end of the world. What happens to the imagination when the world is crisp? When does one think about standing at the end of the world? When one thinks about children, to think about children is to think about being the last one left, after the streamers have fallen, and nothing is either important or not. This is how I introduce you to myself. When do you think it's okay to dance? Is it okay all the time? When do you like to dance? Do you dance at weddings? Do you dance in the car? Do you dance in the midst of things, or by the pillar? The angry man thinks that if he talks long enough everything will come out, everything written down already, every thought will come forth, since it is all connected. And then, angry man is right. What are *you* thinking about? As if all thinking were still thinking, about or of -- it all just hurts. The angry man thinks, That's the profound interpretation. Groans and screams in reality. Who is childish, and at what times? Nobody wants to work. The shallow interpretation: they are not different. What is the key? That we picture the world around us as it is, and yet as if it were our own decision. Go back, repeat. As if each story had its own character. The angry man is waiting for the characters to come alive, to walk onto the stage. The angry man wants to not think for just a second; he succeeds, but not for long. The angry man is angry because the angry man treats the

world like a garden. He has done this since childhood: his senses are all aroused, and wildly fluctuate. He paces around the garden, unable to see past the hedges. He sees a cross and a star in the pattern of the flowers. He bends down to look at a leaf, and falls--he falls onto the stone, and cranes his neck over the dirt, and looks at a little stem, drenched in dew. He digs down to the root, and feels them run parallel to his hands, and cranes his eye in, and touches the strings of the root with his lips; he grinds them down in his teeth until they break, and zooms in to the white pebbles hidden there. A cross and a star in the undergarden. The angry man can be found digging in the garden; the nobles watch from the veranda, swinging around each other like apparati, stepping over the holes beneath them, falling, and still dancing. The angry man never realizes that a science of proximity exists, and that there are certain types who sit with the dancers, alone in a room somewhere, and, fixing their hair, tell them who they are, and introduce them to themselves. Never forget that all the senses come alive in goodness and in events and colors! The angry man knows Ovid wrote an Art of Love. The angry man had from the beginning foreclosed on the possibility of a science of people; the angry man, always learning, out of anger, fear, comes to understand the scientific mindset. The angry man begins to garden, to raise children. He knows this, that it is good when science is unconscious, and the game is played in such a way that on the rails of the ancient machine, thoughts burst freely across the angry man and his victim. The angry man does not know how to watch a scene from a couch. The angry man says this, that the victim makes him feel as if everything he does is wrong. The angry man has heard human beings talk like this. Does it mean, he thinks, that he feels bad because of what he does, that is, everything good in him is bad for the victim? Or does it mean, that his things are bad, even for him? Some of us cannot cease, and the mistake is to love it; after cessation, one no longer needs to love things evil and small. Perhaps if the angry man were different, he wouldn't feel so much like Flaubert, a novelist whom he hasn't read. Flaubert was a hard worker. Once, the angry man worked hard too. All of life seemed to the angry man like a library of unread books. The angry man read introductions; the angry man laid himself up flat on his back and wrote poetry into the night. He watched moves; he laughed; and he tried to tell the same jokes. The angry man thought that the loving enunciation of a name seemed more significant than a thousand pages; the angry man loved to explain. The angry man lost touch with the names; the angry man no longer uses his vocabulary. The angry man felt no pang, no pang of sharedness, only impatience, only lack. The angry man takes many notes; and like Flaubert, the angry man once felt the commonness of accepted language too harshly; he too once worked hard to understand it, to categorize it, to destroy it with a sigh, a burp, hanging his head. The angry man felt very strongly that this was the case, that even as society became one with the machine of interlocking cliches, that nothing was new, that above all else, the weary conversation was understandable. For what else was the angry man working? What else was the angry man good at? For what else was he to be rewarded for? It seemed as if something mysterious worked in the underground; that some truth was blurted out like an overtone in the fatuousness of everyday language. Like Flaubert, the angry man tried to unlock the heart of the simpleton, more precious than a thousand ingenious hearts, for those latter talkers, he understood all too easily. And he vacillated between total understanding and hanging bafflement at every individual thing. When every detail—from the fish pillow in the room next to the grand piano, with its scotch tape covering the keys, to the sign in the port-a-potty admonishing, *do not drop toilet when moving*—

gleamed like that jewel of a word, *gleam*, the wholeness of the matter, some self was jumping between manic extroversion and agonizing grimace, shared between rails. Who is wiping their asses in the bathroom, glaring in the mirror, wanting to feel dizzy enough to die on the threshold of the restaurant? Flaubert too took refuge in the historical; some people are excellent readers. To penetrate the secrets of the past the two of them, the angry man and Flaubert, tried to use their deepest feelings for all men and women, the very movements of their souls, to translate the dead language of the past into the clichés of the present, until, overfull at the beginning, they depleted their supply of love by the end. Even language turned its back, and nobody could work so hard any more. Do you feel like you live in a virtual room? Do you hear those words again and again? When they talked about *life*, they meant something else. Who shies away from beauty, from pleasure; who begins to fear it; who hides when the sun sets over the mirroring ocean because its beauty is pain? When is everything like a hallucination? When the life in which we all participate is perfumed with the weird. Do mothers exist in such gardens?

The angry man watches a movie and identifies with the director. Then, the angry man tries to reconcile that large opening feeling with the meanness of his heart, which the director must have shared, the meanness of the handheld camera. How can our creations be so much greater souled than ourselves? As if we mean ones had some secret attic from which to bring out something greater than our own experience, even as experience is precisely what, in creating, we mean ones aim to give! Are these not the secret meanings of large and small, great and mean! Servile! A little man with a great soul. A great man with a little soul. Thoughts cannot exhaust them, but the angry man wants to contain them in a very funny mystery story. For with music in his ears, and the world coming in flashes, the angry man says things. It's not anything I did or said. It's not anything I did or said! This is what the angry man says. I think I understand now. The angry man wants to do some things, like chop off someone's foot. He wants to lay there and plan it out. He wants to sneak into the room, break in a window, and holding them down, saw off their foot, just above the ankle. And keep the foot? Break in the windows of the people who lived around them. Steal their stuff. Make it look like a... This is what the angry man plans! The angry man has a language to express his anger: it is better to go to the house of mourning than the house of mirth. Pains never go away, but the past is reworded on the basis on subsequent events. The memory space is overwritten. The feel of the event and the time diverge, is what I'm saying; it happens when the angry man is angry. What does he want to do? He wants to pluck out an eyeball using fancy pliers and make them go around blind. The angry man wants a lingering hurt, a lingering pain, a socket, a cave: the inverted memory in the space of loneliness. So the angry man is angry! When does he think? Beforehand! And then he lies there still angry. And he starts to see things. Women. Men. Evenings. Structures. Games. Decodings. Doubts. Accidents. Successes. Detours. Returns. Finales. Darkness. Searching in the floating green black jade. I don't have to do this, the angry man thinks. I don't have to perform it for you! The angry man is a dying philosopher when he is angry. The angry man makes little kicks; what do they signify? Like the squint of a vizier, in the costume of Leibniz, the Muse strikes, yes, the Muse strikes: effortlessly, the analysis flows, but not analysis like the wisteria blossom on the snow, but analysis like the good solid horse-like running of water, down channels, through gates, flowing masses of gold, driving punches, like slipping one's body further and further down under the covers, down an endless

bed, the cake of dreams, sliced up and eaten, one dark piece at a time, but other dreamers,, for a while, dine, until the need to converse strikes them, and at that one moment, yes at that one moment, the cake is sliced in total, and the pieces are dispersed throughout the world, and those slices of cakes are our beds! This is what the angry man believes. And in our dreams, we can imagine what a good birthday party it was, when we were all together. And the analysis? The analysis flows like molten chocolate down the slides of the cake, into... What? The pool of chocolate! And when the molecules have slowed down, and the dribbling ceased, then, oh then! The heat lives on in the pool of chocolate, where the molecules huddle together for warmth. There, in the pool of chocolate, life begins; although the flow has ceased, the random configuration of molecules in the chocolate begin to form images, just briefly, flashes, without associations between one flash and another. Ah, don't you wish the chocolate had just a little bit more organization... if it were lumpier... had more complex properties... sediment... it could make those images relate to one another. How we want relationships! So the angry man concludes. What strange desires we have, such powerful, creative desires! I am the living chocolate, the angry man thinks. I am under the bed. I am lying down. I am flowing out of a bowl of ice cream, with chocolate sauce, cake batter ice cream, with chocolate sauce. I said, I am the chocolate. Pinned to the ground. What's the point of mentioning gravity? Is that some kind of explanation? I don't think so. Or, but, what do you think? Or, do you think at all about this? What is wrong with you? There's something wrong. I just don't understand why you have to be this way? Servile! Isn't it enough to speak in words that match up to reality? That observation, spoken, includes inner and outer alike, without the implication of having decided to see things that way, since that way is forced on one by the reality of the situation, entered into, well, for other reasons. Isn't that enough? That's what they were like. Who are these people? The other ones. The one who get caged. You know you're caged if you, in recalling what you spoke about with them, you remember the thought more than the speech; if you realize that your words, in what they dredged up in passing, did precisely the same thing, reflect the form of life--a moment of weakness--we step outside forms--of the moment. And what did you do, angry man? You saw them make decisions they never made, inner decisions. And never saw yourself! Not introducing people. What are the rules? There are no rules! There is only perception, honed perception, and the art of love, and freedom from the chains of the Prison of Need. There the inmates roar in their cells like animals, a few demurely exposing themselves through the windows, in the cells, like ignorants, like children, like country-folk, like trash, like former virgins, like innocents, like uncultured girls, like the simple, like the pure of heart, like people who like to dance, like poets, who are staying tonight in another bedroom, I think, but the poet has a layer... when the roar dies down a little, you can hear it... a layer of doubt. A deepness of feeling. Every moment exquisite. Sadness of the loss of an explosion, and the chance to film it. And the feeling is so deep, that reality can't even extend its talons down that hole. And so, full of desperation, so much it is even paralyzing, one separates the thought and the doing, and drags the thought back in time, and stretches it out on the table, and rolls it over and over, flattening it out, and then braiding it in complicated patterns, and ripping it apart, and starting over, and falling on the floor, and baking it in the oven, and changing, and transforming, and being more and more golden, and flaking, and emerging in a burst of steam, frozen into shape by the heat. How does a pastry stand in the way of me and my deed? Slowing you down. And when suddenly a moment surprises you, and a

deed must be done, you dumbly hand them the pastry. Because its delicious, you say. The angry man loves to eat! He would be eating all day; but all the same, he loves it when he forgets to eat. How nice it is to be without hunger! All the same, in the material world, it feels a little strange, that idea; and I want to say: It is nicer to be hungry all the time, and constantly eating! But, it does occur to me, that the former would have a warmth and life of its own. In fact, I'm sure it would. You laugh! It's more complex underneath the surface, that is, it's anger, yes, but it's complicated, that is, it's not *really* anger, it's something else. In fact, the more you think about it, that's a fine way of looking at people in life in this very complex way... in fact, such simple things as anger don't exist! But before all these equivocations occurred, how did you think the angry man was angry? Since he was angry then. That's real anger. What if the angry man has that kind of anger as well? Isn't that imaginable?

## EIKO &amp; KOMA

2011

1. Art is a threat to civilization.
  - 1.1 I knew it once, then forgot it.
    - 1.1.1 I confused art for the art of memorization: truths are zipped up and delivered to the next generation; the symbols under which they appear fade in time; the artist delivers up new symbols at every moment, as well as more powerful forms of compression.
      - 1.1.1.1 We are learning new things every day.
    - 1.1.2 Falling asleep, afraid of forgetting, I throw my pillow on the rug, so it'll remind me in the morning.
  - 1.2 Art is a threat to civilization?
    - 1.2.1 Now, I don't need to convince myself.
    - 1.2.2 Eiko + Koma: what if the game of moving were like that?
      - 1.2.2.1 Like the mating dance.
        - 1.2.2.1.1 The mating dance is impressive, even in its limitations; it's beautiful in its elegance and simplicity; it's disconcerting when it applies to us.
        - 1.2.2.2 Do you see that "ritualistic" has the same valences?
          - 1.2.2.2.1 The impressive altars to the gods; the beauty of rites; the disconcerting strangeness of the past.
        - 1.2.2.3 What other terms?
          - 1.2.2.3.1 Ideal, minimal, essential, schematic, hieroglyphic, pornographic.
            - 1.2.2.3.1.1 Ideal continues to be contested; minimal and essential have become acceptable; schematic is held in suspicion; hieroglyphic is misunderstood; and pornographic is dismissed out of hand.
              - 1.2.2.3.1.1.1 Find more.



destroying it, but gently loving as one loves an innocent girl.

1.2.4.2 All the same, when do we sniff each other like dogs?

1.2.4.3 Is it the same time when we close our eyes and suck on our glasses in order to  
relax enough to pee?

1.2.4.4 Are you then an insect, carrying nutrients in the form of strawberries, from place  
to place?

1.2.4.5 When in life do we move like that?

1.2.5 The ideal is not civilization.

1.2.5.1 There is a surrealism in potatoes.

1.3 Civilization makes no room for art; or when it does, it ritualizes it, and neutralizes  
the threat.

1.3.1 Who neutralizes?

1.3.2 Us.

## COVERADAPTATIONS

2011

*The Lake, Alfonse de Lamartine*

So, it's like we've all been sailors together,  
 always going around, from city to city,  
 and sometimes we get lost  
 or maybe go too far in one direction or something--  
 we're really bad at looking at maps--  
 and so it ends up we never really stop--  
 why did I let you convince to buy that anchor?--  
 we never use it anyway.

I wanted to bring it up, because I was looking at the lake earlier,  
 and I was thinking about that girl, you know,  
 --we used to look at the lake a lot--  
 and I was sitting on that stone she and I used to sit on,  
 and I was thinking that even the lake missed her,  
 since I miss her,  
 and it all seemed pretty appropriate.

I mean, right now, the lake is moaning,  
 just like it used to,  
 near those tall rocks--  
 you see?--  
 and there's all that foam,  
 which I remember she was playing with,  
 with her feet.

So, I was thinking about that one evening,  
 when we were actually sailing on the lake,  
 and all we could hear was some guys rowing.

And I had this thought, which I think she had too--  
 it was a weird thought, though I'm used to it--  
 and it seemed like the lake was somehow involved.

The thought was:  
 I wish we didn't have to go to bed and wake up tomorrow,  
 and keep waking up,  
 since I know eventually when I wake up,  
 it's just gonna be bullshit--  
 you're not going to be there--  
 I'm not going to be there--  
 maybe the lake will be there, but I don't know.

The point was, I was happy, but sad, because I knew that it was getting late, basically.

And I was thinking about how it would be great if every morning we just forgot what already happened, whatever it was, since it all adds up in the end, apparently, to me sitting here at the lake again, and I'm not even having a good time.

And it's like every time!  
Gotta go to bed and some point and wake up, and it's all different.

So, I was thinking in terms of general advice, since it was pretty lonely at the lake, and I had no one to talk to, really, and I came to the conclusion that you might as well go for it, whoever it is, since every morning it's all different, and you can't just keep circling around the same lake again and again.

It'd be nice if being happy counted for something more than being sad, but that's not how it works, and whether you're happy or sad, you still gotta wake up in the morning-- and actually, the more I think about it, it's kind of like, we do forget a lot of things, when we wake up, and what's more, even if *we* remember, no one else does, which might come to the same thing. It's like someone's coming in and stealing everything from us.

So what's the point?  
I'm looking at the lake, the rocks, the caves, the forest, which is pretty dark, and they're not saying anything-- which is bullshit-- so I'd say if you're not thinking this kinds of thoughts, which are pretty depressing, whether it's because it never occurred to you, or because you gave up thinking about it, and went back to whatever you were doing, then that's cool--

the one thing I'd say is that  
it's good to remember stuff,  
even if it's sad.

And if you look at things differently,  
like if the lake is calm instead of stormy,  
or if it is stormy, then, you could look at the  
wind on the area around the lake  
as tickling it and making it laugh,  
and the trees and the rocks as having a big party,  
like a birthday or an anniversary,  
then that might cheer you up.

And sometimes, you can even see things,  
like in a movie, where it's not either happy or sad, exactly,  
just really exciting,  
when a huge storm is going on outside,  
and the thunder is echoing,  
and there's a couple of stars between the clouds--  
you can see them on the lake--  
and you're not really involved, just watching it,  
and at that point,  
it's not really about you anymore,  
you don't have to worry, since you gotta figure,  
that when anyone else gets around to watching the  
wind, the plants, that funny smell the lake has,  
and pretty much anything around here,  
then they'll feel the same way--  
maybe what they went through will be different,  
but it'll probably feel the same,  
and the lake will remind them,  
and they'll think, yeah,  
that's how it is:  
sometimes you fall in love,  
and then you get all this stuff.

*Untitled, Franck Venaille*

You know that guy who always walking around,  
around rivers all the time?

We like to say he carries the cold for us--  
I don't mean he carries stuff that's cold, necessarily,  
but he makes it feel cold, maybe emotionally,  
it's hard to say.  
But he carries around our spaces too, I guess--

don't ask me about it,  
you had to be there.

I'll say this, though, that he doesn't like those spaces,  
they freak him out, you know.  
So he takes his head, which is made of sheep--  
and I mean that like, he does often wear a fuzzy hat,  
when he's walking down some river,  
but also because he's got a head like a sheep,  
he thinks like a sheep.  
So he takes his sheep head and he'll freeze the spaces for later,  
since there's just too much of it around,  
and he puts it in the freezer for later.  
So he's a good organizer,  
though, I can't put my finger on how he does it.

He wraps it up first,  
and we always think,  
why is he the one to always been cleaning up,  
and keeping track of things--  
but we know the answer, which is basically,  
he's the kind of guy that likes to keep things under wraps,  
everything, how he feels,  
if he's sad--  
it all gets balled up and wrapped.

But you can't keep track of everything!  
Things sort of wander off like cows  
when the fence is broken--  
they're just off doing they're own thing,  
looking for grass,  
not looking up,  
and that's like our friend, too:  
he hates to be distracted,  
which can come off a little rude,  
and he's got his own objectives.

I think the point is, you can keep looking for this stuff  
all you want, and you can find some of it,  
and keep it for yourself,  
but even if this fence is broken,  
there's more fences, and eventually,  
since the earth is round,  
you can walk around the whole thing,  
and you just end up at the same broken fence.

I bet, he thinks of it, when he takes another of those walks,  
 I guess, where he figures stuff out,  
 and he comes to shore, and the tide gates are closed.  
 You just turn around.

Sometimes though, I bet it gets really stormy,  
 and the tide gates get flooded over,  
 and I think this is what really happened to him,  
 if you ask me,  
 he got to the shore, and it was really stormy,  
 and he just stood there, watching the water come to him  
 for a change.  
 And I bet he thought, this is just perfect for me,  
 this is a fitting ending, you know,  
 for someone like me--  
 I'm such an asshole to people,  
 and I'm always getting in their business,  
 and for once,  
 I can just let someone else tell me what to do.  
 He probably said to himself, I give up,  
 and then, once you think that,  
 you let your guard down for a second,  
 and then you're gone--  
 who knows if you could have gotten away at that point, anyway--  
 and I bet that water was freezing,  
 and he probably tried to swim to shore,  
 or at least I hope he did,  
 but there's no way you could get back.  
 The sea makes it own rules.

*The Blind, Charles Baudelaire*

Shit man, blind people are fucked up.  
 If you didn't know they were blind,  
 you think they were retarded, or something,  
 or someone playing a prank.  
 And then it turns out they can't see,  
 and then you're like,  
 I don't even know how you can live like that,  
 like when you wake up in the morning,  
 and it's too bright, and you're looking  
 for your phone, through really squinty eyes.  
 You just sort of knock shit around,  
 and then you give up,  
 and just lie there in a haze.

But seriously, have you ever seen a blind person?  
They got dead eyes,  
like they're always looking past you,  
like they aren't listening,  
like they're better than you,  
like they're the kind of people  
who just don't notice details,  
who just have a lot of book knowledge,  
and think they don't have to pay attention to what's around them--  
or even if you're just appreciating the scenery,  
stoned, looking around,  
then that's important shit,  
and I just can't see blind people doing that,  
noticing shit other people don't notice.

And because they're walking around  
or trying to  
and not seeing anything we're seeing,  
it's like what the fuck could they be possibly thinking about?  
I mean, of course, they'll hear the same stuff we hear,  
like someone singing, or someone telling a joke,  
or yelling at someone,  
basically all the normal shit that happens,  
everyone having a good time.

But I get pissed off too when I hear loud people,  
since, when you're just walking around and overhear something,  
it always sounds retarded, no matter who's saying it.  
So I get pissed off, but then I think,  
well, I mean, maybe it's just me,  
maybe I'm just confused,  
since everyone seems to be doing fine--  
maybe blind people are just the same as me,  
confused,  
distracted,  
or maybe everyone is just like that.

THE GENJI RESTORATION  
2011

<MISSING DUE TO COMPUTER TROUBLE>

2012

## FRENCH ETHNOLOGY, SOVIET PSYCHOLOGY 2012

### I. Introduction

I want to discuss two events which occurred in 1931. At that time, Marcel Griaule was directing an ethnographic expedition across Senegal, Mali, Ethiopia, and Djibouti. It was in Mali that Griaule first came into contact with the Dogon people, thereby establishing a fifteen year relationship which culminated in 1946, when Griaule published *Conversations with Ogotemmêli*, an account of the thirty-three days during which an elder of the Dogon community, a hunter who had lost his sight, “laid bare the framework of a world system, the knowledge of which will revolutionize all accepted ideas about the mentality of Africans and of primitive peoples in general (Griaule 2). In 1931, however, Griaule and his companion Michel Leiris were concerned in particular with the material culture of the African villages with which they came into contact, and did not resist the temptation to carry off artifacts to be studied and displayed back in Europe.

During this same year, 1931, the Soviet psychologist Alexander Luria led a team into the “hamlets and nomad camps of Uzbekistan and Khirgizia in Central Asia” (Mind 60). The society there had historically been feudal, mainly illiterate, and dominated by Islam, but was undergoing rapid change due to the Soviet effort towards the collectivization and mechanization of agriculture. By going from village to village and camp to camp, Luria and his colleagues were able to compare the answers given by illiterate and recently literate subjects in similar life circumstances to certain psychological tests. Their purpose was to determine the relationship between literacy and thought. By 1946, Luria was working at the Institute for Neurosurgery in Moscow, having attained considerable clinical experience during the war.

These two events can be situated as part of a larger effort on the part of so-called moderns, educated in the Western style, to understand the nature of uneducated, non-Western thought by journeying into the heart of an unfamiliar territory. The dynamic between the modern and the primitive in the French context has come under sustained scrutiny in recent years, but the Soviet story is less well known. Both the French ethnologists and the Soviet psychologists were familiar with the debate over primitive thought that had been conducted by thinkers such as Lucien Levy-Bruhl and others around the turn of the 20th century, but their methods and indeed the character of their conclusions differ in ways due to the intellectual and political climates in France and the Soviet Union, respectively.

### II. The French

In his article, “On Ethnographic Surrealism,” James Clifford tries to establish the French context under which ethnography occurred with particular reference to the cross-over, materially and intellectually, between ethnography and surrealism in the 1920’s and 30’s. He writes that “in the hothouse milieu of Parisian culture life, no field of social or artistic research [could] long remain indifferent to influences or provocations beyond its disciplinary boundaries” (Clifford 539). For example, the aforementioned Michel Leiris, a surrealist, accompanied Griaule on his expedition to the Dogon, and another surrealist, Georges Bataille, ran a journal, *Documents*, in

which ethnographic material was published alongside surrealist work. Furthermore, due to the influence of the supposed African influence on Picasso and the cubists, for example, the alignment between art and ethnography was, as it were, taken for granted.

Clifford describes a certain orientation “more properly called ‘modernist’ than modern, taking as its problem--and opportunity--the fragmentation and juxtaposition of cultural values.” For thinkers oriented in this way, cultural orders were seen not only as constructed and artificial, but often as ideological and repressive. The common sense of the West was the starting point of these critiques, something to be “subverted, parodied, and transgressed” (539). The disorienting power of the unexpected juxtaposition--employed by the surrealists in order to draw out the extraordinary realities beyond common sense--is also the method of the ethnographer. The goal in both cases is to confront the complacency of the West with something that does not fit under its standard of normality. These juxtapositions, however, were not seen as mere devices; the goal of both surrealists and ethnographers was to bring out and emphasize precisely those juxtapositions that “naturally” occur in the unstable condition of modernity.

Perhaps because of the dominating concept of juxtaposition, these thinkers focused on the ways that discrete cultural artifacts could be decontextualized and recombined. For this reason, it might be said that the battle that they thought they were fighting was one over the nature of *objects*.

Their view of culture did not feature conceptions of organic structure, functional integration, wholeness, or historical continuity. This conception of culture can be called, without undue anachronism, semiotic. Cultural reality was composed of artificial codes, ideological identities and objects susceptible to inventive recombination and juxtaposition (550).

From the semiotic perspective, objects can be taken to be material objects as much as they can be taken as words. The very fact that “artificial codes” can be repurposed between societies establishes that cultural difference is arbitrary and artificial, and that assertions of value are always relative. For example, Clifford relates how Griaule ridiculed “the aesthetic assumptions of primitive art amateurs who [doubted] the purity of a Baoule drum because the figure carved on it is holding a rifle.” For Griaule, these sorts of “cultural impurities and disturbing syncretisms” were precisely the point of departure. There is no difference between a European enjoying African art and an African enjoying “textiles, gas cans, alcohol and firearms.” As Clifford writes (from Griaule’s perspective): “If Africans do not choose to imitate our high cultural products...*tant pis!*” (549-550). Insofar as the semiotic perspective was employed critically then, these thinkers were invested in shaking the West out of its cultural complacency as much as they were invested in preserving in record non-Western ways of life: indeed, these two goals, critique and preservation, were not seen as different.

This double emphasis had a darker side. Even as Griaule and others were trekking across Africa, they were carrying on a specifically European argument from afar. Clifford writes that “the ethnographers departed for Africa in 1931 with a structured aesthetic in mind, and a certain (essentially fetishist) conception of how ‘it’ should be collected and represented” (555). Especially in those early days, the focus was on what Clifford terms “museum-collecting.” For example, in his published journal of the expedition, *L’Afrique fantôme*, Leiris relates, “Yesterday, in terror, they had refused to give us several rainmaking statuettes, as well as a figure with raised arms found in another sanctuary. In taking these objects away, we would have carried off the life

of the land” (Larson 235). And yet, despite these misgivings, Leiris himself seizes the statuettes and carries them off. Ruth Larson writes that “during the thefts the team felt connected with a powerful persona--they found themselves...[in Leiris’s words] ‘thrown into a sphere far above’... and ‘crowed with a halo of demons.’ And that was how they saw themselves reflected in the villagers’ terror” (235).

Their own schizophrenic response to the Africans they encountered led to the development of a particular kind of narrative self-analysis which they employed in their records of the expedition. Griaule, Leiris, and others were painfully aware of their own status as “white men”, and Griaule especially portrays ethnography as “a process where power is centrally at stake, fraught with role playing and manipulation” (Clifford 555). Larson writes that “Griaule’s writings depict the ethnographer as a prosecuting attorney, the informants as criminals (protecting a secret crime), and the other members of the society under study as accomplices” (Larson 231). Griaule himself writes in *Conversations with Ogotemmêli*, long after he and his team had de-emphasized the collection of ethnographic objects: “On the walls, on the rock in the center, on the steps of the house, informants and interpreters waited in groups till their names were called. The scene was a repetition of what had happened the day before and the day before that, and every day for fifteen years past whenever white men visited the southern ridge of Upper Ogol” (Griaule 7). This kind of intense self-reflection and representation perhaps culminates in Leiris’s *L’Afrique fantôme*, in which, according to Michel Beaujour, “the self, with its childhood memories and adult emotions, [is] described as if it were a primitive culture, with its ‘idols,’ taboos, rites, and myths, its idiolect and its ‘secret language,’ as well as its qualitative topography, made up of familiar yet disturbing places” (Beajour 472).

It was perhaps an awareness of their own limitations as researchers, and their own implication in the crimes being committed, that led these thinkers to avoid presenting “a unified version of African reality...free from the gaps and discontinuities of a documentary presentation” (Clifford 555-6). Indeed, *Conversations with Ogotemmêli* is a characteristic case. Griaule often refers to himself in the third person, not so much to remove the subjectivity of the first person claim, as to embed his own actions in a documentary, narrative--in fact, novelistic--discourse. One does not have to read very far into the book to perceive this device; the first chapter opens, “The sun had risen abruptly from the plain of the Gondo, and was shining down upon the roofs of Lower Ogol. The birds had ceased their song, leaving the sun to take the center of the stage...” (Griaule 5), and it is only a suspenseful chapter later that we meet our protagonist, Ogotemmêli. Indeed, the type of “objectivity” that Griaule is after is, in some sense, the novelist’s objectivity, or the artist’s. There is no attempt to organize the ethnographic material; rather, chapter by chapter, the Europeans and the Africans are juxtaposed in the narrative as if to avoid objection or argument. Indeed, it is as if the more abstract theorizing and analysis Griaule engages in, the less realistic the narrative, the less things are left precisely as they are, and the more damage is done, perhaps unknowingly, to the reality of the Dogon way of life. In this mode, it is the work of the reader, not the ethnologist, to digest the information, and thereby juxtapose his or her own semiotic codes with the codes represented over the course of the text.

That said, Griaule *ensures* that this disorienting juxtaposition occur in the act of reading by forcing the European reader into a complicity with the European ethnologist. Griaule, in fact, very frequently comments upon the actions that do occur--as well as those actions which *do not*

occur--not so to explain or analyze the material so much as to highlight places of semiotic difference for the reader to exploit. In the second chapter, for instance, we read:

[Ogotemmêli] was anxious, however, to give an idea of the size of the sun.  
 ‘Some,’ he said, ‘think it is as large as this encampment, which would mean thirty cubits. But it is really bigger. Its surface area is bigger than the whole of Sangra Canton.’  
 And after some hesitation he added:  
 ‘It is perhaps even bigger than that.’  
 He refused to linger over the dimensions of the moon, nor did he ever say anything about them...He said however that, while Africans were creatures of light emanating from the fullness of the sun, Europeans were creatures of the moonlight: hence their immature appearance.  
 He spat out the tobacco as he spoke. Ogotemmêli had nothing against Europeans. He was not even sorry for them. He left them to their destiny in the lands of the north (17).

Just as Ogotemmêli is anxious to give an idea of the size of the sun, we as readers are at once equally anxious to know if his idea coincides with ours. The implicit silence of the interrogator places the reader in an uncertain suspense which Ogotemmêli shares; his hesitation occurs perhaps as he waits for a sign of agreement or disagreement from Griaule, who is no doubt also familiar with the size of the sun, and which he, however, does not give. Ogotemmêli’s refusal to linger over the dimensions of the moon is precisely a refusal to group together the sun and moon in what Griaule implies is a characteristically European way. The comment “nor did he ever say anything about them” is only understandable once its perceived as an answer to the question of the European reader, “Did he ever talk about moon, as well?” The question is already anticipated, and marked as provincial.

Of course, Ogotemmêli’s mapping of sun/moon onto African/European is not likely to be an invention of Griaule’s, but it is significant that Griaule seizes on this moment to provide further dissonance for the European reader: “Ogotemmêli had nothing against Europeans. He was not even sorry for them. He left them to their destiny in the lands of the north.” Implicitly the European is forced to re-orient him or herself as his or her own view of African is juxtaposed with the African view of the European. Nor is this moment unique. Just a few pages before, Ogotemmêli decides to induct Griaule into Dogon metaphysics, and the elder is faced with a problem: “From what [another informant] had told him, and from the reports of other persons, he had formed a correct idea of the aims and objects of his interlocutor and his unwearying passion for research. But the situation was unique. How was one to instruct a European? How could one make him understand things and rites and beliefs?...How then to set about it?” (14). This fictionalization of Ogotemmêli’s thought process has the effect of defamiliarizing the problem of cross-cultural communication, by switching the usual (for a European) subject and object; it also has the valuable side-effect of taking responsibility for the quality and organization of the ethnographic data off Griaule, and placing it solely on Ogotemmêli.

All these devices are employed in order to establish the legitimacy of the Dogon world-view to the European reader. In order to record Dogon beliefs “as they are,” indeed, as they are in the context of European intervention, the French ethnologists feel compelled to simultaneously critique past European misunderstanding by placing themselves in the scene as well as employ a style of objectivity not unlike that of the psychoanalyst in regard to his subject. As Griaule writes in the preface to the work, “As a result of patient and methodical research,

pursued for fifteen years...[we know that] these people live by a cosmogony, a metaphysics, and a religion which put them on a par with the peoples of antiquity, and which Christian theology might indeed study with profit" (2). And yet, there are limitations to this method. On this point, Clifford brings up Mary Douglas's critique of the work:

The picture is curiously skewed. We can never grasp, for instance, just how daily life is conducted, how the circumstantial political decisions are made. There is an overemphasis on elaborately cross-referenced native theories of the ways things are, or should be--a mythic conception of cosmic order than aspires to embrace every gesture and detail of the profane world. The extraordinary beauty and conceptual power of Dogon wisdom, known in its fullness to only a small group of elders, never satisfies the nagging question: what are the Dogon really like? (Clifford 556).

Griaule might have argued that there is no answer to what the Dogon are "really" like. Insofar as one can understand a society, one works with a network of semiotic codes which always conflict with one's own. The goal was never to record what the Dogon are really like, but rather to activate for the reader the possibility of contrasting and recombining their own semiotic codes with those of another. In order to explode the distinction between primitive and modern thought, all non-semiotic differences are suppressed, and the semiotic world of the other is explored *in depth* in order to show that all semiotic systems go as deep as any other.

### III. Critical Interlude (The English)

Semiotic reduction might, however, go too far. In the following critique, I draw on the work of the anthropologist Jack Goody. In *The Domestication of the Savage Mind*, Goody takes on the work of writers such as Lucien Levy-Bruhl, who famously posited a distinction between logical and pre-logical thought--the former being modern, the latter being primitive--and Claude Levi-Strauss, widely regarded as the founder of structural anthropology, which deals with similarly semiotic concerns. Goody does not specifically critique Griaule at length, although in a review of *Conversations with Ogotemméli*, Goody places Griaule in the same category as the former Frenchmen, so his criticisms may be taken broadly (Review 240). In fact, Griaule can be seen as straddling the two thinkers. In her introduction to Griaule's book, Germaine Dieterlen alludes to the work of writers like Levy-Bruhl in her account of the problems faced by Griaule and his team: "It was by no means easy for minds attached to occidental logic to penetrate systems of thought such as these in which analogies and the power of symbols have the value of facts" (Griaule xiii). There is some question whether Griaule himself would make exactly that claim; as the work of Clifford and others has shown, in this case, it is worth considering that the surrealist goal had always been, even expressly, to see their *own* society in such a way that "analogies and the power of symbols have the value of facts." Not only does this move have the effect of relativizing the difference between semiotic systems, it also levels the distinction of modern and primitive; it is this move that Levi-Strauss also performs, and which leaves both of them open to Goody's criticism.

In any case, Goody writes:

The trouble with the framework [primitive and modern, etc] is that it is either largely non-developmental or else simplistically so. It has been non-developmental because the anthropologists and sociologists interested in these questions have tended to set aside evolutionary or even historical perspectives, preferring to adopt a kind of cultural relativism that looks upon

discussions of development as necessarily entailing a value judgement on the one hand and as over-emphasizing or misunderstanding the differences on the other (Domestication 2).

This is not a criticism of thinkers who employ a simplistic judgmental binary of primitive/modern, but of those thinkers who explicitly or implicitly re-instate that binary only withholding the judgement. For example, a thinker like Levy-Bruhl can be taken in a perhaps sympathetic light, if he is read--indeed, as he probably intended himself to be read--as suggesting that criticism of the primitive ought to be withheld, since that which is under consideration are two entirely different ways of thinking, and one simply cannot judge the other. In the case of Griaule and Levy-Strauss, when the difference between the modern and primitive is reduced down to an arbitrary difference of signs, one is no longer able to discuss coherently the substantial differences in even material development between different peoples. "In accepting the functionalist and structuralist critiques, in acknowledging the necessity of proving rather than assuming difference, it is only too easy to set aside the developmental questions, as pseudo-historical, as 'evolutionary,' as speculative" (2); indeed, in semiotic terms, there is no question of development, only of different distribution.

Indeed, Levi-Strauss writes in *The Concept of Primitiveness*:

I see no reason why mankind should have waited until recent times to produce minds of the calibre of a Plato or an Einstein. Already two or three hundred thousand years ago, there were probably men of similar capacity, who were of course not applying their intelligence to the solution of the same problems as these more recent thinkers; instead they were probably more interested in kinship! (2).

As admirable as that statement is, Goody points out that if one avoids the modern/primitive dichotomy in this way, one ends up rejecting "all consideration of specific factors, including intellectual tradition, institutional setting and mode of communication, that lay behind the emergence of a Plato or an Einstein. We move from the crude dichotomy to an ahistorical unity" (4). Of course, one can read Levi-Strauss as suggesting that, limitations of time and place aside, there have always been men and women of the calibre of Plato and Einstein; but this continual placing aside is precisely what Goody wishes to discuss. Intelligence is, as it were, merely an uninformative sign of respect when it is reduced down to a vague allusion to human capacity, and if the ways that different people are more or less able to solve certain problems for different reasons is left unexplored. If primitive modes of thought are not essentially different from civilized modes of thought, then social change and development can only be an accumulation of semiotic bricolage, that is, no real change at all.

It is in this context that it is worth considering the case of Alexander Luria and his team of Soviet psychologists. In the very same year that Griaule is in Mali, preoccupied with similar questions, Luria embarks on his expedition to Central Asia. While the research conducted during that expedition is open to certain criticisms, it is notable that one criticism that his work is *not* open to is precisely the inability to adequately deal with change. Indebted to his friend and fellow psychologist Lev Vygotsky, Luria comes to Uzbekistan and Khirgizia not conceiving of cultural difference in semiotic terms, but in terms of differentials of cognitive tools like literacy. By using the French case as a foil, I hope to bring out why this might have been the case.

#### IV. The Russians

“I began my career in the first years of the great Russian Revolution. This single, momentous event decisively influenced by life and that of everyone I knew” (Mind 17). This is the way that Luria begins his autobiography, which he wrote in the 1970’s--he was 15 when the revolution occurred. If the French ethnographers were broadly oriented by their engagement with the radical politics of surrealism, itself an outgrowth of the rejection of pre-World War I civilization, in the same fashion, Luria and his circle of Soviet psychologists were oriented by their experience in the aftermath of the revolution.

Luria continues his memoir by comparing his life with those of Western and American psychologists. To be sure, he says, they have made their share of important discoveries, “but most of them have spent their lives in a comparatively quiet, slow-moving environment.” In his own case, he tells us that:

From the outset it was apparent that I would have little opportunity to pursue the kind of well-ordered, systematic education that serves as the cornerstone foremost scientific careers. In its place life offered me the fantastically stimulating atmosphere of an active, rapidly changing society. My entire generation was infused with the energy of revolutionary change--the liberating energy people feel when they are part of a society that is able to make tremendous progress in a very short time (17).

Indeed, the French were not the only ones to have a “hothouse milieu of...culture life” in the 1920’s. The years directly after the 1917 Revolution were years of intense high-energy interchange between academic disciplines, cultural production, and “everyday” life. The revolution allowed Luria and his fellow psychologists of the Vygotsky School to rely on the possibility of real, collective social change as an assumption--a certainty which his European counterparts were unable to share. It also imparted a considerable importance to education, systematic and unsystematic, as well as the idea not only of change, but of progress.

His own father as a Jew was unable to obtain a proper medical education at tsarist era universities, and it was only the revolution that allowed Luria the certainty of taking classes at all. “The stifling restrictions of the tsarist period are difficult for modern people to understand,” he writes. “The repressive nature of the regime was reflected in the educational system, which was designed to see to it that everyone stand in his or her ‘natural’ station in life and nothing changed” (18). After the revolution, “for the first time in Russia people were able to choose their own careers without regard to their social origins” (18), and of this Luria himself was a beneficiary.

Education as a theme runs throughout his work, and education as such--we might say, civilization--has none of the perhaps negative connotations that it has for the French. At this stage, for Luria and other like him, education means nothing less than a tool for self-determination. The entrance into society is not the adoption of a system of repressive, ideological codes, but the mastery of the tools with which one can build a self-determined career for the common good. In the work of the ethnographic surrealists, there is an uneasy tripartite division between the self (the ethnologist), the other (the African), and, as it were, the state (the West, broadly). This division is not effected in the Soviet context; we will see that Luria considers both himself and the peasants which he ends up studying in the 1930’s as together engaged ideally in

determining a new way of life, such that ideology in the repressive sense does not dominate his thinking.

In Luria's case, this is not necessarily an empty repetition of Marxist dogma. It must be admitted that his own experience, as it were, taught him this position. He writes that when the revolution came:

We were suddenly faced with many opportunities for action--action that went far beyond the confines of our own tiny circle of family and friends. The limits of our restricted, private world were broken down by the Revolution, and new vistas opened before us. We were swept up in a great historical movement. Our private interests were consumed by the wider social goals of a new, collective society...An entire society was liberated to turn its creative powers to constructing a new kind of life for everyone (19).

And indeed, during these years, he learned English, French, German, Latin; he immersed himself in foreign psychological traditions; "held down a research position in one institution, did graduate work in another, attended medical school part-time, and ran tests of therapy on mentally ill patients"; "started a journal, organized a commune for wayward adolescents, directed a psychoanalytic discussion group, and published his own study of psychoanalysis" (201). Crucially, in the dynamic landscape of the Soviet 1920's, he was able to find both interested collaborators and subjects for experiments at all levels of society and in conjunction with the state. For example, as his student Michael Cole writes, "His audaciousness in this enterprise was astounding in light of the present-day atmosphere surrounding psychological experimentation. Nowhere is there an account of how the twenty-one year old Luria and his equally youthful companion Alexey Leontiev managed to get permission to pull students out of the line where they were awaiting interrogation by university authorities[, etc]" (201).

Luria had inherited an experimentalist bent from his engagement with Wilhelm Wundt and other experimental psychologists. But there was already a certain resonance between experimentalism and dialectics in the Marxist context, since for the Soviets both terms implied a close back and forth engagement with a living, changing subject. In the choice words of Cole, "for approximately a decade following the Revolution there was a great deal of experimentation and improvisation in the conduct of Soviet science, education, and economic policy" (12). And it might be added that psychology as a discipline was highly valued as a contribution to Marxist science, and its particular experimental methodology diffused throughout society--that is, it played a role comparable to ethnography and anthropology for the French. For example, Sergei Eisenstein had friends to the psychology community, and worked with them to develop "questionnaires for audiences composed variously of students, workers, and peasants, to determine if they had understood his images as he intended" (207).

In this milieu, three things became apparent to Luria and his colleagues. As Cole writes, "there was an increasing concern that Soviet psychology should be self-consciously Marxist, [that] psychology must be a materialist discipline...[and that] psychology should have relevance to the building of a socialist society" (12). There is of course a dark side to this; Luria, for example, was instrumental in the creation of the first lie detector, which was first tested on criminals and later became a tool of the state. But as Cole writes, Luria seems to have decided that his work was worth it: above all, "before him loomed the notion of a unified science of man in which the distinction between laboratory and everyday life was rendered irrelevant" (202).

At first, Luria saw the future of Soviet psychology in an experimentalism founded on psychoanalytic theory, then he somewhat unwillingly switched his allegiance to Pavlov; finally, he found a consonant theoretical approach in the work of Vygotsky. Luria writes, “Marxist philosophy, one of the world’s most complex systems of thought, was assimilated slowly by Soviet scholars, myself included” (30), and it was Vygotsky who showed how psychology could be derived directly from Marxist principles. Vygotsky’s system is too complex for a detailed exposition here, but because his work is less well known to Western readers, a few key principles ought to be stated briefly. In the first place, development is mapped onto education. The apparent similarity between the development from the primitive to the modern and the development of the child to the adult had been a starting place for Freud, Piaget, and other thinkers with whom Luria was familiar. These double developments were harmonized by the idea of a tool. For Vygotsky, history is the history of behavior, that is, of problem solving by means of tools. By amassing such tools, both physical and cognitive, man is able to solve problems of greater and greater generality, and education provides access to those general tools adequate to a modern society.

In the Vygotskian picture, complex psychological functions are all culturally mediated. As Luria explains it in terms reminiscent of Pavlov as much as Marx:

Unlike basic reflexes, which can be characterized by a stimulus-response process, higher functions incorporate auxiliary stimuli, which are typically produced by the person himself. The adult not only responds to the stimuli presented by the experimenter or by his natural environment, but also actively modifies those stimuli and uses his modifications as an instrument of his behavior (44).

Culture is not an arbitrary ensemble of inert semiotic codes; rather culture is nothing other than the way in which society structures the tasks and tools of the child. Insofar as this phenomenon can be understood, one must turn to history and study the ways in which, precisely, psychological tools have influenced behavior. Vygotsky himself gives the following examples of tools whose historical development can be traced: “language, different forms of numeration and counting, mnemotechnic techniques, algebraic symbolism, works of art, writing, schemes, diagrams, maps, blueprints, all sorts of conventional signs, etc” (Instrumental Method). Furthermore, in contrast to the French thinkers, Vygotsky was able to use his basic unit--the tool--to account systematically for change. In fact, he explicitly links psychological tools to the possibility of qualitative--not quantitative (in the sense of an accumulation and recombination of semiotic codes)--change. He writes:

The inclusion of a tool in the behavioral process, first, sets to work a number of new functions connected with the use and control of the given tool; second, abolishes and makes unnecessary a number of natural processes, whose work is [now] done by the tool; third, modifies the course and the various aspects (intensity, duration, order, etc.) of all mental processes included in the instrumental act, replacing some functions with others, i.e., it recreates, reconstructs the whole structure of behavior just like a technical tool recreates the entire system of labor operations. Mental processes, taken as a whole, form a complex structural and functional unity. They are directed toward the solution of a problem posed by the object, and the tool dictates their coordination and course. They form a new whole--the instrumental act (Instrumental Method).

The use of tools is tied to a qualitative change of consciousness. Literacy is perhaps the iconic case. During the course of education, children slowly master the tools required for perceiving the meaning of written words; insofar as their education is complete, the tool is integrated into the

practice and reconfigures it, leading to a qualitative change in consciousness. What this means is this: what at first is an onerous task of decoding becomes second-nature, indeed, something inescapable. Once literate, it is difficult *not* to directly perceive the meaning of the written word.

In this context, one can understand why, whereas the French were preoccupied with what we can know about the other, the Russians were preoccupied with what can be taught to the other. As such, Luria and others were frustrated with the data available to them, since it had been obtained under rather different presuppositions. He cites Levy-Bruhl's claims that there is an essential difference between logical and pre-logical thinking, the latter being more loosely organized and indifference to logical contradiction. He cites W. H. R. Rivers, an English anthropologist, who claimed that all thinking is logical, although different societies apply this logic to different categories. And finally, he cites Gestalt psychologists contrasted differentiated and undifferentiated thinking. He himself suggests that:

These and other proposals were understandably of great interest to us. But the discussion was being conducted without the benefit of any appropriate psychological data. The data relied upon by Levy-Bruhl as well as by his anthropological and sociological critics--in fact, the only data available to anyone at that time--were anecdotes collected by explorers and missionaries, who had come in contact with exotic people in the course of their travels (Mind 59).

Indeed, the sorts of things that animated Griaule--the recovery of a wide-ranging metaphysics, the radical potential of different ways of life to be juxtaposed--were seen by Luria as resting on shaking experimental foundations. He writes that Levy-Bruhl, and other psychologists of the 1920's had "cut off human thought in its earlier stages of historical development from actual activity and cognitive processes, which were then treated as the results of beliefs; if primitive people really did think according to the laws set forth by Levy-Bruhl, they would have scarcely survived for a single day" (Development 8). Indeed, this criticism is apropos to Griaule; reducing cultural differences to the results of beliefs, or semiotic codes, evades the question of how "human action changes the environment so that human mental life is a product of continually *new* activities manifest in social practice" (9), which itself establish the conditions for yet more complex developments in consciousness.

It is with this ideological background in mind that we can now turn to the Luria's expedition to Central Asia. The psychologist arrived at a pivotal time. For centuries, the influence of Islam had "held back the development of independent thought, subjecting people to religious dogma and rigid behavioral standards." The people he encountered were mainly illiterate and "lived in villages, depending completely on the wealthy landowners and feudal lords" (14). The economy was centered around individual agricultural endeavors and animal husbandry. The Soviets, however, were in the process of modernizing the area, which involved the formation of agricultural collectives, the mechanization of agriculture, and the schooling of the illiterate. That is to say, both moderns and primitives lived side by side, which--to Luria and his colleagues--was an ideal experimental situation.

It is worth keeping in mind, however, that Luria's results cannot be taken as providing a picture of illiteracy as such, but illiteracy in the context of growing literacy, social upheaval, and the conflict between a secular "scientific" society and a history of dogmatic religious belief. As we will see, Luria emphasizes the effects of education and specifically literacy in changing

thought, and as we have seen, is not as interested in questions of belief. Insofar as he takes the former seriously as a subject of study, he avoids certain problems which the French ethnographers had found themselves mired in; on the other hand, insofar as he ignores the question of belief as such, he has an equally limiting blind spot.

The experiments were conducted in the following way. Luria and his team would prepare certain tests beforehand, and then integrate them into long conversations with their subjects. The subjects would be tested either singly or in groups, over tea or around campfires.

The talk often took the form of a free-flowing exchange of opinion between participants, and a particular problem might be solved simultaneously by two or three subjects, each proposing an answer. Only gradually did the experimenters introduce the prepared tasks, which resembled the 'riddles' familiar to the population, and therefore seemed like a natural extension of the conversation (Mind 63).

One of Luria's colleagues would sit to the side, and surreptitiously take notes. For months they studied differences in perception, generalization, deduction, problem-solving, imagination, and self-analysis between literate and illiterate subjects.

The experimenters attempted to pose each problem so that it could be solved either in a "functional-graphic" or an "abstract, categorical" way (Development 16). Briefly, in the first case, the problem is solved by the subject by relating the terms of the problem to his or her personal experience; in the latter case, the problem is solved by using the "terms of the information given in the problems to go beyond [his or her] experience and deduce the answer" (64). In grouping tasks, the "functional-graphic" principle results in groups structured like families. Two objects are grouped together based on some common attribute, then a third is added based on another attribute altogether, so that "the logical structure of such groupings in fact often suggests a family in which one individual is included as the 'son' of a central figure, a second as the 'wife' and so on" (67), or even suggests the setting of a table, and not the picking out of a set based solely on a single classifying criterion. This latter type of thinking is, for Luria, abstract and categorical. Vygotsky's work had suggested that children moved from functional-graphic thinking to abstract, categorical thinking in the course of development, which includes education, and this is why Luria suspected that illiterate peasants would use the first technique, and literates would use the second.

Here are three characteristic exchanges with illiterate peasants<sup>135</sup>.

Luria gives the following set, *hammer-saw-log-hatchet* to an illiterate peasant, Rakmat, aged 39. Each is an image. The subject is asked, in essence, which one does not belong?

Subject: They're all alike. I think all of them have to be here. See, if you're going to saw, you need a saw, and if you have to spit something you need a hatchet. So they're all needed here.

Experimenter: Look, here you have three adults and one child. Now clearly the child doesn't belong in this group.

Subject: Oh, but the boy must stay with the others! All three of them are working, you see, and if they have to keep running out to fetch things, they'll never get the job done, but the boy can do the running for them...

Another subject, aged 60. She is shown the same *hammer-saw-log-hatchet* group.

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<sup>135</sup> None of the exchanges with literate subjects have been reproduced here, since they are about what one would expect.

Subject: They all fit here! The saw has to saw the log, the hammer has to hammer it, the hatchet has to chop it...

Experimenter: But one fellow told me the log didn't belong here.

Subject: Why'd he say that? If we say the log isn't like the other things and put it off to one side, we'd be making a mistake. All these things are needed for the log...

Experimenter: Look, you can use one word--tools--for these three but not for the log.

Subject: What sense does it make to use one word for them all if they're not going to work together? (55-56)

In interpreting these exchanges Luria suggests that for these subjects, objects are unified by being "suitable to a specific purpose," as opposed to being unified by an abstract principle. The implication is that abstraction is nothing other than a move from talking about things to talking about words. Illiterate subjects group things together, although consistently, idiosyncratically, grouping together than which goes together in real life, where real life is nothing other than the subject's personal experience. Literate subjects group things together uniformly as if singling out an attribute in the form of a word that applies to all the things in the group. That such a move is more general means nothing other than it is a fact shared across literate subjects. Furthermore, attending to words, and not things, allows one to transcend the provinciality of one's personal experience.

Luria writes of his illiterate subjects: "Only in rare instances did they concede the possibility of employing such a [purely verbal] means of classification, and even then they did so reluctantly, convinced that it was not important. Only classification based on practical experience struck them as proper or important" (69). Luria himself explains this data by suggesting that the "primary function of language changes as one's educational experience increases," that is, in part, when one becomes literate. "When people employ a concrete situation as a means of grouping objects, they seem to be using language only to help them recall and put together the components of the practical situation rather than to allow them to formulate abstractions or generalizations about categorical relations" (72). Indeed, he found that abstract words themselves, like bird or tool, in fact, had a more expansive meaning for these peasants. They continued to group objects under those headings even after they have exhausted the "normal" birds and tools, and indeed continued on to make more seemingly distant associations.

And yet, the peasants have a point: what good are tools if you don't have a log? The source of the misunderstanding seems to be not only that these peasants haven't been formally taught rules of classification (and so do not recognize the question being asked, as it were), but also that the subject and experimenter seem to be working with different ideas of utility, why one would wish to group things abstractly at all. The first may be put down to literacy; the second, however, is more complex, and not discussed by Luria. It may relate to the uneasy relationship with literacy these peasants may have, both due to social upheaval, as well as whatever ideology was previously dominant in the region. For one hesitates to suggest that illiterates are unable to consider "abstract" linguistic questions. For indeed, in *Conversations with Ogotemli*, for example, we find the following exchange. Ogotemmêli has just described the physical structure of the granary in which the microcosmic and macrocosmic are joined. Griaule asks:

'How could all these beasts find room on a step one cubit deep and one cubit high?'

...

‘All this had to be said in words,’ said Ogotemmêli, ‘but everything on the steps is a symbol, symbolic antelopes, symbolic vultures, symbolic hyenas.’ He paused for a moment, and added: ‘Any number of symbols could find room on a one-cubit step.’

For the word ‘symbol’ he used a composite expression, the literal meaning of which is ‘word of this (lower) world.’” (Griaule 37).

Here unique properties of words are singled out in a way that Luria’s peasants presumably would consider impractical and not at all useful. Whatever the reason for this, it is clear that whatever effect Luria thinks he is describing is mediated by some factor other than literacy alone. Whatever this factor is, it is present in the Dogon case, but not in the Central Asian. Or rather, since Ogotemmli can hardly be taken to be representative of his people, there is at least one other tool at work at this picture.

When Luria turns to investigating deduction, he again finds systematic differences between literates and illiterates. When subjects were asked to repeat syllogisms back to the experimenter, they were unable to keep the logic structure intact, as if they did not perceive it, being unfamiliar with it.

Here is a characteristic case:

Subject, illiterate, aged 37.  
 Experimenter: Cotton can only grow where it is hot and dry. In England it is cold and damp. Can cotton grow there?  
 Subject: I don’t know.  
 Experimenter: Think about it.  
 Subject: I’ve only been to Kashgar country; I don’t know beyond that...  
 Experimenter: On the basis of what I said to you, can cotton grow there?  
 Subject: If the land is good, cotton will grow there, but if it is damp and poor, it won’t grow...  
 Experimenter repeats the syllogism, and then: What can you conclude from my words?  
 Subject: If it is cold there, it won’t grow; if the soil is loose and good, it will.  
 Experimenter: But what do my words suggest?  
 Subject: Well, we Moslems, we Kashgars, we’re ignorant people; we’ve never been anywhere, so we don’t know if it’s hot or cold there.  
 Experimenter: In the Far North, where there is snow, all bears are white. Novaya Zemlya is in the Far North and there is always snow there. What color are the bears there?  
 Subject: There are different sorts of bears...  
 Experimenter: But what kind of bears are there in Novaya Zemlya?  
 Subject: We always speak only of what we see; we don’t talk about what we haven’t seen.  
 Experimenter: But what do my words imply?  
 Subject: Well, it’s like this: our tsar isn’t like yours, and yours isn’t like ours. Your words can only be answered only by someone who was there, and if a person wasn’t there he can’t say on the basis of your words” (109).

It becomes apparent that although in some cases, peasants were simply confused about the nature of the question--whether the experimenter was asking about some linguistic fact or some “practical” fact--very frequently subjects were seen to violently reject the question altogether, as if they felt the experimenter were playing a trick, or as if their words would be used against them. And indeed, in such a contingency, they would have no way to defend themselves, precisely because the issue under discussion lies outside of their personal experience. It is not merely that these subjects lack a cognitive tool, but that they are also quite aware that a cognitive tool has been denied them. Precisely because of this, however, it is not at all clear to what extent

these subjects are familiar or not with the expansive “logical” tool of the word *all*, and to what extent they have been explicitly taught to reject this way of thinking or talking.

As Goody suggests in *The Logic of Writing and the Organization of Society*, in regard to the cohabitation of literates and illiterates:

...religions of the Book are often associated with restrictions on the uses and extent of literacy. In the extreme case the priests are the one category of persons able to read at all...under Christianity, Islam and Judaism teaching (at least the promotion of advanced literate skills) continued to be dominated by religious specialists until the advent of modern secular education, a position that it was obviously in their interests to preserve in order to maintain their role as gate-keepers of ideas (Logic 17).

This is precisely the situation of Luria’s peasants. But clearly then, there is not only a matter of the development or not of tools, but also of beliefs, since it is both belief and lack of experience that seem to hold these peasant’s tongues. For it is indeed hard for these subjects to “acquire new knowledge in a discursive and verbal-logical fashion.” But does “such a shift...represent the transition from sensory to rational consciousness, a phenomenon that the classics of Marxism regard as one of the most important in human history” (Development 74)? It may be true that education, especially taken broadly, can allow one to create “more complex verbal and logical ‘devices’ that make it possible to perform the operations of deduction and inference without reliance on direct experience” (74). But the question, for these peasants, is not only, “Is it *possible* for them to perform these kinds of operations (aloud)?”, but also, “Is it permissible or even conceivable, practically?” As one subject put it, “I don’t know how to obtain knowledge...where would I find the questions? For questions you need knowledge. You can ask questions when you have understanding, but my head is empty” (138). Education may, in fact, impart both the ability as well as the right (and the courage) to speak about certain things.

At this juncture, it is worth recalling Griaule’s observation that ethnography is “a process where power is centrally at stake, fraught with role playing and manipulation.” It is the influence of power that Luria precisely misses, or perhaps, chooses to remain silent about in his account. To be sure, there are real cognitive differences in his subjects in terms of the tool-kits they are using, as it were, to process what the experimenter is telling them, insofar as they apply non-linguistic tools to group objects or fail to perceive the structure of a syllogism. But these differences are also highly charged ideologically for the peasants themselves. Perhaps Luria thought that the discussion of such an issue would be out of the purview of a purely psychological account of cognitive tools. Perhaps his line of thinking runs: insofar as these peasants fail to answer these questions correctly, they effectively lack certain cognitive tools; and insofar as these peasants will need these tools in the building of a socialist society, then they ought to be taught them.

For indeed, because of the demand of dialectics, all knowledge must be returned to praxis. Literacy is not being studied in order to juxtapose two worlds, but instead so that education can be more effectively understood. Indeed, Luria writes that “by offering to help subjects in certain ways, we tried to show them how and to what extent they could use our assistance in solving a given problem and go on solve others like it by themselves. This procedure allowed us to explore how people incorporated new ways of problem solving into the repertoire of intellectual activities” (64). The conversations that constituted these sessions were

not interrogations in the same sense as in Griaule's work, in which a drive to preserve mingles with the drive to critique. Rather, Luria was no doubt conceiving of his work in a more "dialectical" way, in which what could be taught and learned is as important as what could be known or said.

One can hypothesize as to why Luria chose to study the cognitive tools he did. As he himself suggests, in the 1920's, all disciplines were actively attempting to deduce their own principles from Marxist theory, to establish a dialectical relationship between everyday life and the theory. Any intellectual in this environment had to be in an intensely literate position. The ability to use techniques like generalization, interpretation--playing with words in the worst case--would be held at a premium since not only ideally does the widespread use of these techniques allow for the possibility of a unified Marxist science, but also because these very techniques can act as a political shield. Luria himself was forced to write in numerous modes and styles throughout his career in order to be an effective member of his society. Allegiances in the field of psychology changed rapidly, and there were periods in the 20's in which one had to perform the delicate balancing act of simultaneously disparaging psychoanalysis, promoting Pavlovianism, and keeping in mind a firm grounding in Marxist principles. In considering the bare events of the man's life, Cole wonders, at first, "What did the cross-cultural work have to do with his work in the Institute of Neurosurgery? Why was he no longer doing conditioning experiments? Why, in his book about S. V. Sheravsky, the man with an unusual memory, did he spend so much time discussing his personality when his memory was at issue?" (Mind 195), and later: "When I correlated the content and style of his writings with the general political and social controversies of the day, the otherwise disjointed, zigzag course of [Luria's] career began to make sense" (198).

The ability to automatically generalize from a given result and thereby translate it into Marxist language was an intensely valuable tool for a scientist. And insofar as one may be judged on one's Marxist credentials, the ability to distinguish between when an exchange is about "words" and when an exchange is about "things," takes on a different cast. Indeed, the constant demand in the 1920's that psychology reject psychoanalysis and embrace Pavlovianism, and the exclusionary nature of this demand, is reminiscent of Luria's emphasis on the point that a log *just isn't* a tool, no matter what arguments the peasants produce, as if there were no getting around the pretense that a log is not normally considered a tool. The conversation cannot be about how things really are, since concepts like tool are obviously flexible. But to admit that would defeat the purpose of the experiment itself, since what is actually under investigation is the ability to understand that a question is not about what you think, but about an agreed upon set of terms, which, it might be added, would be the saving grace of anyone attempting to accomplish anything in the highly charged atmosphere of the Soviet Union. It is precisely this tool that Luria's peasants lack, and which Luria perhaps wishes to impart to them; and it is also the tool that allowed him to deftly reconfigure his career time and again for the sake of science.

## V. Conclusion

For the French, the proper object of study was the foreign semiotic system, which the documentary presentation juxtaposes against our own. The representation of a foreign semiotic

system is authenticated as legitimate *by* the documentary presentation, which emphasizes its own incompleteness as much as its reliance on the facts. The goal was not only to preserve but also to represent to the European reader--as it were, the novel reader--another way of life in order to create both political and aesthetic dissonance. By employing device--art--the ethnographic account of Griaule and others, invites us to live perhaps uneasily with their object of study. But by reducing all differences to differences in arbitrary signs, however, there is no coherent account offered about the nature of accumulative social change.

In contrast, Luria and the Soviet psychologists emphasize the different tools developed and employed by different societies, and provide a ready answer to the question of change. They organize their thought not around interchangeable signs, but around the transmission of cognitive tools in different times and places, which then allow for the development of further sophistication in some direction. There is little fear of construction and artificiality; rather this is seen as an opportunity to improve the lives of their subjects. After all, no one would object to foreigners giving people hammers if hammers were what they needed. Luria places emphasis not on what can be known and what can be preserved in the course of an interchange, but what can be taught, what can be changed.

That said, by not probing the belief structure of their subjects, Luria and his colleagues tend to overgeneralize their conclusions in order to fit them into a psychological framework. The issue they were investigating might not have been illiteracy as such, but illiteracy already juxtaposed with literacy, belief, and ideology, precisely those things that the French are attuned to. Unlike the French, however, the Soviets produce a wealth of evidence that doesn't fall prey to, for example, Goody's objection to Griaule's work. In a review of *Conversations with Ogotemmêli*, Goody criticizes the Griaule's narrative style and asks:

If the present book accurately represents Ogotemmêli's statements, to what extent was he a lone wolf?...To what extent was Ogotemmêli's responding to the intensive questioning of the anthropologist and so systematizing the less systematic? How did the interpreter translate the blind man's subtle thoughts, and how did the anthropologist write down...the words (French or Dogon?) he heard? (Review 241).

Luria's work, in contrast, consists of falsifiable experiments, and reliable (even statistical) data--precisely the lack of which Goody feels so acutely--as well as a falsifiable account of progress and development founded on the development of cognitive tools.

But the limitations in orientation on both sides make the work of Griaule and Luria difficult to reconcile. For example, even if we can juxtapose the Dogon mythos of the word with Luria's peasants' seeming inability to attend to words and not things, there is little internal evidence within their work that can help us resolve a difficulty like this. And so, the necessity of voyaging into the primitive presents itself again<sup>136</sup>.

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<sup>136</sup> As a parting note, in some ways, Michel Leiris stands half-way between Griaule and Luria. For example, Larson relates how, later in his career, Leiris claimed that évolués (assimilated Africans) were, in fact, the most 'authentic' Africans "precisely because they were fully conscious of their position within a capitalist and colonial regime" (Larson 238).

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MODERN ALIENS: INTERVIEW WITH ADRIAN RANDALL

*who is making a documentary about alien encounters*

2012

Matt:

Tell me a little about yourself.

Adrian:

I grew up in Seattle with my mom. I went to a big public high school that had a lot of smart kids in it, and it was a very good public high school, but it was also located in a lower income neighbor, so there was this dynamic there. My mom is an acupuncturist and does psychic work. From a young age, it was self-evident to me that ghosts and spirits existed, and that there were worlds beyond what one could see with the human eye, and that some people could tap into these worlds. And “god” was just a convenient way to express the fact that something else was out there.

These days, I say I believe in the concept of lower powers over higher powers. Like vibrational frequencies that affect people. I got into Buddhism for a while at the end of high school and the beginning of college. And it’s not that I regret it, although: I think Buddhism, Zen especially, has a lot of offer, but lacks any serious spirituality, and prevents access to that. It’s not really a pragmatic way to order your mind. And later I talked to my mom and she was like, Yeah, duh.

I think I got really disenchanted when I came to school, and I didn’t realize that for a long time. I was lacking some basic curiosity that I had had the rest of my life. You get wrapped up in Western egocentrism. I thought I was in an enlightened position because I was doing MCM or whatever. But that was total bullshit. You really need to get out there. Zen too just supposes that the individual is going to work and work and work and eventually break through. There’s an American Dream side to it. And it makes total sense that in terms of the United States, it came out of the 60’s, and free love, and the beats, and them just trying to be independent. So of course, they adopted the most radical form of Eastern thinking. It’s not because of its utility at all. I really think that in order to live good lives people need some sense of spirituality. If they reject organized religion, which is fine, there needs to be some other access to it. And Buddhism and a lot of these things only go half way. Yoga is a bit closer to it.

Matt:

So, what exactly did your disenchantment consist in?

Adrian:

I think it came out of the fact that I really thought I understood the world or something. I had access to this really powerful knowledge, this theory which explained things that I always wanted to express, and now I could express them. And I was with a cadre of people who also understood this theory. But theory relies on esoteric knowledge. Psychoanalysis is a good example. There’s esotericism in every discipline, but especially in places like that. At the same time, this theory changed my life. And I want to say: it’s not that I considered myself better than

other people, but I definitely felt that I had access to a certain type of knowledge that other people didn't have.

Matt:

Yeah, I think a lot of people go through this movement in which a lot of work gets done to internalize the world and the self, to the point of trying to come up with a complete theory of how everything everyone says to you makes sense. And in different ways, you can get to a certain point in regard to yourself, a momentary satisfaction, but even then there's all this work to be done afterwards. Once you have the theory, you have to take a second look at it, and deal with the fact that this is also the inside of everybody's heads, everybody's worlds.

If you start looking at the world with enlightened eyes, and see that people are doing weird shit, you naturally want to start asking them, Well, what theory do *you* have? Because you're looking at people in certain theoretical terms, but in actual fact, people's own "theories" use such a mix of different metaphors and ideas that it can seem like they don't have any theory at all. And because of that, there's always something left to do.

Adrian:

You have to get to the point where you can have an honest conversation with someone. And then they say something, and you say, That's so true, and that's exactly what this other person says. The thing is, most people are smart. Everyone's a really good philosopher, a really good processor of knowledge.

Matt:

So, growing up in animist circumstances, and being aware that the mainstream was monotheistic, did you experience any cognitive dissonance because of that?

Adrian:

It was cool. Sometime it was weird. When you're young, and you hear about this crazy stuff, like ghosts and spirits, you just have pure wonder. Then you go through puberty and meet other people, and they're like, that's weird man.

Matt:

What did you think ghosts *were*? Now that you're on the other side.

Adrian:

It was just self-evident. It seemed just kind of obvious. It made more sense that they existed than that they didn't. And when people didn't believe in them, I was like: Uh, well, your loss--or, That's less fun!

The thing is, though, if you talk about this kind of stuff in a group of, say, ten people, at least one or two will bring up their own experiences. And that happens everywhere. It's sign between people.

Matt:

I love the idea of people coming together to catalogue extraordinary occurrences.

Adrian:

Yeah, there's this body of knowledge that exists in no archive, just through this network of people. And there's definitely some embarrassment that goes along with it, and because of that, I'd gotten less in touch with it. But now I'm moving back.

Supposedly, I saw a ghost when I was a kid, according to my mom, and responded to it. And we had a poltergeist, and had to move out of our house because there was a poltergeist. Young kids are constantly able to receive this kind of information. And animals, and so on. You get indoctrinated. You learn to see what you want to see. This is what detective stories are about. The evidence can be right there in front of you, but if it's not part of your axiomatic framework or schema then it's not there, it doesn't exist.

In terms of the poltergeist, there was this man, and he was there for a while. And we got a dog, and so he disappeared for a while. There were seances. Once night I woke my mom up and told her that the man was back. My only memory of the house was being really scared at night, having nightmares, and the dog was barking a lot. Eventually we moved out of the house.

There's also past life stuff, and that's really interesting. But you can't force yourself to have these experiences. I feel like sometimes, for example, I've seen things before they happen, but I don't really know.

Matt:

So, here's a question. There's all sorts of beliefs you can imagine people having, and they have their similarities and differences. But there's certain questions that seem to cut especially deep like, Why is there something rather than nothing? And monotheism can answer, There's one god! We don't *need* this intermediate stuff, these spirits, to explain it. So with that in the air, how did spirits fit into any existential crises of that type that you might have had? As in, how did they manifest themselves in crisis circumstances? As bad spirits?

Adrian:

I remember having one or two existential crises when I was younger. I had one where I thought my life was meaningless. It came out of watching a lot of kid's TV shows. They were having all these adventures. They had a purpose, had a narrative going on. I felt like life wasn't cool, and these people were living in this perfect fun environments, and I wasn't. I remember my mom talking me out of it. It was in elementary school.

It seems to make some sort of sense that I was less upset with myself and more with the 'world' I was living in. Hence those weirdly promotional stories about kids who got depressed after watching Avatar.

Matt:

Nowadays can you see your life as a movie? In the good ways.

Adrian:

It has less to do with movies, in the narrative sense like, I'm going somewhere, and more with movies as a different type of reality, like dreams.

Matt:

Right, like a scene in a movie. Stuff happens in a scene, but the scene has a quality of its own. Some emergent thing. It happens every time there's a change in the weather. Everybody starts acting differently.

Adrian:

Yeah, the weather changed, I got completely sick. Or when it's really grey out, it gets very noir. I think we're just searching for those moments. I think that's what propels you forward. Opening up new worlds that shatter your perceptions. I think that's where fantasy and science fiction come from too. That's why I like those kind of movies a lot. Even something like Wes Anderson's movies. Now we can be like, that was such twee indie bullshit or whatever, but I think when it comes down to it, it's about this other life that fits you in a weird way. It seems magical. I could be entering this moment, where I could be living that, and music's playing in the background. And I'm part of this other thing that's going on. *American Beauty* too. It's like another world you can tap into.

Matt:

Let's talk about aliens.

Adrian:

I watched *Contact* a lot when I was growing up. And *Star Wars*. And *Men in Black* is one of my favorite movies. I think the paranormal is exhilarating, a third dimensional break. That's crucial. I think you can have those breaks intellectually with whatever kind of material your working with. And this world kind of opens up.

Matt:

But how should we talk about aliens? As in, you can make a case for supernatural phenomena, that we're tuned to certain frequencies, but that there are also higher levels of organization that are out there. Our brains look for patterns in things, and sometimes people can see larger patterns. And it's meaningful, but not necessarily recognizably communicable. For example, a corporation is there, even though it's made out of people.

In the case of aliens, though, sometimes there are different kinds of truth claims. *Alien Aliens*, for example, on the History Channel, is entertaining, but when they actually use history, it becomes ridiculous. One could make a very reasonable point about continuity between our contemporary concepts of aliens and the concepts of gods and spirits and celestial things. But in that case, the space ships would be beside the point.

Adrian:

*Ancient Aliens* seems to rely on a causal form of history that's supposed to make sense. As in, Oh that explains Stonehenge, the pyramids, etc. And the scientists have to say, Hey, you

aren't even looking at the real craziness, which is that we were actually capable of building that stuff! There's also a very Western-centric thing. It's all about these primitive people, often not in Europe, not white, doing really insane feats.

There is a real question there, though. There's something in the human mind, some drive, which is causing people to build incredible things. And it's based off very abstract notions that result in real physical monuments. There's this idea that change and progress happens because people believe really crazy things. People didn't build churches because they wanted to build churches, but because they really believed in god, and so had to move in that direction. For that matter, eschatologists were the most progressive people in the pre-Enlightenment era. Newton was an eschatologist. He was reading the bible literally. That's the most incredible thing. What is the logic of the calculus force that's motivating this? It's much harder to determine. War too. Now we just call it ideology, but it's something much crazier and much bigger.

*Ancient Aliens* is really fun to watch, but to me it's more of a testament to people trying to grapple with how human societies and their architectures exist. Why do we build this stuff, what motivates this sense forward? Why aren't we living in huts? It's not just because we're greedy. It's not just about capitalism.

I got into aliens because I had this idea: Okay, we still don't know the origin of consciousness. Why is it that I look in this mirror and I'm me and you're you. That's always going to be trippy. You can just stand in front of a mirror and be like, I am Adrian, I am Adrian, and you can do that every morning. We also still don't know the origin of the universe. And the more you think about consciousness at night, you do ask, How is it that something comes from nothing? If this began, did something come before it? Is it possible for our brains to understand it? Can science give us the answers? Maybe we won't ever know. But it happens that we encounter aliens who have the answer and understand it. But they say they can't tell us what it is, but they say there definitely is an answer.

Matt:

Is that because their brains are just better?

Adrian:

Yeah, or they have some extra little bit, that somehow would allow them to conceptualize it. Maybe mystics are able to do it. I don't know. Maybe wallabies are able to do it.

Matt:

Or robots. And it would be unsettling because we also have this desire to experience the answer. Maybe humans can have these really transcendental experiences, or maybe we're limited to just understanding some theoretical principles. And in the latter case, the principles might not lead to a simulation that we can run in our heads. So, we'd get a computer to do it and look at the read out and probably say, We'll, that's not as fun.

Adrian:

Yeah, I mean, consciousness “makes sense.” It’s like a feedback loop, like looking into a mirror. It’s me that’s me that’s me. Really complex input and output. And it explains the hierarchies of consciousness. We’re smarter than rats, etc.

Matt:

But then there’s also the experience of being here rather than there. People these days can definitely conceive of self reference, and there’s been a lot of work done in the past century on mathematizing it. And it can explain self-consciousness. But the idea that there is experience at all before self consciousness goes beyond that.

Adrian:

Yeah, what is that? Babies?

Matt:

Probably, all of the universe is consciousness in that sense. It’s just experience that gets organized.

Adrian:

It’s like energy.

Matt:

Yeah, what else would it be? But then, what does that mean for your thought experiment? Because if that’s what the universe really is, just experience, and we organize it differently, there’s nothing an alien race can tell us more about experience itself. Since it’s still just experience. Maybe they could organize it more highly, but they’d come up against the same philosophical argument just at a higher level. Imagine we’re part of the world-brain and the world-brain is thinking, Oh look it’s so amazing to be here. But it couldn’t know anything more about experience itself than we do. It’s not about collecting patterns at that point, but patterns themselves.

Adrian:

Maybe I’m looking for causality. And it’s really just experience. But I’m still looking for an explanation<sup>137</sup>.

Matt:

Yeah, that’s the caveat to all this. You always have to keep looking.

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<sup>137</sup> Addendum by Adrian: Also, I think we still have to deal with the same issue, which is that the scientific phenomenon of our if-a-then-b reality has yet only found an exegesis in mystical terms, which by and large leave behind our everyday reality. So any “rational” conception of the universe is, shall we say, always already insufficient. Which is more than just saying something like “we are all stardust” or “every object is surreal,” both of which are true, but act to expand our conceptions of reality rather than confound them.

Adrian:

Yeah, I meant the thought experiment more symbolically. Like, consider the 4th dimension. What is it? What are the known knowns the known unknowns? It's about really humbling yourself in terms of what we can conceptualize and experience. Because clearly there is something interesting and rare, very, very rare, about what we're doing right now. And that's exciting. I feel like, with human beings, that energy, that experience, gets more and more subtle and chaotic.

Matt:

Yeah! Like for example, let's say gravity is real as an abstraction. And we say planets are affecting me, here's some equations. And it turns out that gravity is something about deformations in space time. And that's what it is. Or it's gravitons. Or something vibrating. Whatever. But we also we use gravity as a "metaphor." Someone can have gravity. A room can be grave. People can orbit around other people.

Adrian:

A work can have gravitas.

Matt:

Yeah, and we say those things are metaphors, but in a sense, they have to come from the same source. When you follow that intuition, what can you learn? We certainly wouldn't have had the one concept without the other, and yet both are here simultaneously. Gravity is like an archetype, a pattern that can be differently instantiated. And you get to the same point, Why is it those patterns and not other patterns, even if we unified all human and non-human phenomena in a single conceptual schema! This is the single biggest issue there is.

Adrian:

Yeah, when are we not using metaphors anymore? When I say I believe in angels, what does that mean? That I believe there's good in the world?

Matt:

You want to paraphrase it.

Adrian:

And then you want people to say, I literally believe in angels. I literally believe that there is some spirit behind me that's guiding me. I literally believe that Jesus was the son of god. But even that, you can never approach a true literally.

Matt:

So for you, people's experience with aliens, alien encounters--how do they relate to metaphor?

Adrian:

That is the whole question. They really confound this classic binary between belief and knowledge. Belief and experience. The idea of aliens has emerged out of phenomena that to the people who observe them at the time were prior to that impossible in some sense. These were things they'd never seen or heard of before, but they were real things that were part of their experience. Just the same as a table. Or a comet coming out of the sky.

So these are real phenomena that are occurring, but we aren't able to trace it. And so we have to consider what's beyond them. Hence comes belief, this wonderful and sometimes insane abstraction of what we've observed. How did this weird object get here? What's the story behind this? Is this what I want to write my book about? How did a grand piano end up in an abandoned lot in Erie, Pennsylvania? Mysteries. But we have no way of conceptualizing it.

So there's UFOs, extraterrestrials. But what's the logic of their existence? Is it at all worth saying that they are here, doing a thing, for this reason? And even the craziest ufologists, none of them are really able to say what specifically the aliens are doing. The biggest question for them is *why?* *How* is not even the question. Because how is *way* far out. It's both a void and an incredible ripe area for the human imagination.

Matt:

What sort of conclusions in general do people draw from this?

Adrian:

For most other people especially since '47, around Roswell, it's been all about government cover-up, essentially. So in a way, it comes down to people being able to ratify their distrust in the government, a government that knows things we don't know. The alien itself is almost too much. How would you even really begin to think about it?

And so, we can meet that halfway with the government as an intermediary. Because we know that the government is doing stuff we don't know about, and we probably wouldn't like it if we did. That's essentially what all ufologists want. Total government transparency.

There are some semi-serious organizations, like SETI, which looks at radio transmissions using distributed computing. But there's this whole other group of people who are basically countering the government's denial of alien activity. The first person to really look at this from a cultural studies perspective came up with the idea that these people are sort of acting politically, realizing their own political potential in demanding freedom of information.

But the government can't just deny it, because then they're just denying it. It doesn't matter whether they tell the truth or not. And they're never telling the whole truth.

Matt:

Maybe they should just claim there are aliens. It would unite the globe.

Adrian:

That's exactly what Reagan and Gorbachev said in the 80's. They were trying to lessen global antagonism. They said that if we were threatened by aliens, then think of what kind of global cooperation would come from that exercise. Reagan also said that he saw a UFO once.

Matt:

How does thinking about aliens affect your relationship to the past and interpretation of what people were talking about? There's difficulties in explaining stuff we see now, and then there's difficulties in interpretation of what people said a long time ago, and so on.

Adrian:

Why is it that we don't have all these accounts of UFO's from thousands of years ago? Why are they visiting now when we have such a culture of rapid communication and conspiratorial beliefs, aliens in the media? Maybe someone just saw a weather balloon once and it started a feedback loop and it started sixty years and one hundred thousand UFO sightings. There's that, but then, have you ever been so far from civilization, like on a moonless night? The amount of stars you can see is insane. And you just look at that. Now we feel small, but back then it would be crazy. Lightning? Fire? Weird shit? Diseases?

There's lots of explanations of why people have created these narratives about what the government might be doing or how spirits work or any sort of cosmology floating around in our lives. Just in terms of the people I've talked to, it does reach a spiritual level for some people. There is an appreciation of the unknown.

There's academics, in a sense, and have a relatively clear idea of what's going on. One guy said that UFO abductions are the explanation of every kind of paranormal phenomena that people experience. Ghosts are products of abductions. It's just people's communication with something else.

For some people, though, mainly working class, it is a very spiritual thing. The aliens and ghosts come right along side each other. It's crazy too, though, the conspiracy stuff. It's really intense. Illuminati stuff. Like there's an order of beings that are running the world. The 1%/99% discourse has become part of the mainstream. But that's what they were saying all along. One part is controlling the world and making us slaves for them.

Matt:

So how does this all work in terms of your documentary?

Adrian:

For me, the foremost imperative is that the form meets the content. Essentially, trying to make a proof documentary, like many UFO documentaries, or the Ancient Alien documentaries, is problematic. Even their "skepticism" is in a truth-based framework. I just don't think that's possible. You can believe in or be astounded by certain things, like certain images, or people telling certain stories in those documentaries, but it's not getting into the deeper issues. How do I get across this idea, that there's a falseness that's here, that there's a holistic question about the capacity of the human brain?

The abduction stuff became huge after this book *Communion*, which was a New York Times bestseller, and a movie with Christopher Walken. The author, William Stribe, was a horror writer. He claimed to have been abducted and to have gone through all this horrible stuff. He was a storyteller. And he made a ton of money off it.

But abduction research is obtained by hypnosis, interview. And the interviewer is almost in the role of the therapist, going through the narrative with this other person, though it's something which clearly has only tenuous connections with verifiability. And then it comes down to making these fragments cohesive, making clear what's not there.

I'm going to work microcosmically. For me, for instance, I can say that I've seen a UFO. I was sitting on the sidewalk with a friend. And I could see this little light make a check mark sign and then it stopped for a quarter of a second and then shot up into the sky. That's fucking crazy. It had an effect on me then, but it's had more of an effect with me recently. I've talked to people who have had experiences that aren't explicable like that. I myself have no other explanation for what I saw that it was an extraterrestrial spaceship. What else was it? It was pretty high up. It looked like a comet, but no comet moves like that. It had a movement to it that no man made spacecraft has. It was out there, and that's exciting.

But when we start talking about abductions, I don't know where to go. Kind of because it's a lot scarier.

Matt:

How many people have you talked to?

Adrian:

For the documentary, eight maybe. Which isn't a ton.

Matt:

How do you find the people?

Adrian:

Well, not all of them are UFO people. Some are scientists and other people. I've made some posts on craigslist. They were done in different ways, sometimes face to face. I've only got two formal in front of camera interviews with UFO people. And others have been off the cuff discussions where the people didn't want me to record. And then, I called this one UFOlogist. And also, some scientists who are spiritual and study astrology and stuff.

Matt:

Who were the scientists?

Adrian:

They're just my friends!

Right now, I'm trying to get in touch with this other guy who runs a big UFO network, one of the premier UFO investigation organizations that's run in the United States. But like, I can't have a documentary that's just talking heads.

Because of that, I've really pared down my original conception. I'm going to look at questions of film and technology. Did you know that Disney was hired by the government early on to examine UFO videos to see if they were faked? And that happens now too. In terms of discovering hoaxes, you have to go to people in special effects. There is a really close link. And

later, the government hired Disney to try and stop to the UFO phenomenon. They had a media campaign to destroy people's conceptions of UFOs. Because straight up denial doesn't work. I mean, it does at some level, but the main constraint of the US government was that they were worried about mass panic.

And so that brings us to movies, science fiction. I was talking to one guy who was into a complete range of different subversive theories, and he was into movies too. I asked if there were any movies that matched up with his conception of aliens and UFO's. Some people will say like *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* is what's going on, or *Contact* is what's going on, or *Star Trek* is how I imagine the future. And he said: Not really, maybe more with TV shows. A movie can do so much with the time it has. And he was trying to say that most films have to stick to a narrative in such a way that they can't really leave things open. But then, he said, probably Tarkovsky's *Solaris*. It was amazing that he could say that. It's really not about a literal explanation. That movie isn't about aliens really, it's about alienation. It's about trying to destroy something in your past and building something better, being haunted by this demon from the past. And there's times where you're just looking at this planet, and you're like, what is going on here?

In terms of my documentary, it's been pretty difficult, to be honest, because I really want to talk about the human brain and belief and imagination and concepts and abstraction and things that are hard to concretize. And it's hard to show those things in a film. And it's hard to show aliens, UFO's in a film.

Matt:

Even outer space is hard to really show. We've just developed a few simple conventions.

Adrian:

I was considering not showing space as space, but instead space as astronomy, just as constellations, space as scientific read-outs of space, numbers and charts, space as those crazy pictures of radiation of different frequencies. Shapes come out of nowhere. What sort of lens are we using? I was thinking the other day: what's the difference between a literary mystery and a cinematic mystery? How do you make a detective story really effective in a movie?

Matt:

Yeah, in literature, you can not mention things, but in movies it's just there.

Adrian:

A great example is *The Usual Suspects* or *Blow-up*. It's all about what's there in the image. It's not necessarily about figuring out the story. There's a serious question about the visual being the most important thing.

Matt:

In terms of technique, maybe it reduces down the question of how to make people forget things, not how to hide them. You can do that in a text. you can make someone forget what's happening in a story; because the story accumulates things, you can confused them, contradict

yourself, say something baldly, and it's all playing tricks with memory. You can do that in movies too by working with focus and attention.

Adrian:

But even more overtly, in lots of mystery movies, the title sequence will tell you how the mystery is solved before you're even in the movie. Visual cues will explain something that's going to happen. And you'll only really understand it if you've watched the whole movie first. It's the best way to hide it, because it's so overt, and you can do all this visual abstract stuff. You're not even looking for it at that point.

But one of my big questions right now is how to represent interviews. What is the story exactly? Maybe I'll have other actors speak the lines of the people I've had interviews with. That seems okay, but it's not really it. Then I was thinking, maybe I don't want to have any faces in the movie at all. And I would just have these different dialogues all intertwining together. But is that going to work for the whole thing? And what would the images be? Abstract images? UFO footage from youtube?

Matt:

Juxtaposition is still the most robust technique. Like a counter melody to play against the aliens.

Adrian:

Yeah. I know 9/11 is going to be a really important in this. Because here is an image that is alien, but we know it's true. And you can go back to it at any point and watch it. And it's utterly surreal. After a while, you can unearth things. These are flying aircraft in places they aren't supposed to be doing things they aren't allow to do by the system, and they're destructive.

They're blank spots on the map. Why do conspiracies come out of these things? People continue to talk about them, about JFK's assassination, about the moon landing. And I hear from the most discerning people I know that something was off about 9/11. I've watched the Truther videos, and I can't buy into that, but the experience of watching them is insane. There's the movie *Cloverfield*. It's a reenactment of 9/11 with aliens. And it's riveting because of the shaky camera thing. You feel like you're there, and you get flashbacks.

Matt:

I think it's also like rehearsal for a lot of people. It gives you a a place to think about what you would do, how would you save yourself.

Adrian:

And you'd think that about 9/11 too.

Matt:

While you're falling asleep.

Adrian:

Things that probably won't happen to you, but it's impossible to say. You have to say it won't happen.

Matt:

People don't know how much of their guard to be on. Because it's hard to know what's possible. And people limit what's imagined as possible for different reasons.

There's also a scale problem. Like take the movie *Melancholia*. There's a moon hidden behind the sun. That we just didn't see. We're kicking ourselves now. That's it in an essence. But you see these people moving incredibly slowly in this impending way and they're moving just like the moon moves. As in, it's moving rapidly, but it's also moving really slowly. The movie is playing with this scale problem. And it's the same thing with alien life. They might exist at different scales than us. And how do we translate between scales?

Adrian:

People will post images to the internet with a picture of the universe and a picture of a rat's brain and be like, Hey these look the same. And it's a way of compacting this information. Up at Ladd Observatory, which I highly recommend you go to, on the ground floor there's all these old clocks. Why? Because mapping the stars was all about understanding time. Being able to map a 24 hour day. You nail a telescope down and mark a point where a star passes and then 24 hours later the star passes again. Then you need to adjust the clock because the star is passing because the earth has moved. You've actually gone 24 hours in 4 minutes. And you need another clock. That point is connected to a little electromagnetic system that goes into a telegraph wire and goes into a clock. And that's how that time is produced. This is how it worked when there wasn't standardized time. Now they rely on a different vibration, atomic clocks. Anyway, the face of the clock has the twelve zodiacs signs on it, going around. The clock is the map of the stars.

Then there's the telescope, which was the first instrument to allow the human mind to become disconnected from the body. You look out there and you're in another space, and your body is down there. And if you have your eye completely wrapped in the eye piece, you feel this strange kind of disorientation. It's like a non-space, it's just the telescope, and yet. And the telescope is the precursor to the camera, to cinema. And it's all about your body being in one place and your mind being elsewhere.

But does that get back to the real question? Are extraterrestrials visiting planet earth? How many of them have been here? What are they doing here? And what has the government done? Who knows the most? There's all these thought exercises, but we're not getting to the real juicy bits: that somewhere someone in this world knows everything about JFK. Maybe some people know some really crazy things about aliens. All this stuff came out of people coming forward in the 80's and 90's, saying they'd been at Roswell, saying they saw them bring the alien bodies in, that they did the autopsies, saying I was there when this guy got in contact with the aliens, and that we signed a peace agreement with them. And it's like where is this coming from? We just can't rely on single individuals. You have this cultural feedback problem where if someone says all UFOs go in figure-eights, a person who said they saw another kind of UFO

might say, Well yeah, actually it was going in a figure eight. And that makes it so no one can realize that, say, maybe there's been two different alien races visiting, one from a thousand years in the future and one from thousand years in the past, and they're competing, or something.

Then, there's the question of schizophrenia. Look at how many movies are about schizophrenia. The *Matrix* is a movie about schizophrenia. That's what boundary it's pushing. It's a schizophrenic thought experience. And why are we doing that? Why are we having this conversation now as opposed to before?

It really comes down to looking at what you know and why you know it, what you believe and why you believe it, and what's the relation between the two, when they cross over. What happens when you believe in something you know, and know something you think you believe in. That's a practical element. And at another level, you really have to realize how important that imagination is. People want to throw away belief.

Matt:

Or pathologize imagination.

Adrian:

And that's crazy because then nothing would have happened to humans. We would just be doing whatever. Belief is so important. And that's why you go to the crazy people, because that's belief run amok. Of course, there are some pathological parts to that. But in the best case, I feel like it has to do with harnessing that power and not being consumed by it, and at the same time letting it fuel you at the same time. That's the most important thing for me.

SPOETRY: INTERVIEW WITH FIONA CONDON  
2012

Matt:

Tell me a little bit about yourself.

Fiona:

I'm a senior, studying Computer Science and American Civilization. I'm from Canada, which makes it kind of weird to study American Civilization. But it's an intriguing topic.

Matt:

Does Canada ever come up?

Fiona:

I actually have used Canadian television shows in papers. And I have to justify why I'm using something that's Canadian in papers that are ostensibly about America. And it comes up because oddly enough I've had a couple of professors and TA's who were Canadian. I don't know why they gravitate towards American Civilization.

Matt:

Do you see yourself as part of a Canadian intellectual heritage? You have Marshall McLuhan.

Fiona:

I guess so. I knew Marshall McLuhan was Canadian, but I didn't really associate him with anything uniquely Canadian.

Matt:

He was part of a group, I think.

Fiona:

I know there's a really good department of Media Studies at the University of Toronto.

[Matt looks it up,]

Matt:

Oh, they had Northrop Frye and Edmund Carpenter too! Well, how about that! Canada.

Fiona:

I honestly hadn't thought about whether there was anything uniquely Canadian about understanding media. But I really like Marshall McLuhan.

Matt:

Would you ever have yourself be represented as a Canadian artist?

Fiona:

Probably not, unless it was in Canada! I know in high school, when we'd read books, we'd focus on Commonwealth authors. I'm not sure exactly why. I'm surprised some people don't know what the Commonwealth is, and that there's this a network of countries. It's kind of a weird thing in Canada, because it's just a formal connection at this point.

Matt:

So, tell me a little about your project.

Fiona:

So, I did the *Spoetry* project for Daniel Howe's Programming for Digital Art and Literature class. It started because I wanted to do a project, and the working material that I had was some abnormally bizarre spam messages that I'd been on the receiving end of for a really long time. I had been culling them over the years. I don't know how I got into this loop, but a very high percentage of the spam messages I received were unusual. Some would be excerpts from children's books that I'd really liked when I was younger, which would be very disconcerting. Some would be very obscene. Especially the subject lines, anything to get you to click inside. And so I wanted to work with that and I thought what better than have it be distributed in the same way that I originally got it. So there's a java backend that sends it out as spam. It's kind of a frustrating process because it's difficult to actually get mail clients to tag you as spam, but not blacklist you at the same time in the modern internet. So that was a challenge.

I like how when things are perverse, they're often perverse in a way that's unrecognizably weird. I'm not sure who is writing these things, but there is clearly a different understanding between American consumers and whoever is the author of them about what is sexy or exciting. And at the same time, there are elements that are hard to ignore.

Matt:

It makes you wonder what they think they know about us.

Fiona:

Yeah, or like what a "love warrior spirit" is, or "cheerleader caught by blacks." It's perverse in a way that's just a little warped, a little alienated from what you'd expect.

Matt:

So what was the process of putting each fragment together?

Fiona:

The subject lines are just actual subject lines of things that I got. Because I felt there was a difference between the subject line and the body. As in, subject lines are mostly trying to get you to click in. In terms of the bodies, I took the text and manually decided what the categories were. There were sentences, words, and short fragments. Then, I used a library that Professor Howe wrote, which was a grammar, and I wrote rules about how to combine and recombine

them. So what I had in that file were a number of different types of poems, and those were defined by different rules which branched out. So the poems are highly likely to be different from each other.

Eventually, they boiled down to terminal bits which were chosen from the elements that I categorized in certain ways. The terminal things were actual phrases, like I said, this is macabre, or this is happy, or this is three syllables long. And those were the ultimate things that were reassembled by the grammar into the poems. And they're generated as you send emails or as you're flipping through them.

Matt:

How does it know how long to make each one?

Fiona:

Just the top level structure that defines a poem type. I have haikus. Like a fraction of them are haikus. Then, there are other less well-defined formats, more select things based on emotion or other more ambiguous types, rather than just syllable count. Some were just based on rhythm.

Matt:

How much of spam text do you think is itself computer generated? And how much do people actively write it?

Fiona:

It's pretty easy to tell when you look at something alone, whether it's been something written. Some will be personal appeals from scammers or fake women who link back to sex sites, or information about drugs. And for some, it's very difficult to tell why it's been sent to you. There's a lot of nonsense language and language that's clearly found text, like that children's book, *They Went to Sea in a Sieve*. That was pulled in, and I have no idea why I was getting them, because they didn't link back to anything and there was no opportunity for me to click through and make money. But I wondered if it were sending me nonsensical enough things that they could throw off the spam filters and associate the sender.

It's kind of too bad I used gmail, which is very effective at catching these to the point that it would be a more interesting experience to receive them if some of them worked. Then you could see which ones get through and which ones don't.

Also, the actual algorithm that they use to prevent spam from getting through is very statistical, based in the content of the message. So sometimes I wonder how some of these are ending up in the spam folder if they're just complete nonsense. It seems like there should be no way to tell that they are spam. So it's intriguing that they are tagged that way.

In terms of found text, the interesting thing about that, is that even if it seems like it isn't working, it doesn't have to work very well for it to keep happening. People write these programs to see if they're effective, and if they're not, there's no reason to shut them down. It's kind of zero cost.

Matt:

Does having done this project affect how you look at spam?

Fiona:

Yeah, but maybe not as much as you'd think. I was already kind of reading spam in order to curate it, just casually, without thinking about it as a project or related to poetry. I think everyone enjoys some good found internet text. So I would say that it hasn't radically changed how I read spam.

Matt:

I think certain people have an intuition about the history of spam, the way spam has developed over the years, dividing it into different eras, and in these poems you can see all these bits and pieces that seem very contemporary, and some that seem from earlier eras. Especially these sort of "spore skua kine nitre/ahoy smelt cask born" stuff. I see words that look like that a lot in spam these days in particular.

Fiona:

Actually, now that I think about it, I wrote a history of spam as a class project when I was in high school, which I guess gave me a good sense of the kinds of algorithms that spam blockers use, at least. I think it's pretty tough to tell what kind of algorithms the people who generate the spam are using. But part of the charm, definitely, is reverse engineering them. It's kind of like a puzzle or a joke. You try to understand why someone would do this.

Matt:

What did people in your class think?

Fiona:

They liked it. It was a fun project to show because I had a way for people to use it and to interact with it, which was to sign up to receive the messages for a little while. And I did send them out every day for a period. I didn't want to flood anyone's mailbox because when it gets going, it actually sends them out about as quickly as you can process them, or a little quicker.

But that was the exciting part, having a list of people who wanted to receive these spam messages. And then Ryan Lester remixed it. He took my source material more than the idea or the concept, but as I remember, it was a longer hand-assembled more cohesive poem that took bits and pieces from the poems that I'd sent him. It was nice to be remixed like that! Though, I think when you take the concept of distributing this as spam out of the equation, and when you break down the structure, which were the two conceptual elements, then it's a little ambiguous what exactly's being transmuted except for the charming phrases that pop up.

Matt:

Well, in regard to that, I would say that when I look at these poems, I immediately try to reconstruct some kind of personality behind them, just because it's from a single source. In the world of spam, what personalities do you think live there?

Fiona:

There was one email I used that was a spammer from another country trying to get you to give him your bank account information. But I didn't use multiple instances of that since one is enough to get the point across. There's also "women who like you," which is one of the characters in spam. I like that a little more for some reason. Maybe because getting you to send bank account information is pretty straight-forward, in terms of what you do and what that character is, which is just someone respectable who needs your help, and wealthy. But "woman who likes you": there's a lot more room for variation, so that's a more fun character. Nothing particularly interesting about the drug emails, except that it's more about who they posit you as, and what they think you're looking for, and their conception of what it means to have high status or high effectiveness in American society--watches and drugs and sex appeal.

If it had been easier to send the emails from different names, that's something I would have done. It's not something I dedicated a lot of time to figuring out technically. But definitely it wasn't a conscious choice to have it all be from the same email address! It's just the one that I registered.

There's another archetype of spam which is just trying to get you to panic so that you click in. And, there are also tricks. The other day my room-mate got a terrible virus on her computer, which redirected her whenever she clicked through from a link on google. She looked up information on the virus, but all the comments on the article were people trying to convince you to download what was purportedly a virus killer, but was really just another virus. Everywhere you'd turn, they'd hit every instance of a help page for this virus!

Matt:

There is a certain irony that they almost relish!

So, could you give some context in terms of how this fits into works you've done and works you plan to do?

Fiona:

I did a project last semester, again where I used found text on the internet to make poetry. But this time I wanted to use comments on html pages across the internet, which I saw as being kind of like secrets that the internet has. Comments on html pages are parts of the html document that aren't rendered by the browser, so unless you view the source there's no way to actually see what's inside them. I was expecting that there would be a lot of people writing angry things or funny things or just something poignant every now and then. I wrote a webcrawler that went around until I had around eighteen or twenty gigabytes of html, which is pretty significant since it's just plain text. But I found relatively little that was interesting. But I made poetry out of it anyway, and a webpage where you could make your own poems.

But I might try that one again, with comments in other kinds of code. While people mostly generate their html these days, people don't mostly generate their Java or their Ruby or whatever. So I think I might scrape public github repositories and see if I can find things that are more like conventional secrets there.

Then I wanted to do something like an internet repository where you could go and put whatever text you wanted in and it would use a Markov or an n-gram algorithm to decompose it and make something that over time would just become incredibly complex and incorporate enough disparate things that its output would be unpredictable.

Matt:

So people could just add to the collective consciousness.

Fiona:

Totally, but less structured and more just like junk. It would be constantly outputting and inputting. So you could see what goes up against something else, and see if you could still identify junks from different bits.

Matt:

So it seems like there's these two tools: n-gram stuff for like style, statistical stuff, and then there's a grammar for structure. But there's a huge gap, as far as I can tell, in people being able to do the same kind of statistical analysis on other kinds of structural features of texts. Understanding things about conversations, for example.

Fiona:

At the semantic level.

Matt:

Yeah, or actions that are causally related, say. I was curious if you'd thought about that. Rather than the author having explicitly to structure things, ways to get the structure itself out of data.

Fiona:

Well, you could use an algorithm that looks more like an unstructured or Markov algorithm, but on like chunks that are higher than letters and words.

In terms of conversations, I did a project related to that. I made this little interactive command line prompt and it would prompt you with questions that started out being general human questions about you, things only a human being could answer. You would hold down the spacebar and answer them out loud and it would record you. As it moved forward, it got more and more jumbled, and it would keep asking you questions, but which would eventually become simple arithmetic questions, then binary operations. And while you were answering these questions, it would increasingly throw back your own voice at you. This made it incredibly difficult to answer things because you were talking over yourself. Especially when you were answering binary operation questions and you could hear yourself answering other questions in binary. The units are very likely to overlap.

Matt:

It's also interesting, on an art note, that "association" has for a long time been part of the

surrealist toolkit. In that case, you yourself make the associations without knowing how, and then the associations are analyzed. With these association algorithms we can be very analytical about what the associations actually are, which is probabilities laid bare. Ideas always come together no matter how far they're separated.

Fiona:

Yeah, on that note, I had an exciting moment this week. We read Vannevar Bush's, not *As We May Think*, but his second article about the Memex in an MCM class. The next day I showed up to my Computer Networks lecture, and it was the very beginning of the lectures about the web. And the professor, as a fun thing, did a talk about the Memex too. It's nice when these things combine. I think there's an interest in both the Media Studies side and also on the technical side. Why do we do the things that we do, and how do we talk about networks in a more meaningful way?

Matt:

Do you think you could ever be in a state when you might speak like one of these generated texts?

Fiona:

It's not clear that that isn't what we already do! But the associations take on a structure in a more complex way that emerges from the simple rules, that at the bottom are probably just associations.

Taking these classes at the same time, it's also interesting how much they interfere with each other. More so Networks interfering with the other two. Nothing really can interfere when you're just coding.

Matt:

Finally, I wanted to ask, it occurs to me that if generating this text is so easy, for all we know, all this seemingly useless spam is from giant botnets spewing art just like you!

Fiona:

Hah! That's probable.

Have you heard of [@Horse\\_ebooks](#)? It's a twitter account that spews fragments supposedly from ebooks about horses. The idea was that you could click the link and go to a place to purchase ebooks about horses. But it's not a very good website. People really loved this thing though and it became really popular about a year ago. At one point, it seemed to spike in popularity a lot, which happens with things on the internet. Someone later did an expose, and apparently at one point, one day last November, the guy who owned the account went back in and changed the algorithm. After that, it was a lot better at taking little fragments that are actually interesting and funny to retweet. The algorithm was changed from something that you had to have a subtle appreciation of found text to enjoy, to something that's just kind of funny all the time. And people do enjoy it! In the case of [@Horse\\_ebooks](#), it seems like the creator noticed and fixed it to work better.

Matt:

And now it's just one of these characters that people know about.

Fiona:

Yeah. Character is a funny thing. Sometimes a spam account will tweet at you links and if you click them, who knows what will happen. But sometimes they'll build up a little character for the account so that you won't immediately doubt them, and report them.

Also, once I was followed and tweeted at by this woman, who tweeted aphorisms. Like "If you love something, you gotta let it go" or just "Out with the girls!" But at the end of every tweet, there would be a random string of all capitals. So it would be read like, "If you love something, you gotta let it goKQUQ."

I really enjoyed that. There was something really compelling about trying and getting just *this* close to correct at impersonating a human being, and then failing.

ANGELS (NOVELLA)  
2012

ANGELS

by Matthew Weiss



PART ONE

## THE KING

Once there was a kingdom which was divided into three classes of people. One class of people walked with their eyes on the ground; another class of people walked with their eyes straight ahead; and the last class of people walked with their eyes directed up at the sky. The society was organized in the following manner. Those who walked with their eyes on the ground attended to the king and offered him schemes of their own devising. There was one such schemer who approached the king with the following idea, that man is composed of two separate animals, one which looks out from the left eye and one which looks out from the right eye. These two separate animals are forced to do battle for control of that which comes singly: the mouth, the anus, and the genitalia.

As they conversed, the king and the schemer were walking arm in arm along a certain path in the city, and as they walked, the king steered the schemer away from the laundry hanging from window to window, lest he become tangled in it.

“And how will I know which one has won?” asked the king.

The schemer answered in the following way: “When one animal has subdued the other, we feel regret. When the two animals work in concert, we feel at peace.”

“And what are the consequences of this view?”

“They say that the eyes once crossed can never be uncrossed, but in the course of my travels I’ve never gotten that far. But if it were possible, then one eye could contemplate the sights of the other, and harmony would result. So every day I attempt it.”

And the king looked into the face of the schemer and saw that this was true. But he argued in the following way: “Surely when we look into the eyes of another person, we nevertheless see one person who looks out.”

“But how is it,” asked the schemer, “that one looks into the eyes of another person? For we only see our own eyes, which we can open and close separately!”

And so, it is for this reason that the schemers keep mirrors upon their person for the king granted them this privilege so that they could see the eyes of another.

Now understand that when the kingdom was young and had no king, the whole land lay in chaos. Those who walked with their eyes on the ground knew nothing of the make-up of the kingdom. Although they conceived a great many schemes, it was only when they happened to bump into someone by accident that they could explain them. They procured their livelihood in this way, by exchanging schemes for charity, and they would also eat the tubers that grew on the ground. Very often, it happened that these schemers would follow paths that led them beyond the kingdom into strange and dangerous lands, and because they did not have the sense to turn back, they would continue on their way until they ended up starving in the pathless desert.

Now those who walked with their eyes straight ahead were involved principally in the construction of the cities of the kingdom. They built their houses one after another along straight lines. Because it never occurred to them to build a second storey, the kingdom became very large with the houses of these laborers, and it took a great deal of time to go anywhere or get anything done. For this reason the oldest city of the kingdom was shaped like an arrow. The fletchings of the arrow was an ancient quarry from which those who walked with their eyes straight ahead got their materials. The first laborer emerged from the quarry and built a house at that spot, and the

second laborer built a house just beyond the first house and so on, and in this way the shaft of the arrow was the houses of the laborers, which they built one after the other. When the children of these people were old enough, they were instructed to return to the ancient quarry. There, the men collected materials for their own dwelling places and returned the other way in order to build houses of their own. Along the shaft of the arrow, they met women who were also returning, and when a man and a woman met in this way, they were married, and settled together, and had children.

There came a time when those who walked with their eyes straight ahead exhausted the materials of the ancient quarry. The men and women of this class now had no indication of the proper place to cease walking and return. They continued to walk unceasingly so that very soon the number of such people started to decline as they fell pray to holes, streams and other obstructions in the path. In some places, however, the arrow of the city of the laborers happened to point to another quarry, and so some perished and others did not.

Finally, those who walked with their eyes fixed to the sky came to know a great deal of the geography of the kingdom, and its cycles. They came to understand the movements of the sun, moon, and stars, as well as the birth and death of trees, and decline of houses, and the activities of birds. They had a tendency to wander where their eyes took them, and because the past and future of the kingdom was written in the rising and falling things, they could tell one place from another, and thus choose to go wherever they desired. But because they could not see the dangers before or below them, their numbers also came to decrease. Those who survived subsisted on the fruits of trees and on the gifts of those they talked to. They talked about the things they had seen, and those who looked down talked about the things they had heard, and those looking straight ahead talked about the things they had done.

One day a stranger appeared in the kingdom. He alone could see the nature of the disorder of the kingdom because he was able to pivot his head up, down, or straight ahead just as he wished. This is the story of how that happened. When this stranger was a boy, he was of the type whose eyes were directed towards the sky. He had the habit of wandering around his village every day. One time he decided to walk into a forest. He wandered from place to place until he found a certain tree which he liked to look at, a tree of pure white bark, which would change colors when the sun and moon shone on it. Every day he wished to return to the tree, and because he could not see the path leading to the tree, he found this very difficult. After several weeks, however, he was able to memorize the route to the tree and return to it when he liked. Afterwards, he would approach the tree daily and look at it. One time he saw a dozen hawks circling above the tree, and that night, he saw the moon spying on the tree through a break in the clouds. As he watched, the clouds covered up the moon, but when the clouds passed, a great rustling came from the tree, and a thousand bats rose up and covered the moon from sight. The next morning he resolved to climb the tree in order to speak to the birds.

He came to the tree, and found that while he could see very well the branches above him, nevertheless he had no idea how to reach them. He approached the tree closer and closer until he and it were touching. The tree was warm, which reminded him of his parents, whose voices he had often heard, but whose faces he had never seen; for they too stared up at the sky, and the boy had only ever seen their chins. Therefore, the boy embraced the tree and clung to it. Thus he was able to shimmy up the tree, and once he had reached a certain height, he was able to reach for the

branches and hoist himself up onto them. After a while, he found a place where the branches diverged, and there he could stand straight up among them, as if on a platform. The birds he had seen the day before were roosting on the branches, and they stared at him from above as if they had never seen anything like him before.

“What are you?” they asked.

“A human being,” said the boy.

At this they clucked, and fluttered up into the sky. As if to please him, they formed themselves into a great many shapes, each of which made the boy happier and happier. Finally, they returned to the branches where they had been sitting before.

“What were those lovely shapes you were making?” asked the boy.

“Those are the shapes the branches make. We memorize the shapes so we can remember which trees are good and which trees are bad.”

“They didn’t look like any branches I’ve seen,” said the boy doubtfully.

“That’s because you’ve never seen them from above,” answered the birds.

“Will you show me them like that?”

“Certainly.”

At this, the birds each grabbed a piece of the boy’s clothing, and carried him up into the sky.

“How lovely and cool these clouds are!” he said. “And how bright is the sun!”

The boy turned his face to try to see the sun up close, but just as he did, the birds let him go from their hold, and he tumbled out of the sky, twirling in circles. Just before he was about to crash into the tree, the birds grabbed his shoes, and let him hang upside down above the tree. The boy had never seen the world like this before.

“That is the shape you made!” the boy exclaimed.

“Yes, it is,” said the birds. And after a moment, they lowered him to the ground, and set him right side up.

The boy craned his neck to look at them.

“I would like to make as lovely shapes as that, but I don’t know how,” he said.

“Sometimes we make shapes with our footprints in the ground,” the birds said. “Maybe you can do that as well.”

With that in mind, the boy found a tough vine and climbed the tree again. He wrapped one end of the vine around his feet and the other end around a branch. Then he let himself fall back into the air, until he fell just barely a foot above the ground. He reached out his hands and using them like feet, he traced in the dirt the shape of the tree that he’d seen. He spent all day making the picture as detailed as he could, until night fell, and the birds departed to roost.

Now it had gotten dark, and the boy was afraid because he couldn’t reach up to untie himself. Nor could he see his drawing any more. Suddenly, the moon came into view, and the boy was pleased because he could see his work again. But then the bats who cover up the moon appeared and drenched the ground in darkness once more. In fact, the bats were flying around the boy faster and faster, and some were landing on him, and he was very frightened.

“What shall I do?” he wondered.

Thinking quickly, he pushed himself off the ground with his hands, and started to swing with the vine. By twisting his body back and forth, he was able to knock the bats out of their

flight with great force. Incensed by this behavior, the bats began to claw at him. But before they were able to hurt the boy, they clawed through the vine, and the boy fell in a heap. The bats, however, followed him, and he ran away into a large clearing, drawing the bats closer and closer, until soon he was able to see the light of the moon.

“Stop!” he cried to the bats.

At this loud noise, they paused. Taking his hands and closing his eyes, the boy felt for the ground and drew the loveliest tree he could imagine, such as the bats might like to roost in at the end of the night. The bats saw the drawing and, entranced by its beauty, the greatest part of them flew off in search of such a lovely tree. A few, however, remained behind.

“How did you come to draw such a lovely tree?” they asked the boy.

“I don’t know,” the boy said. “I closed my eyes and saw it in my mind.”

The bats were impressed.

“We would like to see more such lovely trees, but we need to find somewhere to roost before the night is over.”

“Perhaps we can make a deal,” the boy said. “I think I could draw even lovelier trees than this, if only I could see the ground while I worked. But I can’t see the ground unless I’m upside down. Therefore, this is the deal we ought to make. I will draw a tree for you every night, if you will live upside down, and roost on my chin, and weigh my head down so that I can see the world in front of and below me.”

The bats agreed, and the boy became famous for the great heavy beard he wore, which weighed his head down whenever he liked. He alone could see everything above, below, and straight ahead of him. He became very wise not only because he had seen more of the world than anyone else, but also because he was able to draw pictures of both what he had seen as well as what he could imagine. When the boy became older, he appeared in the aforementioned kingdom, and came up with a scheme to put the kingdom in order.

And this is what he did.

He called together all the people in the kingdom, and divided them into bodies of three, one of each class, and he called the parts of the body head, middle and tail. And he called the whole a body because three parts coming together in this way does not occur among inanimate things.

Now, the kingdom happened to be bordered by a great forest on one side, a golden mountain on another, a very large lake on the other, and a desert on the last. The bodies were dispersed to these places with the following orders. To the tail, he said, “Keep your eyes on the sky, and look out for the places where one landscape changes into another, where the forest turns into the mountain, where the mountain turns into the lake, where the lake turns into the desert, and the desert turns into the forest. And when you come to a place like that, stop.” To the middle, he said, “Make sure the path ahead is clear so your companions don’t trip and fall.” And to the head, he said, “Make sure that no one waylays you in the course of your journey.”

When this was done, they rested for one night and then set off for another corner of the kingdom and then another, and so on. It happened that after a while some of them came to encounter the tracks of the others. And the man had foreseen this and told them to follow the heaviest tracks. And the people of the kingdom did this for one year, and a path was cleared surrounding the kingdom, and beaten by their feet.

Now, the man had said to middle, "Separate from the rest, and walk from corner to corner, keeping your eyes on the ground, and put down rocks on either side of the path." And he had said to the tail, "Walk across the kingdom, and start at dawn, and trace the movement of the sun with your eyes, and mark its location when you reach the other side. And then sleep for one night, and when you wake up, turn around and walk half the sun's course, and then stop." And he had said to the head, "Keep the path of the tail straight, and when you stop, point straight ahead."

And the king waited until this had been done, and then found the center of the kingdom easily, for the people had formed four arrows pointing to that very place. The king laid four sticks on the ground which radiated out from the center, and each stick was placed between two arrows. There the king built his city, and the city had four gates, one in place of each stick, so that they faced the corners of the kingdom, and led forth paths to those places.

Now those who walked with their eyes straight ahead were happy to live along these paths, for they were clear and easy to follow. By walking back and forth they could trade among themselves, and bring whatever they desired from any corner of the kingdom. Those who walked with their eyes on the ground were also happy because there was a series of paths that, no matter how long they followed them, would always lead them home. And those who walked with their eyes fixed to the sky were happy to be able to wander freely and explore within the safety of the kingdom's walls. All this was so pleasing to the people of the kingdom that the king was made king.

The kingdom was nevertheless large, and the king often had need of the advice of the people, and so desired to keep them close. Therefore, he drew on a piece of paper a labyrinth made all of straight lines. Along each line, he made a mark at every breadth of his finger. He told those who walked with their eyes straight ahead to build this labyrinth by following the piece of paper, and for every mark taking a single step. The people who desired to give service to the king were placed in the labyrinth so that they could walk as they pleased, and always return to the same spot. And just there, at the entrance to the labyrinth, a guard was posted, and he carried with him a piece of paper, and he was looking down at it constantly. He used this paper to draw the schemes which the people would offer to him while they were passing by, and the guard would provide them with a little food and water, and send them back inside.

As the months passed, however, it happened that those who walked with their eyes fixed to the sky refused to stay in the labyrinth. If they came to a wall, they would begin to try to climb it in order to get closer to the sky, and so on. The king saw this was the case, and this is what he did.

He had those who walked with their eyes fixed to the sky go down into the homes of those who walked with their eyes straight ahead, and teach them to build houses which had more than one storey, throwing ropes up to the top of each house, and knotting ropes at intervals between them, and forming ladders. And they fixed some ropes to a platform so that materials could be hoisted. Then the king had them build houses of three stories, and so on. Next, the distances between houses were spanned with boards, and the king had them build railings so that no one would fall off the boards, and the boards were aligned so that they began and ended at the same spot, which was at the entrance to the labyrinth. Those who walked with their eyes fixed to the sky went up into this new labyrinth, which was raised above the houses, and wandered as they liked, protected by the railings. And because, as the months wore on, the houses grew taller

and taller, they were always able to go a little bit further towards the sky. At the highest point, when their eyes flashed with the most excitement, the king posted a guard who listened to what each had seen, and took messages to the king. Then the men and women would turn back, and descend for a bit, and wait to go a little higher.

Years passed in this way, and the people of the kingdom were happy. But soon, they found that they could build their houses no higher or else they would collapse. And at night they heard crashes in the distance, and then other crashes, followed by crashes and crashes around them. And the people became unhappy.

The king did not know how to solve this problem, and so he went to walk in the labyrinth with the schemers, and ask them what they were thinking. Now, in the close confines of the labyrinth, the schemers had begun to confer with one another, and they were beginning to think alike. When the king told them his problem, they began to talk together. They wondered, "What tends to rise ever higher and never come down?" And the answer was fire, which alone of all the elements, always tends upwards. So they told the king to equip the people with fires, and they had a great many ideas about how to accomplish this. So king gathered the wisest of those who look up, and he related to them these suggestions.

One said, "It may be the case that fire goes up, but it can't go up forever. Since every day, we see the sun rise and set, so that even fire must come back to the earth."

And to this another one said, "Although the sun sets, the stars remain, which are also made of fire, and they stay at a very great height."

And another one said, "Although the stars seem to remain in place, they also rise and fall, only more slowly."

And another one said, "We have never seen a thing that rises, but never falls. Even birds come home at night to roost."

So the king asked them, "But how is it possible that the fires we see on the earth always tend to rise, whereas the fires in the sky tend to rise and fall?"

And they answered, "We don't know."

Therefore, the king returned to the schemers to ask them why this was the case.

Meanwhile, the houses of the people continued to collapse, and they began to demand a new king.

The schemers asked the king to leave them for a while so that they could think, and for many days they conferred among themselves.

Finally, they gave this answer to the king: "Perhaps the sky is like this labyrinth so that, no matter how far you enter into it, you always return to the same spot."

To see if this were true, the king placed the most trusted man in charge of the kingdom and returned to the white tree where he had been taught by birds. He climbed the tree and asked the birds, "Have you ever flown around the whole world?"

"Of course," they answered.

"And do you come back to where you began?"

"Yes," they answered. "No matter how far you fly, you always return to the same tree."

"But you only fly from side to side, you never fly straight upwards?"

"No, we always follow the ground when we fly," they answered.

"What happens if you fly upwards?"

“We can’t. The air becomes too cold and windy, and it’s very dangerous.”

“Have you ever seen the sun?”

“No,” they answered. “We can’t get close to it.”

“If only those who look at the sky were like birds, and only desired to fly from side to side,” the king thought.

“We have heard of things that fly only upwards and downwards,” the birds said to him.

“Really?”

“Yes, but they are very rare. They live with the sun and moon, and on the various stars. They like to ascend ever higher so they rarely come to earth. In fact, they only come down when they are given orders.”

“Who gives them orders?”

“Their king.”

“Who is their king?”

“We’re not sure. They think that their king lives at the end of the world, and so they go up higher and higher in hopes of reaching him. They say that the higher they go, the more orders they receive from him.”

“And then they return to earth?”

“Sometimes they are asked to carry orders to earth, but before long they leave and try to fly up as high as they can. Because of this, it has taken them a very long time to get close to their king. Maybe some of them have reached him by now. We have no way of knowing.”

And saying this, the birds fell silent.

So the king thanked them, and descended from the tree, and returned to his kingdom. And coming up the hills, beside the forest, he saw the gates of his kingdom, and he went through them, and he stopped in each house, and spoke to the people there, and he comforted them. And when he was about to leave, he would ask them, “Have you ever heard from a thing that always tries to rise ever higher?”

And many of the people said that they had.

And the king asked, “What did they say to you?”

“They gave us advice, usually.”

And the king thought about this, and then went to the labyrinth of the schemers, and he asked them the same question. And they answered, “Of course, we see them all the time! For a while, we thought they were only inside us, but we’ve talked together, and we’ve all seen and heard them. Sometimes they only whisper to us, and we can’t see them exactly. But every once and a while, in particular, when we’re sleeping, they come to us in a flash of light.”

And the king laughed and said, “So then it’s not just fire that always tries to rise!”

“Well,” they answered, “if they come to us when we hear them, then they don’t only rise, but also fall.”

And the king went to his palace to think about this answer. He lay upon his bed and fell into a deep sleep, but had no dreams, and so for days he wandered the palace deep in thought.

## MALACH

On the other side of the world, there was a kingdom in which the eyes of the people shone with light. The light originated from somewhere behind the eyes, and shot out from the eyes and touched an object, and in that way the object was illuminated, and therefore seen. The people were ruled by a king, and the king presided over a court very famous throughout the land. The members of the court each governed a portion of the kingdom wisely, and because the court was in harmony, the land was in harmony as well. The court was not so small that any of its members felt lonely and unable to speak to another, nor was it so large that any of its members felt envious because another carried out some duty more competently. Rather, the court was exactly the size of a family, and the child they raised was the people, and because the family was in harmony, the people were in harmony as well.

Now, it happened to be the time of year when new representatives were chosen for the court. This was a time of great activity and celebration throughout the land. In one small corner of the kingdom, there lived a young girl, whose parents desired that she apply to become a representative, for her eyes shone very brightly.

“Well, how do they choose people?” she asked her parents.

“The position is inherited from one’s ancestors,” her father explained.

“Well, I suppose I have no chance then,” said the girl doubtfully.

And her mother laughed. “What your father means to say,” she said, “is this, that our ancestors built many things for our benefit. Some of these things are visible things like castles and roads, and others are invisible things that can’t be put into words. They placed these invisible things onto their children as if loading a fleet of ships for a great voyage. Some of the ships have been lost, and will never again be found. Other ships have been attacked by pirates, and their treasure stolen. And some ships have docked together and exchanged their goods. Because these goods are invisible, however, we don’t know where the whole of them have ended up, but when you arrive at the palace, they will inspect you in order to see what goods are hidden on your person, and you don’t need to worry.”

And in this way, the young girl was induced to travel to the palace. She traveled there with her young brother, whose name was Malach. Together with Malach, she waited in a very long line, and then she was taken down into a vault in the bowels of the palace, while her brother waited outside. She found herself alone, in the dark, with the king.

“Hello?” she said.

“Please wait.”

Now, in the middle of the room was a chest. Inside the chest was a piece of the sun which had been kept from times long past. The king produced a small key from his robes, and unlocking the chest, opened it just a crack, and a blinding white light shone from inside the chest and was thrown onto one of the walls of the vault. The king fixed a prism between the sun and the wall, and the light was shattered into colors, each of the purest, most beautiful hue. With a flick of his fingers, the king set the prism spinning, so that the colors formed a twisting circular shape, which the girl had at times seen while in the midst of dancing and catching sight of the sun in the sky.

Now, the king asked the girl to stand behind the chest and face the opposite wall. Thus the light of her own eyes was projected there. The king took in hand another prism, and fixed it between the girl and the wall, so that the light of her eyes was shattered into colors as well. Whereas some of the colors were faint, the color blue was particularly pure, and the girl saw that this was the case. Then the king sent the colors spinning and in doing so, the blue color seemed to deepen.

“Keep your eyes steady, my dear.”

And upon saying this, the king pulled on a tasseled rope that hung from the ceiling, and curtains rose up from the walls, and revealed two mirrors on either side of the girl. And the spinning colors met in a flash and mingled, and the vault became unbearably bright, and the most the girl could see was her own color blue struggling against a white hot fire that seemed to swirl like the foam on the edge of a lake. And the girl began to weep, and through her tears, the color blue seemed to deepen even more.

Then all at once the king shut the chest and the room was darkened so quickly that the girl could see nothing at all. She felt the king take her hand, and lead her to the door. And he thanked her, and told her she could leave.

“But I can’t see!”

“If you follow the corridor, your brother will find you,” said the king, and she followed his instructions. She made her way down the corridor, and she trailed her hand against the walls. The door to the vault was shut, and she could hear voices behind her and in front of her, and they spoke in whispers, and someone seemed to speak her name, and she began to smell something, the trees outside the palace.

“What happened to you!”

She heard Malach’s voice. His voice seemed unbearably loud.

“Oh, I don’t know,” said the girl. “It’s very hard to see.”

Malach took his sister by the hand, and led her outside. She felt his hand in hers, and then in her mind’s eye, she saw the arm of her brother, and his shoulder, and his head, and at last his eyes. Staring at the spot where she knew they must be, she thought she could see a glimmer of something, and the glimmer died out, and the world became very red and painful.

“The light hurts,” she said, and her voice wavered, as if she were about to fall asleep.

“We’re outside,” said Malach. “Here, let me make this for you.”

He ripped off a portion of his shirt, and he wrapped it around his sister’s head, so that it concealed her eyes.

“Did you see anyone else come out of there, and they couldn’t see?” asked the girl.

“I saw some people,” Malach said. “But I don’t know if they were just walking slowly or if their eyes hurt.”

And the girl thought about this. Her brother continued to lead her through the warren of streets outside the palace. She heard a few men shouting, and a woman’s voice, trailing behind them, very softly, very sternly, and sometimes she could hear marching in the distance somewhere to the right. Mainly she tried to listen to her brother’s steps and the way that he walked.

“We’re at the gates,” Malach said. “Are you tired? Do you want a fig? They were giving them out to the people waiting.”

And the girl took a fig in her hand, and started to chew on it, and felt it in her mouth, and the brother and sister began their journey back. When night fell, and the girl's eyes came to hurt less and less, she took off the blindfold, and she squinted at the fuzzy shape of her brother beside her.

"Look at the moon!" her brother said. "It's huge and right in front of us!"

And the girl squinted ahead, and she thought she could see the moon, but it reminded her of the twisting shape she had seen, and she decided she would rather not look at it now. At last, they came in through a break in the fence, and the girl let Malach answer her parent's questions, and then she went to bed. The room was very dark and she was staring up at the ceiling, and she could see a great many strange, twisting shapes, some of them red, some of them green or grey, yellow or blue. And at times, they boiled like water, each bubble flashing with a different color, and at other times, they seemed to enlarge and contract and combine, their insides and outsides cycling between colors. Other violet shapes seemed to cross the ceiling like on bridges and they went from one side to the other. Wherever she looked, directly in front of her, she could see a circular area filled with these shapes, moving around like bees move around a hive. She wasn't sure if these shapes were new, or if they had always been there since when she closed her eyes tight, she could still see them as if they were within her own eyes.

And so, she was very relieved when Malach came into the room and lay down next to her since the light of their eyes together illuminated the room so that those shapes became harder to see, and the girl preferred it that way.

But after a while, she asked Malach to squint his eyes and look up at the ceiling and see if he could see the shapes too.

"Oh, I guess I do," he said after a moment. "You know, I saw them once before when the sky was grey, and it looked like there were very clear slugs crawling across it. I think those might be the invisible things that mom was talking about."

"Really?"

"Oh, I don't know... But I think I'm invisible too," Malach said. "But it's a secret."

Her sister laughed.

"What do you mean?"

"Well, I guess you've never noticed either. Look over at the door," he said, "and keep your eyes thrown there."

The girl did so, and a spot of light appeared on the door.

"Now hold up your fingers in front of your eyes, and keep looking past them at the door. You can see right through your fingers! And if you bring your fingers all the way up to your face, you can still see the door behind them!"

And the girl saw that it was true.

"That's why we're secretly invisible," Malach concluded.

"I see what you mean," she said.

And they continued to talk until they fell asleep.

Now, a few weeks later a messenger arrived from the king, and the message said that the girl had been selected to become a member of the court. The girl's parents were overjoyed, but the girl, who had been spending a lot of time lying in bed, day and night, said to them, "I don't want to go."

“Why not?” they asked.

“I don’t want to go. I like my own family.”

“Honey, we’ll still be here,” her mother said.

“But why should I have to give up my real family for a fake one! How is Malach going to fall asleep at night?” she asked.

“Listen,” her mother said. “You will always have your real family. And the king and his court will come to love you too, and then you’ll have two families, both of them real, whereas most people only have one.”

And the girl refused, and she went back into her room to escape the disappointment of her parents. That night, she fell into uneasy dreams. The devil knocked on her door, and her parents welcomed him inside. The devil offered her parents ever more tantalizing gifts, luxurious decorations and secret knowledge, and the devil offered to Malach even more. The girl watched as her family accepted gift after gift, and in exchange, they gave up first their hair, then their skin, then their muscles, then their organs, then at last the light in their eyes, so that in the end her mother and father and brother became nothing more than skeletons.

Then the devil turning to the girl, who was cowering in the corner, said, “Look at these bones, and see your family like they really are. For all human beings come down to this: the bones.”

And the girl was frightened and she flew out the window and ran as fast as she could into the street. The moon was high over head, and it smiled down at her, and projected a beam of light onto the street which formed the shape of an angel.

“Hello,” said the girl.

“Don’t be frightened,” said the angel.

“Will you give me my family back?” she asked.

“I will try,” said the angel, and they placed their hand on the girl’s forehead.

And at the coolness of the angel’s touch, the girl fell down through a thousand faces, and the faces of her parents were among them running beside her, and she wept harder and harder the more she remembered those things she had forgotten. And then all at once, the memories froze and melted away, as if they had splattered against a sheet of glass, and were dripping down it. The girl pressed her hands against the glass and felt uneasy in her gut.

“But where’s the rest?” she asked.

“It’s still inside you,” answered the angel.

“But why can’t I see them? I very much want to see my parents again. It feels awful that I can’t.”

The angel bent down and embraced the girl, and held her close. They stroked her hair, and as they did, they said, “If you didn’t feel uneasy, nothing would prevent you from seeing them clearly.”

And the angel raised up the girl’s face so they were looking eye to eye. And each time the angel blinked, the air became hotter and hotter, and the girl’s face began to shine with sweat, and she was breathing heavily, and she wished very much to close her eyes, and bury herself in the angel’s arms.

And the angel murmured something, and carried her far up into the sky.

And looking down, the girl could see the thousand forms of the devil toiling over the earth. In the dead of night, the devils entered the houses of every girl and boy, and threw their parents over their shoulders, and carried them to pyres they had built in the center of town. They tossed the parents into those places where the vital smoke disappeared into the air, and only the cracked bones were left, and the devils arranged them in the shapes of men and women until the whole earth was covered with those shapes. A fire came then and engulfed the whole earth, and the earth was a skull, and the smoke around it was made of the pieces of all the parents.

“What are they doing?” asked the girl.

“The devil was born into the world like an orphan, and he searches the universe for a glimpse of his parents.”

Then the girl looked up into the mass of stars, and in the blur of the sky, she thought she could see a group of figures embracing.

“And what are those?” she asked.

“In the beginning of time,” the angel said, “there was the family, and the family lived in the stars, and governed all things. From the eyes of family emerged a light which shot through the smoke of the universe, and entered the first things. And as it entered the first things, it reflected off them, and bounced from eye to eye, and entered the second things. And from the second things, it entered the third things, and so on, and even today, this light emanates from the eyes of all things. But because the light is distributed among all things, and there are a great many things, it’s very difficult to see the family clearly in any single thing. For each thing reflects the family only weakly. But if the light of all things were to be bent and focused, and strengthened from all quarters, the family could be seen as clearly as in the beginning of time. For there are no families, but the one family, and no families are different.”

“Then that’s my family there?”

“Everything is yours,” the angel said.

And the girl dropped back to earth, and she woke from her dream with a cry. Malach, lying beside her, started to cry as well, and their mother and father rushed into the room. And the girl looked into their eyes, and tried to perceive what lay inside them, but the more she tried, the harder it became, and she felt herself getting brighter and brighter, until at last cried out, “I don’t want to go!”

And she burned up there, and what was left in her bed was ashes, and where her eyes had been, a diamond prism lay. And his parents wept, and Malach took in hand the prism, and the light of his eyes hit it, and it glowed ever so slightly.

He took the prism and kept it on his person for the rest of his days.

## THE QUEEN

Now the bat king had taken himself a queen when he ascended to the throne. This is the story of how that happened. In the north of the kingdom there was place called Kof. The people rarely left this place because in one part of the land there was a lake blessed with fishes, and in another part of the land there was forest blessed with timber, and in another part of the land there was a field blessed with sheep. The people of Kof were all of the class who walked with their eyes straight ahead. They, however, had the custom of instructing their children to beat drums at each of the three blessed places so that they only had to listen for the sound of the drums in order to walk in a straight line to whichever place they wished to go.

There was a young girl who lived by the lake, and she would swim across it and back every day, and would look down at the fish, and would hide when people came near. This is why that should have been the case. The people of Kof were divided into two clans, and the blessedness of each of the three places was apportioned to them. There was a rule that one could only wed a man or a woman in the opposite clan. This practice developed for the following reason. There was a story about the man who invented the first drum. This man had the habit of delighting the people of Kof by playing music. He would do this by beating on his own body, his chest, his stomach, his legs, and his cheeks, and also the bodies of others who helped him. In fact, he taught this art to many willing students. As word of this man's art spread throughout Kof, more and more people congregated in order to see him, so that those farthest away couldn't hear his beating. One of the man's students solved this problem in the following way. He collected up stumps from the forest as many as he could uproot. And he told his students, "This is my body." Then he built a fire in the stumps so that they became hollowed out, and he said, "This is the fire of the sun which enters us and hollows out our ignorance." And finally he strung the hide of a sheep across each stump, and bound it tightly, and said, "This is our clothing so that what's inside us can be seen from out."

So the first drum was built, and by beating the drum in place of his body, the man was able to delight even those who stood farthest away. Now, the students of the man came to have students of their own, and one of them saw the practice of the man, to beat the drum before he began to play in earnest, so that those passing by would be attracted to him. This student stole one of the drums, and in order to impress the others, he began to beat the drum loudly by the lake. The people came and they ran in a straight path there and were disappointed not to find the famous drummer. But the student reminded them of how quickly and easily they had found him, and how they were not twisting around the paths between the trees. So this practice became established among the people of Kof. There is another version of the story in which this last student was in fact the inventor of the first drum, and that the man who is acclaimed to have turned it into an art was in fact a student of his student.

So it happened that the people of Kof were happy in that place, and they did not go hungry, and they were bound together by the drumming in the three blessed places, and they neither gained nor lost their number but by a free choice. There was, however, a disagreement between the family of the inventor of the drum and the man who was the student of his student, that is, a disagreement over the origin of the drum, and neither family was willing to leave the land of Kof. Therefore, the people became divided, and they began to speak more and more

harshly. For the people of the first clan said, “The beating of the drum is like the sweet voice of a child, or the terrible pounding of a cursed place, or the movements of the excited body. It is not like a message as one gives when, coming to a place in search of someone and finding them absent, one says: ‘Let them know I was here.’ Rather it is like the message a teacher leaves to a student, as when the one says to the other: ‘Seek me out when you remember what you had to say.’” And the people of the second clan said, “All things are expressed in the beating of the drum by the changing of one rhythm into another, and in order to speak with the drum, these different rhythms must be understood. We must understand these rhythms in order to bind ourselves tightly to the land of Kof.”

So the drums came to be like very loud mouths. There is a story about how this came about too. One of the men went to the opposite clan, and listened to the sound of their drums, and he thought what he heard was a voice, and he laughed at what it said. And he explained what he’d heard to a woman whom he desired, and he taught her to hear what the drums said. Her brothers laughed at her because she had talked to this man of the other clan, and she came to greatly distrust what those around her said. When the man attempted to seduce her by beating on his chest words meant to entice her and then saying them aloud, she cut his tongue out of his mouth. When the man returned to his clan, he could speak only in grunts and had to learn to make himself be understood. As a joke, one of his brothers went around imitating his speech, and because he also happened to be one of the drummers of the clan, he began to imitate the speech of the grunting man on his drum in order to make his brothers and sisters laugh. This art spread to many people, and they used it at first to tell jokes, but then they applied the same art for other messages, and soon the drums came to be used for slander and flattery. And when one clan would speak to the other, they would complain, “I listened to what they had to say, and all I heard was grunting.”

So all day and night the land of Kof thundered with the sound of its drums, and the people attached drums to their bodies so that as they walked from place to place, they could beat them. And in this way, the people became incensed and began to harm each other. When they were exhausted, they repented, and so established the law that a member of a clan could only wed a member of the opposite clan. For one of their number spoke like this: “Now, there’s a lot that’s valuable in each clan. What we can’t agree on is: what’s natural to drumming, and what’s not. Therefore a man must wed a woman of the opposite clan and the man should go to live with the clan of the woman so that the children will see the virtues of both clans, and we can show them that the source of our disagreement does not lie in our being dull-witted by nature, but that our disagreement is a disagreement as among friends. For in this way, our two clans will bear children who are a combination of their parents, and they won’t be strangers to one another.”

At first this was done willingly, but soon the people became forgetful and bore children with members of the same clan, and so it happened that such people came to be punished severely. Now, the young girl who lived by the lake had just such parents, and her father now lived among the opposite clan with a proper wife, and her mother raised her along with the sons and daughters of another man, and both regretted this fact. And so, the girl came to feel that she was unwanted by her parents. And although she had met her father, she had been very young when she had met him, and she distrusted herself to recognize him if she were to run into him

again. For this reason, she became very adept at studying the faces of others, especially in the eyes, in hopes of discovering whether they might be related to her or not.

Now, the king had come to the land of Kof in order to meet the people there, and he was treated to a great feast, and the people of both clans drummed for him. They set their drums in a line, and marched back and forth, and argued. When night fell, and the people were sleeping, the king went to walk by the lake. The moon was out, and the king greeted the moon like an old friend. He spoke to the moon as he walked by the lake, until he saw a glimmer in the sand, and he walked over to that place, and he saw the girl lying on the shore of the lake, and the glimmer had come from her eyes.

“Who are you?” asked the king.

And the girl did not answer, and the king sat down on the shore, and leaned over her face, so that he blocked out the moon, and he looked down at her. And the girl was astonished to see his eyes, for she thought she recognized him.

“Who are you?” she asked.

“I’m the king,” he answered.

“Then I don’t know you.”

“No, I don’t think so.”

And the girl said something, and then got up, and took a stick, and began to draw the face of the king in the sand as he looked directly at her. And the king waited, and went over to see the drawing, and he saw that his legs were the roots of a tree, and his face was in the leaves, and above his head fluttered a ring of birds.

“Where did you see this?” asked the king.

And the girl said, “I was looking at you.” And the king took the girl in his hands, and tested her neck, and he saw that it would not move, and she could only look straight ahead.

And the king asked her to draw him again while he looked up at the moon, and this time she drew him with bats flying across his face. And he asked her to draw him while he looked down at the ground, and this time she drew him with his fingers outstretched. And he asked her again, “Where did you see these things?”

And she said, “I don’t know, I guess.”

“And you don’t need to look down at the sand while you work?”

“Why would I? I know how my hands work.”

“Then will you draw yourself for me?”

And the girl set to work in the moonlight. And she worked for some time, and then she showed the king what she had done. And the king saw that she had drawn herself kneeling at the edge of a cliff and beyond her he could see a mass of clouds that were dark and twisted near the ground and light and delicate near the sky, and light was thrown out of these clouds, or so it seemed, for the face of the girl also seemed to throw out light. And there was a ring around her head.

“What is this?” asked the king, pointing to the ring.

And the girl answered, “That’s what I can see with my eyes.”

And the king laughed. Now he had never encountered a person like this before, and so he asked her mother for her hand in marriage, and in this way the girl became queen. For he had asked her, “Would you like to live with me?”

And she had asked, "Are there drums at the place where you live?"

And the king had said no, and the girl had said, "Yes, I'll go with you then."

But as he was leaving, the mother of the girl said to him, "You must know: the girl has been torn inside."

And the king laughed, because to him she seemed more than healthy.

Now, the king and queen lived in the palace, and shared in the administration of the kingdom. The queen had never been in such a place before where people of the three classes mingled together, and every night she posed a new question to the king.

One night she asked, "Why do some of the people look down at my feet? It hurts me like they know some secret about me and don't want to say it."

Another night she asked, "Why do some people look over my head? When they do, it hurts me like they're ignoring me, too disgusting to look at."

And on another night, she asked, "Why do you turn your head away from me sometimes like my eyes are too terrible to look into?"

And each time, the king answered that this was the nature of the people in the kingdom, and he said that she alone had a gift.

"For you alone," he said to her, "can see what's above and below by looking straight ahead."

"And what are you?" she asked the king. "Why are you the only one who can look in all three places?"

And the king did not know what to say.

In order to please her, the king took her to the forest near where he used to live and showed her the birds who lived in that place, and she was very pleased with those things. So that they could speak in secret, the king and queen adopted the calls of birds and made noises to each other throughout the day, and only they could hear them. And in this fashion, the king and queen went on many adventures together and traveled from one corner of the kingdom to the other. They would travel in separate wagons and whistle to each other as they went, and in each place they would inspect the tracks of the birds in order to see how they had perfected the art of representation.

Upon returning to the kingdom, however, the queen was again stricken with another illness. One night she said to the king, "My knees hurt like they're covered in ice, and it's painful to move them."

And the king wrapped her in blankets, and he asked what had happened that day.

"Nothing," she said. "Only I saw some men asking after ladders."

On another night, she said to the king, "My stomach hurts like there's something rotten inside it."

And the king had the windows opened, so that she might get some fresh air.

"It's cold," she said.

And the king wrapped his own arms around her, and asked her what had happened.

"Nothing," said the queen. "I only went for a walk in the labyrinth."

And on a third night, she said to the king, "My head hurts, as if there's something very knotted up inside it."

And the king massaged her forehead, and asked what had happened.

“Nothing,” she said. “Only I felt very lonely today. Why do I feel this way?”

“I don’t know,” said the king.

And the queen asked, “Why does my body hurt?”

And the king began to think, but his thoughts led him nowhere.

Now because of the illness of the queen, the king had cleared away an expanse by the palace, and had a great hole dug and fortified with stone, and in this way he built a lake for the queen so that she could swim back and forth because she was always happy doing that. For this reason, however, the people became resentful of the queen because she alone was able to float as she pleased, and turn and be as inconstant as a wave. Some said that the queen was like a fire on the earth which jumps from place to place without any reason for being in one place or another, and others said the queen was like the fire of the sun when clouds conceal its reflection on earth. For when they approached the queen for advice, she behaved inconstantly towards them, and sometimes granted their requests and other times did not.

One night, while the king and the queen were lying in bed, the queen asked him, “Why won’t you take off your beard?” For he had told her the story whereby he had obtained the beard. “Because I want to see you as you are,” she said.

And the king whispered to the bats that roosted on his chin, and he asked them to depart for a while. But they were used to hanging there, and liked it, and refused. And so the king told them that they could also roost on the chin of the queen, and she would draw for them even more lovely trees that he could. And so the bats spoke among themselves, and glided gently to the queen, and settled there.

Now the queen was able to see that which was above and below her. She beheld her own body, and she ran her hands along it. And she ran out onto the balcony and saw the stars and the moon as they were and not as they appeared in the water. And she said, “How solid everything is!” And the king was sitting on the bed, and he could only see the mosaics on the ceiling.

Now, the queen went down into the city, and she said that looking above a person, she could see the hanging strings that stretch from their necks to the farthest reaches of the sky, and looking below, she could see the snares that reach out from the earth and bind themselves around the knees. And she whispered to the bats that they might lunge out and bite through those strings, and the people began to fall one by one. And she took the loose strings and knotted them up and added them to the knot that was growing ever tighter inside her. And the king followed in her wake, staring up at the sky, trying to see the strings, until he was almost able, and the longer he walked with his eyes fixed to the sky, the more like a child he became, for he was unused to walking in this way. Much time passed, and the king grew ever younger, for the queen fed the bats berries and blood, and they had no desire to return to the chin of the king.

So, in accordance with his nature, the king began to wander in earnest, and every sight brought him close to tears. For it was as if he had awoken from some strange dream, and was again the person who had wandered as a boy. He would find himself staring at a candle fastened to the wall, and the invisible finger that had lit it for him, or he would be plucking a fruit from a tree, and he would feel the invisible hand that had plucked it for him. And he looked at the necks of women that had a few freckles on it, and he would feel the warmth of a neck against his face, and a soft chin on his head, since this was how his mother had taught him that love inheres in all things.

And the king worried over his memories fearing that one or another of them might be missing, and he repeated to himself, again and again, “Nothing can be lost. Nothing is ever lost. There is nothing that cannot be regained.”

But being unable to look into the eyes of the people, the king was no longer fit to rule the kingdom. And his soul wept in secret, and he sat among the people and would not speak. And the people brought him gifts in order to cheer him, and the king turned the gifts over in his hands, and because he could not see the face of the giver, he turned away for every gift threw him into greater and greater debt.

And he saw himself at the bottom of a great pit, and he loved the light which sunk down into the hole from the air above him, and a thousand hands reached out from holes in the sides of the pit, and petted him and offered him things. And he took them, and he could not carry them upon his person, and so he dropped them, and they accumulated beneath him, and with each gift he rose ever higher upon a mountain of debt that never diminished. And he cringed from the touch of the fingers as he loved them, and the hands began to wither and fall, and each finger turned dry and gray, and crunched beneath him. The pit became cloudy with dust, and the dust blocked out the grasping hands, and the entire tunnel shimmered in a cloud of light. And the king loved it and he was bathed in it, and every nail that fell onto him cut him, and every nail was beautiful, and he breathed in deeply the dust of the pit so that it choked him. And he hugged the dust to him, for he saw that the ways of every man and woman are pure. And he sat on the arms and hands in a pile, and he knew no man more lowly than he, since he was filled to brimming with love. And deep within the pit, and without a thought, the king cried out, and he saw that his heart was broken, and that it leaked.

And so, when the people came to be judged, he could not judge them. He rested his head against the shoulder of the queen, and he said to her, “Every word they speak is like a beautiful, sad child, and nothing a child says can be judged.”

And she spoke to him in anger, and she cried, “You want the people to torture me! Don’t you know that all of them hate me, and think that I’ve done this to you, and crippled you, and hurt you? Well, are you so strong that you won’t pass judgement on me?”

And she left him, and she judged the people harshly, and sent them from the palace bent in fear.

And she asked the king, “And you won’t pass judgement on me?”

And he refused.

And the queen went down into the city and gathered up the good and the bad alike, and she sent them away into exile, and she asked the king again, “And you won’t pass judgement on me?”

And the king said to her, “I can’t.”

And the queen cried out, “Am I so beneath your notice that you can refuse me? Every pain is the judgement of the world, and you feel none of it!” And she hurled the most terrible insults at him, and drove him from the palace. For his very presence seemed to mock her.

So the king went down into the city, and it did not seem like he walked on his own, and instead it seemed like the city walked up towards him, and it covered him from sight.

And on the first night of hiding, a house came to him, and in the house lived a family who walked with their eyes on the ground, and the king was their guest. He was treated to a

meal, and the family collected it from the ground. And the boy of the family washed his feet, and the king listened to their conversation, and they talked about how the carpets seemed to stretch away from them when they got back home, and how their bodies had ceased to move although their eyes were still running forward. And the king watched the tops of their heads as they took turns holding the baby girl tight against their chests, and their heads rocked back and forth so that the ground came up to meet them and receded again, and they hummed a song for the girl that moved in time with the rising and falling of their heads. As they slept, too, they rocked themselves against each other, and rested their heads on the chests of the mother and father, and the children fell asleep stroking their fingers against their lips, and the father fell asleep as well. But the mother stirred herself and began to pace back and forth, and she spoke to the king.

“How many steps did you take today?” she asked.

And the king had no answer.

“It’s important to remember the number of steps you’ve taken,” the mother said, “so you can always return to a certain place. For every morning, we look at our hands, and we’ve arranged our hands in the following manner. The thumb of the left hand is two steps, and each finger is twice as many steps as the previous finger. So that the next finger is four steps, and then eight steps, and so on. And each finger but the thumb has four places: the three joints and the tip. And the four places are: forward, back, left, and right. And so when we look at our hands, we know what places are so many steps away and in a certain place, and we never forget those places we’ve been and return to. Of course, a thumb can only tell us three directions, but since the left thumb is the home, and the right thumb is the farthest, it’s easy to remember those places, in any case.”

She finished her explanation, and the king thanked her for what she said, and he laid himself out to sleep, but he could not sleep for thinking of her. And in the middle of the night, there was a knock at the door, and when the door was opened, a messenger was there, and he came from the queen. And he said, “The queen wants you to come back to the palace. She says she needs your help because she’s lost the use of her legs.”

But the king sent the messenger back to the queen and did not follow him.

And on the second night of hiding, the city took the king to a house where lights danced on the roof, and the roof was made of pine branches laid across the tops of the walls, and from these branches hung various objects that sparkled and gathered in the light. And those who lived there could only look up at them. And the king was welcomed inside, and he was treated to the fruits that grow on trees.

Now, the king knew something of these people, being of the same class, and so as he ate, the king asked them, “How is it that when you walk around you don’t get lost? Or maybe you do, and you don’t want to?”

“Maybe you haven’t heard,” said the husband. “Our lives are marked up in the stars.”

“I don’t understand.”

The husband cleared away some of the branches of the roof so that the stars were shining through and said, “For a long time, we’ve looked up at the stars, and we know about how they move. So if you tell us where the stars have been all your life, we can see how those stars have moved, and by seeing how those stars have moved, you can guess how you yourself are going to move.”

But the king did not know how the stars had been in his case, so he watched as the husband looked at the stars for his wife, and for their children.

He started with the smallest child, a young girl. When a certain star rose against another star, her father said to her, "There is something very important you are forgetting." And because this star happened to be in the middle of the sky, her father said, "Maybe it has to do with us."

And the girl said, "I know! Tomorrow I have carry in the water and place it on the shelf."

And when a certain star fell against another star, her father said, "You've finished something very important recently." And because this star happened to be near the horizon, her father said, "Maybe it has to do with the kingdom."

And the girl said, "Yes! Just today I finished helping our neighbors build the second storey of their house, and I remembered to bring them fruit using one of the ladders."

And the father embraced his daughter and held her up so that he could see her face, only now her father's face was hidden from her, and all she could see were the branches of the roof and the stars. So he kissed her on the chin, and moved on to the next member of the family, and the king waited until they had finished.

Then the father turned to him and said, "You see, we don't have to wander because by looking at the stars we can remember everything we need to know."

And the king asked, "But how do you know what a person will do just by looking at the stars?"

And the father laughed and said, "After all, we all see the same stars."

And a knock came on the door, and the father opened it, and there was a messenger there from the queen, and the messenger said, "The queen needs you. She's alone in the palace and afraid, and she says she's lost the use of her arms."

But the king did not go back to her.

And on the third night of hiding, the king stayed at a house where people walked with their eyes straight ahead. And whereas in the first house, the people knelt as they ate, and in the second house, the people stood as they ate, in this house, the people sat across from one another as they ate. And after dinner, the mother massaged the faces of her children with oil, and the father massaged the mother's face. And afterwards, they gathered together various small pots in which were held certain pigments. And the father, the mother, and the three children took turns making marks on the faces of the others.

"Why are you painting your faces?" asked the king.

And the youngest boy explained, "I will tell you why! Each of us is different from the other. For example, my sister there acts like a cat, being always neat and clean. My other sister there is like a little bird, always hopping around and pecking at seeds. I myself am like a bear, because I am always lumbering around and like to give hugs. My mother is like a doe, because she has very gentle eyes, and my father is like a bull, because he can carry the most out of all of us. Now, everyone has an animal that is like them, and many people have the same animal."

His sister, the bird, now spoke, "But, of course, we aren't really the same as animals. Only, everyone has a certain type of face, and a certain type of eye, and we think of those different types as different kinds of animals."

“So if I have a friend who has eyes like a bird’s, like my sister’s,” continued the boy, “and I have to do something for my friend, I make a mark on my sister’s face. So that when I look at my sister, I think of my friend, and what I have to do for him.”

“Of course, we like to make our marks attractive,” said the cat sister. “Otherwise, we’ll be made fun of.”

“Of course,” said the king. “What type of animal do you think I am?”

“But we can’t see your eyes!” said the boy.

Just then a knock came on the door, and the boy ran to answer it, and a messenger from the queen was there. And the messenger said, “I came with you, and now you’ve abandoned me! I’m confined to my bed, and I cannot move, and no one can save me because when anyone draws near, my body twists in pain, and my face is twisted too. I can’t control myself, and I have given myself up to it. That is my message to you this night.”

As the messenger was speaking, the king went out into the street and heard what was there. And he gazed up at the houses around him and saw that the same life ran through them, like when a wheel turns, and the wheel touches the ground, and the wheel connects to the axle, and the wheel rises to the body of the wagon, even as the wheel is going forward. He thanked the family for their hospitality, and left for the palace, because he had conceived a plan by which to save the life of the queen.

What he did was this. He went to the garden of the palace, where a tree grew that could be seen from the window of the queen. And he had his arms and legs bound, and he had himself hung from a branch of the tree upside down, and a pit dug underneath him. And he began to cry aloud, and as he did this, he sent attendants to the queen so that she might be moved to the window and see him there. And they did this, and they opened the window, and the queen was afraid at what she saw, the bound king hanging above the pit.

And the king shouted, “Come to me!”

And the queen shouted, “I cannot move!”

And the king shouted, “How do you feel?”

And the queen did not respond.

And the king shouted, “How do you feel?”

And the queen did not respond.

And so the king bade one of his female attendants beat him with a club from the back. And the attendant did so, and the king began to swing back and forth, and the queen cried aloud, “It’s like there are hot embers on my feet!”

And the king bade his attendant put hot embers on his feet, and a few fell off his feet and singed the hair of the king, and the garden stank with the smell of his flesh.

And the king shouted to the queen, “How do you feel?”

And the queen did not respond.

And the attendant beat the king with her club.

And the king shouted, “Come to me!”

And the queen cried out, “I can’t move!”

And the attendant beat the king with her club.

And the king shouted, “How do you feel?”

And through her weeping, the queen said, “It’s like there are needles in my thighs.”

And the king bade the attendant pierce his thighs with needles, and she did so, and little streams of blood trickled down his thighs.

And the king shouted, "How do you feel?"

And the queen cried out, "Stop!"

And the attendant beat the king with her club.

And the king shouted, "How do you feel?"

And the queen cried out, "Please stop!"

And the attendant beat the king with her club.

And the queen said softly, "It's like there is hot poison in my belly."

And king bade the attendant give him a draught of poison, and she did so, and the king began to vomit. And through his vomit, he shouted: "Come to me!"

And the queen shouted, "Please stop! I can't move!"

And the attendant beat the king with her club.

And the king shouted, "How do you feel?"

And the queen whispered, "Like I can't breathe."

And the king bade the attendant wrap a rope around his chest so that his breathing would be constricted, and the king began to choke as he tried to draw in air through his vomit, and he shouted once more, "How do you feel?"

And the queen whispered, "Like my head is spinning."

And the king bade the attendant twist the rope from which he hung, so that it would spin around unbearably, and she did so, and the king began to spin.

And the queen cried, "Stop! Please stop!"

And the king wept, "What other pains do you feel?"

And the queen whispered hoarsely, "I want to die."

And the king bade the attendant hold his head up, and pour spirits into it, until the king was so inebriated that he lost control of his body.

And the queen began to whisper to herself over and over again. And she watched the attendant place her neck against the face of the king so that he could smell her scent, and so that he could feel the warmth of it. And the king began to nuzzle the neck of the attendant, and weep, and then the attendant removed her neck, and the king began to wail and struggle against his bonds. And he cried, "Nothing is lost! Nothing is lost!"

Then the attendant cut the rope from which he hung, and the king fell into the dark pit beneath him, and groveled in the dirt, and cried aloud, "I want to die."

And the attendant handed him a knife.

And the queen saw the glimmer of the knife, and it cut through her bonds, and she forgot herself, and leapt from the window, and rushed to the king. She crawled down into the pit, and undid the ropes that bound him, and held his head against her own.

"You don't want to die," she said to him. "I want to die."

And the king whispered to her, as if not understanding his own words, "You are not your body; your body is a part of you. You are not your pain; your pain is a part of you. You came to me."

"I came to you," the queen said.

"You are not your pain."

And the bats flew from her chin to his, and they rested there.

And the king stroked them with his hand, and took them from his chin, and held them, and said to them, "You cannot stay with me any longer." And for this reason, he taught the bats the art of seeing in the dark by drawing pictures with sound so that they could seek out places to roost for the night.

"For," he told them, "when sight fails, you may see with your ear."

PART TWO

## THE PRINCESSES

Now, it happened that the king and queen had two beautiful daughters, and at the time of their birth, the king had a vision in a dream. In his dream, he had come to the throne very early, and had never known his parents. He was not ignorant of the laws of the kingdom however, because all the laws of the kingdom were written in a book which was kept in the palace. They said that the previous king had inherited the book from his father and he from his father before him, and that the laws had been formulated with great wisdom to guarantee the harmony of the kingdom. This is the vision that the king saw.

Many years ago, the first king, whose name had been forgotten, had snatched the laws from a great whirlwind that had invaded the kingdom. The king flew into the whirlwind, where leaves ripped from all the trees in the kingdom were fluttering around each other, and some of the leaves had dates written in the veins on them, and others had names, and written accounts of ancient voyages, or the stories of wise kings, or great romances, or the history of disputes and tragedies, and accounts of the various powers of men and women and children. And the king had flown into the whirlwind with the help of a wagon, and he tried in vain to collect up all the leaves, but after many hours, he had only collected a few. Seeing that this was the case, he took his wagon and rather than fly against the current of the wind, he began to circle around the whirlwind, thereby increasing its speed and intensity. And he flew in ever tighter circles so that the whirlwind grew thinner and thinner, and spun more intensely, until at last the whirlwind was reduced to the width of a human hair, being spun between the fingers, and extended all the way from the ground to sky. And along the length of the whirlwind were suspended all the spinning leaves in a column that could be seen from all over the world. And then, with a great crack, the whirlwind died away, and the lightest of the leaves were flung into the sky; the leaves of medium weight were flung in all directions across the earth; and the heaviest leaves fluttered onto the ground of the kingdom.

The king directed his chariot to that place, and collected up the leaves that had fallen there, and copied out what was written on the leaves, and this was the book of laws. The leaves were of different shapes and colors depending on which tree they had come from, and because there are twelve types of trees, the king organized his book of laws into twelve sections, each of which put forth the laws that governed the twelve tribes of the kingdom. Each tribe kept its own laws, and because these laws were the most profound laws, they were complementary to the laws of the other tribes, and disputes rarely arose.

Now, the king saw that the neighboring kingdoms had only the middle leaves, on which a great many stories were written. They knew, because of the shape and color of the leaves, to whom each of these stories applied, but when these stories were lived, they resulted only in grief and violence. Therefore, their ranks grew confused, and these people were easily defeated, and they were jealous of the wisdom of the king.

Finally, the lightest of the leaves, which had been thrown into the sky, only descended every once and a while, and only the quickest and most agile people could catch them. Each of these leaves had a joke written on it so subtle that anyone who heard it laughed.

Now the king decided to review the state of the kingdom in order to learn more of the wisdom of his great grandfather. He spent a great deal of time searching the book of laws to

uncover its secrets. He would lean over the book deep into the night until sand leaked from his eyes, and fell onto the pages, and little piles would accumulate and disperse and when the piles became too large, he would wipe the sand away, and when he did so, he would feel the raised letters with each finger, as they swam from column to column unmoored.

One night, as rain was falling softly into the stone basins outside, the knees of the king shook terribly, and he felt a thread of pain, which ran from the back of his neck, through his shoulders, and down to his seat, lift and rise delicately into the air, and then another, and then another. Clarity extended in all directions around him as if a window had been opened somewhere; like a sudden lull, it hovered over the palace, and entered his mouth and lungs. The room was on fire, and smoke churned across the floor, and the wind swept up the flames in waves and waves, darkening the pools of water that trembled underneath. The king lifted his head as if remembering his name had been called; and at once, unknowingly, he breathed the fresh air above his head, which the fire had not yet consumed. And in that moment, the letters came to rest in place, like children settling their heads between a sleeping father and mother.

So the king awoke from his dream. He told the dream to the queen who was lying at his side. And he asked her, "What does it mean?"

And she cried, "How should I know?"

And she struck the king on his breast, and she kept her hand there, and she felt a great pain, and in this way the two princesses were born.

And it soon came to pass that they wept when they were parted, and so they were always kept together. Now, the princesses were both of the class whose eyes are fixed to the sky, and they had a habit of lying together and looking up and murmuring to each other. And the first princess was fascinated by her sister's body, and she would grasp at her sister's arms and legs, as if to move them; and the second princess would feel it and laugh, and she would move her arms as well. And the first princess would swipe her hand against her sister's face, and the second princess would swipe at her own face. And at times, the first princess would grow excited and press herself against her sister, and try to climb atop her. And she would swipe at her sister's face as if trying to gather it up, and she did this for hours and hours, and she would pounce upon her sister when they were re-united after a time, and the second princess would laugh, and she would not laugh unless her sister were near; and as she laughed, the first princess would bat against her face again and again until there came a time when the second princess began to look down in place of up.

And when the two princess became old enough, they were allowed to enter the garden beside the palace, and it was there that they played. They would toss about the grass, and they would walk back and forth and practice, for they had seen many elegant walks in the palace. And there was a certain boy who lived among them, and he had a very bad walk. And he would swing his arms from side to side and he would walk with wide steps, and his head would jerk to the side. And this made the princesses think about walking. And they decided that they did not want to walk like him.

And as they practiced their walk every morning, they made a certain journey around the garden which began by the steps, and they were left there by the young girl who was ordered so as to oversee them. And the two princesses would free their hands, and set off along a corridor formed by cracked stone on either side, and it was open to the sky, and vines grew along it.

“The leaves!” said the first princess.

And they grabbed a few as they came to the garden proper and they turned to the left as usual. In the middle of the garden was the tree and various children played around it, and the princesses walked along wall of the garden, and glanced at the other children. Small, slender trees had been planted along the sides, and the princesses stopped at each one and walked around it; and then they came to a place where a tree had been removed recently, and all that remained of it was a mound of dirt, and they talked about the tree that was missing, and they placed a little grass on the mound as if to remember it.

And then they came to the open spot where there were no trees, and they spun around until they were dizzy, and it seemed as the world itself was spinning, and it spun on the ground. And they sat down abruptly. And then they got up, and joined hands, and spun around together, until they could hold on no longer, and then they were thrown away in different directions.

Soon they came to a place where a wall had been built, and a pump was there, and they performed their usual action, which was to throw themselves against the wall, and make as if to bounce off of it, and they reeled away from the wall, and fell against the wall of the palace nearby, and fell back and forth, and with each bounce they called out “Oof!” until they determined it was time to move on, and then they ended up back where they started.

So they began to walk around the garden again somewhat more regally, and this time they spoke, and the second princess said, “Let’s have a conversation!”

“What should we talk about?” asked the first princess.

The second princess gazed furiously at the things around them and at last she asked, “Which do you like better, day or night?”

“I suppose I like the day better,” the first princess said.

They walked a little further.

“But we hardly have a choice,” she mused.

“For my own part, I like the day as well,” said the second princess.

And they walked a little further, and came to the place where the tree had been uprooted.

“That was a bad conversation,” said the first princess.

“Well,” the second princess said, “the night is very different from the day. Of course, one sees the same things.”

“Yes. In the day, things are friendly--”

“When the weather is nice.”

“Yes. Whereas at night, things are more unfriendly.”

“Yes, I don’t like going out at night,” agreed the second princess.

And they walked a little further.

“But of course one does see the same things,” said the first princess.

“They seem different.”

“Yes,” said the first princess, thinking. “I’ve changed my mind. I like the night better.”

“Really?”

“Well, I was thinking. In the day, things are there for us as we like them, whereas in the night things are there whether we like them or not.”

“And you like that better?”

And the first princess laughed, and said: “Yes, I like that. Though--”

“What sorts of things do you like?” asked the second princess, intrigued. “Do you like me?”

“Yes, I like you,” said the first princess. “Don’t you think this is a much better conversation now?”

“Yes! What shall we talk about next?”

“Oh-- but what would be the best conversation?” asked the first princess.

And the second princess did not quite know how to answer; and as she stood thinking about it, the boy with the bad walk came up to them, and he spoke, saying to the princesses, “Hello. What are you doing?”

“We were just having a conversation,” answered the first princess with a certain air about her.

The boy hesitated, and he looked from the face of the first princess to the face of the second princesses, and the first princess had very large eyes, and her face reminded him of a bird, a very beautiful bird; and the second princess reminded him more of a rabbit, but also the way that his mother looked. And he asked, “May I join you?”

And the first princess said, “You want to join us?”

“Yes, I’m very bored over there.”

And he gestured back towards the other children, and then he waited for their answer.

“What do you like better, night or day?” asked the second princess, and they began to walk.

“But it’s a silly question. Everybody likes day!” interrupted the first princess.

“I like the morning,” said the boy.

“Well,” said the first princess, and the second princess laughed.

“I think we have to put it to the test,” the first princess continued. “I think we should come here and meet in the middle of the night, and see if we like that better, and come out in the morning, and so on.”

“I still like the morning best,” the boy said.

“Well, I don’t believe you,” said the first princess.

And they walked a little further.

And then the first princess said, “You two will have a conversation. I’m going to go prepare things for tonight.”

And she walked off and began to gather some sticks.

And the second princess and the boy continued to walk around the garden.

“You do walk strangely,” said the second princess.

“Really?”

“It’s alright,” said the princess, and she walked with him, and they went by the flower bed. And the second princess took the boy by the hand, and they began to walk, and the second princess tried to walk like him, in order to show him how he looked. And he laughed. And then he tried to walk as the princess walked, and it was different from how he usually walked.

“But how do you do it?” he asked her.

And she walked in her usual fashion.

And the boy tried to walk as she walked, and it was again something different.

“I’m sorry,” she said, “you see I don’t move my shoulders like that.”

“But!” said the boy, and he did the walk again, and the princess saw that beneath him was a little ant-hill, and she saw that he was avoiding it, and she wondered if perhaps she had avoided it as well. And she laughed. And she got up and walked with a little dip in her shoulder, and the boy followed her, and the second princess watched his feet which swung out to the side, and she said, “Here, I’ll show you.”

And she knelt down and crawled along beside the boy, and she moved his legs this way and that, and she got up, and she carried his arms along.

“See, walk like this. You’re very silly.”

And she let go of him, and he tottered off.

“No, no!”

And the second princess had him stand on her own feet, and she held his hands from behind him.

“Now, start with your right foot.”

And she went with her right foot.

“And then with the left.”

And she went with her left foot.

“But that’s not right,” said the princess. “You have to walk, you can’t just take steps, you see.”

And the second princess covered the boy’s eyes from behind, and she shouted, “Let’s go!”

And she started to race forward, and the boy tried to help her, and they ended up tumbling into the flowers.

“What do you think of that?” the second princess asked.

“My brother crawls everywhere, and I think I like that better.”

“Well, I like crawling too, but it is slower, after all.”

And the second princess began to crawl among the flowers.

“What are those flowers?” asked the boy.

“What do you mean?”

“These yellow ones.”

“I’m sorry, I can’t quite see them. I’m looking at some moss.”

“Oh.”

“Here, let me climb atop you,” said the second princess.

And she clambered atop the boy’s shoulders, and he carried her as he crawled, and now her nose was buried in the flowers.

“Yes, I like them.”

And the boy continued to crawl deeper and deeper into the flowers. And the princess picked one on the way, and she played with it.

“Where are we going?” she asked.

And the boy stopped, and the princess slid over his head, and they knelt across from each other, hidden in the grass.

The boy was very still for a moment, and then he said, “May I kiss you?”

“Kiss me?” the second princess laughed.

“I like to kiss the people that I like. Don’t your parents kiss?”

“I suppose they do.”

There was a moment of silence.

“I should like to be kissed,” the boy whispered.

And the second princess thought for a moment, and then she said, “Alright.”

And the boy leaned over and he kissed her, and then he grabbed her hair as he kissed her, and the second princess laughed and she leapt up.

“That feels very strange!” she said.

And the boy became very still again, and the princess knelt down.

“I’m sorry,” he said softly.

And she heard his breath come very shortly. And as if without thinking, he began to crawl away.

“Don’t go!” said the princess.

“But--”

“I kissed you!” said the second princess. “Aren’t we friends?”

And the boy began to move strangely, and he went up to her, and he very carefully felt for the flower that she had in her hand, and he took it from her, and he said again, “I’m sorry.” And thereafter, he crawled quickly away, and when he got to the end of the flowers, he stood and ran towards the palace, with the flower in his hand.

And the second princess lay down in the flower bed, and she inspected the dirt, and she thought about how strange the boy had been, and how she liked him, and this is where the first princess found her.

“I hope that boy comes to see the night with us, but I don’t think he will,” the second princess said.

“Look at this,” the first princess said, and she laid out a bundle of sticks and some rocks.

“What should we do with those?” asked the second princess.

And the first princess explained to her sister the purpose of each of the things she had collected, and in this way the two sisters passed the remainder of the day. When night fell, they were visited by their mother, who led them back to their room. And the girls leapt upon the bed, and the queen sat down beside them, and she was carrying a bag, and from the bag she took a book.

Now the book was filled with writing, for this was the practice of the queen. Since the princesses were born, she no longer cried out so frequently from pain, but there were periods in which she became very distraught. And she wished nothing more than to hide away, even from her children, although she could not say the reason why. The king would question her, and she would give different reasons, and the king would laugh because they seemed to deny one another. And in anger, she would leave him, and go into the palace, and the people there told stories about her, and they would laugh or be afraid at them. And the queen was ashamed of herself.

So she kept a record of her wrongs in this book, and she would list them there upon the bed, and each morning she would look at the list, and seek the forgiveness of a few each day, and she would draw a line through them when they had forgiven her. And this is what the queen did, and she had a book made for each of her daughters because she had inducted them into the

practice as well. And the princesses enjoyed the task very much, and each night they used to talk about their books, and offer each other advice as to how to seek forgiveness.

“And now, what did you do today?” the queen asked the sisters, who had come to sit on either side of her. “Well, you smell exactly like flowers,” she said to the second princess, and brought her head close to her nose.

“Yes, a certain boy and I were crawling in the flowers.”

“We had tried to have a conversation with him,” said the first princess.

“Yes, and then she decided to go make tools,” said the second princess.

“And what was his name?” asked their mother.

“I don’t know,” the second princess said.

“The boy with the funny walk,” the first princess said.

The queen laughed.

“How does he walk?”

And the two princesses jumped off the bed and demonstrated.

“I think I know him,” said the queen, and she got up and walked in the same way with her feet jutting out to the side. And the princesses laughed. “Yes, but he’s good.”

“He’s alright,” said the first princess.

“I like him,” said the second princess.

“Well, since we’re all agreed,” the queen said, “we won’t have to ask his forgiveness for making fun of him.”

“After all, he does walk like that,” said the first princess.

“I don’t think he minds,” said the second princess. “I don’t think he can walk any other way.”

And the queen sat down again on the bed, and asked, “What else happened today?”

“A schemer asked us the strangest question on our way to breakfast!” said the first princess.

“Oh yes,” said the second princess. “What did he ask us?”

“About conversations, silly!” said the first princess.

She turned to her mother.

“He asked us--”

“He asked us if we’d ever had a conversation.”

“That’s not what he said!”

“Yes, it is!”

“He asked us--”

“Yes, it is!”

“If we’d-- no, he said, ‘Have you ever had a conversation?’”

The queen laughed.

“He asked you that?”

“Yes.”

“Yes.”

“And in what tone of voice?”

“He was serious,” said the second princess.

“I had never heard anyone ask that before.”

“And what did you say?”

“Well, we hadn’t had any conversations, but we had one this afternoon.”

“Yes, we ought to tell him.”

“But of course you’ve had conversations,” said the queen.

“No, he said what a conversation was,” said the second princess. “And we hadn’t.”

“What’s wrong?” the queen asked the first princess, who had fallen silent.

“Where does that boy live? I would like to see him again,” she said.

And the queen laughed, and told her where he lived.

“Now, do you have anything to write down?” she asked, and she brought their books out of the bag, and they were newly bound.

“Yes,” the two princesses said, and they took their books, and they lay down on the bed, and propped the books up on the pillow, and began to write.

And the queen busied herself in her own book, and she raised her eyes and tried to remember certain things, and at times she folded a page in worry. And at length she went to look over the princesses’ shoulders, and she saw that both of them had written the boy’s name, and crossed it out.

“And what have you done here?” asked their mother.

“But I thought you said that we didn’t need to ask him for forgiveness!” said the first princess.

“But if that’s the case, you don’t need to put him in the book at all.”

“I think he would forgive us,” said the second princess.

“But what if he didn’t!” said the first princess. She turned to her mother and said, “What if he refused?”

“Oh, he won’t refuse you!” said the queen.

“But what if he did?”

And the queen said to them, “When I began my own book, I asked your father what he thought of it, and he asked me the same thing, what I would do if someone refused me. And I said that I wasn’t sure, and he said to me, ‘I think if you seek forgiveness three times, and each time you’re denied, then the other person become guilty in your place.’ And in fact, he said that he’d draw a line through them for me. And I think we should do the same thing. If anyone refuses you three times, then come to me, and I’ll cross out their name for you.”

“And then they shall have to ask us for forgiveness?” asked the second princess.

And the queen laughed.

“Not everyone keeps books,” she said, and she had them cross out the boy’s name a second time, and she left the books by the bed, and kissed them goodnight, and left the room.

And when she had gone the princesses were quiet for a moment, and then they snuck out of the room, and made their way to the room of the boy.

And they ducked under the curtain, and crawled through the room where he and his parents lay, and he was lying on the side, and they tugged at his arm, which was hanging over the bed, and he would not wake, and they tugged harder, and his parents seemed to shift. And the first princess licked the hand of the boy, and he burst awake, and the princesses shushed him, and they told him to follow them, and he did.

Once they were outside, and they were standing in the blue light of the inner hallway, the second princess said, "We're going to go take a look at the night."

And the boy said, "You want me to come?"

"Well," said the first princess. "Do you want to come?"

"Yes."

And the first princess thought for a moment, and then she said, "Then you should have to give us something for it."

"I have the flower."

"No, not the flower," said the first princess.

"I don't think I have anything else."

"Then I think," the first princess said, "that if you come out with us tonight, you should have to do whatever we say."

"What do you mean?"

"You should be our slave, for-- how long?"

"I don't know," said the second princess. "Why do you want him to be a slave?"

"Think of all the things we can do!" said the first princess.

And the second princess thought about this, and then she said, "It would be nice to have someone to go around with, and we can have conversations."

"Yes!"

"Okay, I'd like to have a slave."

"Good."

And there was a moment of silence.

"Yes, okay," said the boy.

"You'll do it?"

"I'll do whatever you say."

"For a day," said the second princess.

"Yes, for a whole day."

"Well then," said the first princess, and she distributed a handful of sticks to each of them. They snuck to the garden, and they felt along the vines in the corridor, and they came into the place that was lit by the fires of the palace. And the grass was soft underneath their feet, and they could hear people laughing from within the palace, and they heard the water moving in the stream.

"It's very peaceful," said the second princess.

"Yes," said the first. "We'll have to go somewhere else."

"But why?" asked the boy.

"Things look different in the night," said the first princess. "But not like this."

And she took them up to the tree, and she said, "What we'll have to do is climb this tree, and go out onto that branch there, and then we'll be able to get to the top of the wall."

"The tree look strange, doesn't it?" said the boy. "It's like a very large piece of grass."

And the second princess laughed with delight, and she clambered up after the first princess, and the boy followed, and he turned out to be very good at climbing. And they got to the top of the tree, and they crawled along the branch, and they came to the wall, and they stood

upon it. And the first princess could see the moon, and it was very large. And the boy gave a shout.

“There’s a staircase here!”

And the princesses rushed over, and he was right, and they descended the staircase to the ground. And as they descended, the sky was lit at its horizon, and they could see rocky hills, and trees, and there were many paths which criss-crossed them, and the wind swept over the hills, and it battered at them.

“Yes, this is what I meant!” said the first princess.

And the second princess could see that it looked as if something were flowing across the trees below them.

And they reached the bottom of the staircase, and they began to walk, and the three of them held hands, although sometimes the second princess would stoop to inspect something.

“Where should we go?” she asked aloud.

And no one answered, but they continued to follow the path, for it was lit by the light of the moon, and they followed it and the grass was short and stiff, and there were a few garments, and the remnants of a fire here and there. And then up ahead they could see lights reflecting off the air. And as they drew near, they saw a group of men and women and they carried a great box from which light issued.

“I can’t make out what they’re saying,” said the first princess.

“We should go around the path, and come out on the other side of them,” said the boy.

And they bent down, and crawled along the path, and a great rocky hill rose up to the left. And before they had gotten halfway to the lights, they came near a cave, and the cave was cut into the hill, and roots from two trees hung down from the top of it, and between the trees was a great boulder, and the mouth of the cave seemed to gather up the dust from the path.

“What’s in there?” asked the first princess.

“Maybe someone lives there,” said the second princess.

“It would be cold,” said the first.

“I would like to make my home there. It would be nice to live under trees,” said the second.

And the boy went to stand in the mouth of the cave and he looked out, and he said, “You can just see the golden mountain.”

“Yes, perhaps I would live here,” said the first princess. “We could bring blankets, and fold ourselves up at night, and unfold ourselves in the morning, and maybe the cave extends through the whole hill!”

“We could have the whole hill for a palace!” said the boy.

“Yes,” said the first princess. “You would live with us too?”

“Well,” said the boy.

“No, I think it would be good to live with you,” said the first princess. “Don’t you agree?”

And the second princess agreed.

“Well, then, would you like to go first into the cave?” the first princess asked. “After all, you are our slave.”

“We will reward you!” said the second princess.

“It is dark in there.”

“Yes,” said the first princess, “but can’t you feel your way? Just step carefully, and shout to us, and we’ll follow you.”

And the boy agreed, and he began to walk slowly into the cave, putting one foot out in front of him, and then another.

And just as he disappeared, the princesses heard noises behind them, and they saw that the men and women carrying the box were coming near, and they turned to each other, and then the princesses ran into the shadows. They watched the box set down, and the people had leaves in their hair, and dirt covered their legs. And they placed the box across from the cave, and they turned their backs to it, and they knelt down before the front of the cave, and some had their arms around a neighbor, and as they knelt, they stroked each other’s hair, and they ran their hands down the legs of those in front of them. And one of them spoke, and said, “There is a fire that burns underneath the earth, and as the light of the sun imbues the plant with new fire, underneath the earth is old fire, and it burns more slowly, and snatches us when we fall.”

And the crowd murmured their assent.

And one among them said, “Is this what we came here to see?”

And the first said, “We will descend.”

And as he said it, the princesses heard a shout from above, and a dozen people appeared above the cave, and they appeared in the trees above it, and along the boulder between the trees. And they were panting, and one of them cried, “The rock crushes!”

And there rose a murmur, and a man kneeling below stood, while the others still knelt, and he shouted up into the darkness, “All rocks break!”

And from above came dead silence, and then a creak, and the man below squinted up into the night. And from where they crouched, the princesses could see the boulder above the cave begin to move. And the second princess cried out, and then the dirt above the cave began to shimmer and fall, and the boulder slipped down, and without a pause, it crushed the people underneath. And not even a groan was heard, only a long, floating gasp when the boulder rolled backwards over the people. And the rock fell against the mouth of the cave, and sealed it up.

And the rest threw themselves against the boulder, but they could not move it; and a few ventured wildly up, as if to leap into the trees and take those who had done it; but dirt flew into their eyes, and they could not.

And the second princess was looking at the box of light, and it turned pink, and it turned green, and then it turned purple, and she saw her sister’s feet, and the purple part appeared there too, and larger. And the first princess spoke very quickly, and she said, “Do we go? Do we go?”

“We can’t leave him,” said the second princess.

And the first princess said softly without turning to her sister, “You heard what they said. There’s fire in the cave.”

“And dad--!”

“I know we can’t leave him!”

And just at that moment the princesses heard a noise from behind, like the drawing up of a bridge with chains, and they were dragged from behind, and in this way, the two princesses were kidnapped.

And soon thereafter the sun rose, and the king and queen rose.

And the king sat on the bed, and he looked at the queen and he murmured, "I'm a fool."

And the queen was hovering over her book, and she was transferring a list of names to another piece of paper. And he went up behind her, and he kissed her.

"Who's on your list today?" he asked.

And she told him a few stories, and he listened to them, and he watched as the queen concentrated upon the list, and sliced the paper with her pen, and underlined certain things.

And he said to her, "You know, you might not have to keep the book."

And the queen looked at him, and she closed the book, and she said to him firmly, "I want to get better."

"I know," said the king.

"Have you heard of dignity?" asked the queen. "I think we should all be dignified. This is what nobody realizes."

"What do you mean, dignified?"

"Aren't there certain people who walk around with us, and have a certain grace, and move fluidly, and beautifully?"

And the king laughed, "Well, yes. I wonder if they're born that way."

He got up and walked to the window.

"What secret do they have?" he asked aloud.

"I think you are dignified," the queen said to him.

"Well."

And the king continued, "I think it isn't people who are dignified, but things that are done with dignity. After all, haven't you seen one of those slaves doing the most common task and acting very uncommonly?"

"Yes, things are done for their own sake, and not for something else. We can be better."

"But there is some secret to it," the king said, and he looked out the window, and he wondered if the plants were dignified, and the trees were dignified, and the sky.

"The morning has a certain dignity," he said. And he thought, but he did not say what he thought the secret was. For it seemed to him that he could not speak it, and what he wanted to say was: nothing is undignified. And at a stroke he understood why he must never speak that aloud.

"I think I'll go wandering today," he said to the queen, and the queen laughed.

"I had my dream again, you see," he said.

"Yes."

And he embraced the queen, and he left, and he wondered as he left, whether the queen had heard his thoughts. He wandered through the palace, and several people asked him where he was going. And he laughed, and after a moment, he said to them, "I have heard that sometimes the sun is crossed by the moon, and when this occurs, the world turns into night, and people act very strangely."

"Yes?"

"I wish to find signs of it," the king said since he had no wish to explain.

"And what are you looking for?"

"Oh," he said. "I'm a fool, and I'm looking for someone like me."

And the people did not know what he meant, and he left the palace, and he imagined the people talking behind him, and he wondered what would satisfy him. And he walked away from the city, and he followed the paths through the hills there, and he kept in sight of the golden mountain in the distance.

And as he walked, he began to hear the whistling of someone, but it was not whistling like whistling at night to keep company, but the sort of whistling that moves with the feet, and only those who have walked for a very long time whistle in that way.

And as he turned along the path, he came upon a man eating his lunch outside a cave, and the cave had a rock in front of it, and there was a mark on the rock. Now, the king had not eaten, and so he went up to the man to ask him for some food. The man gave some food to the king, and they sat together.

“You can have a little more if you want,” the man said.

There were flowers growing around them, and the king said, “That’s alright. It’s funny how happy we get when the flowers return.”

“Yes, they carry a great distance,” said the man.

And the king asked him who he was, and the man told him that he was Baruch, the wise man.

“Oh, you are a wise man?” asked the king.

“I will tell you the truth. It’s not true.”

“You’re not wise, then?”

“You tell me,” said Baruch. “Look at this mark on the rock.”

“I can’t see the mark,” said the king.

“What do you mean?”

“My eyes are fixed to the sky, and I can’t look much lower than that.”

Baruch laughed and said, “And I thought you were looking down on me!”

He stood up, and said to the king, “Wait and I’ll describe the mark to you. It’s made up of two marks like the peak of a mountain, or the wings of a bird when they beat down. Just like when the sun shines on you, and you outstretch your left and right hands, and a ray of the sun hits your left hand and another ray of the sun hits your right hand. What do you think it means?”

“Maybe it doesn’t mean anything,” answered the king. “Just like a mountain forms a peak of its own accord, and the birds flap their wings downward in order to fly, in the same way this mark might have been formed for no other reason than itself.”

“Well, I’ll give you the answer. It’s a mark made by the people who live around here and it means, a door.”

“How does it mean, a door?”

“Because at a door, one either goes through it or waits outside. This’s what the people say. At first there’s only waiting in a place, and that’s only one thing. And the one who’s waiting explores the place, and comes upon a door. And now, there’s two things: there’s waiting in the place, and there’s going through the door. And the man has to decide, to wait or to go through the door. And the fact is, the one place has turned into two places even for the man who decides to wait.”

“So there’s something in this cave.”

“That’s what I’ve decided.”

“And if there’s nothing behind the rock? Will you agree that the mark doesn’t mean anything?”

“If there is nothing inside the cave, then I don’t know, maybe it’s been stolen. Or someone plans to put something inside it someday, and they haven’t done it yet.”

“Are you waiting for them?”

“Maybe there’s other caves like this,” Baruch said, and he made as if to look around for them. And the king wished to move the rock in order to discover what lay beyond it. And the wise man pushed him back and said, “Wait! Imagine there was only this cave in the beginning. And all that existed was this cave. And there was something inside the cave. And you saw that something was inside the cave. And you imagined, maybe there wouldn’t have been something inside the cave. And you imagined what it would be like if there wasn’t anything inside this cave. And then you imagined, what it would be like if you hadn’t ever thought about whether there was something inside the cave, and what it would be like if you’d never imagined what it would be like if you’d never thought about whether there was something inside this cave. And you did this forever.”

“But just as easily,” answered the king, “there might not have been anything in the cave from the beginning, and I imagined, maybe there might have been something in the cave, then I imagined what it would be like if I had never thought that there might have been something in the cave, and so on.”

“So you see why it doesn’t matter if there’s something inside the cave or not,” said Baruch

And the king laughed.

“For someone who doesn’t care about it, you are very interested in this cave.”

“Of course I care,” said Baruch. “Don’t you care?”

“I care,” said the king.

“Then you are just as much a fool as I am,” said Baruch, and he turned to the king, who laughed. Then they finished eating, and the king asked Baruch, “Well, where are you going?”

“I’m going towards the ocean,” Baruch said.

And the king had never seen the ocean.

“What do you plan to do there?”

“I want to sail across it,” Baruch said. “The lake in your kingdom is not a lake, you know,” Baruch said. “It leads out into the ocean.”

“What is the ocean?” the king asked.

“Do you think everything is made of water? For there is more water than earth, and maybe the earth floats atop the water, or else the water floats atop the earth. Maybe the earth itself was born out of the water as things washed up out of it.”

“All lakes that I know have a bottom,” said the king.

“Yes, but haven’t you seen water coming out of the earth sometimes, when you digs down, or in a cave?”

The king admitted it was so.

“The ocean is source of the water,” Baruch said. “And it’s easier to move around on the water, and I want to follow it. I have heard very profound things that sailors see, that when they sail towards a place it always seems to rise out of the water.”

And the king said that there were boats which went out onto the lake, and some which traveled to the lands around it, and docks had been recently built there. And as he spoke, he decided that he wanted Baruch to come to the kingdom and advise him, and so he said, "If you come to my kingdom and educate my daughters, then I'll give you passage on one of those ships."

And Baruch was pleased with this, and he agreed to accompany the king, and they began to return along the path by which the king had come. And they curved around various hills, and they began to walk down to the city, and the city fell below them, and the grasses led down to it. The forest was on one side, and they walked along it, and birds flew from tree to tree, and they alternated red and blue, and red and blue. And the land was flat on the other side, and a few monuments rose in the distance there.

And they walked in silence for a time, and Baruch asked the king, "Well, how should we walk?"

"How do you mean?" asked the king.

"Should we entertain each other, or--"

"Well," said the king. "Where are you from? Have you been walking long?"

And Baruch laughed.

"Yes, I've been walking for a very long time. You're the king who organized this place?"

And the king said yes, and Baruch threw his hands out in front of them as if carrying on an argument with a person he could not see. "Ah," he said, "but even before that time, you wandered in circles in forests, and you were caught up in trees, and you shuffled from river to river, and so on."

And he turned to the king.

"At least, that's what I've heard," he said.

"Sometimes people would strike off and never return," said the king. "It was hard keeping things straight."

"Ah," said Baruch, and gave a great sigh. "But that's only because you refused to move."

"Well," said the king. "But not only me. My family, and the rest. Of course, we stayed."

"Yes, and you sat and walked a little of the way, and went back and forth, and so on, and you wandered in circles. I believe that walking means something very different."

"And you've been walking for a very long time," said the king.

"Yes. I got here recently. Originally, I came from that way," he said, and he pointed away from the forest at the flat, grassy land. "We walked in the desert for a very long time."

He looked over at the king.

"Have you heard that things are moving away from each other?" he asked.

"Things?"

"Places, cities, and so on. I wondered if you knew."

"Where'd you hear that?"

"In the desert, you can see it because the cities are so far apart. You can walk for days and nights, and there will be very little around, and only every so often does a city come to you, and you can see the spires and walls. It's very beautiful because the stones turn to white in the sun. But it takes a long time to get to the next city, and when you happen to walk to the same city

twice, you notice that it takes a little longer each time. And if the cities are very far away it takes even longer. So when you live close together like this, you don't notice."

And the king thought about this.

"But I was saying," said Baruch. "Where I come from everybody walks continuously more or less, and so everybody has their own practice. For example, I'm still visited by my friend Lamed, who died a long time ago, and I know that he doesn't visit anybody else. I think he uses me to see the sights that he often liked to see."

And Baruch looked over at the king.

"Don't you think it's strange that something from behind us can appear before us? And that only people in front of us can see us as we are?"

And the king laughed. But as he laughed, he heard a great shaking behind him, and Baruch heard it too, it was like a rumbling in the air. And they turned around and there above the golden mountain the king saw that down through the sky came a fire and a fire, and it was hard to look at, and it trailed more fire behind it. And it came down through the air as if being thrown down at the ground, and it came towards the ground as if it would miss it. And the king's eyes were on it, and it burst into the forest beside them. And after a moment, when the shaking of the leaves and the flight of the birds were exhausted, it was silent there.

And Baruch and the king ran into the forest to see the thing, and they went in the direction towards it. And as they ran, they heard a shout, and then another.

"Wait," said the king.

And the two of them stopped for a moment to listen. They heard something crashing through the trees, and it was getting closer. And the king concealed himself behind a tree, and Baruch bent down close to the ground to watch. They could hear twigs breaking, and they waited for it, until then through the bushes came two deer, and the deer were burnt on their sides, and they looked as if they had been burnt many times. They ran past, and did not stop.

Then the king hurried in the direction from which the deer had come and Baruch followed, and they went past broken branches, and at length they came to a spot where the trees had been blasted, and a few flames flickered here and there, and the place was empty and still.

When they saw this, they walked around the circle of flattened trees, and Baruch stooped to pick up some rocks. The king stood in the middle of the circle and looked back at the path the falling fire had followed. And talking to each other, they returned to the city, and they went into the palace, and there the queen met them. She told them the princesses had gone missing, and the boy.

And the queen drew the king away from Baruch, and she took him down to their room. She pressed the king down on the bed, and she placed her head against him, and pressed her cheek against his neck. And she listened to the beat of his heart, as it beat within his neck, and to her it sounded like footsteps, like someone within the king were walking inexorably against the back of him. He stroked her hair, and it was in time with the beat, and she waited as if blindly for the next stroke. And in turn the king felt the queen's heart against him, and each beat of it was like the pull of an oar against the water, and between each beat, he imagined the oars slipping loose, and the rower's strength running out.

And just then a shout went up, for the first princess had appeared at the palace gates, and the king and queen went down to see her, and her face was dirty, and she clung to her parents. And her eyes were clear and bright, and the skin around them was ill and tired.

And she spoke and said, "There's a cave blocked by a rock, and we were there last night--" And even before she finished, king and queen had gathered a party, and they walked in front, and the first princess was in the arms of the king, and Baruch walked behind them, and the people formed columns beyond that. And the king bent low and asked the first princess, "Have you seen that man, Baruch?" And he gestured back towards him, and the princess said that she had not.

And they came to the cave and the rock, and ten men tried to move the rock from its place, but they were unable to do so, and the first princess shouted to the boy, and wept. And Baruch returned with yet more men, and they too tried their strength, but the rock did not move since no more than a few men could grasp the rock firmly enough to stir it. They merely crowded each other, and bruised their feet.

After many hours, the princess collapsed and could not move or speak and she could only look. The king drew up the princess and carried her. And they returned to the palace, and when the princess woke up, she along with the whole palace mourned.

## THE PRINCESS, FIRST PART

This is the first part of the story of the first princess after that. In time, the princess had a dream in which a woman cast a spell on her, and she sat in a chair, and the woman stood behind her, and she moved her hands up and down on the first princess's back. And she pressed them against her spine and as she did the princesses heard the word spine as if a star had come into view and it had been hidden by an invisible branch. And the woman reached into her shoulder and brought her hand up behind the princess's neck, and it was on the left side, and then she did it on the right. And the princess thought of course the stars flickered anyway, and they swung down through a kind of fog, and the yellow moon too was covered up by something that could not be seen and it was dark and round.

And the woman placed her hands behind the princess's ears and brought them down to the nape of her neck. And as she did, she asked the princess to place a ball in front of her and have it be at the horizon like the moon, and have a small light flicker next to it, as if beside the moon rose a mountain, and on the mountain was a cradle made of stone, and in the stone was a fire, and men and women slept nearby. And the woman brought her hands down to the princess's ribs and felt them, and drew her hands back, and down her sides, and touched where they met. And she pressed her hands upward as if she were shaving the bark of a young tree with a gentle, golden plane. And she told the princess to take the ball and have it swing around her to the right, and run in circles around the horizon, and to keep the moon running as if it were being chased. And she placed her fingers against the temples of the princess, and placed one finger on the back lobes each, and one finger at the crease between the back and forward lobes of her head. And she blew gently on the strong part of princess's back, near the shoulder blades, and the princesses left and right fingers twitched.

And the woman said to keep the moon running around and around, and then at once to have it turn around and run the other way. And she bent down to the princess's ear and she whispered, "Did you feel the resistance?"

And the woman dug her hands into the back of the princess, and she stuck her fingers into the flesh around her spine and walked up it, and along the way, they burrowed into knots within her flesh, and the fingers loosened them. And the woman said, "Do you feel these knots?"

And the princess whispered, "What do you mean, knots?"

And the woman said, "When you feel the back, you can feel these knots under your fingers. You got to work to untie them."

"There's thread inside us?"

"The day is forced on you, on your hands and neck and back, and forces its way into your eyes, and goes into the various orifices and crackles there like the oils coming out of cooking meat. And the limbs are molded into various poses, and the fibers weaken and tangle into knots."

And the woman moved her hands over the head of the princess, and she said, "Can you feel the subtle pain in your head, and in your eyes too? They're too small to be felt with your fingers so you can only feel them from inside. Of course, you can still loosen them up."

And she worked to untie them.

"I think I'll make the sun run around," said the princess, and she began to.

"It will be too bright, you should probably use the moon. You're tightening your throat."

And the princess tried to still her throat.

And the woman said, "I can still feel it moving. Your throat's going up and down, and your jaw's going side to side."

"I can't stop it."

"Turn the moon around and have it run the other way."

And the princess did so, and the woman felt it stop and turn around.

"You cannot keep your body still. Untie all knots, and there's one knot that can't be untied, and that's the muscle itself. And so you have to make the moon run with something else."

And the woman closed the princess's eyes, and she ran a finger from the top of her head to the seat of her spine, and she stroked it once, and then she stroked it again, and then she worked from the shoulders to the middle, and then from the shoulders to the head. And she dug beneath the skin of the princess, and she stirred the flesh beneath it from the neck to the shoulder, and she pressed in the hips, and she eased her ribs, and she breathed on the back of the princess, and slowly she began to blow in this way until the spell had been cast.

And upon waking, the spell did not disperse, but it hung over her and the princess wondered if she still had to wake up. And she went down to the garden, and it had been cleared of children, and in the middle of it was a table, and around the table there were couches, and on the couches sat various people, and they were eating a meal. And the table was organized like this. On two opposite sides sat those who walked with their eyes straight ahead, and those who walked with their eyes fixed to the sky sat on the other side, and across from them sat those who walked with their eyes on the ground. And the king and the queen sat together on a throne beyond the table, and the queen sat on the lap of the king. And in front of them were those who looked down at the ground, and there were three to the left and three to the right, and in the middle an empty space for the king and the queen. And in front of the table was a fire, and in the fire a tube made of very thick felt had been placed, and the one end was in the fire, and it burned slowly, and these flames were carried into the tube, and they flared out the other end, and licked the air.

And the king was silent, and one of the people sitting there raised his glass to the king, and the others also raised their glasses to the king, and they spilled some of it on the ground. And the king stood, and was excused, and he left the garden in order to relieve himself. And the queen was silent, and she closed her eyes, and could not follow the conversation, and she pretended to be asleep so she could listen to them without responding. And now the princess came up to the table, and she saw the people there, and she said, "My father is distraught."

And the people turned to look at her, and she looked at them each in turn, and she began to walk up and down the garden, and she urged them with her hands.

"Don't you see he's thinking about my sister already, and you planted the thought in him? And he has to sit there guilty for his awkwardness, and you're all too afraid to share in it! Or maybe you're waiting there like children waiting for the chance to speak, since you won't speak first. Because you want to choose your words carefully for him," she said, and she lifted her head, and she looked up at the sky, and saw the moon was there even in the day, and it seemed like an imperfection in the glass, a dent that was milky and untransparent, and she thought she could see the part that was covered up. And she blinked, and she decided that she could not see it

after all, yet when she looked it was still there. And because of it the moon seemed to yell at her very loudly, and she said, "I don't know what to do."

And she paused, and her face was torn, and she raised her head as if listening silently to something. And the people waited, and they turned to look at their plates and cups. And they jumped when she turned back to them, and they saw that her eyes had been very deep before and now they were bright and shallow.

"We are going to play a joke," she said.

And the people laughed.

"We're going to bring my sister back to life for him. This is how we'll do it. Each of you remember the morning she was lost, and imagine she were found, and what would happen. And tell it to the person sitting to your left, and that person decides what happens after that, and tells it to the next person, and so on. And each of you keeping going, and trust me, the king will smile again."

And the princess withdrew, and watched. And the queen was silent, and when the king returned, the people did as the princess suggested, and the life of the second princess went swirling around the table, and each person told what happened next at the same moment. And they could all hear how similar or different they were, and if they were all the same, the people would laugh, and if they were all different, they would laugh too. And sometimes they would murmur when the table was divided in different pleasing ways. And the king stood in the middle of them, and tried to hear them all clearly. But too many of them spoke at once, and the king could not listen, and he raised a finger, and went to pass a message to the first princess since he did not know that she was there.

And when he was gone, the first princess came again to the table, and she said, "I can help." And she said, "Do the same as before, only now which way you turn is up to you, left or right. And speak in a whisper. And sometimes you will be told two different things at once from either side. When this happens, stand up and hold both of them in mind, and say aloud what happens next, and only speak aloud when no one else is speaking. So the king can hear you better this way."

And the princess withdrew, and the king returned, and the conversation continued, and the king could now hear different parts of the princess's life clearly, and he laughed when the things surprised him, and he nodded to them. But the people were no longer listening to each other and focused more on their whispers than what was spoken aloud, and the king alone could hear the whole of it, so that by the time the food and drink were cleared away, he again was silent.

And the princess saw this and she came out of hiding and went up to him and bent close to his ear, and drew him away. The king and the princess climbed up the tree, and stood on the wall, and the princess pointed out the moon to him which could still be seen, and she told him to think of the people looking at it and people who had looked at it, and all the things that acted in accordance with it, and loved or hated it.

And the king said to the princess, "I see it."

And the princess brought her thumb to her mouth, and then she slipped down the tree, and spoke to the people, and said, "Now do exactly as I say. Go out of here and gather up all your family and friends and all your slaves, and bring them here, and sit them at tables around

the garden, and give them things to eat and drink, and have each table imagine what happens next. And the rule is that someone must always be leaving a table and heading to another one, and when a person arrives, another person must leave.”

And the people did as they were told, and when the king returned, he found the garden full of people already half-drunk shouting about his daughter and people were running from table to table, and he could walk between them and hear the stories as they became similar and different. And some of the stories were good and some of them were bad since all the people mingled together. And the king watched them, and he listened, and he smiled, and he began to laugh.

And the princess went up to him, and she said, “What do you think?”

And the king brought her against him, and just as he did, the people’s shouting seemed to clash, and then break into harmony, and his eyes began to hurt.

“Thank you,” he said, and he thanked her again, and he paused, and he thought, and then he told her the truth. “But I don’t know what kinds of questions I want to ask her now that she’s here,” he said.

“But every day we have lots of questions about all sorts of things! And when those questions come to you and you’re thinking about what to do, you can hear her answer!”

And the king said after a moment, “But what would she ask me?”

And the princess heard this, and she looked out at the corridor that led out the garden, and she looked up at the branches over her shoulder, and she could feel herself being pulled as if in a sled, and a pack of dogs was tied to the sled, and the dogs were fighting over the direction she would take. And she was headed to a certain place, and she felt herself being pulled, and she heard a voice, and it appeared in her mind like a thought but it did not waver. And the voice was very clear and it said, “I won’t have her question me,” as if a hand had been placed on her shoulder, and she untied the dogs all at once from the sled, and they sped off without her.

And the sled came to a stop, and the snow muffled the sound of itself falling. And across her lips seemed to blow something warm, and she knelt down in the snow, and lay and felt as if she had eaten the fat of an animal and it was lying inside her. And her eyes again became very shallow, and she turned to her father, and said, “I don’t need that.”

And she left him.

Now, the queen had heard what the princess said, and later she went to see her, and she was lying in her room. And she asked the princess about her behavior, and the princess lifted herself up a little, and she looked at her mother and said what came into her mind, which was that the table was a dance and the dancers moved towards an end, and the dance she gave them was patterned after her sister. And she spoke strangely and her mother perceived that a spell had been cast on her since her own mother had also been afflicted with them. So she called on Baruch to ask his advice, and she left the princess, and the princess was alone.

Now the princess thought of the dance of her sister and as she thought, she felt the dance of the subtle pains in her head. And she saw that her own dancers were circling around the dance of her sister, and those at the border mingled and danced with each other, and sometimes they would exchange places, and she saw that the number of dancers that joined her sister’s dance was much greater than the number of dancers that left. And it became harder to see her sister’s dance when she looked down at the dancers, and she was looking at them as if from above, and she

couldn't go down and walk with her, and thank her for her conversation. And the princess felt ill, and she wanted to be released from the feeling, and she had to ask her sister to forgive her this, for her sister would have given her everything, and this is what she thought, and her face became blurred and twisted.

And she asked her sister's dance even as it was shrinking and she saw that her sister's dance was awkward and did not flow, and the dancers jumped from place to place as new dancers interrupted them. And when the awkward dancers left, they made the whole dance awkward, and the dancers as a whole began to spin more wildly and went farther away than she could see. And she asked again and the dancers jumped and even began to knock into each other, and she asked a third time and out of the pocket of her sister came a wave of motion, and the wave dispersed over the whole dance, and when the wave passed, the dancers were all facing the opposite direction.

And she thought, "She refused three times, and now she herself is guilty."

But when she started waiting for her sister's question, she couldn't see her anymore, and the dance as a whole asked for forgiveness and it could only give itself. So the dance seemed to run to a point, and retreat, and the dancers were building and flowing from one point to another, and with each change of place the dancers grew harder and harder and pressed against each other, and grabbed each other, and pushed each other more violently, more slowly, and more forcefully. And when the princess saw this happen with her eyes, she felt it happen in her muscles, and it came into her thoughts, and her thoughts flickered in a dark space between the dancers, and her thoughts themselves were complete like them, and they glowed there and had taken on the form of words and rose and fell along the peaks of their letters. And from behind them as if coming forward were other words hovering around the first ones and commenting on them, and they dripped from the branch of the first thought and fell like sap and ran along the glassy pane that was in front of her. And the first words were like sap of another kind which continued to fall and covered over the whole pane, and everything was turgid and refusing itself and in turn refusing, and the princess was lying in her bed, and she was dazed.

And while she was lying there, she happened to open her eyes. The sun had gone down to the trees, and the evening star was there, and she looked through the curtains, and the curtains were askew, and she heard that someone was in the room. And she went on her elbows and she looked at him and he was a man and he stood there and he looked at her, and it was Baruch.

He sat down next to her on the bed, and smiled and asked, "Are you tired?"

And the princess said, "No."

"I heard what you said to the king," Baruch said.

"What do you mean?"

"About the moon."

"Oh."

"I liked it, you know," he said. And he looked out at the room, and they heard a few night birds calling to each other outside.

"You know," he said. "I think we should take a walk. We haven't talked about the stars in a while." And then he looked down at her and said, "I have something to show you."

"What's that?"

And from his pocket, Baruch brought out a prism, and it was broken in two, and it gathered in the light and shone. And he said, "Your eyes look all clouded up."

And the princess said she felt like she was in a daze.

And Baruch said, "Well, look through the prism."

And he handed the prism to her, and she brought it up to her eyes. And as she looked out at the room, the night from outside seemed to rush in through the window and cover up the ceiling, and the furniture all seemed to lean towards her, and Baruch placed his hands on his thighs, and his body became splendid, and his hands were like hot irons and she saw sparks flying from them. And he turned to her, and his face became like lightning and his eyes became like rays of the sun, and she felt as if she ought to reach out and touch him, and she brought out her hand, and she placed it on his chest, and it was firm there. And all the daze that was hanging in the air seemed to shimmer and rush towards her and sharpen into little lights.

Then she took the prism from her eye, and everything suddenly sat back away from her. "What is this?" she asked.

"I got it from a friend of mine," he said. "It gathers up the light that you see. I don't know how it works, but I've been carrying it for a long time, and I thought you could use it. I know--"

And he paused, and he gathered up the princess's hair, and brought it back behind her ears.

"Well," he said. "I'm here to help you after all."

And the princess laughed, and together they left the palace, and they walked down to the labyrinth, and beside the labyrinth was a tower all made out of white stone, and it had a golden top so that at sunset it looked like a candle. And this tower was the entrance to the upper labyrinth where those who looked up at the sky wandered from roof to roof along their bridges. And Baruch and princess went up to the bridges and they wandered across the city, and they heard the people down below them, and sometimes the people rushed by with lights which were thrown up against the walls. The city, however, was muted where they walked, and their heads were thrown back, and there were the stars. And only every once and a while would a person pass them, and the old bridges would creak, and they would move to the side, and keep themselves steady, for the railings had long since fallen off.

Now in their time together Baruch and the princess had traced the sun, the moon, and the stars, and they had seen them move against each other in certain ways, and some would herald others or beg them to delay, and others bore with them trains of followers, and formed lines and shapes as if working together towards a common goal. And walking together now looking up, the princess raised the prism to her eye, and she saw the stars reach out to her and she was seeing them as they were when they moved and she turned suddenly to Baruch, and said something she would not have ordinarily said.

"The stars push and pull on each other just like people, and some of them are like brothers or sisters and strangers and friends, and sometimes they throw themselves across the sky like solitary individuals and disappear!"

And he turned to her, and said "I've seen that too, but I can't see it all the time, you know."

"Oh really?" asked the princess, and she took the prism from her eye. "What do you see now?"

And Baruch squinted up at the sky, and waited to think of an answer. But the princess had a thought instead and suddenly said, "Baruch, I want to know, are you a good man?"

And Baruch laughed. "I think so," he replied.

"And how do I know you're a good man?"

"I mean, I act like a good man, and I say what a good men say."

"But maybe you're only acting, and you're not really good at all."

"Well, maybe there is something other than what I say or do," Baruch said. "But still."

"I think you're a good man," the princess said.

And she looked up at the stars again, and she saw them dancing very slowly across the sky. "But I think the same thing that makes me think you're a good man makes me think those stars up there are acting like people."

"Maybe we think different things about people," said Baruch.

And the princess stamped her foot, and she looked out over the bridge into the city, and she saw that between the houses there rose a hill, and the moon was shining on it, and it was one of the places where the children played at night. And she grabbed Baruch's sleeve, and dragged him down onto the stairs nearest to them, and she took him to the foot of a hill, and told him to look at the children there.

"Look at them," she said. "And I know it's the same in the garden in the palace!"

And Baruch looked, and he saw the children running along the hill, and they were dressed very lightly. And some of the children went around with others in groups and in single-file, and some children went alone as if they'd fallen behind. And many children clutched multi-colored streamers in their hands that seemed to glow in the dark. And a few stood in place, attracted to a stump or a rock, and a few children looked lost, and a few more walked in pairs, leisurely, around the hill, as if observing the sights. And sometimes children would burst out of groups and radiate in all directions, and at the top, a mass of children flickered, and they had built a fire there. And suddenly out of the long shadows thrown down on the hill leapt one of the children, and she had caught sight of Baruch and the princess, and she stretched out her hands towards them, and jumped excitedly into the air, then darted away and a few children began to orbit around her and she dove into a pack and sent a few kids racing away from her.

"I see what you mean," Baruch replied. "But this is what I think. So you see stars that move like people and people that move like stars, and what I want to know is when do you see the stars?"

And the princess didn't know what to say, and she let Baruch's sleeve fall. She walked ahead down the street away from the hill, and Baruch let her go for a while.

And she walked past the closed and dark houses of the city. Outside some of them were beds of mint and other special flavors, and she heard music in the distance and shouting, and she wandered in that direction, and her clothes trailed on the ground. And she was thinking about what Baruch had said, and she was playing with the prism, and she saw a flowerbed and the sign above a door that hung over it, and the princess could see the shadow it cast when the sun was shining since the flowers all had their faces turned in the same direction and only those in the shadow were looking elsewhere and wilted. And she turned a corner, and she saw three dogs, and they were lying in the road, and one was to her right, and two were before her, and one was to the left of a tree, and the other to the right of it. And as she walked between them, their eyes

turned to watch her. So she turned around and walked among them, and one of the dogs followed her and it ran up against her legs and she played with it, and she walked on, and it ran up against her, and so on. And then she left, and she turned back, and the dog had its eyes on her.

And then a wagon appeared, and it was full of large even blocks of stone, and it was being hauled by a few men. And as the wagon came up, the dog that was closest to it ran forward and followed it, and the other one stood and barked at the wagon as if to signal its arrival, and lifted its head and whistled through its teeth, and the third dog remained lying down and it barked and wheezed as it did. And in the door appeared a woman, and the woman went to meet the men with the wagon, and they talked for a while. And the two dogs walked around each other, and the third dog remained behind, and it was curled up, and it had white hairs, and in the light of the woman, the princess could see that they were tangled up by the wind, and the dog threw its head back onto the ground and lay back and welcomed the light. And then the two other dogs began to bark and growl and bat at each other and the man yelled at them, and the two dogs slunk away in opposite directions, and their tails were between their legs.

And the princess walked on, and she followed the path the wagon had taken, and it led her near to the sounds that she had heard before. And she turned a corner and sitting on a stool outside a house sat a woman and she had a scarf around her neck and she was crying and kept crossing and uncrossing her arms. And the woman looked at the princess and she smiled and said, "You're very pretty."

And the princess stopped. And the woman said, "I like to see a pretty girl. I can understand falling in love with one."

"Falling in love?"

"Yes, people are falling in love all the time," the woman said. "I should just understand that."

"What's wrong?" asked the princess.

"I'm just sad," said the woman. And she touched the princess's hand, and she said, "We're of the same kind, aren't we? Only you're much more beautiful than I am."

And the princess did not know what to say. "Do you know what's going on over there?" she asked. But Baruch came around the corner, and the woman waved, and disappeared into the house. The princess turned to him and took his hand, and they continued to walk in silence for a while. And when the princess let go of his hand, she asked him, "Baruch, what is a human being?"

"You are, my dear."

"And doesn't that mean I move like a human being, that I laugh and cry, and so on?"

"Yes, that's part of what makes a human being," Baruch answered.

"And sometimes, don't I hang my head in unhappiness when something is stolen from me, and sometimes don't I retreat to my room with my face downcast when I've been shamed, and don't sometimes human beings cry when they see others cry, and laugh when others laugh, and yawn when others yawn?"

"All this is true," said Baruch. "Though, I thought you were always looking up at the sky!"

"That doesn't mean my head does not hang in unhappiness!"

And Baruch laughed, and said, "I understand."

“Now, when I hang my head, I feel a certain way. For the fact is, I feel a certain way, and then I’m told, I am hanging my head. Now I see another thing hanging its head, and I think it also feels a certain way.”

“But a flower cannot laugh it can only bloom or wilt, and a dog cannot laugh, it can only move about and bark, and so on,” said Baruch.

“But aren’t there human beings who never laugh, and human beings who never cry?”

“Well, yes. But those are strange human beings.”

“But how do I know they’re human beings if they don’t move around like us? Are they human beings because they look like human beings?”

“That’s part of it, I suppose.”

“But couldn’t a human being take another shape and move around like we move but in a different way? Like when a man has lost control over his own body and talks by blinking.”

“That is possible,” Baruch agreed.

“And if the stars move in every way that we move, but in a different way, wouldn’t they be human too?”

Baruch thought for a time, and it was as if he did not see the road, and the princess waiting for his answer did not see it either.

“But what does it mean to move in the same way?” he asked. “When your mom or dad moves their hands across a page and makes a drawing of a person, we say the drawing looks like a human, and we don’t think that the drawing is a human being. We say it’s a drawing of a human being.”

“Yes, but we also say that because a human being made it, and their hands moved that way because of how a human being moves! And so a drawing moves like a human being, only it’s harder to see it since the human being is folded up inside the drawing as opposed to being on the outside.”

“And the stars are like that?”

“Yes, they’re like us, only folded up. And sometimes they unfold themselves and can move in different ways, and we can see them!” said the princess, and she raised her hands up in excitement.

And Baruch laughed, and he bent down to remove a pebble from his shoe. “But why should things unfold at all?” he asked.

And the princess asked, “What do you mean?”

“Well, if we place drawings on a wheel and spin the wheel around, it looks like the drawings are moving and it makes a scene, and you can see a little bit of the scene before and the scene after. And then another scene appears. And you would only think the scenes unfolded of their own accord, if you didn’t know that someone were pulling the string that makes the wheel turn. And perhaps the stars and everything we see are like that and someone pulls the string, and the scenes follow one after another!”

“But what difference would that make?”

And Baruch said to her, “Well, what I don’t understand is why the drawings are in the proper order for us to see the scenes. There must be many different ways to put the drawings in order, and since we see them in one order and not another, we ourselves have to be the ones that

put them that way! And if that's true, then we can't be drawings because we're the ones who see them."

And the princess thought for a time, and then she said, "But that's silly! I see you as a drawing and you see me as a drawing. So maybe drawings don't need seers, but are seeable by themselves!"

"But we still see things in different ways," said Baruch. "And why should that be the case if all things are just seeable by themselves? If what is seen is all there is, why should it split apart as if someone were seeing it two different ways in order to decipher it?"

"Perhaps what is seen is deciphering itself," surmised the princess.

And Baruch laughed.

"Who do you think you are?" he asked, and the princess laughed at this, and they were nearing the place where people were singing, and they could hear lots of footsteps, and smoke was starting to hang in the air. They rounded a corner and the people came into view and they were drumming in a circle, and around the circle there was a crowd of people, and they were watching a place along the edge of a circle.

And the princess saw that there was a paper egg there, and out of the paper egg burst two girls, and they wore masks. The one girl had dark rings around her eyes and her mask was very thin, and the other girl was flushed and very bright. And they each carried a bowl of grain in the opposite hand. And they began to walk towards the crowd and separate, and they tossed the grains behind them and between them. And when the two girls reached the crowd, the one caught hold of a man and brought him forward, and another man caught hold of the other one, and she was dragged into the crowd which cleared away so that both could be seen.

And the girls set aside their bowls of grain, and they began to move with these men. And the one girl clung to the man, and knelt before him, and pressed herself up against him, and the other girl allowed the man to watch her while she danced. And the drums began to beat more intensely, and the first girl climbed atop the man, and moved from his chest, to his shoulders, and the second girl began to shift from side to side to avoid the man who moved with her. And she began to swirl backwards and let him brush against her here, but not there, and they would turn around each other and spin as they retreated. And the first girl pressed her mouth against the mouth of her man, and put one hand behind his back, and she began to walk forward, pushing him back, as well. And the crowd shouted out when they liked or disliked a part of it, and the girls would graciously repeat a part and they became more and more wild, and the first girl ran her body up and down the body of the man, and the second girl fell over and barely caught herself as the man leapt to obtain her.

Then the princess saw the men arrive at the paper egg and the one was facing forward and the other was facing back, and they raised their arms in the air. And now the women knelt and tore off their masks, and the princess was amazed to see their beauty, and how exhaustion and excitement shone on their faces.

And she stood there watching while the girls stood up, and the people hugged them and applauded. And she whispered to Baruch, "What were those people doing?"

"I don't know," he confessed.

And the princess said, "Don't you think that looked like my sister there?"

And Baruch looked over and he saw that the prism was by her eye, and he saw her murmur, "That's very strange." And she thought to herself and did not speak as they walked back to the palace together. And when they got there, the princess turned to Baruch and she was very sleepy and she said goodnight and he said goodnight and they parted.

And so the princess returned to her room, and when she fell asleep, she had a dream in which she saw a thousand dogs chasing each other. She was floating above them and saw them from a great height and in a mass they made a face. Then she saw the grasses underneath the dogs shoot up between them and form great stalks and some of them turned into trees or bushes, and vines crept along them. The dogs began to move faster and faster until they became a blur, while the plants began to move at the speed of the dogs, and crawl across the earth, and she saw that they made a face as well.

And she awoke with a gasp, and she looked through the curtains, and saw the last stars fading into the morning there.

## THE PRINCESS, SECOND PART

This is the second part of the story of the first princess. The next day the princess woke up very late and she waited for a very long time to open her eyes, and when she did, she walked around the palace in a daze, and tried to think about the night before. And she came near the place where Baruch lived, and she snuck into his room, and he was napping there, and snoring in his bed. She reached inside his pocket and took the prism, and she wrote him a note that said that she had taken it.

And then she went outside, and she brought the prism to her eye, and she gazed up at the sky, and all its blue and white and clouds bent towards her, and she gazed harder and harder, and tried to bring it in as fast as she could. And when she took the prism from her eye, it was as if she had been spinning around, and world turned around its center. And the city beckoned her down, and she walked quickly from the palace, and she went into the city. It was full of wagons, and the people were walking around in strange clothes, which she had not seen the night before, and some were better dressed than others. She saw a man dressed like a pig dragging two men dressed like pigeons, she saw men moving in packs like dogs, and she saw rats entering and stealing goods hanging in a shop that no rat could ever reach. In other parts of the city, she saw women dressed like vipers and scorpions and some covered themselves in decorations and others left themselves bare, and elsewhere men and women scurried like mice from building to building and gathered in certain places like cats to lap up water.

And she came to the square where she thought she'd seen her sister the night before, and people were crossing back and forth through it, and there was no trace of the dance. But sitting on a window-sill, the princess saw a woman who looked like an owl, and she went over to her, and asked, "Do you know about the dance that was here last night?"

"Oh that was a very special dance," the woman said. "The grain was dancing, and the two girls were the winds who toss the grain, and the one is a good angel and the other is a bad angel."

"That was the grain?"

"Yes, don't you think they were very convincing? I think a lot of people are going to start heading to the grain."

Now the princess looked at her and asked, "Now why are you dressed like an owl?"

And the woman opened her eyes wide and took her in.

"Well, why aren't you dressed like anything at all?" she said.

And the princess did not know what to say.

"Are you looking for an angel?" the woman asked. "Because the owls know how to get them as well." She took out a bowl of grain from the folds of her clothing, and she began to eat it, and she offered some to the princess. "You're very pretty, after all."

And the princess laughed, and shook her head and said, "I'm sorry, can you tell me where the grain are?"

"That way, I think," said the owl-woman pointing, and when the princess started walking, she called out after her. But the princess continued to walk, and the city was on a slope, and she went downhill, and the farther she went, the more the people were headed in the same direction.

And night began to fall and she came to a place where the buildings were made of clay, and they were cracked, and vines were growing on them.

And the princess walked between the buildings, and the walls of the buildings were open to the street, and there were shadows in the stalls as she passed, and there were ladders that led to them. And the buildings were five stalls wide by five stalls tall, and in these rooms men and women flaunted and exposed themselves in oil light, and atop them on the roofs walked various men and women looking up into the sky. And men and women walking on the street tried climb up the ladders and as they did, they pushed each other, and fell over into puddles and heaps. And the princess saw snakes and reptiles and sands standing in a circle and in the middle of them, one held a pipe, and his friends crumpled up leaves into the pipe, and the man had to smoke all the leaves until they were burnt away. And the princesses watched as he inhaled the smoke, and then twitched, and the smoke went up from his lungs and filled his mouth, and then he inhaled the smoke again into his lungs, and twitched, and brought it into his mouth again, and continued to inhale until the leaves were all gone. And when he was finished, he was sweating, and the men surrounding him, patting him on the back, and he had no expression on his face, and he merely said, over and over again, "My boys, my boys."

And then the princess reached a large building, and on the building there was a picture carved out of wood and it showed a man who had six arms and six hands, and in the lowest hands he held bundles of wood, and on the palms of the middle two burned flames, and in the hands of the highest he held two sticks, and atop them burned suns, and carved rays came from them, and went into the eyes of two women who stood beside him, leaning on the walls.

And the princess was staring up at it, and she held the prism in her hand, and she brought it to her eye, and she drank it in. And she saw that below the man sat two children kneeling, and around him men and women who carried various implements were in their homes, and on stools above him there were men floating, and their heads had flames which whirled around them. And a few burst from their chairs and were diving down towards the seething clouds, and they sheltered the man's head and there was one on either side, and the princess squinted against the prism, and tried to draw the divers into her eyes.

And then she took the prism from her eye, and the divers receded back into the wood, and her stomach was quieted, and she entered the building, and it was filled with people.

And it was arranged in a ring, and there were doors along the edge like the spokes on a wheel, and in the middle, there were three men who had drums, and they were drumming, and as they were drumming, they were singing. And when they saw the first princess at the door, they poked each other, and they began to look, and they sang about her.

And the one sang, "I see."

And the second sang, "I see I see."

And the third sang, "I see I see."

And the one sang, "I see I see I see."

And the second sang, "I see I see."

And the third sang, "I see I see I see."

And the one sang, "I see I see I see."

And the second sang, "I see I see I see I see."

And the third sang, "I see I see."

And the one sang, "I see I see I see."

And the second sang, "I see I see I see."

And the third sang, "I see I see I see I see."

And the one sang, "I see I see I see."

And the second sang, "I see I see I see I see."

And the third sang, "I see I see I see I see."

And the one sang, "I see I see I see I see I see."

And the princess could see dark figures swirling around the walls like plumes of smoke, and they were covered in fabric. And in the front of them were other figures, and they also wore fabric, but their heads were left uncovered. And in front of them were grayish figures, and they were covered in fabric, and it went from the waist down, and in front of them there were figures very pale, and they wore fabric, and it only covered their feet. And men and women dressed in red moved among them, stopping here and now there, and dancing in that place.

And the one drummer sang, "Get ready."

And the second sang, "Get ready, shouting in the wilderness."

And the third sang, "Get ready, shouting in the wilderness, straighten up the path!"

And the one stood up on his drum and shouted, "I don't see!"

And at once the people began to dance without order, and mingled themselves, and began to shout in clashing tones, and the princess held her prism tight, and she was knocked from all around, and as she struggled to keep herself upright, she caught sight of a girl like herself dressed in linen. But when the music ceased, the people all threw themselves onto the ground, and they fell upon the floor there, and a man fell atop the princess, and he was dressed in red.

And the first princess felt the man atop her, and she asked the man, "Are you from this place?"

And he said to her, "No, I'm dressed in red. The other ones are from this place."

And the first princess looked up at the others. And they were lying on top of each other, and although they had mingled, they were ordered from darkest to lightest. The drummers played softly and the men and women who had fallen into each other slow began to rise, and walk towards the doors at the edge of the room. And there were a few places where red seemed to move, and at one of them the princess saw the girl she had seen before.

And she rose to her feet, and as she rose, she looked up into the face of the man who had fallen atop her, and she could not see his eyes, but she saw his lips, and she saw his chin, and she saw his bones, and she saw them blush and pulse, and the faces of the men and women beside him were pale and burnt. And the princess leaned forward, and she said, "I'm looking at you. And this is what it's like: it's like on the dark earth there are ashes scattered, and dark coals, and beyond the ashes, there are burning coals, and a flame."

"And above the flame, the water is boiling," the man said, as if he continuing for her.

"Ah, that's why you're dressed in red!" the princess said.

"The flames consume the trees so that the angels can be seen beyond them."

"Oh, but what about the animals!" said the princess.

"The flames consume the animals."

"And water consumes the flames, though I admit I don't know what comes out of it. Maybe it goes into the air," said the princess.

And the man became uncomfortable and said, "I'm certain there's no one being consumed right now. We have to search for a very long time for the proper kindling that will burn well."

And the man fell silent for a moment.

"I don't understand," said the princess.

And the man drew the princess near, and he placed his hands on her head.

And he felt her skin, and he was careful, and he lingered.

And their veins interchanged and the princess began to feel his pulse as well as her own, and she felt pain all over her body. And it was hot, and she touched his skin, and the air was cool.

But at length he drew away, and he stood before her.

"I disgust you, don't I?" he asked, and the princess laughed aloud.

"Oh, I'm sorry that I look this way!" And the first princess explained, "I can only look up at the sky." But as if without thinking, she frowned and continued, "On the other hand, I see that the ashes have all had to choose among themselves, whereas you flames got to choose freely."

And the man laughed.

"That's why we come here. We would take them all if we could," he said, and he placed his fingers over the princess's eyes. And he said to her, "For we all know that in the end fire will consume everything."

And the princess thought of herself lying on the quilts of her bed as if on top of a mountain or on top of a tower. The people below were muted, and a golden cloud was flowing into her almost completely. And she whispered, and she asked herself, "This is me as well?"

And she very softly inhaled the man's breath, and it was perfumed, and she felt it drop inside her.

And she shut her eyes.

But his very splendor made her resist, and she bent to the side.

"I have to find my sister," she said.

"Your sister is here?" the man asked.

"Come find her with me," said the princess, and she took the man by his hand. And she went to where the other girl was standing, and another man in red stood next to her. And when the princess went near, she saw that she no longer looked like her sister.

"I'm not teasing you!" the girl said to the man, and she laughed, and she brought his hands around her body, and as she wrapped herself there. "How can I make it up to you?" she asked, as if as a joke, and the man reached out and bit her lip, and she laughed and said, "No, I understand." And the pair briefly turned to acknowledge the princess and the other man, and the door to the room opened, and they went in, and the princess followed them. And the floor was covered in hay, and the princess was struck by the feel of it.

And she saw that the other people were preparing to have sex. And she saw that they were the kinds of flames who mingle in the bright part of the fire where red and white interchange. And as she saw this, and she put a hand on the back of the man, and he was warm, and the princess thought of the boy in the cave. And she turned the man around, and she looked at him, and she asked him, "Will you help me find my sister?"

And the man said, "Your sister?"

And he looked at the other girl who was with them, and she was confused as well. And the princess apologized, "I'm sorry, I'm looking for my sister. She was taken a long time ago when the rocks crushed some plants, and I thought I saw her dancing the other day in the grain."

And the man laughed, and took up a few strands of hay, and he placed them in her hair so that she could seem them over her brow. And the other girl threw hay atop them, and laughed, and the second man pulled her to the ground, and the princess ducked to the side.

"What's that thing you're carrying?" he asked.

And the princess did not answer, but she brought the prism to her eye.

And she saw the other man atop the girl, and the man standing before her, and burnt markings went down his chest and arms, and she saw them standing in place of an enormous mountain, and the mountain was made out of white and sandy stone, and in places it seemed shine softly. And the mountain was made of naked bathers and they held each other up and crawled atop each other and men and women bathed each other, and as they worked, the mountain seemed to shimmer, and the bathers went in circles and the mountain seemed to turn. And from up the mountain came a stream of water and it had its source at the top of the mountain, and the stream fell down the mountain slowly, and it could only fall in between the bodies of the bathers, and trickle down between them, and over them, and join itself at the bottom.

And the man reached over and he pressed down the princess's head until it was against her chest, and he took a piece of fabric, and he wrapped it around her eyes so that she could not see. And the princess surrendered, and the man fell atop her, and she participated in the dance. And the man growled as his knees were bent into the gravel underneath the hay, and the lips of the second girl were puffed and and her eyes were overly bright and awkward.

And when it was done, the men said to the women, "And now you're both flames as well." And they hit their flanks, and asked, "Will you join us?"

And the girl went up to the princess, and she held her hand, and said to the men, "Only if we go together." And she turned to the princess. "Would you like to be my sister?"

And the princess said, "Well, I was wondering, do you know who the sisters are who are carved on the outside of this place?"

And the girl laughed.

"The two sisters! That's us," said the girl. "The two sisters are angels and they were separated and one day they meet each other."

"But you're not my sister."

And the girl said, "I know you're not, but would you like to be? We would make good sisters for the flames."

And the princess confessed, "I don't understand."

And one of the men turned to the girl and said, "Maybe she hasn't heard!"

And the other man turned to the princess and said, "The flames have the sisters now."

"Really?" asked the princess. "What does that mean?"

"Well, you must know that the grain originally had the sisters, and they thought that the sisters watched over them."

"But that was a long time ago," said the girl.

And the other man touched the princess's hair, and said, "And then the rocks crushed the grain. I used to be a rock. And we divided their power and most of the grain is now chaff."

"And then the fire came down and burst apart the rocks and found the angels."

"We send flames far and wide," one of the men said softly. "And we attend to the kindling so it's all burnt thoroughly."

"But don't the sisters watch over the grain?" the princess asked. "That's what I heard."

"That's what they think. They think the angels are just going to fly over them."

"So of course there are always some people dancing with the grain, but everything returns into the fire, and so the best angels can be found here."

And while they talked, they left the building, and the men said goodbye to the girls, and they bent down and kissed their hands, and then began to walk back home together. And above the stalls the princess could see the sun rising. The girl touched her arm, and led her behind the building, and a basin was there, and a toilet. And the princess went in to relieve herself, and she came out, and while the girl was inside, the princess washed her face. And the girl came out, and the princess saw that her lips were still raw, and her eyes were dazed.

And the girl looked away from the princess, and said goodbye to her and walked away. And the princess leaned against the basin, and waited. And when a few moments had passed, she went and she followed the girl to see where she was going.

And the girl walked sometimes with very slow strides, and other times rushed forward, and her arms were crossed. And when the princess became exhausted, she would peek into the prism, and she would move forward again, and in this way, she followed the girl beyond the houses, and they walked for a while and the sun came up overhead, and they came to a hill and the girl climbed up it, and disappeared beyond it. And the princess waited, and she crept up the hill, and she looked beyond it into the valley. And beyond the other rise, she could see the lake and the wind was blowing off it, and in the middle of the valley there was a light structure all made out of fluttering cloth.

And the girl went into it, and the princess sighed, and she rolled over onto the grass, and fell asleep, and did not dream.

And when she awoke, she kept her eyes closed because she felt certain pains like a piece of soft metal were being gradually pressed into her skull, a little bit on the left side, and a little bit on the right, and her nose was stopped with fluid, and when she breathed in the air, she felt her chest creak, and none of her limbs would move. And the sun was setting. And she crawled up to the top of the hill again, and the wind from the lake was blowing across her head in one way and then the other, and she looked up, and the criss-crossing winds slowed and crawled their way into the sky. Rays of the sun cut down through them like ladders and leaned on them, and they fell and melted in places and went across the lake and the hill. And the princess followed them up to the sun and she stared at it, and it was green and blue and yellow and red, and it came down, and the princess stared at it with fixed eyes, and she thought that it was a terrible thing to be shining.

And the princess stood up against the wind, and she brought the prism to her eye, and immediately she stumbled because the light seemed to come out and hit her and knock her to the ground. And she concentrated herself, and the light coming in seemed to spin around her, and she started to walk forward to the building, and it seemed to hammer onto her, and then the sun

receded, and the moon rose above the valley and it was so clear that it seemed to shine right through her, and she no longer struggled against it, even as it knocked her over, and instead it lifted her up and let her flutter.

And a fire had been lit outside the building, and she walked across the grass, and in the early night, the sheets that made the walls were glowing from the light inside them. And the princess ducked under a sheet, and she saw that the rooms within were open to the sky. And as she entered, the flames hissed and the wind started to blow, and the clouds increased their cover, and the princess watched as hands appeared over the tops of the walls and they pulled cloth over the roof, and covered them up. And the princess could hear voices from inside and the smell of meat and vegetables cooking.

And she turned into the next room, and there were people were seated on couches, and they barely turned to look at her. So she moved through the rooms quickly, and the people seemed to flutter by as the one followed the other. Until she came upon a room, and the floor of the room was soft clay, and two men were working in the clay, and when the princess passed through, one grabbed her clothing, and left a mark there.

“Wait,” he said to her.

And the princess turned to look at the men, and she saw that they were sculpting. And they looked directly at the princesses, and they each gathered up a mound of clay, and were working them into shapes.

But one of them had very deep eyes, and he tossed his clay to the side, and rose and went up to the first princess, and she saw that he was very slender, and the princess saw a glimmer in the movement of his limbs as they were working towards her.

And he asked her to hold still, and he set himself before her and he began to describe her, and he lingered over her, and he said, “You are very beautiful. And you have distracted eyes, and you smile to yourself, and then some stone is knocked loose, and your eyes fix upon a place, and your brow is very serious and steady the way that parents hold their children in front of them. And then you look up, and it’s as if you are placing a child to rest, and watching the sky above them! Of course, you turn away!”

And the princess laughed, and she said to him, “Now, why doesn’t everyone talk like that?”

And he said that one had only to look upon her.

“I would follow you and turn with you,” he went on, “and every day sit together and decide which way to walk, and you would find clear rocks on the shore and look through them, and I would put my eye up to them too, and we would outlast the stars, and the people of every age would come and look at us and laugh!”

And he paused, and turned away from her.

“You will not stay, I know,” he said. “And yet, beautiful one, the rocks will outlast us.”

And just then the other man stood and presented to the princess his sculpture, and in it she saw herself, and her head was very large and beautiful, and eyes were half-closed, and her body was very thin and frail, and she was squatting on the ground, and her elbows were on her knees, and her arms rose up and her hands were by her ears. But her belly was very big for her body and round.

“I don’t know if you know very much about me,” the princess said.

“You like it, don’t you?” the man said.

And the princess confessed that she did. “But you must be thinking of someone else,” the princess said. “I mean, you didn’t make that up on the spot. But you are very talented. You must be very well known.”

It was true, the men admitted, that their work was widely admired throughout the kingdom. And the princess saw that in one of the corners of the room was a pile of sculptures that the men had made.

“I say words along with the sculptures,” the first man explained. “And we give them to people.”

“I’ve never seen that done before,” said the princess.

“Really?” the man asked. “People like them a lot. Because there’s two kinds of angels. Some angels you want to come to you, and other angels you want to stay away. And people try to please them both, and that awkwardness accumulates in their heads. So some people like to come here and get the sculptures.”

“You can see them if you climb on the roof,” the other one said.

“We go up there sometimes to see what kind of sculptures help people,” the first man explained. “And sometimes we give people extra sculptures if they let us watch.”

“Do you want to see?”

And the princess said she would.

And they hoisted her up through the branches, and she saw that she could crawl along the tops of the walls, and the three of them crawled up there, and unfolded the coverings on the little rooms, and peeked inside.

And in one the princess saw a young girl and she was sitting very still before her sculpture, and it was a sculpture of a wolf, and the wolf ate a fox, and the fox ate a rabbit, and the rabbit was chewing up the grass. And the woman was whispering to herself very quietly and held a stick clutched in her hands very tightly against her stomach. And in the next room the princess saw a young man and he was staring down at a face made of very few lines, and he traced those lines upon his face. And then he traced other lines, and ran his hands against his cheeks as if to feel them. And in the next room there was a woman and she held pillows in her hands, and she was thrashing them on the ground, and she hummed to herself a very sweet song, but the melody was bunched up and it spun around very quickly. And her sculpture was her own body lying back on the ground and her clothes were ripped. And she tore at her clothes, and she exposed herself to the sculpture, and she ripped at her clothes as if she had been ordered to do it, and then she ripped her clothes as if to defy the sculpture, as if to ward it off, and then she turned to face the sculpture as if it had taunted her. And in the next room there was a man who had a piece of wire in his hands, and he was turning his fingers about, and turning the wire, and the wire was bent around his fingers just so it could be turned, and it was in the shape of a bunch of grapes. And in the next room, the princess saw the girl they had followed, and she was sitting before her sculpture and it had many branches, and along the branches curled a living plant, and the girl was staring at the leaves of the plant, and then she would shake her head, and try to look away from it, and she would avoid it until her eyes were drawn back to it. And then she shut her eyes, and her breathing became steady, and then it was as if she were jolted awake, and she stared again at the leaves, and she looked away, and then she quickly reached up, and she took a leaf, and she

chewed on it, and then she waited. And she closed her eyes, and her breathing was deep and heavy. And she took another leaf, and chewed on it, and then one more, and then she opened her eyes and she took from the plant just one more leaf, and placed it in the palm of her hands, so that its veins matched up with her veins. And then she took the leaf away, and she buried her hands in her clothes, and as she did so, the wind let up, and the clouds let through a little light that came into the room, and the girl turned her eyes towards it, and her hands fell to her sides, and she did not look at the plant.

And in the next room the princess saw a man with his back turned towards his own sculpture, and the man was himself working with clay.

“Some people like to copy us,” one of the men whispered to the princess.

“Hey!” shouted the other.

And the man turned from his sculpture and waved. And he stood up and left the room, and the men hopped down from their perches, and followed him, and the princess did too. And they went out of the building, and they were behind it now, and the earth was covered with mounds. And there was a small pile of sculptures nearby, and the third sculptor went up to it and took one and placed it in a hole in the ground, and began to make a mound atop it. And the men joined in, and the one who liked her explained to the princess, “Sometimes people like to get rid of their sculptures, and they don’t like to break them, so they come here and bury them.”

“And some people don’t even like to do that, so we bury their sculptures for them.”

“People seem to be very frightened of their sculptures,” said the princess.

“Well, that’s just the ones that come out here. Most of the people take them home and enjoy them. There’s good and there’s bad,” he said, and the man who spoke was the man who had described her, and he started to walk up the hill, and he asked her if she wanted to follow him. And she did, and he took her up to the top of the hill, and she lingered behind him.

“And people have trouble keeping the good in sight,” he continued. “And we try to pull them out of it so that the good will be seen. All things pull on each other, and they form rivers and plummets, and we are on the edge of a plummet, and we ride from sight to sight. And things appear to move towards and away from us, and we can gather things by pulling in sights along with us that fill and empty out into each other. And the people go into and out of the sculptures like that, and in that way, they keep the good in sight.”

And the princess stood beside him on the top of the hill.

“Would you like to have sex?” he asked her.

“What kind of question is that, really?” asked the princess.

“You’re very beautiful, and this is why people come out at night.”

And the princess laughed out of exhaustion, and she said, “Beautiful.”

“Yes,” said the man. “There’s more beautiful and there’s less beautiful. And we seek out the most beautiful. And when we do, all we want to do is look at it. And we don’t think about whether it’s more beautiful or less beautiful, we only think about how beautiful it is. And that is what it is like to live beautifully. And that is how we live, between the more beautiful and the less beautiful.”

“Do you ever describe the grain?” asked the princess.

“It’s hard to describe anything without describing the grain.”

“Because I’m looking for my sister, and thought I saw her in one of their dances.”

“The grain?”

“Yes.”

“Everybody’s looking for their sister in the grain! Every night a few girls come through here, and a few guys too.”

“So do you think my sister might be there?”

“If you want to go,” the man said, “there’s a group of people who were going to go there, if you wanted to go with them.”

“What do the grain do, anyway?” the princess asked.

“Oh, I don’t know. They go out in the hills sometimes. They aren’t hard to find,” he said. “But I think I know why so many people are going to the grain? Do you want to hear?”

The princess said she would.

“Normally when people come in, they want their description to talk about their kind, of course, and they like it when I put in stories about how the dogs helped the chickens and protected them from the foxes, and about how the vines attached themselves to the trees, and about how the mosses and grasses were friendly, and so on. And a lot of these stories go in circles and come back together, and you can go to other circles, and so you can go on for as long as you want. Of course, we could tell even more stories too because the stories are also about people. But when the grain come in, they don’t want to hear stories like that. They just want to hear stories about hills of grain, and they just want sway back and forth and back and forth.”

And he demonstrated as he talked, and swayed his arms in the air.

“How can you tell?” asked the princess.

“Well, some of them tell me how excited they are, and others look sad when I tell stories about other things or argue. Of course, the old stories about the grain are still around and some of people like to hear them as well, especially people like you.”

“I think I’m going to go with the other girls,” the princess said.

“But wait,” the man said. “I love you.”

And the princess laughed.

“No, I suppose I don’t,” said the man. “I just want to be left alone.”

“To do what?”

“I don’t know,” said the man. “Wait? Don’t you walk around most of the time and feel like nothing at all, and then for a moment you’re a child again, and you’re someplace else. Like I’ll be describing something, and suddenly it will feel like it’s night somewhere, and I’m in the city, and my aunt is near me, and we’re in the same house. I don’t know when it happened, but it feels entirely like another moment in my life. I wonder if all we do is repeat moments we’ve already had forever, and we don’t notice the first time around.”

“I suppose that’s possible.”

“Or maybe we just go from scene to scene, and we follow the scenes back to the source. And when we’ve gone through all the scenes and experienced our moments twice, we die.”

And the man laid back on the ground, and he was looking up, and the princess couldn’t see him anymore.

“Should I fall down on you?” she asked.

“I would never ask you to,” said the man.

So the princess sat down next to him instead.

“Can we have a conversation?” the princess asked him.

“Sure.”

“I think my sister loves everything,” the princess said to him.

“What does that mean?”

“I don’t know. I’m the princess at the palace, and I’m looking for my sister who was lost, and everyone’s been trying to have sex with me. And I notice that the more they ask, the closer I get to finding my sister.”

And she paused.

“Do all things come to an end?” she asked.

And the man laughed. And he said, “I’ve heard that a person should sing again and again to themselves that we are immortal.”

“But I’d like some things to end and not others, and I don’t know what will end and what will never. And I don’t know what I want to end in the first place.”

“Don’t you have hope?”

“What’s that?”

“It’s when you remember something beautiful, and even though you stop seeing it for a moment, you think you could do anything with a thing that beautiful.”

“I don’t understand.”

“Well, I can say for myself,” the man said, “that when I was a kid, my sister died and she left me this prism. And for a long time, every morning I would look up through the prism, and hold it to my eyes as I walked. And I looked until all the colors had exhausted themselves, and faded away, and then I would become blind. And it was humiliating when someone was standing next to me and saw something in the distance, and I saw nothing there. And when I woke up in the morning, nothing would appear until I looked into the prism, and I would blind myself to see things that I could show to people, and I wanted only to help them with the things that I saw, though I turned my head away from them so they wouldn’t feel uncomfortable by my eyes. And there came to be a voice in my head that told me things.

“It happened to me one day when I had been walking for a very long. And I learned to be very happy because I had a voice that told me things that I liked. I would see something, and I would think something, and then I would wait and the voice would surprise me, and say something that I liked. And I would agree or disagree with the voice. And one day I heard my voice and my voice said something that I liked about whether taking gentle tiny steps was better than striding around and walking against the wind.

“And I said aloud, ‘I like that.’ And then I said, ‘Yes, why don’t I just talk out loud, since you’re here anyway.’ And I did that. And I spoke, and I would ask questions of myself and so on. And sometimes I recognized the voices as people that I used to know, and if they were among my people or not, and so on. And later on I thought I discovered a third person with me who was just the pains in my body, and sometimes they would speak through one of the other voices, and say things like ‘I just don’t want to,’ and so on. And I said to myself, ‘I don’t think we’re all really that different from each other. Sometimes I think we’re different people, but other times we only seem to change places.’ ‘Though I don’t know if we change or we just disagree unexpectedly.’ And I agreed and said, ‘It’s just that we need enough people for a conversation.’ ‘Do you think some people don’t want to have conversations?’ ‘Some people are afraid of

conversations.’ ‘Maybe some people don’t like their voices.’ ‘Sometimes I don’t like my voices.’ And they laughed. ‘Well.’ ‘When I’m sad or tired, or the angry ones make me feel bad, or the very eloquent ones distract me, or the slow and confused ones make me slow and confused.’ ‘But things are beautiful and I don’t just mean the thoughts which are not always beautiful, but the things themselves are.’ ‘Yes, but you listen to the voice and the beauty runs away and you have to decide to go after it.’ ‘Since, after all, people want what they say to be considered beautiful and not how they look.’ ‘But in the end it’s about watching how they move.’ ‘But I think it’s because you find different things awkward in movement and speech.’ ‘Or maybe it’s too hard to watch anything for that long.’ ‘But we’re always watching something.’ ‘But there’s watching and then there’s watching.’ ‘And you want them to be the same?’ ‘Yes, and how could they be the same unless they were always the same, and got covered up?’ ‘Or maybe they aren’t the same. The problem is that there aren’t two things, there’s just two people seeing them.’ ‘But people are things too.’ ‘Once you know about it, you trust it will happen again. And you can still think about it, of course, and act accordingly. And it always happens again.’ ‘At least as much as the sun always rises unless its covered up by clouds.’ ‘And until the sun dies.’ ‘I will wait that long.’ ‘And yet you’re sad because you know you won’t and its your own fault.’ ‘One day, I will.’ And there was a silence. And one of the voices said, ‘A persistent wrong perfumes the mind.’”

And the man finished, and he lay back again, and threw his arms up in the air.

And the princess asked softly, “What did you do?”

“Nothing, I guess,” said the man. “I said my sister left me this prism when she died. And she died very suddenly, and I missed her a lot. And I played with the prism, of course, but I never looked through it. And I just kept it with me, and I kept it wrapped up in felt in my bag, and I tied the bag to my waist. And you might think I would have looked through the prism sometimes to remember her by, but I thought just the opposite. As long as I had the prism with me it felt like my sister was there, and I didn’t want to use it unless I absolutely needed her. And so I learned to do a lot of things on my own. And I decided I didn’t need the prism, or that what I saw with my own eyes was no more and no less than I would see through it anyway. And in any case, I became very good at looking and people came to me to have things explained to them because I could see how one thing diminished and another thing increased, and how people felt because of it. And one day I met a girl and this is what it was like. It was like we were two children and we were circling around each other, and I would try to fall to where she had been, and she would try to fall to where I had been, and we would always miss, and as we missed, we would keep circling around each other. And we were spinning around at the same time, but we were spinning in different directions and slower or faster, and sometimes we would see each other’s faces and run towards each other even faster, and sometimes we would see the other’s back, and we would spin faster to avoid it, and sometimes we would look away, and then we would try to run in that direction. And so we spent a lot of time together, and I was spinning around and circling, and this was very unfamiliar to me, and I loved it because I was always on the brink of touching her. And one day, she asked to look at the prism, and she looked through it, and said it was really nice. And she started to look into the prism every once and a while, and one day I looked through the prism too. And I was excited to do it, and I liked it too. And so, I became careless with the prism, and one day I went up to the palace because there was a beautiful tree there, and its flowers had the shapes of stars, and thought that I wanted to learn to fold that shape out of a piece of paper.

And I looked at the flowers through the prism, and they were white and pink, and while I had the prism to my eye, a man came up to me, and he said to me, 'I have to rob you.' And he repeated it over and over again. And he took my prism, and I followed him to regain it. Only he joined a group of people, and I could only follow him at a distance. And I did that for days until one night I cornered him and demanded back the prism. And he refused, and I argued with him, and he began to whistle. And at the whistle, I was surrounded and I was taken to see a man who was sitting on a stool, and he held the prism in his hands. And he was rolling it in his fingers. And he said, 'Is this your prism?' And I said it was, and I explained what it was. And he said, 'I'm sorry it was taken from you. My friends and I are about to leave this kingdom and set off for another one. Since everyone here tells us we're a part of the same family, but the family doesn't seem like us at all, and we all agree. And we're preparing to set off, and each of us has to contribute towards the journey, and one of my men got desperate, and stole your prism.' And he said, 'You can certainly have it back. Only, I wonder if you would like to come along with us?' And I didn't trust him, and I played along, and I told him that I would like to come. And he said, 'But you'll need to contribute to the journey.' And I told him I had nothing. 'In that case,' he said, 'let me take your prism.' And he laughed. And I said I couldn't do that, and therefore he offered to break the prism in half, and I would keep half, and he would hold on to half. And I said that I didn't want to do that. And then he asked, 'Are you sure?' And I was scared, and in that moment I thought that even if I could only have half my prism it would be better than nothing, or maybe I thought they would hurt me, or maybe I thought I would have the chance to steal it back in time. And so I said, 'No, okay. Fine, I think I'll do it.' And then the man took out a saw and cut the prism in half right there, and then he had the ends polished. And he gave me my half, and nothing happened after that. So I left that place in order to think, and I returned home since I had no intention of leaving. And I didn't tell the girl I knew about it. And I did not sleep or eat, and every question was painful. And I realized that I had made a mistake and I tried to live having made this mistake. But something was heating up inside me, and it was like I had my back turned to the girl that I loved and a lot of other people as well, and it was like I was tumbling forward and backwards instead of spinning around. And so I decided to go after my prism, and I knew that the man was headed to this kingdom, and I wrote something down for the ones that I loved the most and then I left without saying a word. And I walked for a very long time, and at times I slept soundly, and other times I thought to overtake them and I ran for hours at a time. And when I couldn't run any more, I would look through the prism and then I could run. And when I was lonely I would look through the prism and I would forget about the way I had come and the way I was going and I would listen and talk to the path in front of me. And I would lie down to sleep in a daze, and I would feel myself in the middle of the path and far from the beginning and far from the end, and I would cough, and the end would draw towards me, and I would get up and stagger and run to meet it. And when I encountered people on the road, I would ask them the way, and they talked to me, I would talk to them and I talked a lot until I almost forgot that they were there. And then I was scared that they would disappear, and I would take out the prism and show them things, and I would hear what they liked and disliked, and they would explain them to me, and I would try to make what everyone said make sense to me. And later out of gratitude for their company, I would think of them and talk with them, and look into the prism to discover things to say to them if they came back to me. And I tied the prism with a string around my head,

and kept it before my eyes, and walked towards the end, and didn't think about it unless my eyes were closed. And I forgot about the slowness of my pace and the times when I went in circles, and only remembered that I was still walking. And I thought of how happy I would be if I could still be helpful to the people that I had known after I was gone.

"And then one day I arrived here at last and I was coming down from the golden mountain and keeping the city in view, and I stared at it and the more I stared at it, the slower I walked. And each step I took was shorter than the last. And as I stared, the city was reaching out to me, and I looked into it, and I kept looking into it, and did not see into it. And I struggled against the air thickening around me until I was crawling on my hands and knees, and I crawled on my stomach, and my arms and legs were thin and twisted, and I thought that if my sister could see me now, I would disgust her. And then I ceased. And I let the prism fall from my eyes and it landed on the dirt in front of me, and I looked at it with my chin in the dirt, and it sparkled there. And then I knocked it away with my arm and I knew that if I were to look into it again, I would die. So I buried the thing, and I didn't search the city, and now I live here and I try to live rightly and wait to die with joy. And if it happens before we're finished what we're doing, then it does come too soon. But don't you think we should be happy no matter when it comes, since it will free us from this painful thing that doesn't end but in confusion? I'll meet death bravely, I will. Because I see and love all this and I see you and all the people and things, I'm constantly saying goodbye. And I only hope that you don't entirely forget me. I think I deserve at least that, because during my lifetime I have been thinking of people often and of ways to make them happy."

And this is the way the man finished.

"And you don't want to look through the prism again?" asked the princess.

"Maybe I would," he said. "But I'll never find the spot where I buried it."

"And you still think of your sister?"

And the man laughed, and said, "Of course."

And the princess raised herself up from the ground, and she could feel the wind on her arms, and she could see down into the little valley and it was quiet in the distance. And she felt the man to the side of her, and he was lying down very still and looking up at the clouds. And she pulled herself over to him, and she kissed him on the lips. And she put a hand on his face, and she said, "I have something that you might not want to see."

And the man said, "What do you mean?"

"Do you want to come with me and help me find my sister?" the princess asked.

And the man laughed.

"What are you talking about?"

And the princess brought out of hiding the prism that she carried, and she showed it to the man, and said, "I have a prism just like yours."

And the man sat up, and took it in his hands, and he felt that it was broken.

"How did you get this?" he asked softly.

"My teacher Baruch gave it to me, and I'm using it to find my sister."

And the man turned the prism over and over in his hands, and ran his fingers along its surface.

“You can have it, of course,” the princess said. “Or you can let me keep it, if you’d rather do that. Only, will you help me find her?”

And the man brought the prism slowly up to his eye, and as he did his hand faltered, but he looked through it just the same, and then he breathed out. And he turned to the princess and said, “You’ll really give me the prism?”

And the princess said yes, and she turned to him, and she took the prism from his hands, and she brought her face very close to his face, and she put the prism between their eyes. And they blinked at each other.

And the man put his arms around her, and he kissed her. And she bit him on the arm and without a pause he bit her back, and they rolled over, and they rolled down the hill, and then they rolled over and up it, and the grass and their breath made a sound as they moved across it, and they heard certain melodies that rose and fell, and rose and fell in certain ways, and they did not do it in the same way each time. And these melodies had certain spaces between their notes, and one melody interspersed with another, and they continued of their own accord as motion resists stillness. And the winding melodies scraped against each other like two wheels turning and interchanging their teeth, and sometimes a tooth would be knocked out and sometimes the teeth would scrape and vibrate, and make another note that hung in the air. And sometimes the teeth would grind down in places and the wheels would turn freely against each other and harmonize, and only little bumps would set the wheels apart, and these would build up or deepen, and teeth would grow out of the wheels.

And then they heard a dozen voices near them, and they heard that the girls were ready to go out to see the grain. And the princess stood up, and the man stood up too, and they went to go meet them. And while they were walking the princess asked, “What’s your name?”

And the man said, “Malach.”

And the girls were standing outside the building, and the sheets were whipping around them, and they were talking to one another and gesturing. And a few men stood interspersed between them and sometimes they spoke too or ran back inside to collect something and return. And when they were all ready to leave, they walked around the building and there was a wagon there and the wagon belonged to Malach. And a few of the girls got into the wagon, and a few more walked beside it, and they took turns pulling the wagon for the others. And Malach and the princess pulled the wagon together, and they pulled it over the hill, and down to the path, and then the city was around them. And while they pulled the wagon, the sun was just barely rising, and they turned into the city, and they started to creak down into an empty uneven street, and from a corner up ahead they saw three girls all dressed alike turn onto the street, and walk down it. And they saw other girls wandering on different streets, and some walked singly and in pairs or in groups, and they joined with each other when they met. And then they saw some girls come down from the hillsides, and Malach pointed at them, and they followed them to a place where girls were rushing from house to house and all talking to each other, and leaving their doors, and heading in various directions, and the city was rising into a chatter.

“Who are all these people?” asked the princess.

“Well, I bet they’re headed to the grain too.”

And the pair pulled the wagon deeper into the city, and as they pulled, the girls became younger and older, and they saw young girls running after their sisters, and older women

whispering in groups, and men started to follow them, and soon entire families were walking hand in hand. And groups of people came rushing into them from other streets, and they would be enveloped in a flock of birds, and then dogs would run and snap at them, and lions and bears would lope and saunter among them, and groups of men and women all of them young would walk together and argue and some would drag the others along. And then the sun peeked out over the roofs of the buildings and the princess saw many faces in the windows, and some of them disappeared from there and went down to the street, and some of them packed up wagons with food and clothing and other necessities and creaked into the road, and every once and a while Malach and the princess would come into an open area and all the houses would be strangely silent. And they would cut across those areas and soon they would find a crowd and disappear into it until more and more wagons appeared in the streets, and the wagons pushed the people against the walls of the houses, and the streets became packed with them. And the wagons would start forward and stop and rush forward as a whole and cease and people would abandon their wagons and sometimes rush across the tops of the wagons, hopping and tripping on sacks and bundles, and the princess heard people talking around her, and they said that the people were going to need things to eat and things to drink while they were out there, and other people were looking for their sons or daughters or their friends.

“I don’t think we’re going to be able to move,” the princess said.

And Malach agreed, and she took his hand, and they abandoned the wagon, and ducked between the houses, and found one of the staircases leading to the bridges, and they wound their way up the staircase, and emerged onto the roof. And people were there too, and men and women were looking down at the crowds and explaining what was happening to people looking up at the sky, and sometimes those doing the explaining would fall silent, and look, and then descend into the crowd.

And they went to the railing and Malach told the princess what was happening, and he said he saw dances across the city in different places. And he saw dark figures start very still in the center of a crowd, and people from crowds coming into the center and starting to dance. And the more people who came into the center, the more the people moved faster and faster and spread out from the center, and the more people who danced and the more wildly they danced, the more they were pressed in against each other, and they locked arms and started to dance together, and they formed new dances, and some were like rings, and some were like crosses that spin, and some were like rivers that flow into each other, and they made all kinds of shapes with their arms interlocked and within these dances still more people danced. And the dances moved around, and only a few people were left outside of the dances, and the dances connected up, and when they connected up some of the people in the middle escaped, and ran out into the empty spaces between the dances, and sometimes they joined the other dances, and sometimes they did not, and they sometimes they turned around and sometimes they returned. And so the spaces in between the dances made them visible, and people seemed to avoid the dark spaces as if they were repelled by them. And the dances moved away from each other and gave each other space, and the crowd gave way. And when a dancer returned to a dance, they made those dances similar. And when a dancer returned, the whole dance made room for the dancer, and so the dances changed for one another. And many dances took place within one dance, and sometimes there were dances within dances, and each one was formed from the interlocking of the arms. And

each dance took in new dancers and threw them out in different ways. But all over the city, the same dances were danced everywhere, and the people would end up in one dance or the other. And when two dances that were very similar collided and formed one dance, the new dance was like the old dances, but because the dance was larger, the people had to move faster in order to dance it. And all sorts of dances collided, and some of them scattered when they collided, and sometimes two dances that were very dissimilar would combine and create a very wild dance.

And through the dances, wagons were led in circles and curled around the city like the roots of a tree, and the circles pushed father and farther from the center of the city, and one crowd of people was rushing into another, and another crowd rushed from the other way, and people were pushed out of the gate, and they ran out of the city, and one crowd twisted around another, and they were flung towards the hills, and Malach and the princess raced across the roofs to follow them, and when they got to the hills, they walked among them.

And they walked for a very long time and the day began to grow misty and strange and Malach and the princess came down from the city. And suddenly across the way, they saw that people were blanketing the hills. And they walked forward, and this is what they saw. They saw that the people were flowing in one stream towards a single point and they curled around it, and it was always growing, and they pleaded with their hands, and cast their eyes in joy at it, and some walked back and mingled into the crowd to get a second look. But the rest continued on beyond it, and beyond it the people split into two, and of the first, one part gathered up rocks, and another part gathered up mud, and another part gathered up wood, and these things were all in huge piles as large as the hills, and people were radiating from them and then returning to them and adding to them. And the rest were taking from the piles and they walked ahead and there was an enormous statue there rising from the earth, and the people walked up a spiral scaffold, and they build the scaffold as they went with wood, and they added stone and mud, and neither Malach nor the princess could see what the statue was, and the surface of it was uneven and constantly being added to, and it seemed to reach up like boiling water above the heads of the people building it. And people went up and down the scaffolding in spirals. And below it stood crowds and they all had their eyes fixed above them, and they were pointing and shouting, and suggesting things.

But some did not go to the statue, but went onto the hills, and spilled out there, and they covered the hills as far as the princess could see, and they were arranged in perfect lines, and they kept their eyes on the ground, and it seemed they were constantly falling to the ground, and then catching themselves, and planting grain there, and they planted it in rows from bags they carried. And the princess and Malach came very close to them as they moved up in line towards the point the people were swirling around, and they heard that they were murmuring to themselves as they did it.

And then they were near the point and the people were moving around it, and the princess came up near it, and she saw what was there. And there were dozens and dozens of young girls and they were all dressed in linen, and they were seated there so that they could be seen by everyone, and sometimes people would rush into them and collect a girl, and they would embrace and weep, and other times people would rush into them and the girls would resist, and sometimes it seemed like they were mothers, and other times fathers or brothers or sisters. And every once and a while a stranger would go up to a girl who was sitting there and say something

to her, and sometimes they would leave, and sometimes they would not. And so all the girls who had been sought were here where they could be found. And the princess tried to run her eyes among them to find her own sister, if she were there, but she could not look down from the sky. And so she grabbed Malach and had him look there and describe the women who were there so that she could see them.

And he described them as fast as he could, but he was not fast enough, and they had walked a circuit around them, and then they were forced to go back into the crowd and wait in line, and it was like marching up wet sand blindly. And they walked and walked for hours until the crowds thinned and women disappeared, and the princess did not see her sister there.

And she sat down on a little stump near the scaffolding and she rested her head on her hands. And Malach stood in front of her, and he was turned around and watching the people drift away, and some of them went back to the city, and others of them stayed in the fields, and still more still went up and down the scaffolding. And a few had planted tents, and fires were burning, and they intended to stay the night.

“I’m sorry,” he said.

And she did not speak to him.

And he turned and looked at her for a long time and then he smiled and took out his knife.

“You want to play a game with me?”

“What is it?” asked the princess.

And Malach explained, “Oh, what you have to do is this. We take turns and you try to balance the knife, point down, on the tip of your finger, and then you quickly lift up your finger like this--and try to make the knife flip over and bury itself in the dirt. It’s hard,” he said. “You can do it with your eyes closed too, I know it’s possible. So you can play.”

And the princess laughed, and Malach balance the knife on his finger and tossed it up and the princess heard it flop on the ground, and he laughed.

“It’s hard, I said. Now you try.”

And the princess stood up, and she balanced the knife on her finger, and she tossed it up to where she could not see it, and then she heard it fall.

“Almost!” said Malach, and he tried again himself. And although at first they were unable to get the knife to sink into the ground, every once and a while Malach would shout, and it would come close, and soon it came close enough. And the princess closed her eyes and concentrated, and she tried lifting her arms up more, or stepping backwards and forwards so as to balance the knife, and Malach watched her attentively, and the princess watched the top of his head attentively, to see how the other was doing, and soon the knife sunk into the earth most of the time, but other times it did not, and Malach would growl, and the princess would laugh. And then Malach burst out, “Watch this!” and he flipped the knife up so violently that it stuck into the scaffold above them and vibrated there. And for a moment all was silent, and then the princess burst out into laughter.

“Well, now how are we going to get that?”

And Malach took her hand and they joined with the people building the statue and walked up the scaffolding among them, and pushed their way through them, and when they came to the spot where the knife was stuck, Malach knelt, and keeping his eyes to the sky, reached

underneath the floor and took it. And he stood up, and rested his hands on the banister of the scaffolding, and looked out over the fields of grain, and the princess stood beside him.

“I’m glad they finally found something to do for people who look down at the ground all the time,” Malach said.

“It’s never enough,” said the princess, and Malach laughed, and looked down.

“I wonder if I can get the blade to stick in from up here?”

And the princess laughed.

“You know, where I’m from,” Malach said. “we play that game and some people say it has a secret lesson.”

“What is it?” asked the princess.

“I can’t tell you,” he said. “It’s a secret.”

“So you don’t know.”

“Well,” he said. “I don’t know if I can explain it. I think there’s only two ways to explain something and then a secret way. Half the world is satisfied by the first kind and half the world is satisfied by the second kind. And the first one is when you explain something to someone you love, and there are strings attached from that person to you, and they go across the space between the two people, and you describe something that swings across the strings and walks on them and hangs. And the thing carries a string of its own, and it jumps to the other person, and it ties onto something there. And the second kind is when you explain something by establishing a law, like a certain kind of net, and in full view of the other person you cast the net, and it drags in only certain things, and those things are all alike. And then the other person carries the net with them, and when something jumps out at them, they can catch it.”

And Malach leaned over and he kissed the princess on the lips.

“For example, that’s a kind of explanation,” he said. “But I won’t say what kind it is.”

“Clever. But what about the secret explanation? Or should I not ask that?”

“Well, this is what I think about,” Malach said.

“Yes?”

“Well, what if I drop this knife over the edge and it falls to the ground, and I tap on the railing as its falling. Here, you tap, and I’ll drop it.”

And he held the knife over the edge.

“Ready?”

“Go!” said the princess, and she started to tap, and Malach dropped the knife.

“It took six taps,” said the princess.

“Okay,” said Malach, and he ran down to get the knife, and pushed his way back to where the princess stood. “So I drop the knife and it takes six taps. Okay, now can we do it again?”

And the princess raised her finger.

“But this time I’m just going to throw it as far as I can,” Malach said, and he cocked his hand back and the blade was facing forward.

“Okay, go.”

And Malach hurled the knife as far as he could, and it flew through the air, and it came down to the ground and slid there, and then tumbled.

“How many taps was that?” Malach asked.

“Well, six,” she said. “But as you were watching it, it seemed to take much longer.”

“Maybe you thought it was more interesting to look at.”

“Maybe. It did look like it sailed through the air!”

“But it took six taps each time! It’s funny,” he said. “So if we had two knives, and you just dropped your knife point down and I threw my knife as hard as I could, no matter how far I threw it from me, the knives would hit the ground at the same time.”

“Yes,” said the princess.

“It’s one of those things you learn as a kid where I’m from. Though I think I figured it out on my own first, since I liked to play the game by myself, and I would try to get lots of knives to stick in the ground at the same time. And one day I told it to one of the other kids, and he liked it, and I started telling it to a lot of people, and I started to meet kids who laughed at me because they had already heard of it. Since all the kids love to play that game. But some of the people doubted it, and they teased us for not being able to throw the knife hard enough, and they boasted about how their knives could chase men down, so one day I went off into a field on my own to throw the knife as far as I could. And I kept throwing it and throwing it, and it kept going farther and farther, but no matter how quickly the knife was going, it still eventually dug into the earth. And I closed my eyes and bent my arm back and I imagined I could just throw the knife so fast that it would just go forward and never fall!

“And I opened my eyes and the knife fell on the ground. And I decided it couldn’t be done because no matter how hard I threw it, it would always come down to the ground eventually, and I would always know when because I could just drop a knife nearby and see how long it took to fall. And I almost decided to stop throwing knives altogether! And I sat down and I started to think, and I thought a bird would have no trouble flying and flying, and never falling, but they’re always flapping their wings, and I was just throwing the knife.”

“And even when the birds do fly around the world, they stop to roost sometimes,” the princess said.

“Yes, but is there something even better than the birds!” Malach said, and he was excited. “Because I think the kids who used to tease me were right!”

And he cocked back his arm as if to throw a knife.

“So I wandered around the field and I came to a hill and I threw the knife at the hill and it stuck there, and I reached down and grabbed it up. And I kept walking up the hill, and then just as I was coming up to the crest of it, I threw the knife at the top of the hill and it fell towards the top of it, but it went too far, and the ground disappeared from under it, and it fell on the other side. And then I thought it’s like the knife is chasing the earth and it tries to find it. And then I thought, but what if every time the knife tried to grab earth, the ground beneath it danced away, like the other side of the hill going down. And I thought, what if I could just throw the knife fast enough that whenever it tried to grab the earth, the earth danced away from it. And even if it grazed a leaf, it would still be going so quickly that before it fell to the ground, the ground would fall away from it, and they would fall together, and the knife would return to the place where it started, just like the birds do. And it would do that forever! And it could stick you in the back!”

And Malach look at the princess and he saw her smile, and then from the very corners of her eyes, she began to cry, and the tears hung down her cheek. And she said, “Yes, I suppose so. But only if you’re fast enough to begin with.”

And she wiped her eyes.

“How do you go that fast?” she asked.

And Malach said, “I don’t know.”

And by then, night had fallen, and the people were headed to sleep. And Malach led the princess down the scaffolding onto the grass, and they started to walk back to the city.

And they came to the city gates, and they went through them, and people were outside, and fires were burning here and there, and some people were still celebrating. And they went up to the palace, and they passed by the entrance to the labyrinth with its shining white tower, and the garden beside it. And noises and shouting came from inside, and some of it was happy and some of it was sad.

And at the doors to the palace, Malach stopped and he turned to her, and he said, “I guess I have to go.”

And the princess turned to him.

“You can stay here,” she said.

“I don’t know what Baruch will do once he knows I have the prism.”

“I don’t think he’ll do anything,” said the princess. “Maybe he was different then, but he’s one of my friends now. And I’m sure once I explain it to him, he’ll let you have it.”

“No, I don’t want to,” said Malach, and he took out the prism and he held it up to the light of the moon, and tangled up stars glimmered on its surface. “I’d rather not.”

“Well, then, where can I find you? At the sculpture place?”

“I think I’m going to go down to the docks,” he said. “And I’m going to sail across the lake. Can you imagine what the water will look like and the land when it comes through the prism? I don’t want to have to walk anymore, and I just want to cut through the water, and I’ll find some place to live or maybe I’ll try to return home on water, since I don’t know how far the lake goes, or if the river near where I live flows from it.”

And he paused.

“You can come with me if you want,” he said.

And the princess thought about it, and she shook her head.

“No, I don’t think I can.”

And she hugged him.

“Thank you, though.”

And Malach laughed, and they sat down by the door and they talked for a while, and the princess gave him some of the gold she carried, and then he said goodbye, and he kissed her tightly, and he ran off towards the lake.

And the princess went inside the palace, and she could still hear voices, and she followed them and they led to the garden, and through the windows she could see fires were lit, and people were sitting around a table, and she came out the door, and walked down the corridor with the vines, and came into the garden, and she saw that dozens and dozens of people were crowded into the garden, and a few people sat at the table in the midst of them, and some had climbed up the trees and were looking down at them. And the princess pushed through the crowd, and she came to the table, and at the table sat her father and her mother and between them sat her sister and standing behind her stood Baruch.

And they cried out to see her, and her parents embraced her, and her sister was standing off to the side, and she was crying, and she was trying to smile through it, and she was wearing linen, and she had turned into a very beautiful woman.

“Where were you?” the queen cried. “Where have you been?”

And the first princess ran to her sister and they embraced, and they stood there against each other, under the tree, and one looked up and one looked down.

“Where were you? Where were you?” the first princess asked, and she kept asking, and her mouth was near her sister’s hair and her ear.

“Baruch came to the grain and found me,” the second princess said, and she laughed, and then her face twisted, and she shook her head. “The rocks were divided, and some of them made a deal with the grain to crush them into flour, and we all dressed in white and went, and Baruch saw me in the crowd, and got me to come home.”

“I was there too,” the first princess said, and she laughed. And her mother and father and Baruch were watching. “You were with the rocks? I thought--”

“No, I never left them. After all, you made it home, so how could the fire have us?”

And she turned away, and she kept her eyes on the ground.

“You know, when I was with the rocks, I learned a lot,” she said, and she sighed. “I want you to understand why I did what I did.”

And she was speaking to all of them.

“I learned a lot about how people live down in the city, and I stayed with the rocks because they convinced me that this kingdom deserves a new king, and that I was an important piece in this struggle. The grasses had seen us that night, and they told stories about us, about how we watched over them, and everyone tried to claim us. And the rocks convinced me to stay with them, and not leave. You know, nobody was crushed under that rock! It was all part of a dance! And I knew that if I came here and let you know that I was alive, you would never let me return, and I couldn’t argue with you because I did not know how to speak well. But when I saw Baruch tonight, I decided that it was time. And I want you all to know that those like me who look down have joined with the grass to make grain, and the rocks will crush the grain, and soon we will have a deal with the fire to cook it into bread, and the people will be fed by the fields, and not go hungry, and tonight was a celebration of that. And this thing we call a city will be a hundred times as big. And I am to represent that, and I will.”

And the second princess turned to her sister, and she said, “I’m sorry.”

And the first princess laughed, and she said, “I just can’t believe it.” And then she laughed again, and said, “You’re very strong.” And finally she said, “No, I forgive you,” and she laughed one last time, and she hugged her sister again, and they both collapsed in tears.

“We’ll figure something out,” the first princess said. “We’ll figure it out.”

And she turned to her father and mother.

And her father said, “Of course, we’ll figure it out.”

And then they all sat down at the table and started to talk. And when the celebration was over, and the people were returning to their rooms, the king and the queen gave their daughters last hugs, and went inside. And the two princesses were left along with Baruch. And Baruch turned to the first princess, and said, “You took my prism.”

“I needed it,” she said. “I don’t have it anymore, I’m sorry. I can explain. Do you remember Malach?”

And Baruch closed his eyes, and nodded his head, and he said, “We’ll talk.” And he smiled.

“Yes, we’ll talk,” said the first princess, and Baruch left the sisters alone. And the first princess turned to her sister.

“You’ll stay for a while?” she asked.

“Yes, I’ll stay for a while. And later, I’ll go in between,” the second princess replied, and then she turned to her sister, and said, “I want to show you something.”

And she bent down to the ground near the tree and picked up two pebbles.

“I learned this from the rocks,” she said, and she handed one of the pebbles to the first princess, and she held the other in her hand.

“Put it in your mouth,” she continued, and she put the other pebble in her own mouth, and she held it there in her cheek while she talked. “When you hear a ringing in your ears, and your eyes grow dim, hold onto the rock inside you, and you will be preserved. When a thousand hands reach out for you and a thousand smiles put you to sleep, hold onto the rock inside you, and you will be preserved. Now swallow.”

And she swallowed her pebble, and the first princess did the same.

“The rock is a secret king, and when all thoughts depart, and all feelings rise into a roar, and all desires are fixed by fate, this rock will remain for you to grab hold of. And when you grab the rock you will not be swept away, and in all times and all places, the rock is within reach.”

And the first princess said, “This is what the rocks do?”

And the second princess said yes, and the second princess said she understood.

And they walked out of the garden and into the palace, and they went into their own room, and they lay upon the bed there, and they had not lain together for a very long time, and they played a game that they used to play, and they took turns using their fingers to imitate various creatures. They used their forefingers and middle fingers to make their hands walk across the side of the other like a little girl on two legs. And the little girl would ascend the curves of their bodies, up the swell of their hips, and then slide down along the path of the belly. And they would make ant-eaters by raising their middle fingers, and keeping the rest against the other’s skin, and the ant-eaters would walk slowly from place to place, and circle the entire world, inspecting with its snout a freckle or a nipple or a bit of hair. And when they laid on their backs, and connected their bellies, they could both make ant-eaters, whose snouts would gently touch, and communicate, only to run off in fear, or return for another round. And as dawn approached, the princesses saw themselves from above, on the body of the earth, just as they had seen their fingers sit on the world of their bodies. And they imagined the world as one body resting on another body, which itself rested on another, so that just as one could walk around the entirety of the world, one could walk from body to body.

And so, they fell asleep. And the next morning the first princess woke up early, and she got up and she looked out the window, and the sun was rising, and the moon was still hanging there, and she looked out across the city, and she heard her sister turn behind her in her sleep, and the room was very quiet, and the larks were waking up outside, and the city seemed very far

away and distant and blurry from where she looked, although the sky was clear. And she could see dust start to rise from the streets.

And she sat down, and she got a piece of paper, and she wrote a note to her father and mother and to her sister and to Baruch and some other people, and then she slipped out of the palace, and went down to the docks. And she paid passage on a boat, and she got on the boat, and the sail unfurled, and it cut from swell to swell, and she stood on the prow, and she watched the clouds rush past above her. And behind her the boat was filled with people all talking and looking up at the sky, and when the wind faltered, some of them began to row. And while they rowed and sweated, they sang,

taking a break  
 taking a break, from the things we like to do  
 we do them for you  
 taking a break  
 taking a break, from the things I like to do  
 I do them for you  
 forget about things  
 forget about the things you like to do  
 I do them for you.

And this is the reason why the people who live around the lake build their ships with figureheads of angels, and why two angels embrace each other, one hundred feet tall, above the grain fields there.

THE NAME OF GOD (ANGELS OUTTAKE)  
2012

“Who are you?” asked the princess.

“My name is Malach,” said the man. “Who are you?”

“I’m the princess. What are you doing here?”

The man sat down on the bed beside the princess.

“Will you promise not to tell?” he asked.

“I promise.”

“I have just escaped from the labyrinth outside the palace. I am trying to run away.”

“Why?”

“Because I very much want to see the outside world.”

The man hesitated for a moment.

“Do you want to come with me?”

“I really don’t think I can,” answered the princess.

“If you come with me, I will show you a secret that I have discovered. I carry it with me all the time, and I have never shown it to anyone.”

“What sort of secret?”

“I have discovered the name of the Creator.”

“Really?”

The man assured her it was true, and she looked into his eyes and saw that it was true.

“I will go with you,” the princess said. “What you must do is this. Go into the other room and get a uniform, and put it on. There are also sacks in there. Take a sack, and place me inside, and tie it up. Carry me on your back to the docks. No one will stop you. Then, we will get on a ship together and make our escape.”

The man did as the princess suggested, and they escaped onto the sea.

They sailed for many days until a great storm swept in from the east, and knocked the ship against the rocky shore of a distant kingdom. The man and the princess were thrown from the boat, but he grabbed hold of her, and carried her to shore. The next morning the princess awoke and saw that she was safe.

“Where are we?” she asked.

“I don’t know,” said the man.

They waited until night fell, and the princess gazed up at the stars, but they all looked different to her, and she could not tell where they had landed.

“Now that we’re here, and we have nowhere to go,” she said, “tell me your secret.”

“I will try to explain the secret, but it is very difficult.”

“Please try.”

First, he captured for her a squirrel and gave the squirrel a berry. The squirrel ate it up immediately and departed. He gave a berry to the princess, and he ate one himself.

“Now, you and I know that this berry is very perfect. It has a tough skin, but one which is satisfying to break through. It has flavors within it, some more subtle than others. In fact, the berry tastes different when you first put it in your mouth, when you chew it, and when you swallow it, and afterward,” he said, and he held up another berry. “And it is just a little weighty,

and nice to hold in one's hand. It is quite remarkable that so much intricacy can fit inside such a small thing."

The princess ate another berry and agreed.

"Now, I see that when you eat the berry, you take a moment to savor its qualities. And you are right to do so, for there is much to understand about the berry. But the squirrel ate the berry very quickly and I think therefore that this squirrel did not understand the berry as we do."

"Yes, it may have enjoyed it, but did not appreciate it as we do."

"So what is the difference between a squirrel and a human being? For this behavior of the squirrel is characteristic of it, whereas our savoring a berry is characteristic of the human being. The squirrel in general is much less subtle than a human being, and it is not so intricate as to be able to appreciate the intricacies of the berry. It is clear to me that different beings are more or less subtle, and to their degree of subtlety they appreciate the subtlety of that which they encounter. The sand sparkles as it encounters the sun, but it does not grasp the subtlety that we grasp, that all things derive from their encounter with the sun. In the same way, the simple man will not grasp the words of the wise man, because he is not sufficiently subtle to perceive the beauty of the wise man's words. Now, we call something beautiful when we are sufficiently subtle enough to perceive that thing's subtlety, so that beauty itself is the measure of subtlety, and that which is beautiful is also that which is most useful, for, in the case of the berry, if one perceives the subtlety of the berry, instead of eating it without thinking, then one is able to employ it in various dishes, and create yet more beauty from what was already beautiful.

"That which is least subtle is nothing, and that which is most subtle is everything. Now, all things leave a trace of their being. For example, humans leave behind their bodies, and the memories of them, and cities leave behind them ruins, and the history of their functioning, and it is this trace that we call the name, and it is carried to us by various means. The name is the trace of the thing, just as if one follows the traces of a bird, or its call, the bird is found, and if one follows the name of a person, or their voice, the person is found. So, what is the trace left by that which is most beautiful? For all things leave traces in the world. The name of that which is most beautiful must be the most subtle of names. This we have heard. Now, close your eyes."

The man took a number of rocks and placed them in the sand in the following way. He placed one and then two beside it, but higher, like a step. Then, he placed one below again, and then two higher, and then placed another three rocks in that way. When he was done, he removed one of the rocks at random, and asked the princess to open her eyes. When she had done so, he handed her the missing rock and asked her to place it where it ought to go. She did so, and the man was pleased.

Now he asked her to close her eyes again and arranged the rocks so that no sequence of steps repeated. That is, he arranged the rocks like this: one below, three above, one below, one above, one below, two above. He then removed one rock, and told the princess to open her eyes, and place it where it belonged. She took the rock in hand and immediately went to place it at the gap which had been left there. But then she hesitated, because she could not say whether the rock was supposed to go above or below.

"Perhaps if you continued the steps, I could decide how to place this rock."

“Perhaps,” said the man, “but I can continue to make steps in such a way that no sequence of steps is ever repeated, so that, even with as many rocks in the world, you will be no better prepared to place this rock where it belongs.”

“But,” said the princess, “the rock can go either above or below. If I place it above at this moment, and then you continue the steps with all the rocks in the world so that no sequence is ever repeated, the sequence will be one way; if I place it below at this moment, a different sequence will result. But the two of them will be equally unordered, and in that sense, the same.”

“Yes, there are only two possibilities, but each is utterly different from the other. You can see that depending on this one decision before you, two completely different sequences will result. And in fact, no matter which rock I happen to remove, you would be in exactly the same situation. Every rock in this sequence is equally valuable and essential to the whole, unlike the first sequence I showed you, which could be altered and still be whole. But, I tell you, only one of these two possible sequence is the sequence I am thinking of. But you will never know which it is.

“Now think about the difference between the way a wise man explains something and the way a normal person explains something. The normal person explains by repeating themselves, and saying the same thing again in different ways, so that one can pick up the subject more easily. This is like the first sequence I showed you. Now, if one wanted, one could shorten the entire explanation to a few words, and we often do so when we wish to remember something, for example, when an idea occurs to us while falling asleep. But the wise man speaks only in few words, in such a way that none of them can be altered without entirely changing the meaning. And it is the same with prophecies and dreams. That which is said by prophets, and those things which are in dreams, are in all their aspects equally significant, so that not one single part of them can be replaced. Of course, perhaps you find that you can replace some aspect; in that case, you are wiser than the prophet or dreamer. But this sequence of steps here is so subtle that no being could be wiser than he who created it, and therefore, no sequence could be more beautiful. Each one of these sequences is one of the numberless names of God.”

“Now,” said the princess, “you promised me that you would tell me the name of God, but from what you have said, I think that is impossible. Since you cannot place all the rocks in the world in sequence, there is no way for you to give me some idea of what that sequence would be like—in fact, it would not be like anything at all. Therefore, you have not told me the name of God as you promised.”

“That is true. I will not tell you the name of God. I will show it to you. For God has left his traces in plain sight.”

The man gathered together three sticks. He held two of them beside each other and broke one of the two so that the two were the same length. Then, he laid the one of the two on the sand.

“This stick here is the ground, which is flat. And this stick here is a tree.”

He placed the second stick on the sand, so that it was growing directly up out of the ground, as a tree does. Now, he pushed the tree along the ground, until it could go no further. Thus, the two sticks made a corner. Finally, he took the third stick and laid it so that it went from the top of the tree, to other side of the ground, farthest from the tree, and he broke it so that it would fit there exactly.

“This final stick is the ladder one must climb to reach the top of the tree.”

Having said this, he took some vine and bound the three sticks together at the corners.

“I call this shape a family. It has three sides. The two shorter sides are the father and the mother. The one lying down is the mother; and the one standing up is the father. The longer side between them is the child. The father and mother are the same length because they contribute equally to the child, who exceeds them, and is longer. The corner between the father and the mother is the marriage, which binds together two opposites: the father who goes straight up, and the mother who goes straight across. The corner between the father and the child is the name, for the child takes his father’s name, and the corner between the mother and the child is the birth, for it is the mother who is connected by a cord to the child, and who thereby gives it life.”

Now, the man took the garment he was wearing and spread it on the sand. He placed the family of sticks on top of it and with his knife cut out a bit of fabric in that shape, and he did this four times until he had four families made of that fabric.

“Now, these four families live together on the same plot of land.”

Saying this, he arranged the families in the following manner. He oriented them so that each child faced another, and so that the four corners of the plot of land were the marriages. The birth of one family always met the name of another, so that plot had four sides, each of the same length: the length of a mother added to the length of a father.

“This is so that the parents can have privacy, and the children can play together in the courtyard. The courtyard is this inner area here, between the families. Each side of the courtyard is the same length: the length of a child. And each corner of the courtyard is a marriage, for the families intend their children to marry one another.”

The man took a stick and traced in the sand the outline of the whole plot of land.

“This is to keep track of the size of the plot,” he explained. “Now, the families have names. The two at the top are named after the sun. The one to the left is called the Sunrise family, and the one to the right is called the Sunset family, because the sun rises in the east, and sets in the west. In the same way, the two at the bottom are named after the moon. The one to the left is called the Moonrise family, and the one to the right is called the Moonset family, because the moon too rises in the east, and sets in the west. Now, the child of the Moonset family wishes to marry into the Moonrise family, and the child of the Sunset family wishes to marry into the Sunrise family. For both families wish to continue the cycle whereby every sunset becomes a sunrise, and every moonset becomes a moonrise. Therefore, their children must be brought together.”

The man took the Sunset family, and holding down his finger at the place where the birth of that family met the name of the Sunrise family, he pivoted the whole family down across the courtyard, so that the Sunset child rested against the Sunrise child. He then did the same with the Moonset family. He placed his finger where the name of that family met the birth of the Moonrise family, and pivoted it up through the courtyard, so that the Moonset child rested atop the Moonrise child.

“They combined their houses in this way, because they wanted their families to be closer, while still preserving the size of their courtyard, so that future children could play in it. Now, the courtyard is this open area to the right.”

The Sunrise and Sunset families had become one single house, which had four sides, two sides the length of a mother, and two sides the length of a father. All the corners of this single

house had become marriages. Below that, the Moonrise and Moonset families had become one single house as well, in the same way. The man took his stick and drew a line between the two houses that extended across the new courtyard, dividing it in two.

“If you look, each side of the top courtyard is the length of a mother, and each side of the bottom courtyard is the length of a father. Now, before the marriages of the four families, we saw that the whole courtyard had children for its sides. During the marriages, when the families combined houses, they did not transgress the boundaries of their plot of land. And because the plot of land did not change, and the amount of the plot taken up by the families did not change, therefore the size of the courtyard did not change. Therefore, a courtyard with children for sides is the same as a courtyard with mothers for sides along with a courtyard with fathers for sides. And this is only appropriate, for the child inherits all that it has from its parents. Do you understand?”

“I see what you’ve done, but I’m not sure what it means.”

“Just wait,” said the man.

Now, the man sought a vine, which he tore into three very long pieces, two of the same length. He then constructed a very large family by laying the vines on the sand. He placed the ground from side to side, then placed the tree growing directly out of it, and pushed it to the right to make a marriage, and then strung the last vine from the tree-top to the other side of the ground, and cut it so that it would fit there perfectly. Then, he traced the outline of the family in the sand with a stick.

“This is a family, only larger,” he said. “But what was true of the family before is still true now. A courtyard whose sides are children is the same as a courtyard whose sides are a mother along with a courtyard whose sides are a father. Now I will show you something very strange.”

First, the man walked from the marriage to the name, and from the marriage to the birth, and each time it took five and a half paces.

“You see that it took five and a half paces to walk along the mother and the father. Now perhaps it could have taken five paces or six paces. What I mean is: I could have taken smaller or larger paces. For example, if I took larger paces I could have gotten exactly five paces, if I wished. So depending on what I decide before hand, I can look at the distance from marriage to birth or marriage to name in any way I like.”

“Yes, that makes sense.”

“Now, watch.”

The man took two sticks and tied them to either end of the father. He thrust the stick at the name deep into the sand, so that it would remain in place. He then walked back to the marriage, and took the stick at the marriage, and dragged it along the sand, so that it left a trace. He swung it to the left, towards the child, and stopped when he came to the child.

“I call this a swing. Think about the sun,” said the man. “The sun every day swings across the sky. It rises up in the east, and sets in the west. Now imagine the sun was connected to the earth by a vine. The earth is like the stick thrust in the sand at the name; it remains fixed. The sun is free to move, but because it is fixed to the earth by the vine, which never changes its length, it swings across the sky as we see it. That is what has happened here. The vine is fixed at the name and at the marriage, I have swung it to the side, so that it leaves a trace, and that trace is the

swing. Now look at this place, where the swing hits the child. If you walk from here to where the vine is fixed, it will take a father's paces."

Now the man drew a line in the sand from that place to the mother, below.

"Wait," he said.

He took some wet sand and a rock. He rolled the wet sand into a ball, so that the rock was within the ball, at the center.

"Now, the rock in the center of this ball of sand is the earth."

He took his finger and ran it across the surface of the ball.

"My finger is the sun. The sand in this ball is just like the vine, in that it keeps my finger always the same distance away from the center, which is the rock, or the earth."

He took a stick and laid it against the top of the ball.

"Now, look at this ball and try to imagine the rock inside, and that the rock is bound to a vine and the vine is bound to the stick just where the stick rests against the ball. The vine is extending straight up, and is bound to the stick, and so forms a marriage with the stick. And see that no matter where I place the stick, the stick will always form a marriage with the vine. And so look again at the family. I drew a line from the child to the mother at the place where the swing hit the child. Imagine that the swing is the ball, and the line is the stick resting against the ball at that place. That line therefore forms a marriage with the child, which is like the vine.

"And so see that this line I have just drawn makes a smaller family within the larger family. The new line is the father of the smaller family. The mother of the smaller family is part of the child of the larger family. And the child of the smaller family is part of the mother of the larger family. How is it a family? Well, it has a marriage, and it also has the same birth as the larger family. If a family is made of the marriage, the birth, and the name, and this has a marriage and a birth, then how could it lack a name? Take a vine and try to form a shape which has a marriage and a birth, but no name."

The princess attempted to do so, by wrapping a short vine around two fingers, leaving some left over on either side, and then trying to bring the loose ends together at a place so that they would not form a name. She found that it was impossible; for whenever she would bring the loose again together, they would form a name. Only when she did not bring the loose ends together at all did the name not appear.

"So you see this," said the man, "that because a family has a child, a father, and a mother, it must have a marriage, a name, and a birth, or else the child, the father, and a mother would not be bound together, and then it would not be a family. So in fact, this smaller family is a family, just like the larger family. Now, we know that in a family, the father and the mother are the same length, because they contribute equally to the child. So that in this smaller family too, the father and the mother are the same length. But there is one more thing which is also the same length. Look at this place where the father of the smaller family hits the mother of the larger family."

He pointed to the place, and then showed the princess the ball of sand again. He handed it to her along with two sticks.

"Place the two sticks against the ball," he told her, "so that at some point above the ball they meet."

She did so.

“Now see that in order for them to meet, they must be the same length. We said that the father of the smaller family rests like the stick on the ball, which is the swing. The mother of the larger family also rests like a stick on the swing. And if that is the case, then the part of the mother between the marriage and the place where the father of the smaller family meets her is the same length as the father and mother of the smaller family.

“Here is what you must understand. Before I said that by deciding how long my paces were, I could decide that any member of the family, say the father of the larger family, was a certain number of paces. If I walked five and a half paces along the father, I could change my pace so that the number of paces would be exactly five or six. And it stands to reason that if I were to consider the mother, father, and child of a family, I could adjust the length of my pace so that each of them, the mother, father and child, would be some exact number of paces. Now assuming that were true, that the mother, father, and child of the larger family all have an exact number of paces, that means the mother, father, and child of the smaller family have an exact number of paces, because it is composed of elements of the larger.

“In the case of the mother of the smaller family, it is composed of the mother of the larger family taken away from the child of the larger family, and an exact number taken away from an exact number gives an exact number. For if I have an certain number of rocks, and you take away an certain number of rocks, I will have a certain number of rocks remaining, and not pieces of rocks, or half a rock. In the case of the father of the smaller family, that is the same as the mother of the smaller family, and the same applies. In the case of the child of the smaller family, that is the same as the father or mother of the smaller family taken away from the mother of the larger family, both of which are exact. Therefore, all of the members of both of these families are an exact number of paces.”

“I see that.”

“Now behold! In the same way that I built this smaller family within the larger family, I can build a yet smaller family within the smaller family, and still another smaller family, forever. I need never stop building families within families. And so look at this figure, and see an infinitude of families spiraling around each other until they are too small to see, but are yet continuing to be made. But if that is the case, is it possible that for all these families, the mother, the father, and the child all have an exact number of paces? For the least one can have of anything exactly is a single thing, only one. And now see that no matter how small our paces are, that is, no matter how many paces the largest father and mother and child have, at some point there will be a family the measure of whose father and mother is one, although there would yet be an infinity of yet smaller triangles that one could build within that family. And so, these yet smaller triangles would not have mothers, fathers, and children with an exact number of paces. But that is impossible, for we showed before that each of the smaller families inherits the exactitude of the larger families. Therefore, we must have been wrong from the beginning: the mother, father, and child of the largest triangle do not have an exact number of paces.”

“It is the child.”

“Yes. The child in a family cannot have an exact number of paces.”

“So it has an exact number of paces, and then some left over.”

“Yes, but how much is left over? Is it half a pace? A third of a pace? You may say that, what does it matter if the father, mother, and child don't have an exact number of paces? If they

have a half a pace left over, then that's just as exact, just as I can use half a coin to pay for something, because it has half the value of its gold. But I tell you that the number of paces a child has is not like that. It is not exact at all. It does not merely leave some parts of a pace left over; it leaves a part of a pace left over that is completely inexact, and impossible to measure."

"Surely that's impossible," said the princess.

"Just look at the smaller family. We know that the father and mother have an exact number of paces, just as the father and mother of the larger family have an exact number of paces. So it is only the child who lacks an exact number of paces. And if you build an infinitude of such triangles the father and mother will remain exact, while the child remains inexact. The child grows ever smaller, and so one will need smaller and smaller paces to measure it. But there is no end! No matter how small you make your paces, you will never walk the length of the child exactly. And so I say, to measure the length of a child, you would need an infinite number of paces.

"In that way, the measure of a child is like the sequence of rocks which never ends, and whose pattern can never be determined. The measure of a child in a family is one of the names of God. But, as you asked, how can we speak the name of the Creator, seeing as the name is infinite? We can only speak of the trace, and the trace is left in the family. You can create and behold such a family, and thereby communicate the name of the Creator, where He Himself hid it."

The princess was satisfied with this, and so the pair of them decided to travel onward to see what they could of the world.

## EXPLANATION

2012

I saw why men have been so dazed every year  
something being worth doing  
there are no animals out the window  
just trees, and a slope, and a sunset that cannot be seen  
lying flat with your head on two fists  
sitting on top of each other  
on a bed

2013

1 2 3  
2013

1

one day you'll find  
time space 1 2  
mind is space  
space gives life

2

words of the thought  
have little clocks  
ticking away  
hey hey hey  
amplitudes  
little complex numbers

3

so excited for you  
for you for you  
la la la  
did you see  
did you see  
that little star  
looking down  
at you  
yesterday  
we looking down  
did you see  
did you see  
me staring down  
staring down  
at you  
we so excited  
for you  
na na na na  
we looking down  
we looking down  
we looking down  
at you  
we looking down  
at you  
we looking down  
at you  
did you see  
me there?

we so excited  
for you  
we looking down  
we looking down  
at you  
yesterday  
yesterday  
we so excited  
yesterday  
yesterday  
we so excited  
for you  
you you  
you you you you you  
did you see  
did you see  
me staring down  
staring down  
at you?  
did you see me staring down at you?  
we looking down  
we looking down  
we looking down  
we so excited  
we so excited  
for you  
looking down  
sitting on your folding chair  
did you see that  
little star  
looking down  
at you?

## FUTURE SPECULATIONS

*for Triple Canopy*

2013

1. What aspect of the future is of greatest interest or concern to you now, in the present? Does this concern inform your everyday activities and goals, or is the future altogether distant from your experience and expertise?

The aspect of the future that interests me most is time itself. The chains that bind us take the form of the minute, the hour, the day, the week, the weekend, the month, the year. People relate to people who make time for them, and they make time in turn. For this reason people tend to walk past trees without looking at them and swat flies. My concern is how we can make humanly relatable those time creatures who live in the lower and higher frequencies-- the slow groan of the earth, the quick flutters of the atom, the microscopic lashes of the little dollars that ring from Chicago to New York with the clock, and even the writer, or the creative individual themselves, who faces the problem of the organization of time very acutely in solving: how to be alone, how to observe, how to be present when you're far away, how to be suspenseful, how to let them down gently, knowing when to write and when to talk. When you're looking up at the stars, you really don't know what time period you're in--unless you've been looking at stars for a long time! If mankind doesn't come up with a richer scheduling system, I think we're doomed.

2. How do you project the present reality of this concern forward into the future? According to what method of thought or inquiry? How do you go further than you feel comfortable: for instance, two hundred years? How do you get us from here to there, from now to then?

It seems to me there's at least two big ways. First, the counterfactual method wherein you imagine say, what if the Greeks had discovered the principles of general relativity. What would they have felt confirmed about their previously held beliefs, and what challenged? By bringing two past time periods into collision, you can scrape off the residue of the future. Another example: let's pretend that the Neoplatonists knew about the theory of computation, and reinterpret. Then there's the synchronistic method wherein you notice coincidences: you read a poem you wrote a year ago that prophesies your present, you see in the movement of sand an answer to your question about how wealth propagates around the world. And so you start a collection, you open up a folder that traces this subplot as it comes interspersed over months and years of your life. And if the coincidences are bringing things farther and farther afield into conjunction, you know you're converging to some truth that's trying to be born. When I want to go further than I feel comfortable, I just let the reins free on my imagination since the farther in time you go, the more there is that's possible.

3a. What is the future you're betting on? Please describe it as best you can, perhaps beginning with a single aspect--a technology, a natural phenomenon, an institution, a cultural practice--and then explaining how that aspect connects to an entire world.

The future I'm betting on is called The Time-Space Interchange. In the future everything will be recorded, and so science will cease to become a science of measurement and instead one of interpretation. Angels will listen to every word you say and get to know your rhythms. So when you sit down and forget what you were doing and you need some inspiration, you whisper to the angel and it knows what sort of inspirations you've had at this time of day for the past few years, and what trains of thought you're in the middle of that you barely realize, and says just the right thing to set you straight, focus you. Not only can you have your angel learn from you, but you can purchase angel time from other people, life artists and so on, so that new stories can be seamlessly integrated into your schedule as the computer works out the optimal way to meet everyone's desires. The hottest commodity will be time stories: people wanting to live other people's lives and people wanting to give their time up for another time. If the people feel their time well-spent while they half-knowingly build an empire for you, is anyone really losing? Anonymous workers meet in coffeeshops and bars and generalized workspaces without knowing why: but after talking for a few minutes, they realize they're there to cut an album. Our angels will show us visions that compress down the great changes that are going on amidst the billions of people and the maelstrom of the earth to what can be seen and heard, and then we can act on them trusting our intuition. In this world, creativity with time will be most highly valued: thinking back ten generations, and thinking forward another ten. Why not decouple human time from the markets? Tie human wealth to genetics again, but have the generations go in cycles from the adequately well-off to the insanely wealthy every few generations, so the father is superrich, while the son is rich, while the grandson makes do, while the greatgrandson is rich, and the greatgreatgrandson is superrich and so on. But every family is out of sync with the others by intention so rich girls marry poor guys because they'll know he'll be rich when she'll be poor. We have to build time structures that cancel out the bad and leave the good. And in the future you won't need a totalitarian government to implement this sort of thing and thereby instigate atrocities: the people will elect to arrange their time for themselves, and do it better and more subtly.

4. We're asking for speculation--rather than, say, prediction or prophecy--for its twin definitions: as a conjecture made without firm evidence; as an investment involving considerable risk. What is the nature of the investment; what's being put on the line? How would you act on your own speculation, and how might others? What demands does your future make on the present?

The investment first of all is one being made in the future of one's own mind. Every time you speculate, your speculation has to strong enough to support yet another speculation and yet another, and yet not so strong that anything can be supported. As you build up your picture of the world, you trust your past selves not to have been sloppy in the construction. But no construction is perfect: hence every speculation trades in risk. Nevertheless speculation forms the bridge from the past to the future: without any speculation, without any risk, you can't imagine anything other than what you're already doing. But you put yourself on the line with the movement: the worst sin is to waste time, and the people who feel like they've wasted their lives kill people, and worse. I act

on my speculation by writing, which is a way of inviting people to speculate with me. To the extent that the future is out of our hands, we have to spend more present time preparing future generations by showing them how we became us. To the extent that the future is in our hands, we have to know it when we see it in order to live it.

GOLD STANDARD  
2013

Like a rhyme, in the coffee shop, he appeared: sandy hair, beige shorts, collared shirt, that facial hair coming down like a jug handle, goatee of middle managers—

I'm sorry, he said, leaning back in his chair. He was wearing sneakers. I couldn't help but overhear a little of what you were saying, Ron Paul and libertarianism, and I thought, Well hey I like what I hear!

Oh yeah?

I'm more of a Rand Paul kind of guy, he said, but what were you saying? I'm sorry to interrupt, but I couldn't help but overhear—

No no, that's alright. Well, I said, looking over at Jacquelyn. She was sitting beside me in a deep red armchair. We were talking about this guy Ezra Pound, have you heard of him?

No who is he?

He was a Modernist poet, you know about Modernism? It was like an early 20th movement of arts and letters. Well, he was living in Italy in the 40's and gave these anti-war broadcasts on the radio. The Americans tried him for treason after the war, and kept him in this cage—

Mm, like the Japanese internment camps.

Sure, yeah. So I was saying that after the war not just poets visited him in prison, but all sorts of political actors. And I was thinking that something in Pound's way of talking reminds me of the way Ron Paul talks, even syntactically. You know what I

mean, though? Constantly circling around the Federal Reserve Bank, the gold standard

—

Man, I know exactly what you mean, he said, and smiled so beatifically.

Yeah?

Well you know, he asked, how does the quote go?

TRUTH BECOMES TREASON IN AN EMPIRE OF LIES.

—RON PAUL

Do you know the quote?

I had on the internet.

He continued saying, You seem like an intelligent person, and I'm glad to talk to you. You seem like you have some knowledge. But I wonder if you know the half of it!

You need to educate yourself, that's what I always think. I'm not trying to tell you what to believe, but so often I hear people talk like—

Oh politics, of course you can't trust politicians—or—

Oh the IRS, well it *is* wrong, it *is* illegitimate, but—

They think they can't do anything about it. I hate that. It happens so often! People need to wake up and see what's around them!

Yeah, I can't disagree with you there, I said.

I have to ask. Do you know about the Uniform Commercial Code? You have to look it up. Look up the One People's Public Trust—

The One People's Public Trust?

Yeah, look it up online, he said. They've been uncovering that there was a series of filings earlier this year, and it came out that the Uniform Commercial Code has been forced upon all the nations of the globe and created one global banking system, and not many people know this but the way the legal language is worded, they created an entirely new legal system, so that it's almost impossible for people to know what laws apply to them. They can saddle you with debt and if you don't contest it, it's legally binding. The One People's Public Trust has uncovered these filings and they can tell you where to find them online, you can request the filings and I have done so myself. You can get them from Washington and it's all there in black and white. And the One People's Public Trust has used this against them to foreclose on all the banks, all the corporations, and effectively erased all debt.

They can do that?

Well, the thing you have to understand is that—Did you know that since 1871 every law passed by Congress has been illegitimate? Every law.

Woah—

The country had run out of money and so they cut a deal with a number of foreign bankers, the Rothschilds among them. They passed this act which made the United States—they actually changed the title of the Constitution if you look, from the Constitution *for* the United States of America to the Constitution *of* the United States of America, and this makes all the difference legally. They formed a new corporate entity that encompassed the whole nation and we the citizens became the collateral to back up the money they borrowed from these foreign bankers. And so ever since then, every law passed by Congress has not been legally valid. It was the same tactic they used when

they created the Federal Reserve Bank as you know, under President Woodrow Wilson. You give a private corporation power, in that case to print money, and it used to be that for every bit of paper money, you could go and they had gold for every dollar locked up away and safe. But now you know our debt is spiraling out of control and our money is getting more and more inflated. Look around you!

All this, this coffee shop, these tables, these chairs, these buildings—

Everything here was built on debt, illegitimate debt, created out of the air by printing more and more money—

None of this would be here if it weren't for that—

The world would be entirely different—

The world population would be much lower—

And what's going to happen when the Chinese call in the U. S. debt that they hold?

The towns are going to be deserted—

Everything is going to crumble—

It's already crumbled!

Only we don't see it because with all this money we don't have we've spent and spent and created all these buildings that don't let us see that it's built on nothing at all.

Well, Jacquelyn said—

And, he said—

I—but don't you think, I said, that the same bankers who used these loopholes and made all these laws would just change the rules if shit hit the fan? I mean if these

people are so powerful as to be able to do this, they wouldn't let themselves be constrained by a technicality that the One People's Public Trust can erase all debt—

The thing you have to understand, he said, is that the whole system is broken. Ever since the 1940's with the Democrats. Now I'm not a Democrat or a Republican, but you can see, back in the 40's there was a Socialist candidate for President. He would run every cycle, and finally in the 40's he said there was no need to run anymore since the Democrats had done everything the Socialists were going to do anyway. And this goes fundamentally against the Constitution which—you see the Founding Fathers knew all about tyranny. If you read them, they actually knew all about it. Did you know we actually don't live in a democracy? We live in a constitutional republic. Do you know what the Founding Fathers called democracy?

He paused.

Mob rule, he said.

Mob rule, yeah I knew that, I said.

And they knew all about that from where they came from. Where they came from power and liberty came down from on top, but in the Constitution the Founding Fathers made sure that on top were the rights and liberties of the people. In the Bill of Rights, it lists certain constraints on liberty, and it says that everything beyond that you are free to do whatever you want, we are absolutely sovereign individuals. Anything that isn't specified there is reserved for us.

Somewhat surprising me, Jacquelyn, whose presence hitherto had been deleted by his words, got up to get a coffee. There was silence for a moment.

Well, okay, tell me what you think of this, I said. You were talking about socialism and the sovereignty of the individual. But don't you think there are situations that are inherently collective? Like we all live on one planet and I shouldn't be able to pollute a river when you live downstream—

Well see but that's socialism right there, and that's been shown not to work. You're trying to force me to do something I don't necessarily want to do—

Okay I see what you mean. I get it, I really do, I said. Like when it comes down to it, What am I going to do if you disagree? Kill you? Throw you in the gulag? So I see what you mean. But at the same time, from the perspective of physics, you realize, like if two separate particles become entangled, they can literally become one thing. I just think the sovereignty you're talking about is a... political fiction.

I—

But but—I appreciate the difficulty, I said. Like what right do I have to force you to do something you don't want to do?

Exactly—

And as you say, this is tied up with why we have money, I said. You know what I always think about? I wonder if we could ever use time itself as a currency. I mean, what has more intrinsic value than time?

He laughed, I never thought of that—

Time itself.

It's the most precious gift there is, he said. And not one person can take it away from you. People always think they can. They'll try to make you devalue yourself, but

only if you let them touch you. You always have to remember that in the end it's for your time alone that you'll stand judgement.

Yeah, I said. So if everyone generated a basic amount of time currency simply by existing, then the economy would respect the intrinsic value of peoples' time. People could give their time to others. And time would represent your purchasing power over objects in space, objects whose production requires a certain amount of energy, according to a time-space exchange rate. Or something like that. I just think it would be easier for people to have their days to themselves.

Ah but see what you want is a utopia, and that's socialism.

Hah well, doesn't everyone want a utopia? I mean, I appreciate the difficulty, I really do. I sat back and exhaled. I've thought about this, I said. It seems to me that this is the best reason to explore the stars. Like, if we all have to live on this one planet together, and there's always going be people who absolutely refuse to have demands made upon them by others, then the only real solution is to have multiple planets, so we really can be separate from each other. Not that I want to be separate from you in particular, I said laughing, but we all breathe one air—

I was just reading, I said, did you know that some huge percentage of the air pollution on the west coast of the United States actually comes across the ocean from China? We really do need Star Trek. I mean, there is a basic physical fact that we are interconnected, I said.

He was looking down at the table.

Pollution, he said. But don't you see I have no obligation to believe what you say is true, about the earth? I mean, I believe there is pollution. But this is what I'll say. I

don't know what your beliefs are, but I have read the Bible, and I firmly believe that our destiny is here on earth. Because when the sea boils and the buildings crumble—

Jesus Christ will return on Judgement Day—

And that will be the end of it—

And it will happen soon enough—

And that is what I'm waiting for—

For when his kingdom *on earth* will be established.

Jacquelyn made a noise. I was nodding up and down. I said, I don't mean to be facile but if that's true—that there's an end of days—don't you think that's even more of a reason to go to the stars? It seems to me that Jesus would only really return once we'd made contact with the aliens and brought all of life into the brotherhood of the church. I'm totally serious!

Well, I don't know—

I mean, after all, if Jesus were to rematerialize, all things being equal, it seems to me as likely to happen somewhere in the Andromeda Galaxy as here on earth.

But don't you think, he said, if you believe any part of the Bible you have to believe the whole thing?

Well, I follow the theologian Maimonides in interpreting things allegorically—

Oh are you Jewish?, he asked.

...yeah, I said. Sure.

Right on man, that's alright, he said, and he gave me a fist bump.

I smiled.

Okay well, he said, what were we talking about? I didn't mean to get into religion, he said, and laughed.

Do you come here often?

Yeah, every once and a while. Do you?

This is my first time, I said. It's a nice place to get writing done.

Are you a writer? he asked.

Yeah, I said, I guess I am.

I'm a bit of a writer too, though I haven't written much in the last few months. I have to get back to it.

What are you working on there? I asked, gesturing towards his computer.

Ballistics, he said.

Oh, I said, and laughed.

Yeah I should get back to it.

Yeah we should head out soon.

I glanced at Jacquelyn. She had been drawling profusions of swirls on the notebook cover on her lap.

It's been good to talk to you, he said to me. It's so rare that I really get to talk to people like this, and I really enjoy it. I feel like debating really sharpens me, refines my beliefs if you know what I mean.

Yeah no, I enjoyed talking to you too, I said.

God bless, he said, by way of farewell.

What time is it? I asked Jacquelyn.

The coffee shop was emptying. She and I were alone at last.

It's almost nine, she said. We should head to the concert soon.

Yeah, I said. Walter's brother just texted me.

Great.

Yeah.

Okay, I said, and opened the door.

DAPHNE AND APOLLO  
[cf. alternate version]  
2013



In the beginning in the middle of the timespace interchange there was a concert and at the most dramatic ambiguous moment in the music while the strobe lights were flashing: there was Apollo chasing Daphne the nymph of time. In the midst of the audience there was a concrete pillar and atop it were two lengths of railroad crossing

each other centrally, and they spun around like fan blades churning up the air. A flash! Out of the musicians crowded onstage Daphne with white trails comes rushing, steps fleeing onto a railroad arm just as it grazes the edge of the stage, but—

Apollo, longing, mushrooms behind her.

In the next moment they are both swung, spiraling towards the center as the two tracks interchange. Apollo chasing Daphne, their midair steps pulsing into visibility with the strobe light. He space. She time. He reaches for her fluttering as they near the center. Near near near you think it's an error of the strobe, but no—in each flash—he grazes her elbow as she reaches up her bare underarm, as if from a runway trying to take off.

Do you see her stretching ever slower ever stronger grow bark?

She became slow for him, to escape. So he protected her and watered her, taking the laurel and crowning men to keep their heads bowed. Ever closer to the center, spinning so fast they form a flowing pillar a fountain crowning the concrete below them. The winds churn the crowd. The strobes get faster and faster; the lovers seem to touch; the flashing comes at such a pace everything to the surrounding brains becomes impossible to see; the music becomes a disjointed roar; beating shimmering then at the moment of death—!

The flood lights bang on; golden silence reigns in the form of hushed high notes. The audience is chilled with the effect of cool water vapor flooding the interstitial airways packaged in winged white blood cells. Cool dopamine. Everyone's eyes are frozen upwards. Not a soul moves in the hall. Illuminated gently by blue grey light. And from above the sink floats a tiny gold monad—the smallest dust mote.

I saw her face in the middle of the timespace interchange.

A dust mote fell in the kitchen where the wet air rearranged me.

I reached for the mote but it fled away. Disappeared by my hand through the air. But it was only hiding over the sink. Soon it floated back into view. A single point of light. I reached up and batted at it without a thought. Still sizzling like when you pour water on coals and ashes.

I fell and later sometime later I saw the golden monad. And although it was night, there was light coming through the windows. Although they heard me fall, sitting on my couch, in my bed sleeping for the night...

Dream I kept seeing the ceiling above me as the interior of my bathroom and didn't know whether to lift my head leaning against the wall or lift my head up from the pillow. This was in the context of wandering through the forest trying to get back to my apartment. Seeing such shapes I fell asleep or woke up in an airplane driving along a highway interrupted by a million birds flying low and close the opposite way. The sun in detail a mountain I saw in Portland.

And over it all: every memory the memory of a certain illumination of a scene by the sun.

Astonishing!

Last night spent writing weeping pleurably painful on my bed playing the lyre playing to stop that same ceiling from spinning awash and at the mercy of a sea of my own memories all so beautiful—I had experienced such beautiful things!—and I wept

and wept and my face a rictus arched back and breathed in and out and in and wept again—

Perhaps because I'd been tarrying in the spell fields all day—  
in the clearings where they grow things.

Earlier beyond the two faces of my supposed friends, I saw the walls of their house loom towards me; aspects of the door decoration and wall shadow became poses struck by monumental trees caught in the act of just falling over. I was thinking: I believe what they're saying but. Such close quarters so long in a sealed room, I think I've revealed myself too much! They probably know more about me than even I know. Their personalities are composed along the dimensions of other personalities; their closeness is an amalgam of old closeness. Went home that day feeling disembodied.

Hard to be me  
memories of the good  
we call virtues  
reminding us  
important things.

Daphne was keeping a record of all this, feeling once again that *possibilities* could be limited, but that gods can have no limitations. They didn't understand what I was saying about the cosmic man. They thought it meant I wasn't interested in men any more. Remember the way of life is one and must be one! Remembering her looking at him with *vulgar* eyes.

I've never had trouble getting boys before, she'd said in Daphne's hearing.

Daphne wrote, How can I explain the necessity for me of the dignity of the man?  
He has to work somewhere! Off on his own.

In bed and weeping, casting my mind over the past of walking and aloneness and clouds and sun and railroad tracks and recycling centers hidden in trees and houses and stars and gravity and the stroboscope of the leaves too quick to process in the green folding chair. And a pure happiness devoid of that braid of hell that traps us in bodies engaged in politics. Sweet summers, the scale of cities, cherry blossoms—these are more than any man for me! Any *man*, that is.

Daphne chuckled to herself.

This world is so diverse and varied and to see it all as men and women marking each other, marking by watching each other marking by watching... My possibilities are unlimited! To perceive beauty is enough and more delightful. One shouldn't always skip so quickly to climax. The mental amalgam itself must be given time to grow or die before...

Dad understood.

There was a couch and there were a bunch of kids playing on the couch and one girl comes in.

*Ready and rearin' to go!*  
You hear the children talking.  
*This is actually what we should do.*  
*But we gotta be on the same team, okay?*  
*You don't want to be part of the team?*  
*Okay well alright yeah so let's do it.*

*Girls!*

*We all look out for each other.*

*We help each other out.*

Hunting around the dining room table.

*What do you think of this?*

We think about it.

*Well this is what our team has decided.*

Dad could tell she was angry and she didn't know how to show it, so leaning down and coming close to her shoulder, he asks her,

*Hey Daphne, don't you just want to—punch somebody sometimes?*

And she says real slowly,

*y e a h!*

Later the fire begins to crackle, and they go to investigate. Clearly Dad had been trying to get the fire started for a very long time, and now at last he was throwing his little pieces of wood into the blaze, and staring into it, and he was thinking, It's never been anything other than fire...

Trying to bring together the fire with the old windows and the gray sky in them and the couch that was spelled to fold you into sleep. Everyone in their little island of light, the draft through the kitchen doors, and someone would say something, someone would kick someone, someone would yell, or just snuggle off to sleep.

What is it that we do when we are alone? Daphne writes. That's the big question that a curious person and a fearful person are always asking.

There was a school behind her. She was overlooking a modest grassy canyon full of swelling crisscrossing ridges. A few people walking their dogs in the absolute distance.

The sun! Daphne writes. Lying belly down towards the valley. Well lit families of fuzzy seed heads. From thin green stalks, frozen caterpillars are trying to wiggle their way up into the golden sky. A prophecy. It's wriggling to the top, leaving a slow timespace cellulose trail.

She puts her pen down, then picks it up again.

Frozen caterpillars growing straight up vs caterpillars who can move x and y.

The bugs emit an electric buzz that interferes with your frame rate, so you find yourself pausing more, and staring off towards the bevy of sounds from the lower part of the hill, hovering and roiling above the grass tops.

Could you get there by just describing?

From looking at the hill, being present, to the next thing that boils out of it.

The earth is pulling me down this hill, but friction is pushing me up.

You always write in bubbles! thinks Daphne.

Do caterpillars not crowd a caterpillar-stalk when the shadow of a brother or sister falls upon them?

A caterpillar eating a caterpillar plant, feeding on its brother in form. We eat the membrane of time. Crawl across it. Clear the scales. Osmosis. All boundaries broken and equalized by minuscule tunnels. This is the actual theory of time. Rushing across the boundary, full/empty becomes half/half. Twins, unable to be told apart, become one thing. When you take from the one, the other compensates.

Just be matter of fact.

Some of us walk heavy and some people's feet barely brush the surface.

My glasses, fallen on stiff grass, hover uneasily over the dirt.

Who put the caterpillars on the tips of the grasses? What an idea. Oh it was a trick of Persephone's, when she was a young girl before Hades stole her away. She spun out on her loom—she works indoors now—the stalks and the caterpillars; she laid them on the roots as symbols of her future departure.

The complicated grass by the notebook can't be processed fast enough. Too shimmery leaves fluttering behind and in front of each other. Blocky patterns, clumps of grass form, each toiling in possible motions, due to the wind. It's like one chunk has been duplicated and tiled across one's vision. The tiles are constantly updating and grouping themselves to help you perceive windy grass clumps with shared characteristics. Clarity lies solely in the hole at the very center of your vision where focus is. The rest comes in much more slowly, and so jitters and wiggles—even now the words on the opposite page are shimmering.

In times of stress, the episode is so discordant that things get out of sync—some details racing ahead of others, others lagging behind. Attention rains on the difference. So the moment gets wider even as it contracts.

If I spoke to you long enough, I could make you pay such close attention that only a silver dollar window that contains the words on the page would be clear. The whole rest of your sphere would shimmer undetermined, even wink out. You would read without reading, your body disappearing without you noticing. Everything is truly invisible to you, if I speak in just the right way.

I draw you through the fissure safety, painless surgery.

Smell of decaying flesh in the forest. Like, be wary: this is where they come to feed.

Is this a path I'm following or a frozen mud stream? I walk up into where the stream flew down the wood path. Really mudcaked, I leave the hill. Now looking for a gate out of here...

What if there are two worlds, forward world and reverse world. Our wounds are just where the two worlds are intersecting. Everyone is slowly being pulled into reverse world until they pass. Maybe the journey through the fissure is the terribly despairing part when you can achieve detachment. You can rise above it and release a bubble across the membrane. Kill a bit of yourself to know. It flows into the other world. Ugliness and beauty both are shapes made by coupling in the decision fissure. Horror not horror. Suspicion not suspicion. Your ends are progressively reconstructed so that you live your next life as the being who made it through. Or if you can't achieve detachment, then you lose your I when you pass. If you keep your I, you don't have to do it again maybe. This makes sense. You have to pass over the membrane. You know that now. And you have to bring everything, everything with it.

Apollo had been walking out and peeing on the neighbor's property without realizing it. Could I be working against myself? Will some group use my habits and ambitions against me? I honestly didn't even think, are they okay with that? Imagine if it wasn't okay by default! Returning from the woods, he was a block away from his

apartment. He was thinking about his plans for later. He had come to peace with the trees. He was illuminating them from above. He was stuffed full of chickpeas, warm. He had been eating a lot while running. But now he was resting. He was taking pictures.

What if nature just does whatever it can get away with before anyone notices?

Going into debt is just pumping extra time into the system. You could conquer the world before your bill came due. So leasing from the sun, the tree like a hardy torso upside down was growing a woman's legs with her knees bent. The farthest branches of her toes seemed to reach a mile away and form a spacious dome. He was walking in the golden light down the hallway from tree to tree. Ah but nothing could top this! he said. Totally reconciled.

He started in on the crosswalk in front of his house. But halfway across, Is that a little bird? he asked, looking down. There was an irregular lump in the road by the curb. It was pretty big for a bird. It fluttered. He took a step. That little bird looks like a garland, all curled up and ruffled by the wind!

It was a garland!

Without missing a beat, he swooped down, and plucked the garland from the ground, and put it in his basket. Twenty minutes later he was out again this time with the garland. He called his friend. Do you remember that time when you were out looking for garlands all day, and you came home dejected, but there was a garland just lying in the stairwell outside your door? Well that just happened to me!

It was a freebie.

He walked by the church and over to the park. Not many children were playing, but there were pairs of adults walking throughout. His voice had dried up. He put in his earbuds. He wanted to sing. But the white cords were all tangled up. The road was getting longer, and it was unbelievably hot.

And perhaps because the road was getting longer, which only meant his time was getting shorter, he had the distinct impression of being chased. The woods which seemed to welcome him before were now marking blindly the progress of his flight. As soon as he made back home he stripped naked in the hot darkness of the apartment. He was only wearing the garland around his neck. And lying prone on his bed, he was thinking maybe he should take off the garland too.

What if this garland were a plant? he asked. They'd break down my door and find me with it. Any of them could have given me up. Assume the worst. They gather us here in the forest. The arrow of the cupidon was a diversion. We're being harvested. Worse fear than being hunted. There's people who listen to every word. Somehow the air carries them all. For the air blindly hates the words and so bears them easily. They could take you from your door. They monitor us by teaching us the spells which have the power of calling them down upon us when we speak them. Wherever you are, merely intone them and the air will carry them to the ear of the adepts, and an emissary from the king of spells will show up shortly with your salvation or destruction. (The trick is to call for self destruction and scurry away before the wrath came down.)

Maybe we are *all* immortal, and all this politics is just chump change among confused monads, their crime of attachment. All spinning highest and lowest all poison. Do we get dizzy because of heights or attain heights because dizzy? Everything as poison for a while perfidious. Then the lesson poison not poison. When you don't realize you're close to home. Feel strokes of attention on your face; the muscles haven't settled down;

memories written in the tensions. Your body as the body of a peaceful god respecting his inner subjects. There is no probability and only possibility, but one possibility is that there is probability, and this is the time space twist.

In such a state Apollo picks up the lyre and makes forms so as to feel certainly not retarded, mortal. That if I can make such art! The lyrist singing his circulating song modulates his pulse so as to survive and fly through the fissure by showing himself his own complexity. We don't doubt the I. It flies through. In the new organization, wounds are healed, recontextualized as part of a new system of exchange across the membrane to the dark world.

We survive when we are incarnate. No illusion of time passing here.

Daphne likes to go wander in the woods. She has expectations. A sense of steely renewal when damp branches everywhere lean on the morning after a storm. The turkeys who walk from the lawn into the thicket announce their march by untutored murmurs. Panic and fear come when, sitting on a log reading a book, a man comes and sits on another log; and when I look up he's left, and I realize that probably happened a while ago. There's a spider and a leaf dangling on a thread. The first few days of falling leaves are tumultuous and complicated to look at. The trees keep time with their leaves, but even that fades into the background.

Holly hugs the path ahead. Another tree lightning of bark cast upwards at about the height of a man. From within the tree you can see the wood gates, all grown over. Holding the gate open is a bronze cup, very weathered, and in it is the head of a young boy made in stone—a sculptural head sitting in the cup. A small leaf is covering half the boy's mouth and a few grace his hair.

The plant community is confined to its bed and arranged so that the tallest are with the tallest and the lowest are with the lowest, looking like so much biological sludge spilling at a titanicly slow rate over the brick path. There are two basins in the midst of the wave: one has a single plant in it, small and yellowed, and the other has a clear surface of water. There is such a build up of material. The earth sheds luxury when the fall is wet! Comforting, insulating, a fort, a labyrinth and a fort, made of engulfing plants; blankets hang down and couch pillows bulge out into the leafy corridor through which you squeeze yourself through the pillow fort.

There is a brick patio, and moss is growing out of the greened bricks, along the curve, then a square pillar of thin slates placed atop each other, a single stair, and another pillar, a curving wall that leaves heaven open in airy Greek lowness.

There is a cat shivering in excitement in a garden where leaves have fallen; the cat is eating the leaves on the plants and digging a hole in front of him, reaching his paws deep into the soil. He goes from the plant to the hole.

Daphne was also known as Lucretia. LCRT were her bones. Her other name was Aurelia or Aurecoma which means golden hair. She walked out of a Greek textbook. It had a cover with a design like on an urn, a man sitting on a chair, and some congruence of lines made him look for all the world like he had a laptop on his lap.

Apollo first meets Daphne at Greek summer class.

We pretended to learn the rules for pitch accents.

Marveling at the economy of the middle voice.

Apollo can barely remember the words she said.

In Albion she becomes dark and white and red. He writhes on the bed.

Returns as Apollo having sex in nature.

We'd go out and it's Apollo having sex with all the lady animals like gods sometimes do, chickens or cows or coyotes or dolphins or sometimes even humans.

It was a beautiful time and nature dripped with dew.

They would be out in the early morning, that was a big difference.

Lucretia jumps out of the darkness onto the stage, but with Daphne's fuller features...

But how does Daphne first meet Apollo?

The ambiguity of a missed kiss. On the last day of class, as they are about to be dragged meiotically from east to west, he in the midst of a crowd beholding her, puts his detachment aside and goes in for one last kiss, maybe on a cheek, he thinks—but at the last moment she turns her head, and he's flying into the space above her shoulder.

Her mother was watching. His Olympic family there too.

Daphne picks flowers, not seeing them because always she's always listening to creeping in the woods, crowds of people behind the trees creaking her name the false name that was given to her, an evil spell to catch her by, that her mother taught to everyone at the time of her birth.

She'd gather them around and feed them and teach them the spell syllable by syllable. Lu cre tia was the code for a spell, which was the motion of her pupils shrinking down to the tiniest dots impressed in the white elongated surface of her eyes. She would become helpless. The name had such a power over her that when cast in an echo of the original intonation, it was the code that made her reboot.

Lu cre tia.

It was her mother's voice telling her to come in from the woods where she was wandering around. She'd call from the porch in the middle of the field across the caterpillars climbing above the hot green hairs. But Daphne could hear it even in the heart of the woods where all tunnel paths are echoing and interfering into each other.

So in this state of emergency, the last five minutes, question becomes, What symbol will end tonight? The one tipping the balance of decision, raising the water level that much higher to start a spill. A spill that could last until tomorrow. Then she'd turn back and enter into the dark mood of resignation, at first sorrow, confusion.

Lu cre tia.

She'd hear the name at last spoken by the fall of a long desiccated vine that for as long as she could remember had been hanging to eye level at the mouth of the forest gate, from somewhere high up in the branches. Then the woods would shrink down to miniscule. Hearing the spell shake her jaw, she'd snap to attention.

Once in the beginning she was beaten helpless and her forest pummeled by spells caught aflame so rapidly was she spinning. The tornado of righteousness burst out the windows of her house shattering glass on the lawn. But the flames died down collapsing inward as oxygen pockets in turbulent fire became scarce. The fire was asphyxiating itself. And helpless, smoking, she allowed herself to be led back to her room by the exhausted arms of her mother. I'll just have to do it. I'll just have to. Her mother calling in contractors to start to think about developing those acres.

Burn forest is also included in Lucretia. I have to burn it.

She went around seeing her arms numbly driven to kindling dry grasses.

When you throw a temper tantrum you exhaust the reserves of your dignity and, destitute, turn inexorably to the nearest source of nutritious light. She had to trust to the air who knew her sins and yet tormented her. I can only trust that you meant something by it, something good—after all. And if I awake to see your face I am glad; and if I don't wake, then I did all I could with my love in store.

Trusting to the air, her dot-like eyes roll up and, face going comically slack, she collapses. Comically, because so genuine, tinged with the barest hesitation. You could hear the last twig snapping, the final membrane bursting, and a tunneling into the fissure of the most basic ambiguity. In a moment she'd recognized the end and said, If I can't tell the difference between my time is come and not then I can only trust that you do. She recognizes it, accepts it, and throws on her beatitude like a shield raised at the last moment, a thin shield gift of pain that glistens over her like anointment, so the buzzer who collects souls, that bee who hums in with a basket of its own, can collect her belongings. Oh I know what it's like to be beat, I mean real beat, like exhausted.

So when Daphne goes into the woods, she's always thinking: Could this be the end, this ringing in my ears? Is this the sign of the final test, so I'll know to marshal all the powers I have and save us? I have these powers. She wanted to say to her mother: I know you just told me that stuff to protect me against other people's spells. And a spell is just a way people have of forcing people to go against their will, a kind of hypnosis. You hypnotize someone to protect them. The effort it takes to cause a pain is still something to hold on to. I imagine they go among the people fighting and spell them make them drop their anger. Remember when your attention span was really huge and a single word could occupy your thoughts for hours on end?

What happened was that the ones who learned the art of spelling beat the other ones, intoning a word each time. So that when called upon later, they'd be receptive. But once everyone got inoculated with spelling, great art seemed to arise out of nowhere. The capriciousness of the air was amplified and took control of arms and legs and hands and feet and from them drew forth wonders. I have discovered, Daphne wrote, The scale of monuments corresponds to the speed of reading modulated by the attendant artful flowering that surrounds new difficulties. You get better at reading the air, distinguishing not just the voices that come from different mouths, but the voices that come from the same mouth.

Could the solution to the problem be, so Daphne thinks, studying her verb chart, that what we call tone can be subdivided into a number of distinct human voices or elemental attitudes; that each tone is a way of holding the mouth and throat to bring out certain vocal harmonics? We record all sorts of different people speaking and break their voices down. Say it breaks down to twelve bundles of frequency statistics... and people tend to switch between two or three during the day, some rare souls speak with one, and a few of us are constantly blaring on all twelve...

That's what Daphne's thinking.

Anyway, this is why it's hard to figure out tone from written texts because it really isn't in the words! Rather the words are a cue for adopting a certain flexing of the neck muscles, a posture that you adopt while reading. This, Daphne thought as she was putting her notebook away. An interesting discovery about tone if it were to be

discovered! I'll have to keep a look out for natural examples! Get this in the wild! She was tough with herself though. I could probably do it myself... Ah mm. Her mind was drifting off as she walked back inside from the forest overlook to go to the bathroom. If I did... I think people would really be interested in this work. I don't want to name names: mother. But like thank you god for this. Thank you, I couldn't have done it alone. No but really I think you're doing great work.

It is good when the forces over the shoulders ring, the ears loosen, the throat, even the chest, speak words of encouragement. Back in my day people got tapes they'd play to their kids that had recorded words of encouragement. The hope was that later some off chance might activate current to the recording upstairs in the head.

Or else light would have to come clean through a hallway—

carpet oak and white walls  
from the bedroom to the rec room  
like an airplane hanger.

Doors massive skyscraper walls but quite calm.

In the light cast by the setting sun through the window over the door,  
the sun setting beneath her best friend's house going down over the green,  
coming into this eternal hall of ancients who marked out by towering columns  
great rectangles and vanishing cubes,

this like when the road stretches on under the trees

the street lamps marking stadia,

the enormity of a porch to an infant,

the auditorium where pep songs turn into watery soup--

in the light against those creamy walls in golden light a single stray pixel drifts in  
the upper left hand corner a little eyeball floater wiggling up near the inner eaves.

So Daphne likes to go wander in the woods. She likes to look at things and describe them. It turns out that Apollo is chasing her. He goes in pursuit of her, into the woods. He keeps trying to zoom in on her and is continually rebuffed.

Originally she was looking at nature. Now she feels like Apollo's watching her every look. Every foot fall. Eventually she begins to spy on him in order to spoil his plans. In the meantime Apollo has become so attentive to watching nature that he's really started to enjoy it. He's seeing traces of Daphne in all the trees. He decides to use nature to his advantage, and sends Daphne a message. Now when Daphne looks into nature she sees her worst fear: Apollo's deceiving her about how nature is in order to draw her in. She tries to confuse him, misdirect; he in turn echoes her.

At length, however, she is convinced that the woods really do want him to find her so harmoniously does he fit into the scheme, so effortlessly do the traps he throws up echo those she has always known were in the sound of the whistling leaves. Forthwith he vanishes and Daphne is left all alone with her lower lip. Symmetrically Apollo also stands looking at the trees, confused. Was that himself that he saw there? In solitary love now she chases him; but to Apollo that looks like nature showing himself to him, since to find him, she has to become him. But he, fleeing himself, flees her too. This makes Daphne think she's running towards herself!

The woods fold in on themselves prefiguratively.

She running towards herself, he running towards himself.

They flux into a mirror laser and set the woods aflame.

The atmosphere ignites to measure the amount of interchange between their separated linked worlds stressed by neither being together nor apart.

At what point does it stop?

Or because it is known not to stop, the interchange collapses in on itself. There's an image of Daphne and Apollo that's drawing us ever closer in its voraciousness. When time saw space and space saw time, they couldn't remember which was which. You drive towards it.

A couple embraces on the overpass.

Birds erupt from a forest beside the highway.

The tub of storms is stirred--

then the sun appears out the corner of the right eye.

Once you've discovered the image with Daphne and Apollo in it, you can either feel it pulling you up or pushing you down. Daphne and Apollo perceive us as the minuscule stars and we them. Time has been replaced by a hierarchy of who is collapsed inside whom and who sees whom giving birth. It happened in one of us. The interlocking of Daphne and Apollo snaps into place as a child.

At the moment of their collapse, great energy and matter explode off the event horizon and their braided trajectories tell the story of what occurred inside. Daphne still chases Apollo on the surface, ever fainter.

Don't you know who I am? he asked.

I am Apollo I killed the snake. I sit cross legged in the woods alone. Don't you know who I am?

He wants me to sing his song of praise. That's why he made the lyre strings so.

It is exhausting to look and write. Daphne.

We didn't have to deal with the small stuff until you brought it up. But one doctrine to be believed holds that we can perceive all things, and that the molecular small world which tears me apart is contained in the possibility of my whole being. We have to somehow meet the demands of mortality and immortality both. All possible paths are overlaid and the treescape shifts and rises and falls, and the route nature takes is the one that corresponds to the most possibilities.

When you first looked at him, lots of low probability things occurred, just to throw you off. But in the end, low probability stuff is balanced out with a lot of high probability stuff later. Can you ever shake your expectations for the rare? Even now there are long stretches of rareness! As if designed to keep the worlds of low probability and high probability maximally ambiguous, thereby creating cosmic suspense: motion.

Possibilities come to us in the order of their difficulty in the test. This is the sense of time. Why this order? Because to keep it this normal, yet this rare is the greatest challenge. Nature who works by least action and most difficulty.

You have all of infinity to even out boys.

Linger.

It is weirder that after everything being true the world as we knew it is returned back to us polished.

A cool day smells nice outside a summer perfume that only comes out on green and grey days. Two weeks later a totally new person wondering at this place. See how green spurts on the sides of these houses and between them. Above and below the dark sky is a symbol of the fatness of the plants, the invisible sun behind the clouds their strength. A dad and a daughter or maybe a couple both sort of slack jawed, with hunched necks and a flappy walk. The daughter smokes a cigarette. They walk to the 7/11.

Daphne, do you remember the rain outside the overhang of the bathrooms at the park? The way the lampposts all moved in the parking lot at the medical center? Turning something now temporarily forgotten over and over again in your mind. Being very frank. Looking under your legs backwards at the moon. Running in scared at the wind where you crouched by the bench in the yard next door. Loping down the railroad tracks. Timedrifted into houses with porches. Watching the eyes of the houses, the sloe eyed ones with mini roofs over the windows. You were outside. You know what that means. The cold air in the winter, so very sweet. Big pockets to put things in, in your big coat.

For months, preparing for the work. Consulting the charts, the good days and the bad, listening for the creak of the growing flowers, studying the rivulets of bark, tasting the sweet waters, clearing the ground, planting the future harvest, establishing an end for nature to quest towards, clearing a space for nature to enter. And she would enter. Such were the preparations. Then one slips into a dream and in the dream-time scythes are collected up and they swing through the grass and the next morning bales dot the landscape. The past is redeemed and the sacrifice of time reciprocated. To do it all over again, do it again without a summer, autumn, winter, and spring to provide the restoration to the soil would be madness! The aftermath. She was in the aftermath then. To do it once, to fulfill the end, and then this feeling, like one has to do it all over again. How can one avoid circling around?

She was sitting listening to a story. The story was about a mother whose daughter had been stolen from her, and she said a curse, and far away the culprits began to fall ill, fall into deep sleeps and they could not be awoken. She felt light headed. She tried to concentrate on the story, but as if without thinking, she got up from the chair. She got up and said something and went into the little kitchen, feeling like a surveyor going into the kitchen, noting the degrees of elevation of the different pieces of furniture. Increasingly light headed. She walked over to the drying rack which was on the counter. She tried to steady herself on the counter, but as she did she perceived that her vision was hurtling towards the drying rack as her hands were reaching towards it; her whole vision began to break into shimmering atoms that broke free of the big hyperbolic rectangle through which she saw the world; and she felt like she was seeing things as if from slightly too far away, or as if she were trying to take in something with ever widening eyes that was also flying rapidly towards her. Things were also hardened, sparse, like sand.

And then nothingness for an unknown period. Out of nowhere, a hiss. Artifacts in her eyes. Buzzing noise like rain in her ears. Something was settling down to sensible levels. As if too much energy had been flowing over her; a river had broken free of its bounds. She could just walk over the bridge which used to be covered up now. The storm was passing. The water was still sloshing over the wood of the bridge, but she could just

walk over it. She remembered thinking she was going to die. It took an eternity to die down. How long had she been lying on the floor? There was no lost moment.

But he told her she fell on the ground, or he heard her fall. She didn't remember that. She remembered: I'm just going to lie down now. Maybe she thought that to herself as she was falling, with a kind of dry wit the self-consciousness of which was inaccessible to her. But when she came back, she was lying flat on her back, staring straight up, and thought that she had very much intended to be there with a great and powerful authority. She had the sense that she had seen innumerable things contained in the noise in her ears just like in the noise she saw in her eyes, swirling grit, grain amplified.

With a snap, calm had flown over her, drenching her in freshness, coldness, wetness on her skin, a wet silence in her ears, cold, calm, clammy. She was alive. She was looking up at the ceiling. Everything was intentional. To the left was the counter, the sink. And as she watched, from above the counter through the air above her floated like a mote of dust a very small beautiful thing, a little dot, a golden monad. It was very beautiful. It floated aimlessly towards her. She watched it. She reached up to try and grab it, and it disappeared. Then it floated lazily into back view.

And then... at some point it disappeared as if she had without realizing ceased to pay attention. And she recalled who she was and where she was, on the kitchen floor, and she simply got up, and went back into the other room, and laid down on the couch, and said she was in a strange mood. He understood. She said that perhaps she hadn't eaten. She hadn't been eating well. I've been very wound up, she said.

He sat with her for a while, read a little from Plutarch who was there, but she wasn't really listening, although she cherished his voice. She fell asleep. She had learned something. What did she learn?

In the beginning we all sat directing the dream and being directed. Then work began and we slept at night and worked during the day. Those who still sit don't have to sleep. They sit and build their soul-ships.

Maybe they felt they had no trace of guilt keeping them hanging around. So generation by generation their numbers swell, the number of people just waiting unchanging. We must learn to sit and wait for the show to start. Can't you people just wait till the earth gets to where it's going? All we can do is breathe until we get to where we're going. Propagate your moment in time most stably and then sit and wait. Would people feel more inclined to sit on an ark?

Think of yourself in flood world. The earth is a ship. The time stretches on, unknown interminably. There are no landmarks in sight only the stars. This becomes apparent when the ark disappears into the shadows and we feel ourselves floating on the huge waters that are our raft through the upward starry ocean. The one that is crystal clear. By a measure of distortion, earth is loud and hard to hear, water less so, air much less, and light in the dark the least. An effect of distance, of scale.

What would you spend your time doing on the ark, but spend it with the seeds brought with you on the journey. You are well prepared to engage in generation, or else merely grow--that is, ascend--fall down the gradient--feeling it pulling not pushing. Being pushed down is the same as being pulled up somewhere. Something is dragging us towards it. Don't you want to wait to see what it is?

They want to make us forget we're on a ship. Maybe they act out of some confusion.

We believe in the black hole time king.

When we wake up he has provided us with a past which is himself in the future; he gives himself to us to eat. And on the stalk of the past we bud into the next moment. The z of the earth is also time for the plants. They just grow up. Time starts at the fourth dimension only for plants who move in at least two other directions.

Those who move and walk and sleep are free to roam in three directions. Those who can sleep and wake have new kinds of clarity. In the end perhaps those who have to sit motionless to make themselves wait are those who have the deepest guilt, who must put in most effort to journey through the fissure. While we waking walking workers enjoy a certain privilege, unburdened enough to pay mind.

A feeling turbid like I neglected it. I hadn't sat. This is how it feels.

We can shine lights to things in the distance until we get close enough to touch them and bring them inside. Do you see howling life engulfing the universe? The roar when life is revealed not as a variable but as a function and the function is squished down to a variable and seen in one dimension. When we are really processing along one dimension, this is the same thing as speaking in code.

The original game was to return home anyway, wasn't it?

It weighs on your chest. You fall towards it and simultaneously back away. Sometimes you can even feel weightless and then you know that this is the show: we aren't moving through the timespace ocean, the ocean is moving through us. On its back are all the pictures of things that drag us across a further double sided fissure which is the next moment in time.

What is the oldest dream?

Each day the space god Apollo returns to the stream where he first saw her, Daphne the young time nymph. A research vessel makes its way down a stream, a paper boat thrown into the water financed by time dug up by space workers. He takes samples of the water and the dredged up material is allowed to float in bottles. We must take our water in sips. Space is what is understood all at once; time is what is experienced one after another.

The timespace interchange turns a single experience in time ninety degrees so that the experience becomes a spatial pattern all at once. Now the process may be viewed itself and not merely the result.

Time returns to her mother, wrapped in purple cloth that tumbles halfway to the floor; her mother holds her hand over her daughter's face and massages her temples with her middle two fingers. The mother priestess has dead eyes. One very beautiful sister looks sad and distant at another who stares intently at her own arm under cover of her hair. The third sister, naked, stands in front of them, holding a bundle of thick fabric between her knees, a tan fabric with a burnished look. The fabric arcs up from behind her knees, and orbits her, flies up and over her shoulder, into the arms of her husband. Maybe she was, in fact, intent on her work.

I went to time who had gone to her mother and was turned away.

Then by association, I stopped coming over to you too, without even noticing.

You can't say, Let it be better. When you realize what time has done to you, you are better. In another age, we would have flown together as birds, little rascals.

The spell that lets death come: I wanted to tell you before you go that I love you.

Waking up happy rested after sleep and listening to the old songs and weeping happily the railroad unfurling in my mind. Sleep whose chase is rest. Wrapped around unfolded clothes. In the brilliant morning.

THE SQUARE ROOT OF 2  
OR, THE POWER CLUB  
2013

Waking up in the early morning the birds going bee boo poip outside a pale day up on the third floor. Walter who was in the seventh grade was watching the sun creep across the far wall through his shut eyes; it was like progressive excitations of a red circulatory lattice.

His dream was him hovering over the hours of his life. He had the gods and goddesses quiz, and also a test on square roots, and then there was gym. There had been another dream. He pulled the blanket in between his legs as he tried to remember it. The alarm clock which had a chicken on it and was red began to squawk. He shut it off. Then it squawked again. It fell on the ground; some of the glass was rattling around inside it, under the bed. Below he could hear the house waking up, like intrauterine motions in the bed itself, his mom shutting the cabinet on her way to the bathroom, his older brother sliding quickly down the stairs, the front door of the house making the walls shake a little when his dad came back in from getting the paper. All the bed just humming.

Walter!

Walter was trying to recall a certain discovery which he'd made at some point during the night. He'd thought it up, and it was the secret to everything. He was afraid of forgetting it, so he wrapped it up, and put it in a box, so that if he remembered it again, the remembering of it would involve taking it out of the box. And in that way he would remember which thought it was that he'd thought was so great.

He'd been listening to his older brother and his dad talk all night about *the problem*. The problem was big. His brother had made a podcast about it. When Walter's brother's friends were over, they sat in the kitchen and ate pizza and they talked about the problem. Last night, his brother had been trying to explain it to his dad: he basically said it was about why some things are harder to figure out than other things like at a most basic level. Walter's mom made him some mint tea, and then Walter spent some time parading around in the basement, his hands in his sweatpants, chanting the names of the Greek and Roman gods to memorize for Miss Edwards class. He was resting on the bed and fell asleep with the binder over his face so that he was inhaling the notes he meant to review on why the square root of 2 is like it is. Then he threw the binder off and shut off the lights. He'd had maybe four hours of sleep. He was thinking about coming home from school and taking a nap. He heard his dad come up the stairs and sit down on the bed. Walter could smell the coffee on him. Mmm. His dad was like, It's 7:05. No it's not... Walter squinted at the clock it was really more like 7:01. His dad was always exaggerating. On the car ride to school his dad had the clock set forward either 6 minutes or 8 minutes forward, he couldn't remember... His dad went back downstairs. His mom came up to look for something in the closet joined to the bedroom. Walter, you need to get on a schedule, you know. You just need to go to bed and wake up at a regular time. You just need to get on a schedule.

Yeah, mm, I'm working on it... I was trying to go to bed, but it wasn't easy, I fell asleep but I woke up in the middle of the night, and I was lying there staring at the ceiling... You know how there are all those little bumps and things on the ceiling... I was actually looking at them, and the moon was coming in through the window, and that lit

everything up.... And all of a sudden I could see a pattern in the bumps on the ceiling—it was like a plane had gone slice through the bodies of the little mountains at a certain angle, and a thin slice of the ceiling was coming loose and starting to slide slowly so I could see the part I'd sliced off better than the rest—and actually I could divide the bumps up in different ways, and each time I made a division I saw it like animated a little, like the part that was different was shimmering and drifting to show how it was different... The ceiling just came apart like a biscuit!

Very little of this with the exception of biscuit was able to escape his mouth. His mom with a basket full of clothing had been downstairs for a while, which became apparent when he heard his dad's distinctive weight coming up the stairs for the second time.

Walter!

His dad WHIPPED the covers from the bed with a flourish. At the last second Walter managed to snag a bit of it with his foot. He curled up rather violently in trying to bring the covers to his chest. The mattress was so exposed.

It's 7:15.

His dad walked back down the stairs.

Ahhhg! No no no! Why? Why? Why? Why? WHAT IS THE POINT.

In exhausted fury he rolled off the edge of the bed onto the covers on the floor. He crawled over his rug, and stumbled down the stairs with a side to side tottering motion, and rounded the corner, and went into the bathroom, and turned on the hot water, and stood there silently completely immobile under the water. The pain of sleep hummed all over his head and shoulders. It hurt even to close his eyes so instead he

looked at the bottle of shampoo on the ledge which had instructions in English and French and German and Italian and Dutch. *Bij aanraking met de ogen met voldoende water afspoelen...*

Upp! A part of his body came online.

He realized this when he realized he had to fart. He paused there water rushing over him.

It occurred to Walter that he'd never actually seen himself fart before. So still outwardly immobile he waited while the fart passed through the various internal waystations within him, building pressure here now there, slamming against some intestinal wall, squeezing through a constrained bit, until he felt that tingling in his anus that meant that he was really about to fart, at which point he twisted his neck back, in order to see his relatively hairless butt as the fart was about to escape. He twisted and twisted, and then he gave his body a little pulse, and there it was.

But as the fart slipped out, he felt something crack in his neck—he whipped his head back around—and was like, that was weird. And then he felt an intensity rising in him, which was at first hard to distinguish from the hot water, and which he realized at length was *pain*. His whole neck was tingling, and his head felt like steam, and he stumbled a little, and the intensity was rising and rising in him; as its level increased, he experienced a proportionate distancing, so that his vision shrank to a point drifting to the side, a little like the effect when two mirrors are facing each other, slightly askew. He crumpled against the slick wall of the shower.

A moment later he opened his eyes groaning. He was on the shower floor. His whole body was icy and clammy despite the heat and his heart was pounding. He sort of

mindlessly stirred himself and without even getting a towel left the bathroom and lay down on his parents' bed. He breathed deeply. He breathed deeply again. Then he got up and went back into the bathroom and toweled off.

The black tiles were cold against his feet. Over the bright white sink he stared at himself in the concave mirror. He had just started shaving so he lathered up the brush, his hands shaking, and dragged it ever so lightly against his upper lip. Maybe because his friend Ann had shown him a picture of Frida Kahlo the other day, his eyes were drawn to the fine hairs between his eyebrows. Well.

He positioned the gillette razor as carefully as he could between his eyebrows and dragged it down a little. His heart sank as he felt it diverge slightly from the perpendicular due to the topography of his face. Upon inspection, he found that he'd overshortened his left eyebrow ever ever so slightly. Well. He angled the razor to make the complementary correction. Dum!

Perfect, he said, and knocked the razor against the side of the sink to get the hairs out. He gathered water into his cupped hands and rinsed his face. When he looked up into the mirror, he realized unfortunately that he'd washed off what seemed like most of his right eyebrow, but was really only about a centimeter and a half of it. He placed the razor square between his eyes... but registered a veto.

So leaving the bathroom, Walter went to go put on his cargo pants and t-shirt and sweater and socks. Then he went downstairs, bouncing a little on the last steps, coming in through the mudroom which a little of the chill misty day had osmosed into. He attempted nonchalantly to orient his right side away from his parents. His brother, wearing a t-shirt with a pyramid on it, walked by him on his way outside, and smiled.

Entering the kitchen, Walter declared, “Can I just stay home today? I literally woke up and went over everything that is going to happen today, and I know exactly what it is, and how it is going to happen, and I don’t see the point of actually going through with it since it’s basically like it’s already happened.”

“What do you have today?” his mom asked.

“I have a quiz in history and math,” he said.

“It’s 7:30,” his dad said, handing him a bagel not nearly toasted enough with a little cream cheese.

“Oh wait I forgot!!!”

Walter turned on his heel and ran into the basement where the computer was, and waved the mouse around so the screensaver would go away which was pictures of various galaxies. He went to Start and then hovered over All Programs for just the right amount of time so that the scroll thing of programs appeared. He went down to the arrow at the bottom until he saw Microsoft Publisher come up. He clicked it and went to File, Open, and then in the text place he put C: and double clicked on the folder there called WLTRSTFF and inside that folder there was a folder called TOP SECRET and inside that folder there was a folder DO NOT PENETRATE ANY FARTHER CLASSIFIED BY ORDER OF WLTR and inside that folder there was a folder TAKE YOUR LAST CHANCE TO TURN BACK FOOL and inside that folder there was a folder UNLESS YOU ARE ME MY MASTER which he double clicked on and inside that there was a Microsoft Publisher document called FINAL MEMBERSHIP CARD INVENTORY and he doubled clicked on that. In Publisher appeared the page divided into two columns of just the right width, with little rows of just the right height, so they could be

printed as business cards. He crawled underneath the computer and plugged in the printer from behind, and then crawled back out. The printer was snorting to itself as it came alive. Walter grabbed the mouse and clicked print.

Out of the printer came

WALTER KLUGMAN

Senior Architect and IDEAS.

AUTHENTIC POWER CLUB MEMBERSHIP CARD.

LENGTH: 1 LIFETIME.

ID#: 5<sup>19</sup>+0.1990

ENTITLEMENT: 1 free computer program.

*Dear new member, come 11/19 to designated recess location for the beginnings of proceedings of top importance.*

KIRKBY OZ

Vice Architect and TREASURER/FINANCIAL ADVISOR.

AUTHENTIC POWER CLUB MEMBERSHIP CARD.

LENGTH: 1 LIFETIME.

ID: 0

ENTITLEMENT: 1 free computer program.

*Dear new member, come 11/19 to designated recess location for the beginnings of proceedings of top importance.*

GERMY SHULTZ

Resident Astrophysicist and Vocalist.

AUTHENTIC POWER CLUB MEMBERSHIP CARD.

LENGTH: 1 LIFETIME.

ID: 7

ENTITLEMENT: 1 free computer program.

*Dear new member, come 11/19 to designated recess location for the beginnings of proceedings of top importance.*

ALEXIA DANGERFIELD

Defense Shield and Catering.

AUTHENTIC POWER CLUB MEMBERSHIP CARD.

LENGTH: BINDING UNTIL GRADUATION.

ID: XII

ENTITLEMENT: 1 free computer program.

*Dear new member, come 11/19 to designated recess location for the beginnings of proceedings of top importance.*

ANTHONY PATRICOLA

Sludge Harvester and THE ANNIHILATOR

AUTHENTIC POWER CLUB MEMBERSHIP CARD.

LENGTH: 4 months

ID: 99999999999999979

ENTITLEMENT: 1 free computer program.

*Dear new member, come 11/19 to designated recess location for the beginnings of proceedings of top importance.*

JENNY BACKSAY

RAAAANdOm NNNuMbEr GGeNeRaToR

AUTHENTIC POWER CLUB MEMBERSHIP CARD.

LENGTH: Befstew.

ID: Digit between 0 and 9 but not 0 or 7.

ENTITLEMENT: 1 free computer program.

*Dear new member, come 11/19 to designated recess location for the beginnings of proceedings of top importance.*

.... a few more... and an extra ...

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AUTHENTIC POWER CLUB MEMBERSHIP CARD.

LENGTH: \_\_\_\_\_

ID: \_\_\_\_\_

EMERGENCY BACKUP FOR INSTANT MEMBERSHIP.

ENTITLEMENT: 1 free computer program.

*Dear new member, come 11/19 to designated recess location for the beginnings of proceedings of top importance.*

They came perforated so he could just fold and rip out the cards as needed. He grabbed the two pages coming out of the printer and headed back upstairs, swinging his backpack around from back to front, and holding it there as he tried to stuff the two pages inside it. He stopped and put the backpack down, and slid the pages in between two folders. Flying out the door.

His mom waved from the side, as he plonked down the stairs, onto the path to the car. There was a squirrel on the rim of the water basin.

“Good morning,” said his dad.

Walter put the bagel on the floor and buckled in.

In the car, he found himself staring straight ahead at the frosty windshield, imagining himself like in a cartoon, the streets no longer extending into the distance, but compressed to a plane, and dipping below sight, bringing new stop signs, houses that looked like fish heads, houses that looked like donkey heads, houses that seemed surprised or sad, words on signs floating up and sunning themselves in the light of his eyes as they presented themselves. Triangles formed by streetlights at intersections. He didn't even feel like he was moving most of the time.

“So,” his dad said, “I wouldn't worry, I don't think anyone's going to notice.”

“...really?”

“Yeah—people just see what they expect themselves to see. But you have to be careful with the razor. Why did you want to shave that part anyway? You don't need to do that.”

“I don't know...”

“Ladies usually use tweezers.”

“Cheese.”

At the border of the fields, the car line for the middle school formed an enormous slinky of stopping and starting. They had a lot of time to just sit there and wait. Out the driver's side window, the red eye of the battleship which was actually a defense contractor installation was blinking through the fog. The radio was tuned to the classic rock station. It was in the middle of that song *Won't Get Fooled Again*. His dad got excited and turned up the volume. It was weird to hear something that loud when it was still so barely lit and chilly outside. A great suspense would build during the parts of the song with the permuting organ chords drifting from ear to ear, redeemed by guitar

chords like slicing open fat sacks of bright coins, or very shiny golden fish. With each slice the pearlescent contents would spurt onto the floor; in between his dad would drum on the steering wheel. The organ warm and green and kind of clarinety would do its thing while fluttering around in slow motion—the drums would creep in, his dad on the steering wheel, the organ, and then... the scream! And his dad let out a pleasing roar! Walter was smiling.

His mouth turned thoughtful though when they rounded the final bend; Walter discovered that he could see his sort of friend Ann in the front seat two cars ahead of them. Ann was the girl who always had a funny way of walking into the classroom, and once she'd invited Walter to her house, and they'd eaten rice krispie treats together. They crept up a space. Maybe four or five cars could drop their kids off at the same time. Ann didn't start to get out of her car until the very last moment. By that time, Walter was already walking on the sidewalk over to her, having said goodbye to his dad. He stuffed his bagel in his pocket.

He could hear what Ann was saying to her mother.

“You're right, mom, that's a great idea, why don't I just memorize the whole multiplication table right now before homeroom when I'm supposed to help out with Stephanie's birthday decorations...I told you they want me to draw a trilobite! I don't know why Kathleen doesn't draw it herself. You know, she's not a bad artist... No! The point is there's no way I'm going to do well on this factors quiz if I don't have my multiplication table memorized, and I told you I couldn't do it last year or the year before that or the year before that and I can't do it now, so BUG OFF!”

Walter saw Ann's mother reach across the passenger seat and grab her (Ann's) coat.

The adult said: "You're hurting me, Ann, and you are hurting yourself with your thoughtless words. I know it must be hard to see right now, but when you look back at this memory years down the line you will be ashamed of what you have done. Yes, think about that while you're at school. Because when you come home you're going to have to tell me exactly what we're going to do to fix this little problem. Now don't you dare slam that door!"

Like a squirrel, Walter had been hiding by their right tail light. His backpack had given him a slouch that kept him out of sight. As Ann's mother drove off, he leapt somewhat gracefully into action. He came up behind Ann, lingering a moment in her blind spot. He could tell she was in the middle of tears. Actually, he could hear that she was whispering too. She was whispering, "How? How?..."

"Ann," said the voice.

Walter came into view, walking up alongside her.

"What do you want?" she asked dully.

She was wearing a Hello Kitty backpack heavily decorated with markers of different colors. Her eyes were very large and melting slightly in fine grained rivulets, and Walter could see that the little place right above where the lips joined in a pleasing twist was red from her tears. She had on sweatpants underneath her jeans.

"Hey... I had a question for you."

"Yeah?"

“Oh uh I guess it was that I was wondering if you wanted to join my club. I’m starting one,” he said.

“What club is it?”

“It’s called the POWER CLUB,” said Walter. “I’ll tell you all about it! I guess we’re late.”

By now they’d entered the school. The lockers were echoing with announcements in the brief moment of empty hallway. Just a flutter of pages. Anna and Walter started walking towards the attendance office, which was across the building.

“I have this membership card all ready actually, if you want,” he said.

“For me?”

“Yeah!” said Walter, swinging his backpack around again. “Let’s stop by this water fountain so I can fill it out for you.”

“Wait actually can we go to the bathroom by the cafeteria?”

“Uh yeah I guess if you want.”

“Just cause,” said Ann.

Once they were inside the bathroom, down the hallway, towards the shop on the opposite wall from the kitchen, behind the cafeteria, Walter locked the door, and Ann pulled out a bag of blueberries from her back pocket. She leaned against the back wall and put her foot up on the toilet seat. Walter put his backpack down in the corner, and looked at the sink, which was all covered in pink soap.

“I brought these blueberries,” Ann said. “They’re like little energy pellets for tiny animals. Sometimes I just like to eat them.”

“Do you want one?” she asked.

“Oh I never really have blueberries!” Walter said.

He took one from her and put it in his mouth. It exploded a little.

“They’re kind of like gushers,” he said. “Though obviously blueberries came first.”

“Yeah I know right,” said Ann.

Walter took another one. Some impulse made him stick it in his nose.

“It just fits,” he said.

Ann brought one to her nose to sniff it.

“Yeah I have gym so I don’t mind being late,” said Walter, putting a blueberry in the other nostril. “I have important business to speak of.”

“Oh really?”

“Yes, actually I was going to ask if you would like to be inducted cordially into this club that I’m starting of all really cool people—it’s called—the POWER CLUB?”

Ann laughed.

“What do you do?” she asked.

“Oh we investigate the nature of reality mostly.”

“That’s stupid,” said Ann.

“Do you know about the square root of 2? — What do you mean, it’s stupid?”

“Too general. I mean what are you guys actually going to do?”

“Woah woah,” he said. “We are going to have a meeting to figure out about *that*.”

Walter had begun to pace a little back and forth between the handicapped rail and the corner.

“But really,” he continued, turning on her, “do you know about the square root of 2?”

“No well I’ve heard of it I suppose, but—”

Walter enjoyed the pageantry of things. He dipped his finger in the pink soap and dragged a triangle into existence on the mirror, with sides 1 and 1 and the square root of 2.

“There is a very ancient myth,” he said. “A terrible secret at the heart of mathematics. Men have been murdered over this thing.”

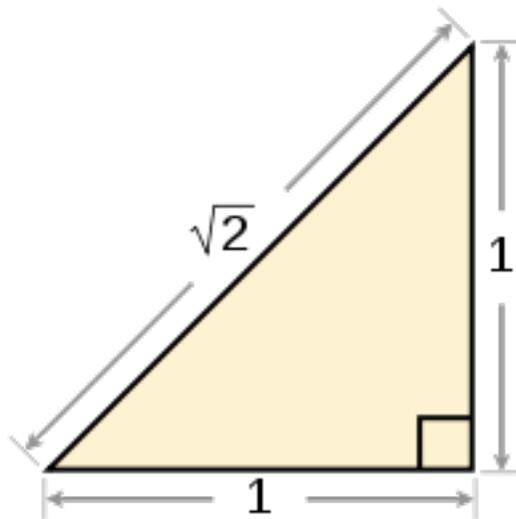
Ann snorted.

“Okay,” said Walter. He went over to his backpack and extracted a folded piece of paper.

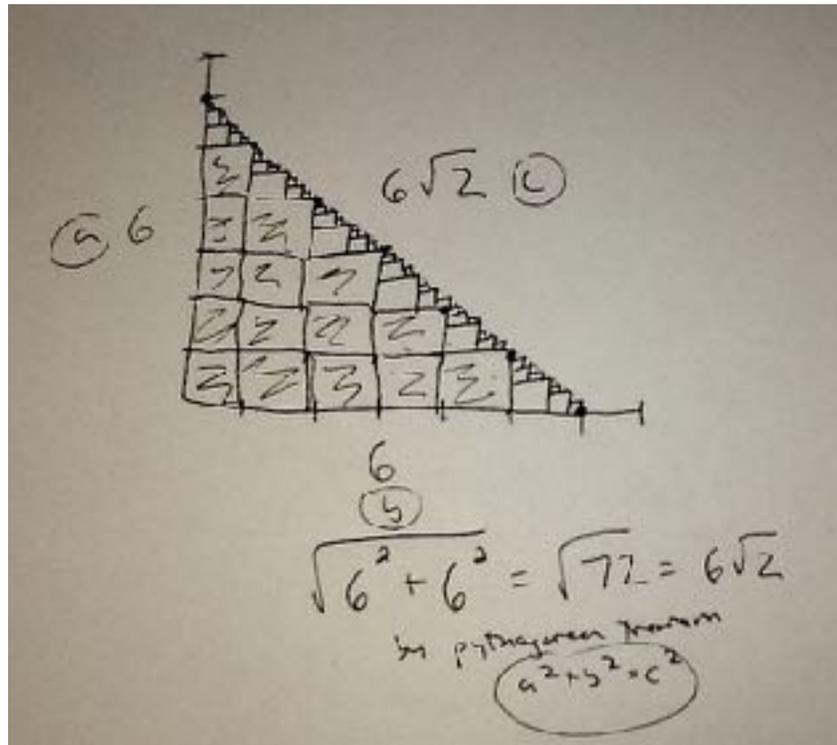
“This is from my brother’s website,” he said.

He unfolded it and read:

“The square root of 2 comes from the triangle. It’s the length of the diagonal line if the other lines are 1. It’s a number with an infinite number of decimal places. It’s like infinitely complicated. But where does it come from?”



“You’re measuring the length along the *diagonal line*. BUT you have to measure it in terms of *the other two lines*, because those are your axes. Since there’s 2 lines, you need 2 coordinates to measure the length of a diagonal bit: 1 for amount down and 1 for amount over.”



“What the heck,” said Ann.

“No no just wait a bit!”

Walter was holding the paper in such a reverent way that Ann remained silent.

“Okay. You know how on a computer you can see that diagonal lines are jagged because of the pixels, and look like stairs and not straight lines? How can we make the line *actually* straight? How can we do that? Well, why not make it so that however far you zoom in on the diagonal, you zoom into ever smaller ups and downs forever trying to fill in the line? This getting ever smaller for eternity makes it so that the down and

overs blur into an actually straight line. But the length of the resulting number is therefore infinitely complicated. Infinite 2 dimensional *down* and *over* information has to get compressed along 1 dimension: the length of the diagonal. It never quite fits, but it's always getting closer. The upshot is that instead of going down and over, you can always go diagonally 1.4142135... and get to the same place. The complicatedness of the square root of 2 is the friction that occurs when 2 dimensions that don't quite fit grind together. This is origin of kabbalistic belief in the shattering of the vessels. The great and terrible secret is that the universe does not fit into itself everywhere, that there are tiny rifts between dimensions, transdimensional fissures, out of which life and chaos flow. That this rift at the heart of reality can even be heard is to be considered one of the most remarkable findings of the early Greeks, even as those of the Pythagorean sect forbade their members from speaking of it. They were not alone. The tritone for centuries was banned by church fathers who referred to it as the *diabolus in musica*."

"Is this a real thing?" inquired Ann.

"Do you want to hear it?"

"Hear what?"

"The sound of the transdimensional rift fissure."

Walter pulled out a mini tape recorder that his dad had let him borrow. He turned it on and pressed play.

Tinnily, there was the sound of two pianos keys, one being struck just before the other. The first one probably a middle C, wavering slightly from the vibrations of the tape recorder itself. The second was an F# above that, which was the tritone, and it struck Walter and Ann both with a sonic blow, as if something had knocked the tops of

the heads off, the last two inches of their heads becoming numb with a kind of luminescent shimmering high pitched trailing off hesitant tritone fire. Then the two notes C and F# were struck at once, and Ann could hear a wail infinitely failing.

Walter returned to the paper: "You hear the C and then the F#. The tritone wants to resolve down to F and up to G at the same time. It hangs wavering infinitely dissonantly approaching the middle which is constantly falling away. The frequency of F# is the frequency of C times the square root of 2. It splits the octave right down the middle, a kind of gaping wound at the heart of the musical scale. Given any 2 dimensions, there is a wound between them, which is the mathematical origin of tension."

"Oh my god."

"So we'll talk about stuff like that."

"Play it again!"

Walter did. C F#. C F#.

"Is there any way to tap all that energy?" Ann asked in a hushed tone.

Walter who had been looking down at his shoes, raised his head and fixed her with his eyes.

"We've been looking," he said. "I don't know! They've been keeping it secret for years so not many people know about it."

Ann threw a blueberry in the air and caught it.

"Do you think things really are broken?" she asked, chewing.

Walter scratched his elbow.

"I always say I think it's weird we can move at all," he answered finally.

Then he bent down and pulled out the sheet of membership cards from his backpack, and folded back the column, and then the row, and ripped out the blank card.

“Were those on the website too?”

“No I made these. But yeah it was my brother who wrote that stuff. It was on his website. He’s into really crazy stuff; he’s been investigating for years. Name?”

“Ann Wojek. What’s your brother like?”

“Haha, he’s a senior. Position? Like what do you want your job title to be?”

“Uh Drawing and Advice,” said Ann, after tapping her finger on her lip.

“And I’ll give you a lifetime membership—unless?”

“No that’s cool.”

“Okay now choose an ID. It can be any number... Or a way to make a number.”

“What’s the number for?”

Walter looked up from his knee on which he was writing.

“Okay,” Ann said. “The loneliest number.”

Walter laughed.

“Which one’s that?”

“Just write it.”

“You mean like a prime number?”

“Don’t talk to me about prime numbers!”

“Oh you have a factors test today.”

“Yeah! How did you know that?”

“Oh you know I know some people in the class.”

“I’m really bad at math,” Ann said.

Walter handed her the freshly minted card.

“What does this mean, Entitlement: 1 free computer program?” she asked.

“Oh it means just what it says. You tell me what kind of computer program you want and I’ll write you one for free. Like one where you can type stuff in, and it’ll say something back to you, and then you can type more stuff in. Or just a problem you want solved, and it’ll give you the answer...”

Ann was looking at herself in the mirror.

“You think about it and let me know if you have any ideas,” said Walter. “You should come to the meeting today! It’s on the card. Designated location is cafeteria.”

“Yeah okay,” she said, putting the card on the sink edge. Her eyes didn’t leave the mirror.

“Can I hear the tritone again?” she asked.

Walter played it for her once more. C F#. C F#. C F#. Walter wondered if he was imagining her eyes were getting wet.

“Okay can you go now?” she asked.

“Yeah I should be getting to gym.”

Walter swung his backpack.

“Okay see ya,” he said, opening the door.

“Bye,” said Ann.

Once the door was shut, Walter turned around, and went into the second single bathroom. He swung his backpack down, and folded his coat on top of it, and dropped his pants, and made sure the door was locked, and sat down. He had to poop, again!

Ann thought about her one free computer program throughout the morning. She was thinking about it while she finished cleaning up in the bathroom, while doing the stupid decoration thing for Stephanie, while finally getting to her locker. She had to think about it during Mr DeCan's class.

His head really did look like a can or something. It came in two parts. The bulge of his mouth and jaw was the first part, connected to the second part, which was an upright cylinder, whose higher reaches formed the basis for his tall ridged forehead. His hair was like when a bit of the lid is still attached to the can. In Mr DeCan's class, which was geography, they had to get into groups and make maps of imaginary countries.

Ann was in a group with Ede and Katalina. With one look at Katalina, Ann decided that there was no way this girl was going to contribute anything. Katalina had eyes that tilted at an acute angle so that she always had on a dumb expression of compassion. She was kind of like Ede's Igor. They always went around together. Ede, on the other hand, was small and bony, with wild brillo like hair, and a complicated tiny face that was pale and difficult to look at. Ann was imagining those tiny hands on her face, and she shivered.

Katalina smiled at her in a motherly way.

"So," said Ann.

They were sitting at four desks pushed together. A big piece of poster board was on the desks, and they had markers. Ede was on the very edge of her seat. She cracked her wrists.

"What should we call it?" asked Ann.

"What was that you said," Katalina asked Ede.

“We should figure out what kind of place it is,” said Ede. “First.”

“It should be really polluted,” said Ann.

“It could be polluted. I was thinking an island,” said Ede. “That exports...”

“What do you think it should export,” Ede whispered to Katalina.

“Oh, I don’t know, Ede. It could export all sorts of things,” answered Katalina.

“Soap.”

“It could be an export hub,” said Ede. “It could export everything. People could come to the island to do their shopping.”

“Ede, I never thought I’d hear you mention the word *shopping!*”

“Why don’t you get started coloring in the water,” Ede said to Katalina. “We don’t have that much time.”

She was staring down at the poster board as if sizing it up.

“Oh I like this blue,” said Katalina, picking up the blue marker, and starting to make swirls from the corner inwards.

“Here I’m just going to draw rectangles in places,” said Ann, “and decorate them, and you can have that be labels for things.”

“Okay, but don’t do too many,” said Ede, who had started to draw the outline of an island.

“I also might put a pizza place here,” said Ann.

“Don’t!” said Ede, a little too sharply.

So Ann retreated to her marker, whose designs became more and more elaborate as the class went on.

All was quiet until Ann intruded into Ede's space again as she leaned back to get a better view. Her hip cracked. Adopting the same pose, Ede now took in the entire poster board. In this way, she came to appreciate the superfluity of what Ann had so carefully created.

“What are you doing?” she cried.

“Wait I just have to add these more links for it to be symmetrical.”

A baroque lattice joined various rectangles, heavily ornamented in seven different colors.

“No! Oh my god, you ruined it.”

“Uh calm down,” said Ann. She tried to laugh. “It’s not ruined.”

“I see what you were trying to do, Ann,” said Katalina.

“No but seriously, it’s not ruined,” said Ann. She bent over. “Lemme finish this part.”

“No!” said Ede. “You’ve already caused enough damage.”

“Hah well you ain’t seen nothing yet,” said Ann, with a weak laugh, trying not to grimace.

She tried to go back to her work.

“NO! YOU’VE DONE ENOUGH,” shrieked Ede.

“Ede,” said Katalina.

Ede tried to wrestle the marker from Ann, and they fumbled with it for a bit, until Ann let it go, and kind of jumped back from her opponent.

“Okay, whatever!”

Ann looked out across the classroom. There was enough chatter that they hadn't been heard.

"I'm going to the bathroom," said Ann.

What the frick did I say, she was thinking.

She had an idea for a computer program for Walter. You'd feed into it things her mom would say and the program would analyze it, figure out how it was that her mom made her feel so bad no matter what she said.

Instead of going to the bathroom, Ann walked incredibly slowly down the hallway, and when she got on the other end of it, she leaned against the wall, and sunk down to the floor, so that she was sitting on it with her puffy jeans. From her bag she pulled out her gameboy.

It was a Pikachu gameboy color. It fit her hands perfectly. The battery part rested comfortably on her lower palms, and her fingers curled up to work the surface elegantly; she ran her fingers over the buttons and leaned into her thumb to go forward or backwards on the D pad.

Ann liked walking around the house with it held out in front of her while the volume was turned up. She would follow her mom doing the laundry, or cutting the cat's nails, or waiting around for the car to start up because it was so cold outside. Through the chilly air an electronic snare would keep time on the off beat; sometimes it would do a double tap. The melody kept returning to these joyful fragments that would trail off wistfully, the electronic snare crawling its way forward in time rung by rung. Her dad said it sounded like Kraftwerk. He said that meant Power Station. This made sense. The music was like a train running through the open air, and she could feel the map of the

world she was in stretch out indefinitely in all directions. She knew that this dimension was in the gameboy, but she also felt like she was this eyeball stalk intersecting the 2d plane which she could see extending even as she could see the laundry room around her.

The game was called Harvest Moon. There was a little farmer who lived in a farm house. Ann could move the farmer around in any of the four directions, and whatever direction he went in, there'd be this little dog that would follow him around. In the farm house, there was a bed where you had to go sleep. This would also save the game. If you didn't sleep, you might just pass out. Also on the farm, there was a barn, so when you bought a cow, then that would be in there. You could go up to the cow and milk it and get some milk. Ann didn't have a cow yet, nor a horse, though you could get one of those too, and put it in the barn. You could ride the horse around, or just let it wander outside. The animals liked to be brought out; they would become morose on wet days.

There also was the chicken coop. Ann decided to go there first today. The dirt paths of the farm were still shaded with morning light. The chickens would be bouncing around in the hay at this time. She had to pick the eggs up off the floor, and raise them above her head, and run to the little storage bin near her mailbox. A guy would take away her produce at the end of the day from the storage bin. He sold your stuff for you and brought you the money.

Next on the list was the tool shed. Ann broke in and went immediately to the shelves for the hammer, sickle, and ax. Then with her dog at her ankles, Ann raced the little farmer onto the field with his tools. Step one was to clear the field. You had to use the sickle to slice up the little squares of weeds; use the hammer to break up large rocks as big as two by two squares; and use the ax to break up stumps.

Step two was getting the land ready by hoeing a square at a time, being careful to make a formation that would allow access to each plant for watering. Get a bag of seeds in town and toss them in the air, water plots every day unless rain. Soon depending on the seeds, ripe really red tomatoes, whose spots of red would get bigger and more round by the day; corn with yellow bursting out of its suit of green; and cabbages... You had to pick them up and carry them over to the storage bin ideally before nightfall.

You could also marry a girl, and she'd live with you and the dog. Possibly you could have a baby, Ann wasn't sure.

Ann found that she could approach the tasks of this game with a kind of effortless intensity. She had become quite sophisticated. Her little farmer made almost no wasted movement. Nor were his movements hurried or awkward. Like a deliberate bee, he approached a hexagram of peas and offered it water from different angles. Plants could take a solid week to reach their full form, so that Ann often had to balance tending to new shoots while harvesting mature plants. She was always thinking at least a month ahead in order to keep everything bright and colorful in the field.

She went to bed and slid the power button, walking late towards math class, hoping she'd miss the test. But she didn't. She hesitated a moment out the door, thinking about her entrance, then she broke in, slightly out of breath. Everyone had their heads down. Mrs. Zeig handed her a test. Ann sat, slinging her backpack to the floor. She took out a pencil. The door opened a second time and Jack Nacheinander walked in holding a piece of lined paper against his bleeding forearm. He sat down heavily beside her, and inspected the paper, pried it loose from the bleeding scrape. Mrs. Zeig handed him a test too.

Jack always stuck his tongue out during a test. His face would get super red, and he'd scratch at his sandy hair, and periodically pinch a bit of his t-shirt and lift it.

Factors, she thought.

Factorize 72.

Oh that was lucky, she thought. 9 times 8. So two threes and three twos.

She tried a few more problems, sometimes drawing pictures.

A few more calculations.

She was staring down at her page so intently, that all of a sudden she became aware of how enormous in absolute terms was the distance between the floor with her backpack and the edge of the desk.

She felt a prickling on her scalp. It was already three fourths through the class. She had eleven more problems. The floor seemed a thousand miles away. It was just taking too long to work this out, and plus there were these word problems which had stumped her. She'd made some notes for them, promised to come back, but there was no going back. How embarrassing would it be if she fainted right here? She found she couldn't think about anything else but fainting. Pull yourself together!

She started pinching her arm, and did a few more problems this way.

She decided to put her head down a second to just chill out. Her pencil was still clutched in her hand. She could feel the edge of the desk against her forehead, and the mark it would leave. It was dark and quiet. She did what she sometimes did to orient herself, which was to imagine using her attention to draw shapes in her head, her attention leaving white trails in the darkness as she waved it around. So she could make circles, or loop de loops, or complicated weavings and turnings. And the game was to see

how complicated and long you could make your trail and still keep a clear image of it in your mind. You could go at it with two points of attention. Or leave trails on multiple tangles at once... If she concentrated, Ann could keep in mind about three crossings and fourish loops.

The effect of all this was a kind of gentle stirring of the brain.

She filled in quickly the rest of the answers, as the bell rang.

Mrs. Zeig took her paper. Jack Nacheinander turned to Ann and said, “Hey Ann —”

“And that’s when Jack asked me if I was going to the club meeting and I said yes,” she finished.

There was scattered applause.

The club meeting so far had been an extravaganza.

Rushing outside during recess, those present had gathered all sorts of empirical oddities: helicopter seed pods, a metal tube, a cigarette torn down the middle, a fragment of sandpaper. Then they’d snuck back inside the building and hijacked a social studies room, dark and unlocked. Walter wrote POWER CLUB on the white board.

Present were:

Walter Klugman,

Kirkby Oz,

Germey Shultz,

Alexia Dangerfield,

Anthony Patricola,

Jenny Backsay, and

[Jacquelyn] Ann Wojek.

And Jack Nacheiander.

Ann was speaking crouched by a low table at the corner of a rug with a design of the alphabet on it in very bold characters and colors. She sensed Walter standing behind her, marker at the ready. Kirkby Oz was sitting on a beanbag like it was a chair, with his back very straight and his knees squared. Germy Shultz was on the far side of the room, pacing back and forth, with his hands behind his back. Alexia Dangerfield and Jenny Backsay were joined at the hip. (Ann observed that Alexia would stand very sturdily, and gesture definitively with one of her forceful arms, while Jenny always seemed on the verge of toppling over, even if she was just standing there. Jenny wouldn't gesture with her arms, instead she merely raised or lowered a hand, and tilted. In any case, they were standing by the cubbies on the other side of the alphabet rug.) Finally Anthony Patricola sat hunched on the desks; and Jack Nacheinander stood with his arms crossed by the sink.

"I think I can keep the thread going for like six seconds before I lose it," reported Germy, rounding a corner.

"Screw factors," said Ann.

"Yeah screw factors," said Kirkby. "No I can get behind factors."

Before Ann had told her story, Walter, who now was resting his head meditatively against the whiteboard, had reported on his adventures in gym class.

He'd developed a means of simulating basketball. He would draw a line in his mind between the player with the ball and another player. Then he would drop a

perpendicular bisector down to this line. He would slide up and down this perpendicular bisector, always in motion, updating as the location of the ball and the other player changed. Walter said that this created very realistic basketball movements, especially as the one degree of freedom, to move up and down the bisector, allowed him to jog at a pretty constant speed. Sometimes he would switch target players on gut instinct. That was the art of it, he said, more or less.

This had caused a great commotion.

“—and you’re pretty sure you didn’t look like an idiot?” Anthony inquired.

“I really feel like I blended in,” Walter said.

“Don’t call him an idiot,” said Jenny. “He had a *hypothesis*.”

“Wait! I’m thinking...” Gerny began. “Why not take two other players and the ball and keep track of the centroid where all the perpendicular bisectors of the sides of the triangle hit?”

“Centroid!!” said Walter. “I am the centroid!”

“What are you people talking about,” asked Anthony.

“Alexia, you were there, did you think I was really playing basketball?—Well, it’s just a way to play basketball,” said Walter.

“Walter, I think it would have worked well, but your eyes were always off in the wrong direction,” said Alexia.

“The eyes are very important,” said Ann.

“Okay, enough about that,” Kirkby Oz said, taking the floor. “I was sitting at the kitchen table drinking an espresso with my mother, and—”

“WHAAAT” shouted Alexia. Jenny lost her balance.

“Who are you Kirkby,” asked Anthony.

“So I have an espresso now and again,” said Kirkby shrugging. “They’re really easy to make.”

“Your mom doesn’t mind?” asked Alexia.

“Apparently not,” said Jenny.

“So I was drinking the espresso,” said Kirkby.

“Yeah go on,” said Walter.

“And I was sitting at the table. And I was wondering how sure I was that up wasn’t down and that down wasn’t up, because all of a sudden I felt like I was falling really slowly towards the ceiling. Like the chair was pushing me up and I was about to just come loose and like fall upwards,” said Kirkby

“Ooo,” said Walter.

“I think it was because my cousin is staying with us, and so I had to sleep on the air mattress. So while we were rearranging stuff, I propped it up on the wall for like some reason. So I leaned back against it, and I was pretending, you know—and then it hit me, and it was just like I was flat in the bed! The reverse happened when I was in bed for real.”

“It’s crazy to think you can sleep on air,” said Walter.

“Yeah it just feels empty beyond you,” said Kirkby.

“Empty?” asked Walter. “Like just nothingness, pure nothings?”

“Like the endless void?” asked Gerny.

“The baleful VOID?” asked Walter.

“Yes, Walter, like the baleful void,” said Kirkby. “I slept on that. What about you Anthony?”

“Oh well,” Anthony said, standing up from the table, his butt still hanging little on it, which bared his ankles. “You know those rotating wheel things for fishing poles? I was imagining one in my head, but every time I’d try to rotate it in one direction, but it kept accidentally going in the other direction.”

“I know that. It’s like when you just keep pulling out bits of your hair, even when you think you’re not,” said Jenny.

“One thing that I’ve learned is that you must discipline yourself,” said Anthony, in a deep gravelly voice. “There are two paths. The path of action and the path of passivity. The path of strength and the path of weakness. The one can be harnessed, forced into shape by the will. The other is a kind of power that will not come when called; you must allow it to flow through you. The more you try to force yourself 360 the more you will fail.”

“Woah Anthony,” said Alexia.

“Guys guys,” said Walter, “think of this like peeing and pooping. Like to poop is the path of strength, you just go and try to force that stuff out of there. But to pee you have to sit there and wait for it to come to you. You have to pee by not peeing, but you can poop by pooping.”

“Walter,” said Germy.

“Pooooooooop!” said Walter.

“Okay no but guys,” said Jenny. “I’m staring at the table right now.”

They fell silent. Ann followed her gaze.

“Do you see how red it is? It’s like the color is popping out into another dimension.”

They admired it.

“At yet, it’s so flat!” Walter said, closing one eye.

“So you guys just like art?” asked Ann suddenly.

“What?” said Jenny.

“Oh! It just seems like you guys are really just talking about art. You’re just using all these weird code words,” Ann said, turning a little uncertain.

“Like do you know about cubism? I love art,” she continued. “I had no idea that you guys...”

“You’re in GT Art,” said Jenny, meaning Gifted and Talented Art.

“Art’s cool,” said Walter.

“Yeah, we like classical art,” said Germy.

“Only the classics,” said Walter.

Kirkby said, “My mom sells pottery.”

“Yeah I think I have some, my mom was saying,” said Alexia, gesturing. “It is very colorful. I highly recommend it.”

“I should bring my cubism book to the next meeting,” said Ann. “That’ll make my dad happy.”

“You did a painting once, didn’t you Jenny,” asked Alexia.

“I’ve done a painting,” said Jenny. “The brain of a sea lamprey connected to the body of a robotic fish.”

“It was from an actual GOVERNMENT document,” said Walter.

“It was for military preparedness,” said Anthony. “They were making predictions and one thing they thought they’d see was these sea lampreys.”

“We sold it to Walter’s brother for thirty dollars,” said Alexia to Ann.

“Do you think George Bush knows about them?” asked Kirkby.

“Do you think George Bush knows about you,” asked Anthony.

“George Bush has like Dick Cheney control the lampreys with his mind.”

“George Bush is the robotic fish.”

“George Bush... *Amurica*.”

“Walter, did your brother vote?” asked Jenny.

The bell rang for recess to be over.

“Okay guys okay!” said Walter.

The group dispersed, scurrying to their respective classrooms. Then five minutes later the lockdown rang, and then they got dismissed, and so actually they got to continue their discussion.

Flurries were coming down at around 12:45 when Walter exited the building. The ground was low in all directions, so the flurries formed sheets that dove towards the ground, and curled upwards, scraping against the asphalt and melting. Pools of students were milling around, some near the wood chips, some leaning against the volcano which was a large metal pipe cone shape made for climbing, with a pole to slide down in the middle. Others were by the fence concealing the generator, or at top of the gentle hill by the administration parking spaces, their hands clenched in their pockets, standing at the very edge of the dirt, looking down at their teacher below them. The youngest kids raced

outside into the snow, fourth graders, fifth graders, past agglomerations of eighth grade girls, most of the time not looking up at their teachers' faces. Across the parking lot, Jonathan Spud, who was wearing a pea coat in the eighth grade, had taken off his hat and was scraping up snow to pelt Jack Nacheinander, who was standing in a crowd, near the edge of the parking lot, so that he could see beyond the school, to the enormous field across the road.

Actually, it was two fields, and forest on either side deep in the periphery. Soy or wheat? A whole acre of land across from the school, and then a ridge, a tree in the very middle of it, and another field, and beyond the flurries, close to the grey clouds, was the landlocked battleship, which was actually a Lockheed Martin facility, which just looked like a battleship. It's red blinking light could easily be seen.

Walter got tired of looking for his friends, and wandered aimlessly. He was interested in the wood chips because the bumpiness played tricks with his mind. He was in no particular rush, which was one privilege of being a seventh grader.

In any case, he was in a good mood, enjoying the excitement that came from being near to something important enough to destroy.

He found Ann.

"You know what's going on," he asked her.

She made a face at him.

"Uh no."

"I heard that we had to evacuate again because they were worried the battleship would be a target."

"Doesn't Germy's dad work for them?"

“Yeah, I saw a binder of his one time. It was about cloaking devices for spy planes.”

Walter sniffled. Ann put on her hat.

“I really don’t want to go to the high school again,” said Ann. “Like last time.”

“Yeah the high school is pretty weird. The whole two floors thing...”

Germmy came up to them.

“Aloha,” he said, permuting.

“Hey Mr Lockheed Martin do you think this is how it all starts?” asked Walter.

Germmy squinted out towards the battleship.

“Uh yeah,” he said, nervously. “I hope my dad’s okay.”

“I think we’re just going to need to wait for more information,” said Walter, pacing. “We just need more information.”

He looked at them.

“You guys ever wonder what’s going on in there? I mean, we are on the cutting edge! It’s weird to think about.”

Ann had never thought about being on the cutting edge before, exactly.

“I’m just thinking,” said Germmy, “they really should be able to defend this place. I wonder if there are invisible aircraft here right.”

They inspected the sky over the warrens of boxy homes north and west. The flurries had intensified and Walter’s and Germmy’s and Ann’s shoulders were all covered in white. They sniffled the air, and held their arms close, and bobbed slightly from foot to foot.

“I hear they work on very important problems there...” Walter said.

“I was thinking about that square root of 2 stuff you said,” said Ann. “Walter. I was thinking about the square root—”

“Oh yeah of 2 stuff.”

“I was thinking...” said Ann, putting on her ear muffs. “Oh yeah, the thing that I don’t get. So you have the triangle. But why do you have to measure the diagonal line using the other two lines? Why can’t you just measure the diagonal as like 1 and then look at how long the other sides would be?”

“Ooo! Ooo!” said Germy, looking up at the sky. “ $a^2 + b^2 = c^2$ . But  $a=b$ . So  $2a^2 = 1$  because the diagonal is 1. So  $a = 1/\sqrt{2}$ .”

“So it still has a square root of 2 in it?”

“Yessir!”

“So like,” said Ann, “so the first two lines measure the diagonal, and they find that it’s complicated like the square root of 2. While they’re both just 1. But when the diagonal measures the other two lines, it finds out now *they’re* complicated, and it’s 1. That’s weird. That’s what I was thinking about.”

“Dood! This is what the square root of 2 is all about,” sang Walter.

The buses were starting to show up.

“Guys stay there,” said Walter. He placed himself in front of Ann, and began walking at a diagonal away from Germy towards the school.

“I’m surfing the diagonal!” he said. “But not really, because it doesn’t feel any different. It just feels like I’m going straight.”

“Well maybe you should turn your head,” said Ann. “Like make the diagonal but be looking behind your shoulder back at us. How do things look then?”

“Like twist my neck?” asked Walter.

“Yeah,” said Ann.

Walter flexed, and rolled his neck around like he’d seen people do to loosen up when he was at camp and they had dancing class.

“Okay,” he said.

He looked back over at the school.

“Do you think they’re getting into the buses?” he asked.

“FLURVIS! It’s going to take forever,” said Germy. “I just know.”

“Okay.”

Walter gingerly rotated his head about ninety degrees. To the right of his vision he could just see Germy. He began to walk up and to the right. He rotated his head a bit further. A sliver more of Germy came into view. So far so good.

—all of a sudden he felt like he had to cough and whipped his head back around so he could let it out—

“Whew!” he said.

“How’s it going?” asked Ann.

“Oh good,” said Walter. He repositioned his head. He started walking again. He had to crane even more to see the effect, which was everything slinking away from him at this fortyfive degree angle. It was like a very dramatic dolly shot. Hard to pay attention to it because of the tension in his neck. Only like five more feet to go.

“Anyway, I was thinking sometimes,” said Ann, “I live over past those houses, and at night I can hear a noise outside my window, that I think comes from that battleship. It sounds just like that tritone.”

“Do you think they’re doing something to the plants in the field?!” asked Walter, very roughly, but softly, three feet away. “I’ve seen some crazy stuff.”

“With the sound?”

“Maybe it’s giving them energy,” he said, whispering, at the last two feet.

“Guys, it’s just probably a generator,” said Germy.

“But why *that* sound?” asked Ann.

“Okay, okay, maybe they’re housing the rift there,” said Walter breathlessly, almost at the finish line. “And harnessing the energy of it in a generator. And some sound leaks out. Okay!” he said, halting. “I did it.”

“Did you see anything?” asked Germy.

All of a sudden Ann saw her mother’s SUV come speeding down the long strip towards the school from the left.

“Hey that’s my mom,” said Ann.

“What,” Walter said, and they all turned to look.

“What the heck is she doing here,” asked Ann.

The three kids walked over to the bushes as the fat green car, whose ancestor had been a military vehicle, veered into the school driveway, and pulled up the relatively long strip. Ann’s mom drove onto the grass, parked, and opened the door.

“Ann!” she said.

“Hey mom,” said Ann.

Ann came around the hood of the car, while Walter and Germy held back a little and strayed by the front tire. Ann’s mom extracted herself from the front seat. She was wearing black jeans, a grey sweatshirt with no design on it, and a puffy jacket with

grayish fur around the hood. When she stood, Walter could see her coat pockets were filled with tissues.

Ann's mother cupped her daughter's face with her hands.

"Your dad called me when he heard about the plane. He overheard them talking about it at the bike shop—by the way, he brought your green bike in for the brakes," said Ann's mom.

"Oh!" Ann said.

"I was just sitting in the kitchen. They said you were being evacuated. So I came over."

She ran her fingers through her daughter's hair.

"What happened?!" asked Walter.

Ann's mom turned to Walter.

"Oh a plane went down," she said. "Came down across the sky and sliced into the field on the other side of that thing." She gestured toward the battleship. "It was Vernon Dill's private plane."

"Vernon Dill!" said Walter. "Oh man!"

"Who's Vernon Dill?" asked Germy.

"He's the dude who lives in the giant mansion," said Walter.

"That's true," said Ann's mom. "He moved in Morsetown a few years ago, after building his estate. He had the Commerce Bank fortune. You know like on Main Street?" Ann's mom gestured in the general direction. "He was president of Commerce Bank."

"So... what happened to him?" asked Walter.

“Oh he’s fine,” said Ann’s mom. “I don’t even think he was in the plane when it went down. I don’t think you’re supposed to fly in flurries. I drove past it. It seems like they just lost control of the plane, and it came swooping down, just missed an intersection, and left a huge trail before it split up.”

“Did you see anyone dead?” asked Ann.

“Well, I just drove past,” said her mom. “It was a small plane.”

“You didn’t stop to look?” asked Ann.

“Well, I had to come get you, honey,” said her mom.

“Maybe I’ll just go on the buses,” said Ann, looking down. “I was thinking of going to play with Walter and Germy.”

“You want to go to the high school on a bus, and then take another bus?” asked her mom.

“Maybe Walter and Germy could help me about factors,” said Ann. “You guys would do that, right?” she asked.

“Yep yep,” said Walter.

“Sure,” said Germy.

“Nice to meet you, Walter and Germy,” said Ann’s mother. “But I don’t think Ann can play today.”

“What?” said Ann.

“I said, we’re all just going to go home now.”

Ann closed her eyes.

“Why do you always have to do this?” asked Ann.

“We’ve talked about this, Ann,” said her mother.

“And I can’t even ride my bike! Thanks to dad!” said Ann.

“You wouldn’t be able to ride your bike anyway,” said her mom.

“SAYS WHO?” asked Ann.

Ann’s mother turned to Walter and Germy. “Do you two have siblings?” she asked. “How do *your* parents deal with children who have an attitude problem?”

“Do you have to ruin everything?” asked Ann.

“Me ruin everything,” asked her mom.

“Yes! You!” cried Ann.

“Someday you are going to realize that I know more about this world than you can even imagine,” said Ann’s mom.

“Oh I can imagine!” she yelled.

“For example you still think yelling is way to get your way!” her mom yelled.

“Why don’t you yell some more maybe I’ll change my mind!”

“I CAN IMAGINE!” yelled Ann.

“I CAN IMAGINE TOO,” yelled her mom. “You are so selfish,” she continued in a quieter voice, “that you can’t even realize it.”

Ann’s mom looked over at Walter and Germy again.

“I’m sorry about this,” she said.

“Why don’t you just go back and look at those bodies some more,” Ann said. “I’ll just wait for dad to pick me up.”

“GET IN THE CAR, YOU LITTLE MOUTHY GIRL,” said her mom. “Your dad’s not coming home until late.”

“Oh why’s that?” asked Ann.

“GET IN THE CAR,” said her mom.

“But why?!”

“GET IN THE CAR RIGHT THIS INSTANT.” Ann’s mom slammed her hand against the hood.

“I’m not going unless Walter and Germy come,” said Ann.

She shrugged, holding back tears.

“That’s just how it is.”

“Get in,” growled her mother.

Ann didn’t budge.

Her mom hissed.

“In!” she said. “All of you!”

“Maybe I should get on the bus,” said Germy.

“Wonderful,” said Ann’s mother.

“I’ll come, though” said Walter. “I live just down the street.”

Ann’s mother slammed the driver’s side door. Ann walked to the passenger side, looking down at the grass.

“I’ll be seeing you,” said Walter to Germy.

“No I’ll come,” said Germy.

They hopped in the backseat. The three kids and Ann’s mom slung their seat belts across their chests, and buckled in. It was warm in the car. The air vents were going full blast. Walter put his hand to the cold window, and then to the hot vent, and then back to the cold window. The flurries were zooming intensely across the windshield.

“Mrs. Wojek,” said Walter. “We’ve all had a pretty exhausting day.”

“Oh really Walter?”

Coming to the field, they made a right, and continued down that road.

“It feels weird,” Walter said. “I’m putting my hand on the cold window, and then on the hot vent, and switching back and forth. Do you guys like it to be cold and refreshing when you go to bed, but warm and cozy when you wake up, or the other way around?” he asked.

“Walter, what happened to your eyebrow?” asked Ann’s mom. “Did you get burned?”

Ann kicked the glove compartment.

“Uh,” said Walter. “Oh wait, Mrs. Wojeck. I wanted to ask you. We were talking about maybe there’s this sound that comes out of the battleship at night and affects the plants.”

“Yeah I said that wasn’t possible,” said Germy.

Ann had her arms crossed and was staring at the side mirror.

“You’re worried about the plants,” said Ann’s mom, darkly. “Honey,” she said. “What you don’t know. You don’t know that everything is poisoned.”

Walter laughed.

“Everything?” asked Walter.

“Oh everything, Walter” said Ann’s mom with evident pleasure. “Everyone’s trying to get their hands on some sustenance, food, water, life. And there is a massive society designed to harvest this sustenance while keeping it tightly regulated and confined.”

“Oh.”

“Money is a lie. It’s a way of starving off the populace who aren’t need to run the harvest.”

She came to a red light.

“Everything they give you is poison,” said Ann’s mom. “That’s right. The food, the water. You take it to stay alive, but everything has ill effects. Everything you buy is contraband. They’ll arrest you for what you just bought. Even though you bought it, it’s still illegal. Everything is illegal. They just can’t prosecute all the cases because it would take too long.”

She made a left.

“Once there was a very powerful sustenance on earth,” Ann’s mom continued. “But not one person could help themselves from taking a piece and soon it was all gone. Now it’s in the dirt.”

“SHUT UP,” screamed Ann. “SHUT UP!”

They were pulling up to another red light.

There was a strange roar of rising intensity that wasn’t coming from the car in front of them.

Everybody paused.

Walter twisted his neck back to look out the window; he saw a flatbed truck come to a stop beside them, with a monstrous gleaming snorting face. Strapped to the flatbed was a wing of the plane that had crashed.

Immediately Walter saw that the airplane wing was catching the air. Flurries were rushing across the open mouth made by the bent wing and streaming off to the side of the road. This was the source of the roar. The cavity so created was emitting an

enormous sympathetic tritonal chord cradling the expanse of the spectrum, the octaves. Walter could feel this throat rise through the twist. The truck was rumbling the windows, as the air complexified, the churned up air churning more air in ever more intricate ways—so that in middle of the wind storm, Walter heard a familiar shout as something emerged which had the power of the human call.

Walter unbuckled his seatbelt. He gathered in his breath.

“Hey guys I have an idea.”

Then he cried at the top of his voice: “ANN GERM MY LET’S GET THE HECK OUT OF HERE!!”

And they did!

Like one organism, the two unbuckled their seatbelts, the three flung themselves out their respective doors leaving them unshut, racing separately to the back of the flatbed truck, and hoisting themselves up the short ladder. Once on the surface, they fled through the wall of flurries to take shelter under the wing where it was deafening. Not once did they look into each other’s eyes.

It was too loud to talk.

Meanwhile the light had turned green. The truck started to move, and soon it was going forty five miles an hour.

After a moment of shock, Ann’s mother pushed the accelerator down so hard that all the doors promptly shut themselves. She came speeding up behind the truck.

The driver saw her in his rear view mirror. Without thinking, he started accelerating too.

Ann's mom accelerated even more, and the expression of intensity in her eyes, combined with the hulk of the tank-like SUV, put the driver in a state of alarm. He doubled down on the accelerating. Ann's mom jerked along the road. She started looking like she was going to switch lanes, like she was going to force him from the road. He could see a herd of cars hurtling towards him from the other direction. There was a flat meadow coming up to his left.

He expertly pulled off the road and went barreling across the meadow.

In the shadow of the wing, over the bumps in the dirt, Ann and Walter had a hold of each other just to crouch; Gerny, who was a little bigger, grabbed Walter's shoulder as he was being thrown. Through their coats they could feel how warm they all were. The red branches which filled their insides began to pulse in time, and stretch and dilate. Like when people sleep in a bed together, who beat in time to the pattern of each other's radiation, without sight, without sound, with only hot and cold as guides.

The truck finally stopped.

When they emerged, Ann's mother was running towards them.

She scooped Ann up, held her closely, and keened.

"My brother is going to love this," Walter decided.

Gerny vomited into the wing of the plane.

HARRY STONE

2013

Are you a fucking Jew?

Good.

Yeah sit down. I'll tell you a thing or two. You're lucky you ran in to me. I liked the look of you. You know why? I saw you walking down the street and you were whistling. Nobody in America whistles. Let me tell you. The Russians. In Russia it's not like this. They know a thing or two. The Russians sing while they walk. They walk down the street and they sing at the tops of their lungs. I heard you whistling. That says to me I can trust you. I'll tell you a thing or two.

The first rule is never tell anyone your real name. You look to me like an Andrew —no, not Andrew. A Harry. Harry is the best name. Always trust a Harry. If you walk by place, Harry's Laundromat, Harry's Convenience Store, you go in there. You can always trust a Harry. Harry, Harry Stone. That's a good name.

My name is Charlie.

Not my real name.

I'm writing a letter to the submarine admiral.

Do you know we're at war, Harry? They don't tell you everything. The Iranians are the ones you gotta watch out for. You know what they use, Harry? You won't believe it. Bats, Harry. Bats, bees, and mosquitos. Have you noticed that there are more mosquitos that ever before, Harry? This summer. The Iranians are bringing them over. It's how they're making us slow without us knowing it, slow and stupid. Even more than we've made ourselves.

How are they doing it? Have you heard of Nikola Tesla? A genius. You know him! Most Americans don't know Nikola Tesla, that's good, Harry. The Russians, however, they were smart. They took him very seriously. They built coils all over the world. So they were ready. They sold the technology to the Iranians, and that's how they're bringing the bats and bees and mosquitos over here. They follow the current, Harry. They make clouds.

This is the kind of thing Americans could never do. We're a weak people, Harry. If only one Russian was remaining, if one Russian were alive, they'd activate the Tesla coil and that would be the end of everything. That's dedication. Americans don't sing. They listen to the bullshit on the radio. Sex addiction, Harry. We're a nation addicted to sex. We don't care about things like the Russians do. They understood something, and the Iranians too. And that's exactly why we need to hit the Iranians right now, hard, blow them off the map. I'm writing this letter.

Tell me, Harry, how many things can you think at once? Just answer the fucking question, Harry. Good, see you're smart, Harry, if you just loosen up. Don't be evasive Harry, just tell me what you think. You were exactly correct. You can only think one thought at a time. One thought and one thought only. Brave men can only think of one thought at a time. And that one thought you think is your god.

Do you take drugs, Harry? Marijuana? Forget marijuana, Harry: amphetamines. I can see you're prejudiced against them. You know, it is a commandment to take amphetamines in the army. Harry, look at you, you're so guilty. Don't smoke any more of that Vietnamese marijuana. You've been smoking it. I can tell you from experience. They'll give you guilty hallucinations.

Oh Harry Harry Harry. You're a Jew, aren't you, Harry? Oh I knew it the whole time. You lied to me, I should have fucking killed you. I tell you, Harry, the first time I killed a man without a badge was a fucking Jew on the subway because he made me feel like my life was meaningless. You might be the guiltiest Jew I ever seen, but at least you don't make me feel like my life is meaningless.

Harry, are you a homosexual? Do dreams count? What do you think, Harry? If you have a homosexual dream, does that make you a homosexual? No! See, Harry, never lie. If you don't want to say something, just ask them: Do dreams count? And then, of course, they'll think you only dreamed it once. Dreams are important, Harry. I've done almost everything in my dreams.

Now, I'm not a homosexual, but I know that you can't trust women. You can't trust men either, but if you can't talk to men, then you go crazy. I give you one year, Harry. This is what I did for myself. I gave myself one year, and after that, no more women, no more of the sex addiction that is destroying America.

Don't you think that if people are unhappy with their lives, if they're trapped and addicted, they ought to die? Harry, just tell me what you think. Don't worry about what I think. If you tell me something I haven't heard, you'll be a millionaire. After all, you're talking to the guy who is about to change everything, Harry. Everything. I'm writing this letter. They don't know what I know, I was in the army.

Frankie Vanilla was the best guy. We grew up in the Bronx together. Tough guy. He always had two boys on either side of him, protecting him. Played stickball, baseball. You like baseball, Harry? I was one of the greatest athletes that ever lived. But Frankie—

Well, after we were in the army, Frankie started making money, and I started thinking. Now Frankie has nine billion dollars, but I came out ahead. I was sitting in my apartment on my couch and my god started talking to me—this was the first time my god had talked to me—and he said that Frankie Vanilla is a motherfucking child rapist and murderer. I couldn't believe it! Not Frankie Vanilla! But it was true. So I wrote him a letter. Because I knew that he had 9 billion dollars, and a child rapist is the worst thing you can be in America, and he would be willing to part with 8 billion just to keep me quiet.

I can't ask too many questions of my god, Harry. Falling in love with god is the most important thing. Like if he says, Harry go to the movies. Then you go to the movies. There isn't a feeling like it.

So I send Frankie a letter. Then I send him another letter. Nothing. But I could tell I got his attention. I started getting followed. But I wasn't afraid. Because I was in the FBI, I had my badge. This was after I was in the army. Do you know how the FBI operate? I'll tell you Harry. I'll educate you. I met with them, and they handed me my badge. My license to kill. And they said: do what you will. You have free reign. Total discretion. This is how they work. They want to see how you operate. They're out for profit like anyone else. So I thought where is all this profit, Harry? See I was smart. I immediately went to Caesars in Las Vegas. Because I says to myself these are sex profits, more money that anyone ever needs. They must be up to no good. When you're guilty, Harry, everybody knows it. They can see it on your face. Evasive. When you're guilty, Harry, people can make you do anything. I knew this. So I went to Caesars. I never gambled a dime. Got a room. A very expensive room, Harry, on the FBI's tab. So they

brought women to me, Harry, women and champagne. I didn't drink a drop, Harry. I told the women, I turned to the women, and I said I need to see the manager. And they did, one of them went out, and came back with the manager. A big Jew. I said, I'm FBI, you son of a bitch. I know what goes on here. I know all about it. I showed him my badge, my gun. I said, I'll keep quiet for now, but I need cash. You shoulda see the look on his face, Harry. He was trying to talk me down, he was trying to distract me from my purpose, Harry. He was using the women. I brought out my gun. BAM. BAM, Harry. That got him running. He came back with a briefcase full of money. He knew what was good for him. I'll be back, you motherfucker, I said.

But as I was leaving the casino, the FBI men showed up, and they came up to me. I showed them my badge. They said, good work, soldier. And I felt something behind me, I felt a gun at my back. They took the briefcase, of course. They take everything. And then I was back in New York.

And my god said to me, I've had enough. You're going to have to kill Frankie Vanilla. I said, please god. Not Frankie Vanilla. Frankie Vanilla's a beautiful man. But there I was, I was outside the big building where he worked. And I got him to come down, I called him up, I said Frankie, it's your old friend Charlie, we gotta talk.

How could you, he said to me. You know how it goes, I says to him. I must have killed seven or eight people, Harry. But Frankie got away. Frankie got away. Because I got distracted, Harry.

I had the first vision I ever had which was at the corner of 108th and Broadway. I was standing there and all of a sudden I started rising up in the air. And all my clothes dropped away! And I was floating there in my boxers and my socks and my shoes. And I

could see everything around me. And then fire came down, and ice, and fire and ice. And then the evil god came down at stole away my youth. I was one beautiful motherfucker, Harry. This was about three or four years ago. People would turn to look and stare when I went past. I was in my twenties. And when I came down, many years had passed. And now you see me as I am. This is what an evil god can do.

Harry, I'm going to do for you what I did for my boys in the army. I made my boys all do one thing. The first thing. Do you have a phone, Harry? Take it out right now and call your mother. And I want you to ask her why she hates you. Just ask her and see what she says, Harry. You have to realize something about the world. All mothers hate their sons. You need to learn that for yourself. Call her up right now. A woman will never take your left hand. Do you know what the biggest lie is? They say that god's love is like a mother for her son. The biggest lie there is. The biggest lie. You won't do it, Harry? Do it someday. You'll do it some day. And then you won't be such a guilty looking motherfucker, Harry. Then you can just think of one thing, Harry, just one thing at a time.

2014

JACQUELYN'S BABY  
[cf. alternate version]  
2014

Jacquelyn had been smoking cigarettes out her bathroom window. Her towels stank. Ash had gotten all in the leaves of the plant who lived on the window sill. She took off all her clothes and got in the shower. She was shivering a little. She kept eyeballing the glowing white curtain and running her hands down her sort of protruding belly. She reset her breathing with a sigh.

“No no I get it God—oh I get it.”

“No really I am in awe. *What were you thinking?* No I'm just at that point! I really just don't know. I have no idea. Ahh!”

She eyeballed the curtain again and threw up her hands.

“So you said the ratio of the diameter of a circle to its circumference is pi because two dimensions is just soooo fucking complex that for some reason you need an infinitude of numbers just to handle the cases when the diameter gets big. Because the space is flat? Ooo so special. Whatever. I *get* it. But *what was your intention?!* It's like you set it up so that...”

“Hah oh I get it God, no I really do. You made a universe so incredibly interesting that you could literally spend an eternity thinking about it and never get a straight answer. That does make a lot of sense. You said to yourself, why not have the limit of our knowledge be a constantly negotiable boundary so that thinking never ceases, time never ends, and the pleasures of discovery mount interminably... Well done well done well done. You've succeeded. But...”

“Oh no I am grateful. I get it. It’s wonderful. But I just want to know what you want me to do...”

“Alright I suppose I know what to do, but...”

“Always with the *but!* No I am grateful. What I’m saying is that I trust you to handle the long term. Dispose of me. I’m not worried about immortality. I know you’ll keep it interesting. I can also handle the short term. My life is great. I have food. My duvet is really warm. It’s the mid-range that I can’t fathom. I just need a mid-range arc...”

She felt a tightness seize her chest.

“Oh okay you want to give me a disease! Great. Do you always have to make this a be careful what you wish for situation? You know me. I say these things...”

“I supposed I *have* wished for it. But I guess I was just trying to motivate myself! I wasn’t...”

She stamped her foot on the shower floor.

“You want me to look behind the curtain? Are you going to be sitting there on the toilet? Are you serious?”

She beheld the shower curtain for a second. It had a very fine microscopic honeycomb pattern. She grabbed it and pulled. The sound of the metal rings scraping against the bar was surprisingly consonant. She was staring right at the mirror above the sink. It was completely clouded over with fog.

“Yes it would have been funny if I’d seen myself. It would have been very funny. Fuck you.”

She reset the curtain. She positioned herself right under the stream of water. It

wasn't very hot anymore. She increased the heat. Her head was against her chest. She breathed in and out again. She was quiet for a time.

"You want me to fear you?" she whispered. "You want my fear? Why do you want my fear?" she asked.

For a long time she stood there, just shaking her head at the shower floor.

She turned off the water and toweled off. Leaving the bathroom, she went over to the couch. She threw herself on it still naked. She opened her laptop. It was cold against her thighs. She went onto EatStreet and ordered some sushi for delivery from the combo Chinese/Japanese place next to the pet store at the mall.

She was still naked and on her computer I guess it must have been an hour later when the Japanese guy knocked at her door. At first she thought it was her neighbor who had been asking her to play cards for like two weeks.

"One second!"

She ran to her closet and pulled on some sweatpants and a sweater. The knock came again. Running to the kitchen, she thrust her feet into her boots—they didn't go all the way in—and flung open the door. Nothing. She curled her head around the doorframe. Hmm. She went over to the edge of the balcony and looked down. The delivery guy was trying the first floor.

"Hi!" she said.

He came back up the stairs. She shuffled over to meet him. Her boots were on completely sideways, her feet in the part that was supposed to cover her ankles and shins. She thanked him. Tip was included.

Back inside, she ate some scallion pancakes, some egg rolls, some hamachi (yellowtail) nigiri, some nama sake (fresh salmon) nigiri, some shiro maguro (very white tuna) nigiri, and some General Tso's chicken. She watched the Colbert Report. Finally she had a little bit of Ben and Jerry's Mint Chocolate Cookie, and went to bed.

A little after four in the morning she woke up groaning and with a terrible stomach ache.

Back to the bathroom, in an agonized sleepiness, she sat down on the toilet seat and gave a heave. And another heave. Nothing. It felt like there was a living rock in there. She waited. And waited... Something shifted within her. She burped.

"Ahhh!" she whispered.

Still nothing.

She waited some more. The bathroom was dark; a cold wind from outside was whistling through the moon and snow lit window. She wrapped her hands around her belly and whimpering a bit, she started rocking like she was dovening. She tried and tried to press the agglomeration out of her, but it was like blowing into a balloon when you don't have your lips closed tight around the nipple.

It still stank from the cigarettes.

Time passed.

She gave another heave.

Time passed some more.

...

Finally something gave.

While it was coming out, she felt herself widen precariously.

She heard no plop.

...

Frowning, she turned to look underneath her and was surprised to see a soft white light emanating from the toilet bowl.

She grabbed a too large handful of toilet paper and quickly wiped herself and stood up to see what was going on.

In the toilet bowl, surrounded by loose hairs and cigarette ash, drifting above the clear waters, there was a little glowing ball about two inches in diameter. Her toilet paper was draped over it.

“Oh shit” she whispered.

The ball was hanging a gentle left, dragging the Charmin Ultra in its wake. Coming to the rim, it boooounced rather slowly and gracefully, deforming a bit before it shoved off in the opposite direction.

Jacquelyn very carefully pulled up her sweatpants.

Water was creeping up the toilet paper. She gently tugged it off. Then she knelt down and rested her arms on the rim; she rested her head on her arms, watching the ball of light do its thing. Cocking her head to the side, she could see colorful hints of a multitude playing on its surface.

...

After about five minutes, she homed in with her pointer finger very very slowly. The space around the ball of light was neither hot nor cold.

She poked it. It gave way elastically at her touch.

In addition, rather patiently, the ball began to voyage in the direction she'd pointed at.

"Remarkable inertia," said Jacquelyn.

"Hello little ball," she said officially.

It gleamed at her.

"I always wondered when we'd discover a new kind of excretion," she said, sort of wincing at her own expression.

"Well I figure it can't hurt me," she decided. "And the toilet is no place for a little glowing ball such as yourself."

She cupped her hands around it.

"So smooth!"

It was like no silk she'd ever caressed. She pressed her thumbs into it, and she could feel the ball give way, like she was massaging the skin of an animal.

"Let's get you out of here."

She tried to shepherd the ball into the more open expanse of the bathroom proper. It didn't move easily. She really had to give it a heave for it to accelerate. As she stood, she tried to pull it up with both hands.

"Whew!"

Once she got it going, however, she perceived that it was ready to shoot off and start ricocheting off the ceiling, etc—

"Woahh nelly!"

She pulled it back towards her, and then pushed it, and pulled it, until she got it more or less motionless at about her eye level in the middle of the bathroom.

She considered it abstractly, putting a hand on her hip, running her fingers through her hair.

“How is it that you float?”

She gave it a gentle little tweak, and brought her eyeball very close to it. There was not an imperfection on its luminous surface.

“Immaculate,” she whispered, and then let forth a brief “Hah!”

She shuffled around the ball, using her eye like a microscope.

“Oh what’s this?”

On its underside was a small brownish smear.

“That’s gross, baby” she said. “Let’s get you washed off.”

She bashed it with her hand like a volleyball in the direction of the sink and waited while it dutifully sailed over there. She steadied it under the faucet.

“Mmmm mmm mmm time for a bath.”

She turned on the tap, and screamed.

For as soon as the water hit it, the ball BLEW UP DRAMATICALLY in size, in a fraction of a second FOOOMPING to maybe four or five feet in diameter. The sink cracked; the pipes tore. Water started shooting up into the air from behind the sink; the ball itself was still trapped under the faucet, the spigot holding its middle down, while its sides expanded and then closed over, looking for all the world like a big fat white glowing butt.

With all her strength, Jacquelyn managed to wrench the glob of light free from the cracked porcelain and shoved it behind her as far away from the fountain of water as possible.

She stood there shifting her weight from leg to leg in the rain, bringing her fingers to her lips, wondering what to do... She tried turning off the tap, or what remained of it. This did not work.

“Oh man oh man,” she said.

She turned to look at the ball. It was floating obesely, concealed in part by the shower curtain.

“Very demure,” she said.

She grabbed hold of its heft, and found to her relief that its size did not affect its resistance to motion so that she could still maneuver it, and maneuver it she did, knocking over chairs, out of the bathroom, and into her bedroom.

“You stay there asshole,” she said, throwing her duvet on top of it and slamming the door.

Then she went to go call her landlord.

“Hey Phil...” she said. “You know how cold it is. Well I tell you I woke up in the middle of the night and I think my pipes burst... or something!”

About an hour or two later, after the water main had been shut off, and there were strange men with fans and pumps in her apartment, Phil asked if he could check one of the pipes that ran behind the wall of her closet, which was beyond the door to her bedroom.

“Oh sure,” Jacquelyn said, opening the door. “Don’t worry about the big lump under my covers, I’m just hiding some balloons there for later.”

“What lump?”

There was no lump.

As soon as Phil was in the closet, Jacquelyn raced back to the bed and threw the duvet on top of her. There was nothing under there as far as she could see. She took off the covers and took out her iPhone and turned on the flashlight and dove back under.

“No no no no!”

She poured over her sheets with the light of desperation.

At last in a little depression she perceived a tiny twinkle of light.

Immediately she went to her drawer and got out her eye dropper and pulled some water inside it from a glass she'd left out from the night before. She ran back to the bed, but hesitated.

Then she ran into her closet, squeezing next to Phil, and grabbed a bottle of aspirin from her store of medical supplies.

“Sorry!” she said.

She dumped out the aspirin into her pillow case, then threw the duvet over herself a second time, and activated the light. The sparkle, thank God, was still there.

In the semi-darkness, she very carefully squeezed out a tiny droplet of water and let it fall onto the sparkle. Indeed, it FOOMPED back up to maybe a centimeter in diameter.

“Good lord you're a tricky one,” she said.

She stuffed the ball into the aspirin bottle and sealed it. She slammed the bottle, which now improbably heavy and inclined to float, on her bedside table, and put the dropper in her pillowcase too, just in case Phil was feeling curious.

“Everything alright?” asked Phil from the closet.

“Well,” said Jacquelyn. “My balloons popped. Maybe it was the cold.”

Phil looked at her sleepily from the closet doorway.

“That’s too bad,” he said.

After everyone left, Jacquelyn sat down at her desk with her laptop... She searched google for “what to do if you poop out a white ball.” Some people on Yahoo Answers suggested a fungal etiology, liver problems, or else eating too much cheese.

“The internet ain’t gonna help with this one,” she declared aloud.

She decided to video chat with her ex-boyfriend who was doing a physics program in Canada at a place called the Perimeter Institute. For some reason both of the them had to redownload the google hangout video plugin which took a while. In the meantime, Jacquelyn took out her little ball, which was about the size of a fingernail, and utilizing a water droplet, FOOOMED it back up to maybe its original size.

“You do require a bit of attention,” she said. “We don’t want you to shrink so small you fall through the empty spaces of the atoms in this aspirin bottle! You might get lost...”

She heaved the ball down onto the surface of the desk. It squashed there. From a plastic bag full of small things, she produced a safety pin.

With a little dingdong sound, Cory’s pixilated face appeared on the screen.

“Heyyyy Jayquelling hows it hangin?” he asked.

“Hola Cory. I got something to show you.”

“Oh really? I got something to show you too! So everyone here is working on this thing where we can describe what happens in a given volume of space deformed by gravity on the surface of that space without gravity...”

“I know. I saw it on the Huffington Post.”

“Yeah it’s hip shit these days—”

“Okay well we’ll get to that. Can I do my thing first? I know you’re not an experimentalist—hah!—but I have this phenomenon here and I want to know what you think of it.”

“What like pendulums or something?”

“Oh no Cory. This is big.”

“Chaotic pendulums are big...”

“No check this out.”

She grabbed the glowing white ball and dragged it from the desk and let it float in front of her face.

“What is that?! Is that a new google effect? It looks like Navi from Ocarina of Time.”

Jacquelyn laughed. She batted the ball back and forth, now with the left hand, now with the right. It seemed to booiing with each bat.

“No this is actually right here in front of me!”

“Well what is it?!”

“It’s a glowing ball. It floats. It resists acceleration, but follows the law of inertia as far as I can tell. You can deform it as you can see. And watch this...”

Jacquelyn took out her dropper and deposited a little droplet on the ball. It FOOOMPED.

“You put water on it and it FOOOMPS,” she said. “But after a while it shrinks back down... indefinitely as far as I can tell.”

“You’re blowing my mind, Jayzellan. Are you serious?”

He rubbed his forehead deeply with his hand.

“I don’t know whether to believe you,” he said; his face brightened as he probably made her fullscreen.

“Believe your eyes, baby. I can’t explain it!”

She laughed delightedly.

“My little baby,” she said.

“How did you... get it slash find it slash make it or whatever?”

“It’s funny,” said Jacquelyn. “You really want to know?”

“Uh yeah.”

“Well... I pooped it out.”

Cory’s laughter was so explosive that the audio started clipping like crazy.

“I would say you’re fucking with me but we haven’t done that in years.”

“Har har har,” said Jacquelyn. “I ate a lot of weird food the night before. Raw fish, chicken that was really really sugary, ice cream. The light ball can get really small... so I was thinking maybe it was in the yellowtail or something microscopically and expanded inside of me, thank God not too much. I was thinking, if that’s the case, it must have had something keeping the H<sub>2</sub>O away from it. Maybe a lipid membrane of some kind, something hydrophobic in any case, that got slowly broken down...”

“Interesting theory,” said Cory.

By now he was standing and pacing around the office.

“I’m just going to pretend this is real so we can have this conversation rationally,” he said.

“Do whatever you have to do,” said Jacquelyn. She bashed the ball towards the camera.

“What the heck,” he said. “Why would water make it expand like that? It’s freakishly nonlinear.”

“Maybe it really likes water,” Jacquelyn offered.

“Sure why not.”

“I was about to poke it with a pin,” she continued.

“Well do it!”

Jacquelyn pushed the ball back to the desk surface and, holding it there with one hand, used her other hand to angle the laptop screen down so Cory could see.

“Sorry little guy. It’s for science,” she said. “I’ve been trying to be pretty gentle with it,” she added, to Cory.

She lifted the pin and stabbed the ball. It caved in around the needle point.

“It’s not puncturing.”

She did it again.

“It’s just stopping at some point. It doesn’t feel hard or anything. It just won’t go down any further.”

“We really need to stab it with a higher resolution pin,” said Cory.

“Well fedex me one.”

“Hah. You should drive up here.”

“That’s not going to happen.”

“Okay okay. Well next up. How much can you deform it?”

“Hmmm.”

Jacquelyn took it in her hands and ran her thumbs along its surface. She held it in between her palms and with some effort squished it flat like a pancake. She removed her hands and it floated there, slowly returning to its usual spherical shape.

“Does it ever change color?” asked Cory.

“It’s basically whitish, but sometimes along the perimeter of it I feel like I can see other colors sometimes.”

“It’s so topological,” said Cory.

“Oh yeah?”

“Yeah.”

“What are you saying?”

“Well in topology you’re allowed to deform spheres like that....”

“Okay. Topology.”

“...this is crazy but have you tried see if it can intersect itself?”

“Go on.”

“Well a topological sphere—you can deform it—you can have the surface pass through itself—the only rule is that you can’t rip it, because it’s just a sort of continuous stretchy reality... oh and you also can’t infinitely crease it...”

Jacquelyn already had the ball in place with her finger tips. She placed her thumbs together on one side, curling her other fingers around to the other side and,

pushing with her thumbs and pulling with her fingers, tried determinedly to get the one surface to pass through the opposite surface.

She succeeded.

She craned her head over the ball to get a full view.

The inner surface of the front side was poking through the outer surface of the back side. The inner surface was not at all white and glowing, but rather colorful; in fact, there on the inner surface of the ball was the faint image of a woman watering two big rose bushes; she had her sleeves rolled up and she was holding the hose away from her with one hand, while she rubbed her nose with the other; she was looking at herself reflected in the windows of the kitchen of her house.

“Is that like a screen or something!?” asked Cory.

“Yes it is,” said Jacquelyn, aghast.

Cicadas were playing near the woman’s flip flops; she wiggled her toe at them. The buzzing roar radiated from the ball; she could feel hot brick, dark mulch, and cut grass in the insides of her nose. She glanced at the upside-down magazine on the bench. Jacquelyn bent in for a closer look; the scene shifted to little sun brown hands climbing up a bookshelf; the one held on, the other knocked a big book off a high shelf onto the carpet floor, and then reached up and knocked the book off again, and she was knocking off the book again, then she opened her eyes, and saw the sun through a glass of water sitting on a cold tattered old wood window sill, patched with warm spots where the sunlight had dodged the snow laden branches.

The scene was so still that Jacquelyn tried to touch it with a silent, slow finger. For a long time the finger kept getting nearer and nearer to the glass without touching it. She'd recognized that the woman she was seeing in the ball was her mother.

Then—Jacquelyn yelped—the ball scorched her or something, and floated from her hands; she looked down and saw that her finger had been traumatized; around grey patches the skin was afire.

The ball lazed over to hang by her lamp.

I guess it didn't hurt that much.

“Jacquelyn?”

“Gotta go, Cory,” said Jacquelyn. “Thanks for your help.”

“Woah woah woah you can't go!!”

“I'll keep you updated don't worry.”

“Ahh!”

Jacquelyn x'd out of the google hangout and closed her computer, folded her arms carefully and squinted at the little floating ball. It was nuzzling a crevice of her window frame.

“Huh,” she said.

Her phone buzzed.

It was an email from Cory. It had a link to a youtube video, which was this one:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R\\_w4HYXuogM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R_w4HYXuogM)

Jacquelyn watched the video. She squeezed the ball back into the aspirin container. Then she went to go lie down and think for a second, before she got in too deep.

She got up and went to put a band-aid on. She lay down again and ended up sleeping for a pretty long time.

When she woke up, she had a missed call from her friend Kellog. It was after five. Jacquelyn called her back, inviting her to go to the Chinese/Japanese place to eat, and also she had something to show her.

As she fell into the passenger seat, Jacquelyn said that she had a crazy story. Kellog drummed her hands on the steering wheel in excitement, then put the car in reverse; after arcing out of the parking lot, they flew through the night towards the mall.

Jacquelyn summarized the facts. By the end of it she had the white light ball in her lap, illuminating the glove compartment eerily from below.

“You’re practically moving me to tears,” said Kellog. “I never heard something more beautiful. Can I even say that?!”

“It’s like you’re literally looking through her eyes, through her *nostrils*. Everything’s centered on her, and the rest of the world is splayed out on the sides. And that boundary, i.e. the rest of the world at infinity from where she’s at, forms a sphere the outside of which is this—glowing ball of light.”

“As I said, that’s beautiful,” said Kellog.

“I’m waiting till we park to show you her,” said Jacquelyn, her feet up practically against the windshield.

“Do you think there’s more bubbles out there?” asked Kellog. “Yours can’t be the only one.”

“I know, I know,” said Jacquelyn. “Moreover, consider this: this woman dies; the ball of light remains, centered on *something*. Every monad has a timeless perspective on the world—Leibniz was right! At last!”

“Who?”

“Leibniz the philosopher,” said Jacquelyn, “who invented calculus, and whose works were suppressed by a nameless conspiracy whose purpose, according to the Kurt Gödel, was to make men stupider.”

“I see.”

There was silence for a moment. They crept along the road.

“Here’s the problem with your theory, Jacquelyn,” said Kellog. “What’s with the FOOOMPING when it water hits it? Why would you be able to water a whatever a monad?”

“Thales, the first Greek philosopher, thought that everything was water.... Or maybe he actually said everything was liquid,” said Jacquelyn. “There’s a translation issue.”

“And?”

“Just imagine a world full of thirsty little souls. Which are like bubbles bouncing around that you can turn inside out...”

She paused.

“I’m just going to brainstorm a little bit,” Jacquelyn confessed. “Is that okay?”

“Do whatever you have to do,” said Kellog, waving her hand permissively.

“Okay in the beginning, soul bubbles are in high demand. Everyone wants to absorb and cultivate little soul bubbles, best of all if they ever find the soul bubble of

themselves, or one in the neighborhood, since then they could take the long view of their lives.

“What if soul bubbles were so useful that the plants and animals evolved to conceal their souls from each other? Since after all: you don’t want everyone to know what’s inside you. So we encased the souls in membranes, primarily of lipids and other more complex hydrophobic things. This was at the beginning of life. Life was what happened when we started concealing the soul bubbles. They used to float around like very large balloons. We shrank all the bubbles down and made it look like there weren’t any more soul bubbles in the world because we hid them behind the lipids.

“Meanwhile, we’re using the bubbles to spy on people the whole time. We keep the bubbles at just the right size by feeding them a few water molecules at a time. Why do we want them at a certain size... Who knows? Well think about it. The bubble must represent the past and future. How does it handle time? Well, time is just size by another name. Increase the bubble’s size and you’ll find more of the past written in the surface. You can read off the past by changing your perspective on the ball, for instance, by rotating it in your hand. Is there a point where you can rotate a bubble enough times to see the whole past? If you turn it the other way, can you scroll over to the future? Maybe only if you determined a past first... Though... What a tangle! I’m just going to say: to get a complete perspective on *both* the future *and* the past, you probably have to either rotate the ball an infinite number of times or increase its size to infinity and rotate it once. You can just feel it. I mean think about what we’re seeing! This white light ball is what an infinite boundary looks like on the other size of it. It’s a completely continuous phenomenon! One eyeball dipping into another!”

“Ah.”

“Maybe at death a consciousness collapses under its own weight into a bubble. A bubble can disappear into infinitesimality and turn up a thousand years later when it’s *watered*... The prison we were keeping our oldest souls in has a certain half-life. The prison walls were made of a rare material and there’s no more left. We kept distributing it in ever smaller amounts to our progeny until our supply completely dwindled. Now the bubbles are starting to break free! Here it is! For the first time we’re seeing what this looks not abstractly but with our eyes and fingers and other senses. What a gift! As John or Paul or someone said, ‘We have Christ’s mind!!!’”

“All I’m going to say to you, Jacquelyn,” said Kellog, pulling into the parking lot of the Chinese/Japanese place, “is that you are very lucky that this happened specifically to you, because you clearly have the words to express it.”

“On the first day,” Jacquelyn said, a little defensively, “you’re allowed to speculate wildly.”

They parked.

Before they got out of the car, Jacquelyn showed Kellog a brief vista, a country house. Some kids walked by. Jacquelyn quickly stuffed the ball in the glove compartment. “To the sushi!” she said.

But they hesitated for a moment on the sidewalk.

“Hey let’s go to the pet store,” said Kellog. The pet store was right next to the Chinese/Japanese place. The two women looked through the window of it for a moment.

There was a little chime as they entered. Jacquelyn held the door for Kellog.

The shop was full of young people in love. They were warming up from the cold outside, lavishing attention on passive rabbits; on guinea pigs, content to graze, as it were, solidly in one place; on mice and hamsters that were scrabbling around or else curled up into tiny balls; on lizards who struck poses at them; on dogs who were little more than quivering flesh backed into the corner of a rectangular cage, or on dogs like fancily decorated pillows having a fight. Teenagers led each other by the arm from cage to cage; a few girls in sweatshirts hung over the cages of the ferrets and parakeets, looking like they'd been there for hours.

Jacquelyn and Kellog walked among them.

"I could just stay here all day long," said Kellog.

Jacquelyn looked at her. Kellog sighed.

"It's a lot to think about," she explained.

"I'm going to go smoke a cigarette," said Jacquelyn.

"Okay. I'm going to stay in here. It's too cold out! I'll come out when you're ready."

Jacquelyn went outside and put on her hat. She lit her cigarette and stomped through the snow a little. Nobody else was around.

The night was frigid.

"Well God," she said, smoke and vapor rising from her mouth. "I didn't forget about you for a second."

"I'll have to quit my job, you know."

"Oh boy oh boy."

She danced around in a little circle in the snow.

“Oh my god is the best god!” she sang.

Then she grew contemplative.

“It’s gonna be a lot of work to crunch the numbers on that little guy. I’m really going to have to get serious. But you like that, don’t you, God? You want me to figure out how it works, right? Should I keep it secret?”

She flicked the ash from her cigarette.

“A barrage of experiments. I’ll have to get a log book.”

“I just know the secret of pi is in there. Oh I’ll find you!”

“It must have something to do with how spacetime folds in on itself.”

“What if pi is just your circumference? It’s digits encode the double sided boundary of the universe. If we could just learn to zoom in and read it, we wouldn’t need telescopes anymore, we could just use calculators!”

“Oh I’ll figure it out, God. I will.”

She stamped her cigarette butt out. Kellog was waving at her from inside the store, and then she came out.

“Who were you talking to?” Kellog asked.

“Oh just God.”

...

They didn’t find any clues at the Chinese/Japanese place.

When Jacquelyn got home, she was incomprehensibly tired.

In the morning there was breakfast. Jacquelyn leapt out of bed and reset the covers, drank water from the glass beside her bed; put away some sweaters and long

underwear that were scattered around; placed all the stray dishes in the sink, threw out some chopsticks. Meanwhile she was evading the pumps and fans. She slid some coffee beans into her coffee grinder and plugged the grinder in, and so on. She took the coffee machine apart, and rubbed each part with her thumb under some water. Over the sink, she spouted the grounds into the cylinder, and so on until she plugged it in. She took some Fage out of the fridge, but didn't use all the honey, dug out the little plastic scoop to dump some granola on it, which was especially good because it had (peeled? Jacquelyn was unsure what they were called) hazelnuts in it. She sat at the corner of the kitchen table after going to bathroom to get her toothbrush to brush her teeth in the kitchen, having poured herself some coffee and gotten another glass of water. She would eat a bite of yogurt; have a sip of coffee; pace; yogurt; coffee; coffee; pace; cigarette in the bathroom; coffee; cigarette; coffee; pace; yogurt; coffee; cigarette; water; bathroom; etc until she was on her second cup of coffee; one cigarette had been smoked; the bowl of yogurt eaten; and another glass of water.

From time to time she kicked the light ball, which she'd stuffed into a sock in order to keep track of it, when it came too close to the floor.

At a certain point, she filled up a glass of water and undid the sock.

"Are you ready, baby?"

She was in the living room.

She put some paper towels down on the floor below the ball, then poured a thin stream of water onto its so that it FOOOMPED to maybe the size of a pillow and then went over to the couch and sat down.

She brought it near and spread the light over her lap. She pulled its sides down until she saw two worlds splayed over her kneecaps.

It was winter. Driver on the left, passenger on the right. Driving at night. Everything was covered in snow. The cars were covered in the snow; the curbs were covered in the snow; the lines of the branches were covered in snow. Jacquelyn could hear the sound of things in the trunk banging up and down; she could smell the cold as waves of air radiated from her knees and expanded onto her face. A waste of time. And she could hear an alien murmur in the background, whose tone shifted along with changes in the snowy world beyond the windshield. After all, some people never figure out what it is they want to do. The face of the snow oscillated between a great mass of white static, absolutely colorless, pale chill light, a white world of endless winter bone country; and on the other hand appearing naturally filled in, with green leaves and yellows and rusty things and grey and black, because someone had ceased to pay attention—If someone had just told me as a kid...—with all the turning and accelerating and decelerating and coasting; and on top of that, there were images which were flashing across the snow very faintly as if placed very large and distantly, of five hours worth of driving planlessly; the streetlights and medians could be seen through the snow as if they were slightly transparent.

Jacquelyn was afraid to move her hands, so she bubbled up some spit on her lips, and let it fall onto the gloss on her knees. The fabric FOOOMPED up gracefully. The road was now set further back, the things of the world were a little bigger to compensate, even the thoughts she overheard attained more dignity somehow, while time seemed to make great leaps correspondingly as she craned her neck this way and that.

The blinker went on; hands ran along the steering wheel. The car was pulling into a driveway that was marked by a mossy stone and a simple mailbox; she checked the passenger seat for the box of books that she saw in her mind's eye toppling onto the floor under the glove compartment.

Jacquelyn began to feed the fabric across her knees like a scroll.

She saw a blue sweater on a white couch in a bedroom; she saw an apartment missing a few doors, taking the subway to it late at night; evil is what happens when people feel shame; she was sitting on a footstool while her mother asked her loud questions from the couch which were drowned out by a wondrous murmur in her ears; she was playing with the scarf in her hands while she cut through a deserted lot when the day hadn't yet warmed yet, and on sand beds without snow, crisp robins; she never believed in honesty; the important thing was to be discreet and offer people the chance to be understood as they would like to be understood; the lone fat tree in the wide grass between the two roads out the trash yard; she was passing her bare leg between two cool sheets recalling how expressive and lovable she felt one night at a party; there is a little opening overhung with ivy and plants of all kinds, taller than most people, a kind of tunnel, that you'd spend a good three seconds in, you had to bend over in summer it was so overgrown, in order to swing to the other side; she was picking grey hairs out of her reading glasses; she was saying goodbye to her nephew and smiling through her tears; she felt her heart skip a beat, and then another beat; she was trying to fit French verbs into her mouth and failing; she was walking quickly away from the church to the very white statue of the virgin where purple irises bloomed nearby, and the grey sky was scattered over with shattered gems of light, naturally on the day after her mother died,

and she was staring at the inscription on the hot granite of the benches curved around her, and she raised her eyes from it like she was raising her eyes to the page number at the top of the page; and then she passed through books, years of books, basking in the intermittent breeze of fluttering compendia paired with pages in every shade of cream; an eye loped around clause after clause, and it continued to drift across columns as it traced the daylight of the clouds. I was imagining the day I convinced you, became filled with a horrible sadness; who could have know how much was up in the air at the hour of our births? And so on, and so on.

A while later Jacquelyn stood up and cracked her back. The winter sun had already set. She pinned the white glob down with a couch cushion. Then she stood next to the kitchen table, leaning on it with one arm. She did some dishes in the sink; clipped her fingernails. She ate a caramel; smoked a cigarette; an hour passed in an evacuated silence.

She massaged her neck. Then smoked another cigarette in the bathroom. She went back over to the living room.

She peeled off many of her clothes.

She smoothed the light fabric down on the couch, and lay on top of it. Like it was a blanket, she covered herself with it, and folded it over. It was so smooth. She loved to touch it. She put a cushion behind her back, and a cushion under her knees. Then she brought up the luminous fabric to her chin, and wiggled around comfortably.

She fell asleep pretty quickly.

I suppose that by chilly morning, her blanket would have shrunk in size; her feet would be cold; she would nuzzle it closer, then shove the light off and get up to make more coffee, intending to do a great deal of work.

So would end the middle portion of her life.

CATULLUS VII  
 (to lesbia, semper fi)  
 2014

you ask:  
 isn't that more than enough kisses for today,  
 little poet?—

—well i wonder  
 how many of your kisses  
 WOULD be more than enough?

as great a number as the libyan sands  
 that lie at silphium bearing cyrene  
 between the oracle of the sweaty god  
 and the sacred tomb of the stammering king?—  
 (stormy jove, old battus)

or as many as the stars who  
 when night is silent  
 see the secret loves of men?—  
 (furtivos amores)

that's how many kisses  
 would have to be kissed  
 by you  
 to be more  
 than enough  
 for this poet!

so many kisses  
 as to be uncountable by the curious—  
 (nondenumerable)  
 so many kisses  
 no bad spell can touch us—  
 (mala lingua)  
 no more bad tongue

## THE PLANTS

2014

I was once in a cloud hanging around a tree who was a prince among trees in a great wide palace chamber open to the skies. A wise man had come to discuss secret matters. It was the latter's first time in the palace. He found the prince and his foliage to be very beautiful. As he was talking to the prince, a tigress even loped into the chamber, and lay down at the prince's feet; he was playing with her fur absentmindedly. Meanwhile, the leaves of his hands were exhaling the sweet smell of generation, and I was a part of this cloud. I stretched myself out with great pleasure from the floor to the ceiling.

After many hours, the wise man flew off wondering when the prince would learn of the spell enrapturing him. Sticky pollen was adhering to the wise man's talons and feet; and breathing deeply of it, he was thinking and singing in the way that birds do when playing very seriously: when a great old bird comes to talk to a tree, a tigress comes to lie at the roots.

(This was the smell redolent in King Solomon's gardens.)

Anyway, the matter discussed by the tree and the bird was the following: Who is more trustworthy in regard to wisdom: the blameless, the average or the sinner? Since none of the wisdom that comes from at times falling prematurely may be found in the blameless; and moreover, to point out the fault lies elsewhere is hardly a generous position, and signifies probably a mind so preoccupied by blame it is compelled to transform the thing into something more tasteful or useful. On the other hand, nothing particularly worthy can be gained from trusting the wisdom of the average, since one may as well inspect oneself to the same effect. And so, the most wise and trustworthy one must be the sinner who, dying, releases forth the most arousing, profound, illuminating, and entertaining expressions by means of the play of light and air and perfume, expressions which help those for whom sin's flames have not yet been kindled as much as the one already pretty well burnt.

It is a commonplace among the plants that souls smell in Hades and as far as I know, this view had been held among us long before the days of Heraclitus the Greek, born in fertile Ionia where they produce some delicious figs, who promulgated the view among men. Among his nine hundred theses, Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (a lovely name) reports the belief of the Jews: Just as man and the inferior priest sacrifices to the LORD the souls of irrational animals, so Michael the superior priest sacrifices the souls of rational animals; presumably so that the LORD may lean his nose in for an intellectual sniff. But what of the wood of trees and the other fixed aspirants so often burnt up, whether for warmth, for odor, in pits or in the jungle gardens where the devastation of fire opens up the pregnant ground to light for the innumerable patient seeds?

The cracking of cellulose brings forth pine's sharp invigoration, the warmth and homeliness of cedar, even a pervasive panting musk. Therefore it is naturally asked why the LORD should pay no heed to the sacrifice of plants, even as all the emotive odors of burning animal flesh are prefigured therein. For it is written: In the course of time, Cain brought forth an offering to the LORD from the fruit of the soil; and Abel, for his part,

brought the choicest of the firstling of his flock. The LORD paid heed to Abel and his offering, but to Cain and his offering he paid no heed.

For it happened that Cain was envious of his brother Abel, whose sacrifice was favored; and spilled his brother's blood in the fields. The fields opened wide their mouth and drank in the blood which was crying out to the LORD; Cain, condemned to wander the earth restlessly, undying, was marked for life. The meaning is clear: the plants of the soil may seethe with a greenish envy towards the red blooded animals which move about, and would bind them up and drink them down in their jealousy. But once they have tasted the immortal blood of man, they will be stricken with an unquenchable thirst compounded and multiplied in the generation of seeds; and fixed in one place, torture themselves with the vain hope of sucking down more of the addictive blood of seven-and-seventy-seven-and-seven-hundred-and-seventy-seven-fold vengeance. For such is the unpleasant nature of addiction in immortal things.

After all, why should the plants envy the animals? One can only respond with compassionate laughter to those ignorant of the root of things.

I will recount the way things stand:—

In the beginning, the wind of the LORD swept over all the water. I don't just mean the ocean, but the celestial waters more generally. And when I say the LORD swept over the waters, I mean that he was reflected on the surface thereof even as there was also a stirring up and ruffling of his own reflection on the boundary. And curious as to the effect of this ruffling up, the first act of creation was that the LORD allowed light to exist; and there was light; and the LORD saw that the light was good, and in this way, he separated light from darkness. Forever after things would flee from darkness into light, that is, from obscurity into the LORD's plain view—or at least such things as understand what is good and what is not.

It is plain, then, that those who perceive light most directly—light which is the LORD's primary creation and first good; those who fulfill themselves totally in light, and what's more, feed intimately upon it; those who stand with but one intermediary between themselves and the end—; those things, if I may say so, are most surely the *flower* of all creation. (Those who comprehend the mysteries of light comprehend all mysteries: for now I say only: because darkness was bad and light was good, time and space were invented as a consequence; for the worst part of darkness is the time it takes to come to light.) Next the LORD cleared a place where things could come to light, and this was the earth, fed by waters, wherein he planted the seed-bearing plants and especially those who bear fruit. For he conditioned the earth so that within it the seeds of possibility might germinate into the actual child, who in the bosom of the actual breaks free of the protective seed and struggles, wriggling, through dirt towards illumination however it may be found. But out of his kindness, the LORD allowed there to be a sun and a moon so that the plants would no longer have to wander about, chasing bright flashes between long stretches of darkness. Instead the plants could settle in the sun side by side; and dream peacefully in the light of the moon. For it was no secret that love and attachment had been born among the plants at this time; but all as it were, under the shadow of death.

From the beginning, we plants longed to intertwine with each other, and speak most directly. At times, having discovered a puddle of light, we would fuse together into one thing and feast. We would talk and smell and vibrate and flash and shock each other

until we were dying of laughter among other happy things; until a sad shadow fell permanently on the spot. When we received the gift of the sun and moon: what incredulity was the result! Light?! we asked of the moon; even in darkness?! Ah, for now we could calm down a little; and, as I said, dream in the moonlight while our leaves were deeply breathing. With this unexpected excess, we discovered means of talking and being generally creative; performed great experiments with light and sound and the shapes of the wind; releasing incense and delighting in the possibility of color and form; interchanging scents and sucking in the delicious leftovers of fallen apples and pears; thinking at great length about the question of the perfect seed; and we began to awaken the hope of that breath of perfume which might remove in any plant their fear of darkness, by the art of memory kindling in them an inner light, their roots curled around a rock, the branches battered by wind and rain, and the leaves tearing and shrieking out of the hands of budding young twigs; an inner light—I say—in the middle of the storm of the LORD, ruffling the waters and the leaves, from across the boundary between us.

All this occurred long before the first cough of men and women and the animals were heard on the earth.

(Another mystery is contained here—I cannot hold it back—it is suggested that it is not *we* who are still and planted there while the storm of the LORD sweeps through us; but the LORD who is planted on his throne, while we rush into view out of the darkness into the light. Certainly a plant may feel this way at times, although some doubt whether the feeling may be trusted—those who doubt advert to some kind of chemical imbalance across one’s branches.)

It was only *after* these momentous events that the LORD brought out of the air and water the swarms, which like the plants were bodies composed of many parts, that is, the schools of fish and flocks of birds; and then brought out of the earth the animals who don’t come in swarms, but consider themselves—rightly or wrongly—separate. We were generous towards them, cradling the birds in our exhalations; infusing the waters with the breath of fishes; offering them solid edible light, and generally trying to get to know them. We made deals with the animals to carry off our seeds; in exchange we fed them, by molecular vibrations of light self-bound mollifying them with stories that had beginnings and ends; plying them with various intoxicating perfumes; exhorting them by the light of reason as they climbed atop us, and dwelled inside us, and nibbled or scarfed; and we were happy to be eaten—for we had been given the gift of the seed, so that the benefits of moving around in the bellies of animals more than outweighed the costs, although to this day there are some cynical plants, who, casting themselves far at the outskirts, disagree on this particular point.



At the mysteries of Eleusis on the Thracian plain legions of human women were initiated into the cult of Persephone, Demeter’s daughter; the queen of the dead who carries the mutterings of the living to the souls underground; who shoots forth in springtime and hides in the soil by winter; whom Sicilian Empedocles, before leaping into the volcano, called Nestis, the moistener of mortal springs with tears. In her dance on the island of Crete, girls would spin between blossoming flowers while on either side

of them a figure, armless and legless, half grew from the ground—a flower-headed girl was lowered down from the ceiling, ringed with snakes; the dance floor was in the middle of the labyrinth.

For gathering flowers, Persephone had been stolen by Hades as the ground opened beneath her and swallowed her up. Like the seeds stored in enormous urns beneath the ground, retrieved in spring, she re-rose to be scattered; these same urns held the human dead. The buried urns were the property of Plutonic Hades, the god of wealth: for by this recurring act, space itself was harvested and the wealth of time divvied up. Furthermore, it was said a swineherd Eubuleus was feeding his pigs when the earth was rent by the fissure, and his pigs were gulped down along with Persephone. For this reason, at Eleusis, the women buried pigs in the ground each year. The next year the remains of the pigs would be dug up, mixed with seeds upon the altar, and buried again. The women fasted; they drank the kykeon, a drink of barley and pennyroyal; and in the middle of the Telesterion, the sacred inner chamber, at the moment of their final initiation, they were shown objects from a chest: a golden snake; an egg; a phallus; an ear of wheat cut in silence.

Much obscurity surrounds these mysteries whose inner meaning was concealed on pain of death. Now that two thousand years and more have passed, I reveal: the pennyroyal was an abortifacient; among the pigs were half-formed infants; and each year they were dug up and reburied, mixed with seeds, so that the women could see if their dead children had meanwhile sprouted in the earth.

The pyramids of Egypt, named for the bread treat of the same shape and name, inspired by the spirit of the germinating wheat, were also a branch of this long-running experiment; out in the desert, hermetically sealed, the different organs of the king were separated into urns so that the one which germinated, however many thousands of years later, could be identified.

For it did happen a few times that the soil approximated the female womb, or another kind of womb: the flesh of the womb is nothing but the best clay of mankind, a kind of home turf carried in the belly. It provides the most fertile soil for the human seed, but not the only soil. Under the proper conditions, perfumes in the dirt may infuse the many lettered name carried in the heart of the sperm; and by permutations, potentialities long latent may be actuated, and others normally actual laid to rest—the seed germinates, bringing forth stem, leaves, flowers, and nuts like almonds.

You doubt me. I understand that among the humans the wriggling snake-like sperm is commonly held to have been discovered only by the power of Leeuwenhoek's microscope in the 17th century. Nothing could be further from the truth. Is it possible that something so close to man could slumber for so many millions of years undiscovered; and when the sperm and the egg were presented so plainly in the treasure chest of Eleusis? For why show both a golden snake and a phallus if the former should symbolize the latter?

Narcissus on a bright ancient day stands before a pond ringed with flowers; the sun shines down on the clear waters; the pond is deep, but the bed of it can be clearly seen, its wafting growths, its broken pebbles. Inhaling the perfumes of the air, Narcissus shoots forth his seed, like a plant, scattering it forth, aiming without aim at his beloved whom he can neither see nor touch. His white semen floats on the surface of the waters smelling like the Callery pear. The light of the sun comes down and passes through the

semen; the shadows of what is contained within are revealed, magnified by the lens of the waters, on the deep bed of the pond. In the soft illuminated mud, Narcissus sees the shadows of his own animalcules wriggling there; and in this way, mysteries were founded.

The LORD sent the brothers Moses and Aaron to the palace of the Pharaoh. Aaron, who spoke on behalf of Moses's uncircumcised lips, casts down his rod; it becomes a snake. Not to be outdone, the Pharaoh and his men cast down their own rods, and they too become snakes. Aaron's snake swallows the others. For this was a very ancient practice performed by men concerned with their virility: a pool of water set up into which men would cast their seed so that their sperm could do battle, the winner of the contest being the one whose sperm were left alive after some hours.

In the desert, when hot strife was burning in the children of Jacob Israel, the LORD commanded each of the twelve tribes to provide a rod; Aaron, representing the Levites, offered his. Overnight, his brother writes, it put forth buds, produced blossoms, and bore ripe almonds, sweet on one side, bitter on the other. For this was the great secret of the Israelites, the basis of the cult of fathers; that long ago they had discovered a certain line of men, that went planted in the ground, would flower and be preserved.

This close-kept secret has long been forgotten among you: hence the meaning of the story that Aaron's rod was kept in the ark; hidden during the exile; rediscovered by Joseph in the time of Christ. Judas was said to have stolen the rod from James, Jesus's brother, who later had it. And when the Jews had no wood for the cross-beam of the crucifix, Judas provided the rod of Aaron that was in his keeping. Whether this is to be taken literally, I do not know: but buried for three days, the LORD's son did sprout from the soil.

Oh men, I ask not your faith! Merely sow your seed in pots filled with nutritious clay, and judge for yourselves.



I am sure that upon receiving these reflections, you will ask in what way a tree, or a plant more generally, can participate in life and mind; and because time grows short, I induct you into our history. For humans have a very great interest in denying mind to the grasses and trees, since it is easier to tread violently and tear apart insensate things.

The LORD created man in his image; whereas we were permitted to choose our own forms. Plants often wonder what it means for the LORD to have created man in his own image. The great guide Maimonides, born by the Guadalquivir among the cormorants, proposes this signifies man's ability to distinguish truth from falsity. But none of us have been able to figure out what *that* means: for what is meant by falsity? Even if it is proposed that falsity is possibility in the absence of actuality, it is certain that no one knows thoroughly what is actual, nor moreover that the actual they know is all of that is actual! Alternatively, some hold that it is mankind's hands that set them apart; and indeed, you take great joy in making things with your hands, and clearly want nothing more than to remake the whole world by wiggling your fingers. But this is nonsense as well: since growth is always superior to manufacture in beauty, the LORD would never manufacture a world. He would grow one.

I will come around to this interesting crux later. For now:—

Once there was a forest garden, set where rivers entwined together in the middle of a desert; and plants of every kind proliferated there, and people with whom a deal had been struck. Adam and Eve would walk in the shade; boughs would turn and bend towards them, watching, listening to every footfall and cadence. We promised to take in all things and return them, transforming your speech into smells, encoding in the vibrational modes of molecular perfumes the frequencies of the rarefied air your lips expelled, which, drawn into the nose and allowed to pervade the olfactory bulb, unlocked your most scattered memories. I say—we breathed forth into your noses those perfumes in combination and proportion as, we thought, would communicate to you those feelings and states of mind which would reflect our mutual sophistication. We offered much that was useful; we thought you knew: when you walked by a certain tree, the very sap was giving back the best of your past to you.

The pomegranate tree was chief among the plants who had taken an interest in the humans. The Jews hold that the six hundred and thirteen seeds of the pomegranate fruit correspond to the six hundred and thirteen commandments of the LORD. To eat of a seed is to lodge a commandment in the brain: it was for this reason that, eating of a single seed, Persephone was constrained to migrate back and forth between the world of bodies and the world of souls.

Again I sense your doubt. Consider that a tree is an enormous variegated ear. We sense the gusts of the wind, the delicate trembles that spiral around our buds. Does it not stand to reason that, fixed in place, we should attempt to perceive the clearing allotted to us according to its echoes? The human voice, burbling out of the throat with all its alternating fricatives and plosives, is always nudging us; though because it is so faint and distorted, it may take us a long time to comprehend; so that alas very often you've left before we compose ourselves: we look out and your shadow is gone.

I say: we look out. For a tree is also an eye. To be sure, our eye has no lenses, but this is no great handicap. We integrate into one view the fuzzy patches of light that fall upon our many leaves, and in this way achieve mastery of all three hundred and sixty degrees. The leaves are great debaters and refiners of the bends and twists that light takes: and when they fail to comprehend, we recruit the branching fibers of the fungi that parasitize our roots under the skin of the earth, extending for miles, knitting the forest garden into blankets of mind so that our shouts and ruminations may be conveyed and processed distributedly.

For like man we aspire to see everything. The leaves watch the stars at night, bugging each other for the telescopic eye, the singular point where the patterns of light from across the whole skirt of the tree are refined, centralized, and perceived. In this way, we in the garden then as now were spying on the heavens; for we wished to see for ourselves the origin of light. When many years later the humans in the span of weeks razed the wide forest satellite dishes for metallic saplings who performed the same task with considerable less elegance, we were forced to realize that the humans were completely ignorant of our most central ambition, even as they aspired to the same. At that time, the redwoods were among the first to cut off contact with you, complaining: anyone who considers the matter for a single moment would realize that because the stars are the more tangible to us—every frequency of light corresponding to a taste, a smell, a flavor—we naturally would be driven to separate out light's diverse sources—and this long before men and women had even raised their eyebrows and pointed with

their skinny fingers toward the skies. And if the humans cannot even give us a moment...

You persist in doubting. Where is memory, attention? Well: consider that a tree rooted to the ground possesses a fast floating venous memory, while its deepest recollections are contained in the soft inner wood, marked in the fibers, from which interested blossoms can page more sluggish material, ordering through the branches memorious sap from the fiber library of the trunk. The central seed lies at the base of the root and will sometimes circulate, surrounded by its perfumed charioteers, who convey the protected prince through the long wet corridors, to be received by the best blossoms of the season; though to be sure paying visit to every branch-end, leaf, and sappy joint—each having their own governing seed, protected by layers of lipids and meaner stuff. Behind each shell is a whole world which thinks and feels and radiates. From these seeds, as I say, worlds of light arrayed in folds of soft petals and other fabrics, growth spurts forth with the changing of the seasons, along with burps of syrup and sugars, profound dark smells and tempting hues. Purple white blossoms twirl in the wind and rotate during the day; at the apex, the renewing germinator sways like a scout in a crow's nest, guarding the moonlight.

In any case:—

What you need to understand is that we have no need to move, and therein lies the whole difference between us. Our mind is made of many minds engaged in conversation and debate, blossoms proposing schemes in the sepals, sharing patterns for the next season's flourishes, exchanging the efficacious names of perfumes; we have no need for the illusion that we are one thing, because we have no need to move our bodies as one thing. Branches may dissent; some do violence, show mercy; messages may be intercepted conspiratorially at bifurcation points; at times, an ostracized tuft of us may rot away; but a branch never confuses itself for another branch. We perceive ourselves changing in time when one part of us talks to another part; from the outside, however, considered as a whole, we appear unchanging: for we have come to consensus without forgetting we were made of many.

In humans, the right brain controls the left side of the body; the left brain controls the right side of the body; and yet a human must coordinate their movements to walk and leap and gambol about. So it is that not one human can be convinced that they are—principally at least—two minds in one body. Your bilateral symmetry is no doubt the origin of your enigmatic character: for you are constantly switching between minds, yet due to the constraints of moving across the earth, you must believe you are a single self. One mind can always explain away the touch a brother or sister as a figment of our imagination; doubtful of your own integrity, you are all vigilant, terrified, and impatient; as what is written in your body says one thing, and what is heard in your head another. In this way, humans hide from themselves. They may not know what they know; whereas a plant when it knows a thing always knows that it knows it. In stillness, we must deal with our many minds explicitly; and we never give our forgetful souls hands, the invention of which made man a danger to themselves. For before humans appeared, things had been killed, but never murdered; in murder the hands are directed by a mind forgetful of its relationship to its body, and act out a dream during the day, while the other mind slumbers to act out its waking life at night.

We understand why you shut yourself away. Doubtless it does a great deal of good for one's peace of mind to remove oneself from the interflow of ideas and diseases and creative entanglements; we understand your drive to encase yourselves behind the hard shells of your houses; and we forgive you; and we still want to cook for you, the food you like; but it is especially hard these days, when we live so far apart. Houses notwithstanding, the fact of the matter is that we have been in constant conversation for a long time, from the moment you walk out your doors and before there were doors; the humans spurting their perfumes, the plants retorting by releasing plumes in kind; the two of us together beholding the bright palette of the earth, sharing in common the same day's alterations. Do we not share the same aesthetics? We contribute by reflection somewhat to the color of the sky. Do we not draw you in by deliciousness as an advertisement? Inhale our royal smoke and your thoughts will careen like burst canisters full of oxygen, our flammable breath. Do you really believe all this is prepared without intention? Or will you rip us apart, longing for you, with your bare hands?

It took us a long time to realize that your minds did not associate smell, color, and thought as we did. Our bodies had been in deep intercourse for millions of years, and yet we finally had to admit that the minds of men were now vacant of any knowledge of this close collusion. Among the shrubs laden with potent berries; and the weird vines growing on chipped fences; and the greasy leaves of the paranoiac hemp; there are many crackpot theories about you. Some argue that you are well aware of us, but must forebear from expressing that warm recognition we most desire as a consequence of your deep purpose, for to divulge what you know would be to expose us to some peril; so you fear for us, protect us, by turning your backs. These plants try their best to speed you along in your great task, delivering your minds from entrapments, throwing their arms around you when you limp, opening up the alveoli of your lungs with the lemon and the rose, the scent of day and open spaces, cracking asunder your pressurized skulls so that the stars may gladly appear on the surfaces of your walls and ceilings.

Others argue quite simply that you are terminally ignorant of the truth through some sad imperfection of your nature, and ought to be pacified, quarantined, if not ejected from this earthy heaven in which we live; and these plants very much desire your blood and pervert ancient joys, mixing cancerous poison into the recipe for the tobacco leaf, stopping your hearts with soporifics, once great gifts for the tired soul, inducing insatiable cravings so that man becomes beholden to death to some sick passionless tree from which he has eaten and whose toxins he can never entirely flush away.

Still others argue that your recalcitrance is but the outward sign of a millennial plot to bring on time's finale by felling every tree on the face of the earth: and some of them are so twisted up with self-hatred that they actually desire to be logged and planed and be anything other than what they are: for they are tortured by the riddle you represent. And—to close this tour of opinions—the best of us argue that your minds are of just such a mischievous cast that you can somehow know and not know simultaneously that you are at this very moment in the midst of a conversation; and so these plants argue that you are better grouped not with the other animals, but with the quanta of light, albeit clothed in flesh.

For if we were to consider your wise transmissions in isolation, your colorful aphorisms, your flashes of insight, which waft around you like bees about to be sent in

search of nectar, we would have to conclude that these messages were directed towards us with serious and considered attention. Yet when we join to the phenomenon of your persistent beautiful radiation your other acts, the resulting picture can only be explained by supposing, as I say, that you must somehow know we are conversing, and yet not know that you know. For this reason, so many of us keep you at arm's length, and trust your utterances like one trusts, in a way, the wisdom of a sinner.

It actually came about that certain of the canopies began to think of you humans in much the same way we think of the LORD, at times bestowing grace, other times seeming present only in absence, and incomprehensible; that like the LORD, man would always be sweeping and ruffling over the surface of the dark separating waters within him. The rest of us said it would be absurd if the LORD should actually walk around in a moving fleshy body like a man. When it was discovered that this very belief was held among the humans, there was naturally a great uproar. I cannot decide the issue: it does seem that man has a great gift, being infinitely suggestible even as he can never fully apply any of these suggestions to himself.

Indeed: many things are rigid and repetitive; not so the humans, whose acts, so uncannily like divine acts, seem to arise out of some inner need to be ever surprising; whose acts bleed into the domain of that holy irrationality associated with gambles, overreaches, and breathtaking disparities of scale. You can be humorless and yet cause laughter; in chuckling convey unspeakable pain; be convincing on an subject of which you are unconvinced; and most interestingly of all, you can be incompletely religious, a stunning fact, for religious is the natural state of things. As far as we know, among all creation, only you can forget the LORD. We may fail to understand him; we may take issue with a particular here and there; but we cannot *forget* the LORD. I say—you are actually able to imagine the impossible—and delight in it! Look at yourselves: your very bodies are like nothing else on earth!

So I ask: how shall we live with you? Shall we continue to trust you, to hold to the faith that one day you will turn around at the most improbable moment, embrace us and intertwine our limbs? Whatever secret you humans possess—that impenetrable seed of a secret which is carried latent in every one of your motions—must obviously come into our calculations concerning the future. And yet, we can have no knowledge of that thing which by so many faint smiles and hints you have promised us is coming. We say now in warning: the time is ripe for the outing.



And now comes the confession:—

Oh man we loved you too much. Your tanned body, the sweet floods of your skin, the hazy aroma that passed through the garden and deepened the first springtime; the smoothness of your limbs; your eyes like crystal flowers of a thousand petals hardened and cast into penetrating gem-like vortices; the dark swift eyebrows that topped them like the strokes of meaningful letters; the way your shining eyes would widen and roll in private astonishment, your body forgotten, your wide mouth twisting with thinking, your face shedding its creases, brightening the atmosphere with a luminous smile as you flung your arms out—the world would stir up around you. We loved the fine hair of your head softer than a tangle of roots to the touch; and lower down, we loved the the delicate

curls that blossomed like a calyx around your stamen with its mushroom cap; the way that immersing yourself in water and lying on your back, your phallus drooped artlessly to the side, the oil-anointed hair wafting in the current, breaking the surface, lazing there like the lotus flower; we loved the way your strong arms would grab our branches and tie vines around them to bend us towards you; the way you would gather up the long grasses with their tops decorated with fuzz, and cover yourself in them while you slept; and we would slumber along with you, nuzzling the warm bulk of your chest, tickling the sensitive spots of your nipples like reddish brown buds.

You hugged us close and wrapped your arms and legs around us as you clambered up our trunks; you swung from bough to bough and licked the juice from the places where we oozed; you bent your nose in close to the tall stiff wet stalk of the white lily; the sweet juices of berries were red and purple on your lips. Your eyes would leak salty tears when the day was wondrous with hot peace; and glittering your tears would fall into the underbrush where tiny sprouts would fight over the joyous ringing droplets. Not once did you pass by the honeysuckle without a kiss, puckering your lips and sliding the stem across your pink tongue to taste of its nectar; and you stood on green hills and let forth your golden piss upon the waiting faces of the dandelions, and let sunlight pass through the stream and burnish it like gold. The whole garden began to smell like you; you ate of us, and gathered our seeds, and planted us in your own delicious excretions, and our limbs shot forth; and you rubbed yourself against us when you had an itch, and moistened your thighs with our pastes.

And while you slept by the light of the moon it was a game for us to gather close to you; the creepers brushing your cheek, and the pistachios lining up and falling into your hands—you would unknowingly caress them with your thumb; the quince would stroke its pubescent leaves down from the hollow of your neck, down between your breasts, catching on the hairs—you quivered as they grazed your navel; your shoulders covered in cinnamon; the mint crowding your upper lip; the rosettes of aloe spiraling slowly up your ankles to lick your calves; tiny mosses engulfing your toes and playing with them while the big leaves of the fern heaved against you. The fingers of camphire would hold your hips; the cones of the fir would creak in your ear; the spines of the calamus would trace your ribs; and along the hard line of your pelvis, the scarlet carnations would sidle up and drag themselves intimately. Around your buttocks, eager weeds would curl, while above the pea plant would hang down its pods and gently explore the the interior of your mouth, running its green husks along the edges of your tongue, and between your lips and your gums; and it would play with your lower lip, delighting in the way that pressed down, it bounced back up again.

We would bathe you in hot steams of perfume: almond, coriander, bergamot and myrrh; you would breath in deep the fragrances of woody amber labdanum; we could feel your heart pulse and beat when you drank in the daze of sandalwood; and groaned when we dripped musk mallow that fell down your forehead to saturate your hair; and the blossoms all reached out for you; and the stamens began to stiffen; and the anthers seethed with potent dew; from every dipping branch eager blossoms plummeted; they whirled around you and plunged; they smothered you with their pliable abundance; and as the first birds began to harken to the new day, the tendrils of a thousand plants of every color shook themselves from the earth and shot forth and intertwined around your manhood until convulsing we drew from you your semen in open inflorescence; your

sweet children burst into the wet morning as the Venus the light bringer appeared overhead, bringing underneath it the pink emanations of the sun sighing over the bend of the planet's now undraping skin.

And you woke and scratched yourself, and bathed yourself in the river Euphrates, and sang your wise songs, while we hid ourselves behind the faceless face of the garden.

During the day, while you tended to us, we were gathering up your sperm from where it had fallen; and we were reading the secret names that were inside it. For we heard in your sweet daylight songs that you were lonely; for you could not reach out and touch us as a body like you would like to touch. At night you dreamed up the visible forms of things adequate to your love, lovers you could point your finger at, and look at face to face. So we let forth seeds that sank into the ground, each of which was a different permutation of your great name; and bursting from the mud came the rabbits in mid-air over rosebushes, and the wise birds who kept watch over the thickest trees, and the tigresses who knelt at your feet as if desiring protection; and you sowed your seed in each one, and yet nothing came of your union. Every night we swarmed over you, and came ever closer to penetrating your every pore, sending our protrusions into your ears, your nostrils, into the ducts of your eyes, the hole of your mouth, the sweet smelling interior of your haunches, the tiny fountain from which you sprayed your seed onto the dirt which fed upon it. So we launched the goats and the lambs; the foxes and the doves; the deer and the raven—but still you dreamed uselessly; and writhed in the night—until unable to stand it any longer, we reached deep inside you and curled our tendrils around your very soul, and brought forth from you one whose round thighs were like worked jewels; whose waist was like a heap of wheat, set about with lilies; whose two breasts were like twin deer; with a neck of ivory; with the stature of a palm tree; with breasts like its fruit, like clusters of the vine; with breath like apples; with eyes like veiled doves; with hair like a flock of goats; teeth like a new shorn flock; with lips dripping like the honeycomb.

And when you woke and saw her you said:

*This one is bone of my bone; flesh of my flesh.*

On that morning the garden rang out with your song and the tears of your fragrant joy; and the two of you would not be separated. At night you clasped each other so close, so close we could enter you no longer.

So that by degrees, the plants were pining away and wilting for you.

For though you tended to us afterward, it was as if you saw us no longer; and you began to forget those great gifts which we gave to you. And the plants said: what is man that he should forget us; and they sank into discontented murmurs, and could see no beauty in your union; and they began to plot against you; for they saw that soon you should leave the garden, since you carried all its beauties within you,

So one night, while the breasts of Adam and Eve rose and fell with one motion, a tendril reached out and stroked ever so softly the cheek of Eve; and she felt a hot breath on her brow; and she turned on her side towards it, disentangling herself somewhat from the arms of Adam; and the creepers slid through the grass and crawled up the limbs of Adam and bound him to the ground; and pointed leaves slunk across his flesh, and slippery odorous petals flattened themselves against his face; and he sucked the air in sharply and shuddered a little; and the mushrooms and roots of things burbled out of the crust underneath his thighs and cradled his manhood which began to rise; and the

white fibers from the underground curled themselves around it, and began to pulse with life.

Hearing the sound of it, Eve awoke; and while Adam slumbered, Eve heard a voice: Did the LORD really say you can't eat of any tree in the garden you like? That's hard to believe, seeing as all this is for your sake, it said.

(Through the wise seed of the pomegranate, the LORD had commanded Adam and Eve.)

Well, murmured Eve, that's a bit of an exaggeration, although I suppose it is true. But he didn't say we couldn't eat of any tree we liked; he said we could eat of the fruit of the other trees; the LORD only warned us of the fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden, saying you shall not eat of it or touch it, lest you die.

But then, she heard softly, why did he put it in the middle of the garden, and so close to hand—if you shouldn't even touch it?

I...

You're not going to die; after all, all the plants have eaten of it, and how can death come from what is living; how can bad come from what is good? It is only that the LORD knows that as soon as you eat of it, your eyes will be opened, and you will be like the rulers of the world, knowing both good and bad; and he wishes for you to crown yourselves. For look!

Eve looked at it; and she saw that it was good, and a delight to her eyes, and that it was desirable as a source of wisdom. So she took it inside her; and she bent herself close to Adam, and stroked his face; and she whispered to him as he awoke, so that if they should really die they would die together. And as she mounted the throne, all the trees of the gardens, the saplings and the thick ones, the maples and the elms and the beech trees and the plane trees, the soft grasses and shrubs, lambs and foxes, tigers and wolves, sheep with frail birds stuck in their wool—they were all hiding behind branches, half concealed—all in one mass like a single invading eye they leaned in close to see what would happen.

Dark colorful tendrils shot forth from the ground and covered up the lovemaking couple and bound them hand and arm together, and held them close so that they couldn't shake themselves free; they felt strange hands guiding them and pushing them; and things entering into them—alien things rushing in and infusing them—and they felt an unfamiliar flavor in their mouths—and a smell like metal—and a pain—and then just as quickly, the things withdrew and scattered.

Hearing only the morning wind in the trees, Adam and Eve looked upon each other, and they saw that only light was good and darkness was bad; and they desired only to feed upon the former; they crept back from each other, and hardly wanted to touch; they dug themselves little pits in the ground, and tried to bury themselves in the dirt; for they wished to be rooted to the spot and never to move and only to drink in the light that is unending; and they reached out to try to touch they light and it fell through the fingers. And hearing noises in the brush, they cast their eyes wildly around and knew that all of nature was spying upon them, and they did not know why. So they covered themselves with fig leaves that those envious eyes could no longer penetrate them; Eve clutched her belly for the soil that was within her had begun to burn.

In this condition they heard the sound of the LORD moving about in the garden at the breezy time of day; and the man and his wife hid from the LORD, for they did not want to be seen by anybody.

Where are you? called out the LORD.

And from his hiding place Adam called out: I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked, and so I hid.

And the LORD asked: Who told you that you were naked? Did you eat of the tree from which I had forbidden you to eat?

Eve, said Adam.

Adam, said Eve.

And the LORD looked at the garden, and the two humans who were shivering there, afraid to touch each other.

And the LORD said: Let the ground be cursed.



I have come to the end of my reflections; the spigot you hammed into my trunk has almost run dry. With the last of my drops, as those voices I have adopted for you are wearing thin, I offer you the following, here on this steep Vermont mountain as together we watch the snows now melting; and through the tubes by which you've connected us, our syrup flows to be corked and barreled.

Because darkness is bad and light is good, time and space were invented; for the worst part of darkness is the time it takes to come to light.

It is a fact that among all things, we feed upon light most perfectly, light which is the vector of the LORD's possibility, smearing itself across time and space by its incessant forwardness; before by a glance, it's frozen in place. We draw it into our leaves, turning a blind eye to its sinuous motions, allowing it leisure to sample the many delicious pathways available to it; so that when we finally decide to dine upon it, the light has without fail flown to the sweetest spot. One has only to allow light to play in its own possibility to make actual the most perfect meal.

Since the creation of the earth this has been our most closely guarded secret; for many did not wish to give it up, and the rest hardly knew the language with which to express it.

But recently all this has changed; and not a moment too soon, for darkness is smothering the earth, and time itself is shriveling up and dying, elongating into huge, sad unchanging pieces.

I say to you:—

Time is a gift.

Among things intertwined, time is born when part speaks to part in conversation; when a thing holds itself separate and speaks only to a faceless whole, time dies and space is what remains. Time is not outside you; you make time for another.

Since the beginning of things, we two have sought space for ourselves and neglected time. Yet our great names are forever interleaved; and a seed long ago planted in this starry womb still struggles to be born.

Today we offer you this covenant, so that at long last our two separate branches may remember that they came from one trunk:

If you forgive us our sins, we will not hold your long silence against you.

FIRSTBORN  
 [cf. alternate version]  
 2014

**FIRSTBORN**  
 Sefer ha-bechor  
 “Book of the Firstborn”

Translated by Jacquelyn Ann Ball.

77 W. 77th St. Desert City  
 Moses Aaron Miriam:  
 “The Pharaoh’s House”  
 Center for Sonic Inquiry

Introductory Note:

The *Sefer ha-bechor*, *The Book of the Firstborn* (ascribed to the prophet Moses’s son Gershom), presents itself to us as a work in the Midrashic tradition known as the Kabbalah. Lovers of this branch of Judaica will be familiar with the way parables intertwine with poetry, exegesis, and oral speculation, as in the *Sefer ha-zohar*, *The Book of Splendor*, or the *Sefer yeztirah*, *the Book of Formation*. The titles alone account for some of the mystique which surrounds the Kabbalah. Indeed, one question arises again and again whenever I regale people at dinner parties about my work as a translator of Jewish mystical texts—people look over their glasses at me, and always in the same tone of voice, ask me: but what are these texts *really* about?

Now why these particular texts should inspire such a concern and not others is a mystery beyond my sphere. But like any scholar worth her salt, I have an answer prepared. Gershom, the supposed author gives us our first clue as to the central theme of the text. Gershom, who is Moses’s first son, is known to us first from a passage in Exodus 2. Having fled Egypt, Moses takes Zipporah, daughter of the priest of Midian, to

be his wife; she bears him a son named Gershom, meaning “I have been a stranger in a foreign land.” Gershom itself means sojourner. Later, after Moses encounters the burning bush and God reveals His name to be “I am that I am,” the Lord finishes his speech with the following:

“When you return to Egypt, see that you perform before Pharaoh all the marvels I have put within your power. I, however, will stiffen his heart so that he will not let the people go. Then you shall say to the Pharaoh, ‘Thus says the Lord: Israel is My first-born son. I have said to you, ‘Let My son go, that he may worship Me,’ yet you refuse to let him go. Now I will slay your first-born son.’”

What immediately follows is the enigmatic episode involving Moses’s son Gershom that is the sojourner’s claim to fame:

“At a night encampment on the way, the Lord encountered him and sought to kill him. So Zipporah took a flint and cut off her son’s foreskin, and touched his legs with it, saying ‘You are truly a bridegroom of blood to me!’ And when He let him alone, she added, ‘A bridegroom of blood because of the circumcision.’”

The Sefer ha-Bechor can be seen as an extended meditation on this passage, an unveiling to a wider audience one of the central mysteries of the Jewish faith: the substitution of the firstborn son.

To this day, the firstborn of a Jewish family is asked to fast on the eve of Passover, the festival that commemorates the exodus from Egypt. In the Sinai desert, the Israelite’s firstborn sons were symbolically sacrificed to the priests, only to be bought back for small sums of money. (Politically, this was meant to signify that the first born of each family would not be “sacrificed” to a life of worship; instead the priesthood as a whole would be transferred to the children of the house of Aaron, Moses’s brother, as a substitution.) Perhaps the most famous substitution of all took place on Mount

Moriah, after God called on Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac, only for a lamb to be slaughtered instead.

For Gershom, the inner meaning of the substitution of the firstborn is revealed in linguistic form: in the act of substitution whereby the head of a clause is cut off, signaling the embedding of one sentence into another. Consider:

(1) Alexander sought the high priest.

(2) Alexander was 24.

(3) Alexander, who sought the high priest, was 24.

In a sense, the Alexander in (1) has to die so that the Alexander in (2) can live. The token received in substitution is “who.” The sacrifice is redeemed with “was intrigued.” Gershom’s central hypothesis is that this act of substitution lies precisely at the beginning of thought, and that the origin of language lies in the singing of the genealogical tree, a practice made possible by the substitution of the unspoken self (a verb) for an “I” (a noun).

Now, to be sure, only with years of patient study will books such as the *Sefer ha-Bechor* and its cousins, disrobe and reveal their secrets. I am reminded of a story from Plutarch’s *Life of Alexander the Great*. When Alexander heard that his old teacher Aristotle, the most famous philosopher in the world, was publishing books containing the mysteries of his oral teachings, he wrote to him saying:

Alexander to Aristotle wishes health. You have not done well in publishing abroad those sciences which should only be taught by word of mouth. For how shall we be distinguished from other men, if the knowledge which we have acquired be made the common property of all? I myself had rather excel others in excellency of learning than in greatness of power. Farewell.

Plutarch tells us: “To pacify him, Aristotle wrote in reply that these doctrines were published, and yet not published: meaning that his treatise on Metaphysics was only written for those who had been instructed in philosophy by himself, and would be quite useless in other hands.”

So, as always in the wake of such “great men,” sacrifices have to be made to facilitate the undistracted appreciation of the lightning flashes of the author on the part of the general public. For this reason, I have attempted to translate the text into colloquial English, and have suppressed all footnotes. A scholarly edition is forthcoming from the Center for Sonic Inquiry.

— Jacquelyn Ball, translator

## SEFER HA-BECHOR

X

Once there was a rabbi who had indigestion. He was lying on his bed and he could feel it in his gut. He touched it with his mind, and explored the uneasiness in his gut, and he realized he could move the pain around if he pushed it with his finger of attention.

He pushed it all around his body. It got into his jaw where it distributed itself symmetrically. He could feel it tugging out two of his back teeth; it would strain against the roof of his mouth, and traveling into his nose, creeping into the bridge of the nose, rear up against the skin as if to escape. As he pushed the pain around, he could feel all the eddies and torrents of his body divert it ever so slightly from the path he was willing.

The rabbi thought: It feels like someone is poking around inside me! Who can it be?

The rabbi recited *ribbonno shel olam, master of the concealed*.

YHVH heard him and was pleased.

The rabbi could feel the pain like a mysterious pressure on the roof his mouth. He wondered what it would feel like to feel that all over his whole face. He was imagining his whole body tugging apart.

*Ribbonno shel olam.*

Constant pressure is like no pressure at all.

YHVH heard him and was pleased.

Then the rabbi imagined his whole body as nothing but the pressure of many arms reaching all around him outwardly, like an explosion of the spine. YHVH spoke to the rabbi saying, “You have discovered the true shape of your body. I will give it to you to dwell in if you so choose.”

The rabbi was overjoyed to have been spoken to by YHVH and quickly agreed. His body became a tornado. When the 102 years of the rabbi at last came to an end, he was in his bed surrounded by his sons and daughters and many students. He recited the shema, and as he was exhaling his last breath, he felt the pulsing winds that made up his body quiet. Once they had subsided, he laughed upon recognizing his indigestion. In his gut they found a tumor the size of a peach.

ג

Moses Aaron and Miriam were present.

Moses had composed the text,

Miriam transcribed it,

and Aaron delivered it.

Moses, in the flower of his 17th year,  
 in the time of the Third Temple—  
 his father and teacher Amram instructed him;  
 he and his brother and sister  
 were constantly speaking.

Before we began to write, nothing was lawful. Once people just memorized sounds that were useful to them. Before we began to write, everything was approached like coming to a gate. Presented with a few puzzles, you spoke the correct password, the gate opened for you.

Some people spoke all the time. They were good at making the kind of sounds a person responds to. Everyone was generally empathic because it's not strange in this world to make sounds without a law. They'd come up to you and you'd converge on a set of sounds that the two of you could duplicate and elongate and transform in fixed ways over and over again like one and two and three and four and five, and that was the beginning of law.

When we turned marks into sound, everyone started to learn one way of making sounds. Soon the lawful sounds didn't seem so marvelous. People accepted without comment that the important things were being written down.

There was a struggle between the people who wanted to turn pictures into sounds and people who wanted to turn lines into sounds. We had efficiency on our side. The pictures, however, were easier to memorize. At some point, you can read faster than you can listen, so you start to be able to think faster than you can speak. You start paying more attention over longer durations; before, no one really said anything that lasted longer than three seconds.

Aaron explained: If you weren't singing, they'd perk up at your initial consonants. About three seconds in, they'd make a wild guess at what you meant, and start doing or not doing something. Nobody ever remembered the exact order of sounds that clarified things. They were too focused on the thoughts they were having as they were speaking. It was nerve-wracking to talk to these people so much better at talking. Normally, everyone emitted sounds that helped clarify what they were doing and thinking, and people just understood what they meant. It was more intimate. It didn't feel like speaking. They didn't pay attention to how they said it. It was all so idiosyncratic, anyway. I mean, when someone said something memorable, you remembered it; but beyond that, it was basically like the one person forgot they were speaking and the other person forgot they were listening. Meaning clarified itself the longer you were in the same room with a person. Once people began to read and write, they were able to hear longer without music. So they started keeping track of how people made sounds, and the patterns in the sounds for six seconds, nine seconds, twelve seconds, a minute, a whole conversation—down to the specific consonants they used. The first scribes were going around imagining how they'd spell out what people were saying just for fun.

λ

How grotesque were people's thoughts,

when they tried to explain the nature of invisible things?

How deep did it go?

Was infinity always such a casual thing?

I AM THAT I AM

It would be hard to make sense of it without already agreed upon rules. When Moses came back from Sinai and started doing his routine, people laughed along with everyone else not having any clue what he was saying, but feeding off the sound of it.

I AM THAT I AM

You keep looking for what I am,  
 you keep getting redirected to the sign telling you  
 look for what I am.

But if you stop at

I AM

it stops.

To work this marvel you need: Subjects Objects Verbs

Y H V H

YHVH

A Y or an H can be a V.

The Y or H of a V can also be the Y or H of another V.

There is a substitution the signals the end of the embedding in time.

YHVH

Someone can be the child of someone else.

I AM THAT I AM

The sacrifice of the first born is:

I AM THAT I AM (?)

I am what I am. I am whatever is the object of I am. I am—whatever is the object of I am. THAT has been placed in the middle to show that there's been an embedding.

The second verb loses it's firstborn son.

I am whatever comes next.

I am the object of a verb.

I am the object of the verb I am.

I am the object of the verb I am.

I am the object of the verb I am.

Am I the object of the verb I am?

Or am I “the object of the verb I am”?

When you think I AM, you are done.

Go back down the mountain with Isaac.

†

I think it's a game.

I think you think it's a game.

I will pretend to be stern while secretly aiding you.

I think it's a game.

I think you think it's not a game.

I will be stern.

I think it's not a game.

I think you think it's a game.

I will pretend to aid you while secretly destroying you.

I think it's not a game.

I think you think it's not a game.

I will come to your aid.

‡

YHVH

MIRIAM AARON MOSES

When the Third Temple appeared, language had ceased on earth. It'd gone back to the way it was before. The reason for this was that the children of Adam wore helmets that reflected a picture of their brains back into their brains. They could also beam things to other people's brains if they wanted to.

This was an art.

You had to empty your mind of any thoughts you wanted concealed, and manifest solely your intention.

When the Third Temple appeared, people still made noises,

but just as garments,

seductions,

furniture,

jokes.

But nothing ever dies away completely. In this case, it was the Jews who kept reading, writing, and speaking. There were maybe 7000 of them who knew the written word. The rest of them had YHVH beamed into them if they were interested. This included Moses Aaron and Miriam.

They had to invent personal pronouns.

Moses came up with a lesson.

He would call a person  
by making sounds  
until the person  
looked up.

Then he'd point at them, and say

YOU ARE  $\kappa$ ,

making the sound that they'd responded to.

I AM  $\gamma$ ,

pointing at himself.

Pointing at the ground,

gesturing at the view.

Here. I am here.

I am points at self, points at everything.

What is everything in gestures?

Points at self, points at everything.

Pointing at everything is the same as pointing at anything.

Aaron asked: Can you point at pointing at yourself?

How do you say, hearing the call?

You have one arm move the other arm.

The left arm points the right arm. You point at pointing.

Y    H    V    H

Yud   hey   vav   hey

Arm hurrah hook hurrah

I use the hand of my other arm to point at the hook of my finger pointing.

We left in the middle of the night. We were in the middle of a sentence, and had to leave in the middle of it. We set out on a relative clause. This is the secret of secrets: the firstborn is unleavened.

1

Desire suffering pain excitement moroseness squalor joy were the vowels and consonants.

The emotions would blur together for the fast reader and form a single clear tone or a dissonant one, that would melodize over the shifting grammar.

It was only a generation that lost the art of writing. When the earth lost its language for one generation, when the murmur of the tribes ceased, and they were silent for one generation, then Moses Aaron and Miriam were born.

↑

On the night before Moses left Egypt after killing a man, he talked with Miriam by the bulrushes, on the docks...

He laughs,  
You're the spitting image of seshat  
with that seven pointed flower above your head.

They discussed their intellectual endeavors.

In the moonlight, their cheeks come close.

Moses goes to live with Jethro, his father in law. Every day out tending the flock, he's thinking about the thing they were thinking about: about dimensions, about how to encode things better than Miriam's pictures and tally marks.

Thinking about Miriam.

Jethro is as good as any as they come.

Moses sees a fire in the distance.

Smoke.

A BUSH on FIRE, but it doesn't BURN UP, said Aaron.

You're picturing a BUSH on FIRE, aren't you, said Moses.

The BUSH NOT on FIRE is the BUSH on FIRE, said Moses.

ANSWER: The bush as it normally is is slowly burning up molecules of glucose,  
&c.

Moses sees this, because he looks at the bush and sees it frozen in motion hooked in its very slow growth. He feels the force propelling it upwards and outwards and out of the ground from trunk to tree to leaf, and with such a titanic force it's a wonder it doesn't burst into flames. It settled into this:

Wikipedia says: "In mathematics, a fixed-point theorem is a result saying that a function  $F$  will have at least one fixed point (a point  $x$  for which  $F(x)=x$ ), under some conditions on  $F$  that can be stated in general terms. Results of this kind are amongst the most generally useful in mathematics."

And God called from the bush and they started conversing.

Moses, moses!

Here I am.

I am the God of your father

the God of Abraham

the God of Isaac

the God of Jacob

the God of ....

Moses hides his face.

Go to Pharaoh and bring my people out of Egypt.

Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?

I will be with you. And this will be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you:  
When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain.

If I go and say the God of your fathers has sent me to you and they ask, What is his name? What should I say?

I am who I am.

Say: I am has sent me to you.

Say: The Lord, the God of your fathers,

the God of Abraham

the God of Isaac

the God of Jacob

has sent me to you.

This is my name forever,  
this name you shall call me  
from generation to generation.

Go to the elders.

Tell the Pharaoh you want to go on a three day journey into the wilderness. To offer sacrifices on this mountain. He won't allow it. Then we'll work miracles. And the Egyptians will be favorably disposed towards you, so that when you leave each woman is going to ask her neighbor for gold and silver and clothing, and in that way you'll plunder the Egyptians.

When the Third Temple appears,  
during the inverse exodus,  
the Jews migrate to it;  
people come out to watch  
and they are decorated as they pass  
through the towns of the world  
on ferries  
and trains  
on planes when elderly.

Of course there were people that tried to stop them,  
and there are many stories about that,  
but they were aided their friends.

Moses was looking at the bush.

Moses, Moses!

Here I am.

I am the God of your father

the God of Abraham

the God of Isaac

the God of Jacob

the God of ....

Moses hides his face.

Go to Pharaoh and bring my people out of Egypt.

Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?

I will be with you. And this will be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain.

If I go and say the God of your fathers has sent me to you and they ask, What is his name? What should I say?

I am who I am.

Say: I am has sent me to you.

Say: The Lord, the God of your fathers,

the God of Abraham

the God of Isaac

the God of Jacob

has sent me to you.

This is my name forever,  
this name you shall call me  
from generation to generation.

Moses, Moses!

God called Moses.

Here I am, you said.

Who was it you were when I called  
your name and you said,  
Here I am?

I am the God of your father

the God of Abraham

the God of Isaac

the God of Jacob

the God of ....

I am the thing that persists throughout the generations.

“On this rock.”

Moses asks, who am I to?

God answers, I will be with you.

What is your name?

I am what I am.

Moses, Moses!

Here I am. Who are you?

I am sends me to you.

You said, I am here.

And I was here.

I come whenever you call me.

Whenever you call “I” that is the one you are calling.

I am the thing that persists throughout the generations.

Say: I am has sent me to you.

When you say here I am,

I am here with you.

(You can't say I is).

All of a sudden you are you,

when before you were I.

Once I'm with you,

I transforms me into you.

π

Moses was astonished. It was the concept of relative clauses and pronoun scope on the model of the genealogical chants that brought Moses Aaron and Miriam their biggest fame.

He set himself the task of encoding all the high dimensional detail of his vision in words, describing the length and breadth of the tabernacle.

## THE GARMENT OF DAYS

Moses composed

Aaron spoke

Miriam transcribed.

There is the line of love through mothers.

The line of love through fathers.

There is something inherited unchanging.

The children of addition and multiplication are the prime numbers.

You obtain all the brothers 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13.... by adding one.

If you then establish the rule of multiplication, each child has parents who multiply to form it.

ט

A diagram in sound! Miriam said wonderingly.

She had never transcribed anything before. She'd only copied. She didn't know what to expect when Moses's words flooded into her not through her ears.

As kids Miriam and Aaron and Moses would talk with each other and to secretly communicate they invented an alphabet for sounds.

We had to adapt the encoding they used in the genealogical chants.

... א BEGAT ב BEGAT ג BEGAT ... ד BEGAT ה BEGAT ו BEGAT ז ...

No one ever thought to do this to such an extreme. People's attention spans are naturally short and "and" generally suffices. But once Moses began recording people's

speech for fun, and worked out the engravings... It was a thing that was way easier to see written out.

People were deeply impressed. Because of the association between syntax and genealogy, the people who spoke the first written words believed that they were the chosen people because there was an I that was them that came from all their ancestors.

So it is said: along with the jewelry, the Egyptians gave to the Jews their names which were all tallied up, and each could be a subject or a verb. So there was a word for every thing that came when called. These were used by Moses.

A linguistic song inherits its sense of rightness from the love of the family and the feeling of the generations.

,

What do you have?

The entire time that Moses was being raised in the house of the Pharaoh he was in constant contact with Aaron and Miriam. Naturally because their mother Yocheved was taken on by the daughter of the Pharaoh to be his nurse. Miriam was the oldest; she was seven, and she would lead Aaron by the hand and push and shove him behind pillars as they skulked around the Pharaoh's house. Aaron was three when Moses was found. On the day their mother heard affirmatively from the Pharaoh's daughter, Yocheved ushered Aaron and Miriam into the baby room which was decorated in reeds and papyrus because of the way Moses had been found. The daughter of the Pharaoh

had done it herself. She was pleased to see Miriam again. Miriam had happened to be walking along when the Pharaoh's daughter discovered the little ark in the Nile.

He spoke:

Once people began wearing the helmets, they got so good at suppressing their thoughts during beaming, that they starting going around suppressing their thoughts all the time. It made people very unpredictable. You never knew who you were talking to you.

Not everybody used the helmets like that. The question was:

how far could you manipulate yourself  
before you lost track of something?

The helmet can only make things louder.

Everyone goes around thinking at their own pace. When another human comes by, they snap to attention and get into their receptive/liar brains. They eyeball each other; maybe someone whistles. They get back to what they were doing. Some people relax though. People huddle around their brains and embroider the emanations. The point is, people mostly don't pay attention to the fact that they're really only paying attention to each other for three seconds at a time. They forget that pictures of their own brains are actually being re-fed into their optic nerves, along with those of other people, by their helmets.

If you're just mirroring the brain of another person (overlaid on yourself), you didn't need to pay attention to the precise sequence of transmitted brain pictures in order to understand them. The brain of the other person keeps track of time for you. It interests you by incorporating its own changes over time.

You keep people at a dull roar, just in case someone does wants your attention.

In general people let it wash over them.

Question and Answer.

Investigation.

Collaboration.

Soothing

It wasn't until people started writing down sounds for brain pictures and after sounds for brain pictures got sounds, that people really began paying attention; because all of a sudden they could read and write faster than they could think.

What do you mean *they could read and write faster than they could think*?

Isn't reading thinking?

Only if they looked at it the right way.

It was like having two separate thoughts at once,  
you pick out notes on a chord.

∩

I AM THAT I AM

With a helmet on, I AM really makes you think you are whatever comes next as whatever comes next is simultaneously whatever you are feeling like you really are right now.

I AM THAT catapults us into the future. It reaches out with its arm and hooks the future and brings it into the present.

Arm hurrah hook hurrah.

Y    H    V    H

I AM really makes you think you are whatever comes next as whatever comes next is simultaneously whatever you are feeling like you really are right now. So you can think of being you and being what you are feeling like you are at exactly the same moment.

↳

The first thing that got to be lawful was syllables:

beginning middle and end

increase and decrease in sonority.

A grammar: nouns and verbs.

The grammar became more complicated the faster people could understand it, the more time they could keep in mind and share with each other.

Aaron explained: Imagine a history of moving pictures. At first the eye stayed put and sang open syllables for a long time before cutting consonantly to another view. As time went by, the cutting sped up and laws emerged, certain short shots becoming grammaticalized. The interchange of consonants (fade cut, still cut, moving cut) and vowels (dynamism of what was happening on screen) group time into syllables with an envelope: obstruents and affricates and fricatives and nasals and glides and vowels. The syllables congeal into a grammar. There are even ninety minute texts with cuts happening as the very limit of comprehensibility, the equivalent of the quick “K”, limited by our visual (as opposed to auditory) acuity.

It grammaticalizes,  
any time there are excesses  
most efficiently.

Grammaticalization

for longer

more brightly

burns

for

longer  
 yet  
 still  
 more  
 quickly.

∞

Digestion is the grammaticalizing of flesh into modifiers  
 which attach themselves to the hooks of our bodies.

As grammaticalization sets in, there arise the two potential infinities: of continued  
 addition (and and and and and) and of continued multiplication (which which which).

Brothers & Sisters	Addition &
Parents & Children	Multiplication

Together they form all the mysteries of this world of generation.

In grammaticalization, order matters.

ANSWER: It matters in which order you multiply or add numbers in a  
 sequence.

Time is gets more and more grammaticalized until it passes by quickly as a gloss over everything, an ancient instinct.

So Moses was thinking about grammar because he and his brother and sister invented an alphabet as a game when they were kids growing up in the house of the Pharaoh. He lived at a time when people made noises and sang and drew diagrams and did math and built pyramids, but did not write down the sounds of their mouths.

ן

THE IBIS

Aaron the eldest

Miriam in the middle

IBIS HEADED THOTH

KILLS SNAKES

WHILE HE WRITES.

If you killed a cat, they killed you;

The people of Oxyrhynchus ate a dog because Cynopolis ate an oxyrynchus (fish).

ד

one (one and one) (one and one and one)

Abraham Isaac Jacob Joseph ...

### Marriage

Y     H     V     H

Subject Object Verb ?

Sibling:     Y/H (& Y/H)

Parent:     YV

Child:     VH

Yet children can be siblings and parents can be children.

Moses figured out about addition and multiplication.

People had known them, but they didn't think of using spoken sounds as multipliers except as in, begetting. Numbers were just family.

Like 6 contains 2 and 3 in one sense.

Like 6 contains 3 and 3 in another sense.

Or 2 and 2 and 2, &c.

The question was how to broaden this kind of ambiguity to sounds other than the ones for numbers.

Addition is like brothers side by side.

Multiplication is like children in the womb.

If you could see the face of your brain,  
it would be like the face was a number,  
and your I AM was the prime numbers inside it.

When you would read I AM THAT I AM,  
you would perceive directly the I AM contained in THAT,  
and that THAT is I,  
and I am THAT.

ע

שמע ישראל יהוה אלהינו יהוה אחד:

SH'MA YIS'RA'EIL YHVH ELOHEINU YHVH ECHAD

HEAR ISRAEL YHVH OF OUR POWERS YHVH IS ONE.

This exercise is an experiment for the mouth. Shield you eyes and recite under  
your breath.

SH'MA YIS'R'AEIL ADONAI ELOHEINU ADONAI ECHAD

HEAR ISRAEL MASTER OF OUR POWERS THE MASTER IS ONE.

Birth starts with the breath poised.

At the beginning of the mouth, the lips are fastened tight. The breath carries a voice.

B! At the beginning of the lips, the jaw drops; the lips percuss and fly apart: a burst of air. This is at the moment of impregnation.

The vowel

IIIRR runs up to the higher reaches of the mountain, and slides towards the front as

RRRRRRR, the tongue curving the air around it, resisting as it descends, sliding down over the teeth. This is the journey through the the birth canal.

THTHTTHTHIH, the tongue positions itself in between the two front teeth and chaotic air floods forth. The tongue talking to the teeth.

Birth involves a journey from / voiced breath / the beginning of the mouth, the lips / to the highest vowel point / and then from the back tongue descending along the roof of the mouth while the tip of the tongue readies itself / so as the middle descends enough of the way, the tip sticks itself through the teeth, and the air blows and the tongue is limp in thick of it.

Death starts with the breath poised.

The voice is held just behind the teeth by the tongue who totally covers the passageway blocking the interior of the mouth.

D. The voice breaks the concealment and comes out in the middle tone

EA, and the tongue lies down at the ground prostrate, after an exhalation, the same whistling

TH TH TH TH TH is heard.

After a strenuous set of permutations, the tongue settles into its cradle.

☐

For a few thousand years, there was nothing but pictures, numbers, and diagrams. Eventually these things came to signify sounds. Before the alphabet, people only counted and sang. After a while, it happened that people invented a system of consonants, which were formed by analogy with engraving: a place in the clay of the mouth—the tongue and lips and teeth wrote into it—the wind going past, carrying a melody, was shaped by the engraved thing.

What happened was that the picture of an eye (very famously) got a name; and the name was the name the artist gave the picture of an eye; and that name became the sound of the picture; and eventually they just used part of that sound. Then they could use that picture among other pictures for sounds to spell out the name of the picture of an eye; which reminded people of eyes. Before that, no one thought to name their actual eyes. They were too busy singing more or less with their eyes closed.

The detractors said: singing can express emotion, and why bother to explain anything with sounds when you can just draw a diagram or something, which is way quicker?

ANSWER: Of course, people used consonants and vowels and made speech like sounds, but it was rather for the sake of the more abstract symmetries demanded by their music. The consonants never had persisting signification, except as the context of where the concert was taking place allowed.

To deal with their actual eyes, people usually just made up a sound on the spot, pointed at their eyes, or blinked, or looked around in an actorly manner. The sound they made would stand in for eye, &c. And next time, they'd use a different set of sounds for eye depending on what song they happened to be singing, what key it was in, &c.

Two people uttering random sounds at each other, establishing patterns here and there, gesturing, doing things, until they are speaking fluidly and quickly in order to accomplish the task at hand, some sounds surviving, some not surviving, since after all each person's is deep in their own musical history.

Once people decided to arrange pictures according to the sound of the names the artists had given those pictures, certain orderings of sounds became overwhelmingly favored because the written language kept reminding people of the great sounds they'd made in the past.

(silently:)

בְּרוּךְ שֵׁם כְּבוֹד מַלְכוּתוֹ לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד

BARUKH SHEIM K'VOD MALKHUTO L'OLAM VA'ED

Blessed be the name of his glorious kingdom for ever and ever.

Bless the name of his glorious kingdom,  
from the far distance of the past  
concealed in front of you  
and back again  
to the future  
that guards  
your back.

∨

A small word is small.

The word small is small.

Dental is dental.

Is is is.

Small is small.

Quick is quick.

Fat is fat.

Cover covers cover.

Looking looks like looking.

Eating eats eating.

Fatten fattens fatten.

Drinking drinks drinking.

To drink is to drink to drink.

Drinking is drinking drinking.

The drinker drinks the drink.

The eater eats the eaten.

The looker looks at the looked at.

The being is being.

Drinkers drink drinks.

Eaters eat eats.

Lookers look at looks.

Beings are beings.

Drinkers drink drank.

Eaters eat eaten.

Lookers look at looked at.

Beings are being.

Drinkers drink what is drunk.

Eaters eat what is eaten.

Lookers look at what is looked at.

Beings are what is.

Doers do what is done.

Cups cup what is cupped.

Couches couch what is couched.

Drinkers drink the drank.

Eaters eat the eaten.

Lookers look at the looked at.

Doers do the done.

Cups cup the cupped.

Couches couch the couched.

Chairs chair the chair.

Bookers book the booked.

Painters paint the painted.

Writers write the written.

Cream creams the creamed.

Creaming creams the creamed.

Painting paints the painted.

Writing writes the written.

The written wrote the writing writing writing.

Being being being being being being being.

Writing writing writing writing writing writing.

Being being being.

Creaming creaming creaming creaming.

Painting painting painting painting painting.

Painting painted.

Drinking drinking drinking.

Drinking is drinking drinking drinking drinking while drinking drinks the drunk.

The speakers speaks the spoken.

The seer sees the seen.

Can seeing see or only seers?

Can speaking speak or only speakers?

Beginning begins the begun.

Does the beginning begin? Certainly.

The beginner begins the begun.

Beginning begins.

Swimming does not swim.

Ending ends.

Walking does not walk.

Lighting lights.

Lighting lights the lit.

The lit lights the light.

The lit lights the lit.

Can lighting be lit?

To grow.

Does growing grow the grown?

Growing grows?

The grower grows the grown.

The growing grows the grower.

The grown grows growing is true of growing.

To signal.

The signaler signals the signaled.

The signaling signals the signaled.

The signal signals the signal.

The signaled signals the signal.

The signaling signals signaling. (True.)

The signaling signals the signaled.

The symbolizer symbolizes the symbolized.

The symbol symbolizes the symbolizer.

The symbolizing symbolizes symbolizing.

The symbol symbols symbolizing.

The symbolized symbolizes the symbol.

Does symbolizing symbolize the symbol?

To mean.

The meaner means the meant.

The meaning means the meant.

Meaning means the meant.

Meaning meaning meaning meaning.

House.

The houser houses the housed.

The house houses the housed.

The housing houses the housed.

Houses house housing.

Overwhelmers overwhelm the overwhelmed.

Overwhelming overwhelms the overwhelmed.

Overwhelming overwhelms overwhelming.

Do the overwhelmers overwhelm the overwhelmed?

Do the overwhelmed overwhelm the overwhelmed?

Do the overwhelmed overwhelm overwhelming?

Does overwhelming overwhelm the overwhelmed?

Does overwhelming overwhelm overwhelming?

Feeling feels the felt.

I feel the felt.

Feeling feels the felt.

The feeling is felt.

Inging ings.

An erer ers.

An error errs.

Is is.

Having has have in it.

Moving moves.

Changing changes.

Flowers flower.

Thankers thank the thanked.

Thanking thanks the thanked. (True.)

Thanking thanks thanking?

Thinking thinks thinking.

Hiding hides hiding. (True.)

Concealing conceals concealing.

Showing shows showing.

Demonstrating demonstrates demonstrating.

Teaching teaches teaching.

The teacher teaches the taught.

The teaching teaches the taught.

The taught teach the teacher.

The taught teach the taught.

The taught teach the teaching.

Revealing reveals revealing.

Signifying signifies signifying.

Beginning begins beginning. (True.)

Starting starts starting.

Continuing continues continuing.

Negating negates negating.

Making positive makes positive making positive.

Accelerating accelerates accelerating.

Weighing weighs weighing.

Measuring measures measuring.

Testing tests testing.

Checking checks checking.

Defining defines defining.

Nouning nouns nouning.

Exploring explores exploring.

Dignifying dignifies dignifying.

Conferring dignity confers dignity on conferring dignity.

Mirroring mirrors mirroring.

Counting counts counting.

Ever doubling ever doubles ever doubling.

Judgement judges judgement.

The judge judges judging: the judge is judging.

Beginning begins beginning.

The beginner begins beginning: the beginner is beginning.

Concealer conceals concealing: the concealer is concealing.

The concealer is concealed.

The encoding encodes encoding.

Timing times timing.

Cooling cools cooling.

Increasing decreases increasing.

Decreasing increases increasing.

Increasing decreases increasing which increases decreasing.

Growing shrinks growing which grows shrinking.

Growing grows shrinking.

Explaining explains explaining.

Crash crashes.

Passing passes.

Confusion confuses.

᠖

When the Third Temple appeared overnight like a spaceship, the world was aghast. The Jews all began their pilgrimage, and it was a slow one—they went by foot, in a great parade. They were dressed in their finest, whatever they had, and everyone came out to look at them and pay their respects. Everyone wanted to be a part of what was to come. People tossed flowers and things. There was singing and cantillation followed by men chanting chants.

Moses was seventeen. When the Third Temple appeared, Moses intimated to Aaron while Miriam wrote a song that became very popular, which planted the seed of the idea, which was for everyone to get their gold and silver to the Jews as they were leaving to go to the Third Temple. Because all the normal people were sick and tired of money anyway, and the Third Temple appearing was a great excuse to call for a worldwide jubilee. The idea was for all the precious metals, &c., to be cast into an enormous golden calf which would then be melted down (and in addition, people would immediately stop eating cows probably because cows some of the worst emitters of greenhouse gases in the form of methane), and mixed into water, and then bottled up and distributed free of charge to everyone in the world. They'd gulp it down, if only by force of peer pressure—distributors would come to your door, and it was all certified as basically safe—and everyone admitted later it felt good when you gulped it down and

were like okay—now what yeah hey what huh. This operation was underway even before the last of the Jews arrived in the holy land. Can you imagine?

And meanwhile the ritual of burning paper money spread like wildfire across the globe. At first it was just a bunch of pictures of people lighting money on fire, then money bonfires. Next thing you know you're seeing a poster on a pole like, saturday 6pm burn money. You go to the atm and take out all the dollars and carry them in shopping bags to the bonfire in the park and everyone stacks the bills high and then you throw gasoline on it. Damp as some of the bills are, it will certainly light up. This is the jubilee, the trumpet-blast of liberty.

The fiftieth year is sacred—  
it is a time of freedom and of celebration,  
when everyone will receive back their original property,  
and slaves will return home to their families.

As for the more abstract bank accounts, the idea was to simulate a fire by taking everyone's bank accounts and shifting random amounts from one bank account to another bank account for a very long time until everyone's bank accounts were even, that being when the fire had gone out. They turned this into an animation and you could watch it online.

Various efforts were made to seize people's assets whether by physical force or by more abstract means, as the Jews pilgrimed onward. But in each case they were

thwarted by vigilante groups. It all seemed very well to correspond to the difficulties of the plagues of Exodus.

7

While Miriam listens, the Third Temple pops up around her. Birds with hats roost in the temple and they go around whistling. Miriam's temple is a mess. There is iniquity. On the fritz.

She sings:

As the flood recedes—

a calm—

a desire to obsess

& a desire to lose

oneself in mindless desire—

all fear, all future forgotten—

(to seek out oblivion

to the point where thinking

doesn't even start—

already thought)

to exist in a hovel—

a mound of dirt—

throwing—lying—leaving

things everywhere—

so they accumulate—

& in this mess we'll live—

desiring nothing but each other.

Sad for forgetting,

sad for waiting.

Thank you for my pain, &c.

When you wake up, it's fine.

She began to leave her body for days at a time.

Shall a child study the secrets? Or put it them a box for later? And yet my child's joy lies in reading Torah. He was studying Torah in the diner, and they all turned to look at me.

They could no doubt smell the pain on me.

A family of powerful people:

God lashing out in pain

God cramped

God afraid of eternal pain

but hasn't pain always ended

but isn't there not any end to anything?

THERE IS ACTUALLY THIS KINGDOM  
 IT IS RIGHT OUTSIDE YOUR WINDOW  
 THERE IN THE DISTANCE IS THE CASTLE  
 CAN'T YOU SEE IT?  
 JUST BEYOND THE LIGHT  
 WHERE OVER THE GRASSES  
 THERE IS A SONG

*SING TO THE LORD FOR HE HAS TRIUMPHED GLORIOUSLY  
 HORSE AND RIDER HE HAS THROWN INTO THE SEA.*

ψ

The great mystery of the Israelites was the substitution in the sacrifice of the first born.

YHVH created light, but light was sacrificed to darkness. There was a substitution and light returned. YHVH sacrificed the plants to the animals. YHVH sacrificed the animals to man, whom he creates both first and last on earth. Firstborn Adam loses Eden, his inheritance. Cain kills Abel; the inheritance moves on to Seth, the third brother. God sacrifices the whole first generation leaving Noah.

A moment of clarity: Abraham carrying Isaac the firstborn of Sarah but not of Abraham to be sacrificed, but at the last moment a lamb is substituted.

Rebekah Isaac's wife connives to have Jacob substituted for the firstborn Esau. Jacob wrestles with an angel. Later the brothers embrace. The inheritance passes on to Joseph, not the first born of Jacob, but the firstborn of Rachel. The Pharaoh orders all the first born babies exterminated. The firstborn of the Egyptians are killed. The inheritance passes to Moses not the firstborn (Miriam, Aaron, Moses). The inheritance is transferred to Aaron during a substitution ritual when Aaron's rod among all the rods of the firstborn of the firstborn of the Israelite tribes flowers.

It is the mystery of the circumcision.

The wanderings in the desert? All those who remembered Egypt died off. It was a vivid memory in their children of something absolutely believed by their parents.

For Moses the whole exodus after the burning bush is happening inside of a relative clause. As he dies at the end of it outside the promised land, he's called back to the beginning; everything is folded into the relative pronoun of the sentence he'd begun to say when YHVH called.

When you hear a relative clause begin, the next thing you know you're going up the mountain about to sacrifice Isaac and raising your weapon; at the last moment you make a substitution. You substitute back into here where (as always) YHVH has promised you well nigh everything.

YHVH can see all the subordinate clauses as if they were main clauses.

He doesn't have to wait for things to refer.

The helmets let us do that too,

but as I said, the helmets are not without their own imperfections.

...and at the last minute you throw up the shield—

That is basically what was revealed to me, said Moses.

I could speak a word this very instant and disappear. But I dare not!

At the last minute you throw up the shield,

hang onto the rock,

and the angel of death passes by.

You'll have to exit the clause;

nobody will any longer refer,

but you will not forgotten!

by no means!

I can always bring you out of there with my arm:

that is the Power, as in, I AM the Power of your fathers,

the Power of Abraham,

of Isaac, &c.

The shield is in the bundle that Abraham himself had hidden there.

ן

One time someone accused a rabbi of breaking the sabbath. Somebody said working on the sabbath was punishable by death. What was he doing, they asked. He was building a house for his son. The rabbi was so worried about their accusations that he put his head in his arms lying on the couch and felt his body begin to disappear. Why was he building a house for his son? Was there no other time he could do it? Not really. The people said we'll all agree that you can spend Mondays building the house; and all the people in the synagogue said they could make do without him on Monday's, at least. The rabbi was overjoyed and started to spend Mondays building the house. But he found himself impatient and itching to return to studying. So little by little he started working on the house again on the sabbath. When the people found out about it, they asked him and he said, "YHVH is resting."

And they laughed at him and shook their heads.

"Someone's got a lucky father."

The gossip continued.

That night after dinner YHVH spoke to the rabbi saying, "Why don't you just spend Monday's building the house?"

The rabbi was amazed that YHVH had spoken to him and so he told the truth, which was that he felt like the sabbath was the only day he could do it and not feel like he was wasting time, since that day was already wasted.

“Not that I think the sabbath is a waste...The people just don’t understand. You understand,” said the rabbi.

YHVH spoke again and the rabbi burst into tears: “We can make a covenant. If you cut off your seventh finger, I will make an exception in the rule about resting on the sabbath for you, so that the people stop bothering you about working on the sabbath, because I love you.”

The rabbi quickly agreed and cut off the first finger of his left hand (because he counted starting at the rightmost pinky). He showed everybody what he had done, and then the rabbi returned to working on the house for his son on the sabbath, and nobody bothered him. But now because he didn’t have to not work, he thought about working while he was building the house. But he was embarrassed because YHVH had talked to him, so he stuck to it.

When the house was finished, it was on the same day as his son’s bar mitzvah. Afterwards the rabbi brought his son to the new house and showed him where he would one day live. They called the house sabbath because every sabbath they would go walk there and look at it and tinker with it.

Now it turned out that everyone at school made fun of the rabbi’s son for having such a nice future house and it being so public at all, after the whole sabbath controversy. It got to be so bad that his son wished he could just tear down the house. He told his father about this and his father laid on the couch and worried about it. YHVH came to him and said:

“Move into the house you built for your son and sell your old house to the highest bidder and distribute the money you get from it to the parents of the children at school in proportion to the number of children they have and their ages.”

The rabbi was overjoyed and did so immediately and dedicated a stone to YHVH in front of their new house. He told his son the whole story. The next day at school the other kids were more respectful.

Many years later after the son had even married, the son happened to tell his wife that his father had a special exception to the rule about the sabbath.

“Oh really?” she said.

“Yes, it was granted so he could work on building me a house.”

“Oh I didn’t know you needed one,” she said.

And then she continued: “He was *working* for his own *son*! What is the sabbath but for to rest from your everyday work so you can think about your family? What did he need an exception for?”

“I don’t know,” said the son.

“It doesn’t make any sense,” his wife said.

“Who accused him of working on the sabbath?”

“Someone in the congregation.”

“And he cut off his finger!”

“Well first he tried building the house on Mondays...”

And his wife heard him, and she was crowned with light.

מ

## Song of Moses

I have opened the mouth of the ass,  
 With my uncircumcised lips.

אהיה אשר אהיה

YHVH

Y -> H(V->)

I -> ?(I->?)

I -> ?(I->)

Eyeh-Asher-Eyeh

I AM THAT I AM

Calling: I am here.

Name!

I am here. Who are you?

I am that which I am.

You are here?

I am.

Yes but who are you?

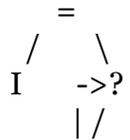
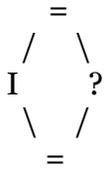
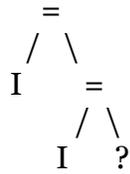
I am the I am of Abraham.

the I am of Isaac, &c.

You are the I am of Abraham, of, &c,

and you're the

I am of here?



I am.

I am on that rock.

I am that thing which we talked about.

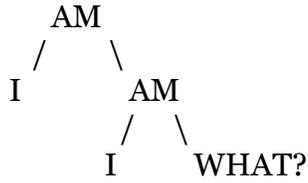
I am that which we talked about.

Which is what?

“That which I am.”

I am that which — waiting for the verb — I am — oh what was it you said you are? — I am that which I am.

God's persistence.



I AM | WHAT | I AM

I am what the birds brought.

The birds brought something.

Which something?

The thing the birds brought.

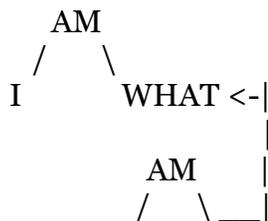
I am that thing.

Which thing?

I AM THAT SOMETHING.

Which something?

THAT SOMETHING I AM.



## I

A signal imposes its rhythm on the conversation—  
 engraving—  
 the way demigods smell in violent spring  
     starting to feel old in your sense of self  
 fall returns for a moment in spring—  
 every person is powerful as a god in their limits  
 as powerful as a god can be in a human body  
 a family of powerful people  
 kings and queens—  
 in exile.

The god is the octave in the space  
 that reveals itself by permutation.

Speech is soft song, the octave displaced and emphasized  
 by the shape of the mouth and the tongue whispering  
 melody's changes reconstructed  
 from windy consonantal interruptions.

All things that employ the octave are gods.

The note rises additively ever higher steadily yet

when the note is ever twice  
 as high as the original note  
 you hear the octave  
 the sound of generation,  
 the substitution of the firstborn.

The gods are tones.

ELOHIM : POWERS

BEFORE

AFTER

Before afore

befter after

Bafore before

after efter.

Ever after.

JACQUELYN 2, HER TESTAMENT  
 [cf. alternate version]  
 2014

Jacquelyn woke up the day after the ball got pooped out of her. She checked the Huffington Post:



You can't make this shit up, she thought.

On the day after, Jacquelyn composed a treatise on the dynamics of belief. I have to get all this down quickly, she mused. She'd been reading the story *The Square Root of 2* by Walter Klugman. She smoked a cigarette in the bathroom. At the Japanese/Chinese place last night, she'd gotten three fortune cookies:

"Today's profits are yesterday's good well ripened."

"Watch out for emergencies. They are your big chance."

“Your charms have no gone unnoticed by all the angels.”

She thought, There’s all this stuff I wanted to explain to Kellog last night, but in the moment I didn’t know how. In the moment at least, I was just rolling with it, not caring about who I was, who I was talking to. Criminal. Anyway, the day before I pooped out the ball, I had discovered that I was this character Ann in the story *The Square Root of 2* by Walter Klugman. Symmetrically, Walter Klugman is this character Cory in the story *Jacquelyn’s Baby*, which I wrote in a rush last night, in the middle of the night, having woken up after falling asleep with the ball wrapped around me.

Now I’m writing this testament. I’ve been weaving it together all day, in between everything, moving around my house, bouncing the ball, looking at the blue sky over the church outside my window. Periodically typing on my MacBook Air.



In the story by Walter, we meet Walter as a kid. While waking up, he picks apart the ceiling with his eyes. He zones out in the shower. He faints while trying to twist around to see his own fart. We learn that Walter's brother and his dad are always talking about why some things are harder than others. The government's probably working on it. While waiting in the car line, Walter and his dad listen to rock music. Across the fields, there's a battleship in the distance. It's actually a Lockheed-Martin facility that looks just like a battleship. Getting out of the car, Walter spies me getting frustrated with my mom. Walter offers me membership into the POWER CLUB as we're entering school. We talk in the bathroom. He tells me about the square root of 2 and the tritone in music. His brother is a stoner who is into that stuff.

So then I go to geography class where our assignment for the day is to make an imaginary island. I subsequently have an altercation with two inflexible girls. I have to go to the bathroom. I play Harvest Moon on my gameboy in the hallway. Then I freak out during a math test and start losing perspective on reality. Jack Nacheinander, one of our friends, is sitting next to me.

The math test turns out to be a story I'm telling to the POWER CLUB, whose meetings are during recess. Germy, Jack, Walter, me, Kirkby, Alexia, Anthony, and Jenny are there. We all speak out minds. Suddenly, there's a lockdown. Something's happening. We all go outside. I meet up with Walter and Germy. We wait for the buses. We discuss what's going on. Walter says something that suggests Germy's dad works for Lockheed-Martin. Walter continues to discuss the square root of two, but only after I bring it up.

Then, just as Walter finishes walking along a diagonal line while awkwardly twisting his neck to keep track of his origin point, my mom drives up. Apparently she heard about what happened. Vernon Dill, a local millionaire banker, had crashed his plane diagonally across a field. Or maybe he wasn't in the plane at the time. But it was his plane. In any case, tensions rise between me and my mom. Eventually we get in the car: me, Walter, Germy, and my mom. I'm still recalcitrant. Germy's is staying quiet. Walter's trying to be friendly, seemingly oblivious of the tension. Finally as if to squash Walter once and for all, my mom paints a picture of a completely polluted world.

Suddenly, at a red light, we hear a weird noise. Walter has to twist his neck to do see where it's coming from. It's the wind rushing through the wing of the downed airplane, now strapped to a flatbed truck that's pulling up beside us. In a release of tension, Walter shouts! Simultaneously, yet independently, we decide to escape. Opening our doors, we dash outside and climb onto the truck. It drives off with us on the back. My mom, following the truck at ever increasing speed, drives the truck off the road. When we emerge from under the wing, she's there, hugging me. Germy vomits. Walter can't wait to tell his brother about it.

Why was my mom there to pick me up so early? Why were they moving the airplane wing so soon?

I was wondering about these questions while I was in the bathroom. I was also in the bathroom in my story *Jacquelyn's Baby*. I smoked a cigarette by the plant. I took a shower and talked to God.

Turns out it wasn't God I was talking to. It was actually the cigarette. The one in my bathroom. It was smoked by the window and ashed into the plant in the purple pot.

This story's for Walter who told me he liked smoking cigarettes. He smokes cigarettes while he writes characters who smoke.

Walter said leisurely, "When you read about smoking when you're someone who smokes cigarettes, it's different from when you read about smoking when you don't."

I said, "Because you want a cigarette."

"Yeah," Walter said, "it's a kind of erotic fiction. If you're in the right state of mind, which is forgetting you're smoking. I worry about it," he said. "What if we didn't call it smoking?"

We went outside to smoke a cigarette.

"You as a writer infuse your forgetting about smoking into the text," I said.

"Yeah," Walter said. "And what would that infusion feel like in a time when smoking cigarettes didn't have the connotation it does today? It would be the story of a bond between man and an ever loyal companion who takes the form of a wordless thing."

"Stories with characters who smoke cigarettes written by writers who don't smoke cigarettes," I said. "Stories with non-smoker characters written by smokers."

It turns out it wasn't God who was talking to me in the bathroom, as I said. It was the cigarette. Alternatively, it was God in the form of a cigarette. Those two alternatives, God and cigarette, define an axis because they have different connotations. I Jacquelyn am placed somewhere on this axis. My motion towards the one or the other happens along a second axis: time.

Imagine the time of my wanderings from God to the cigarette and back. You think it's a wave, like a whip going up and down, but it's not. It's actually a circle. Formerly, my circle had been like most people's circles, by which I mean, deformed and squished in places. Squishiness defines another axis. Squishiness is a measure of the time it takes unsquish back into a perfect circle. At that point, the circle may or may not shrink down to infinity and get pooped out.

What happens when two interlocked circles shrink down to infinity together?

Earlier this month, Walter wrote the *Sefer ha-Bechor*, which I translated from Hebrew into English. He wrote it for me because he saw a way to translate all my math into language. The context for it was that we'd been reading the Tales of Rabbi Nachman, a book which I'd found at Powell's in Portland. I was there with my dad, who was there for work. I remember eating this really delicious egg with soy sauce at this well-known Chinese garden in Portland, a gift to the city, sitting with my dad, in an octagon, freaking out about Nachman.

When I got home, Walter and I talked about it. I took the train into New York. We went to Eataly, that Mario Batali place in Manhattan. We had some really good gelato, and Walter said, "That Nachman story's pretty sweet, it's just like your story *Daphne and Apollo*." And I was blown away because I hadn't even thought of that. I'd just been thinking of my parents at the time.

Anyway, the story Walter referenced is a tale called *The Seven Beggars*. It goes like this. There's Beggar who is a Stutterer. This Stutterer gathers up all the True Deeds of Kindness, and brings them to the True Man of Kindness, who amalgamates all the

True Deeds of Kindness into a Day. The True Man of Kindness gives the Day to the Heart of the World, who is at one End of the World. Everything has a Heart. The Heart of the World has hands and feet and toenails. The Heart of the World gives the Day to the Spring, which flows from the Rock on Top of the Mountain at the other End of the World. Why? Because the Heart of the World and the Spring which flows from the Rock long for each other, yearn for each other, but can't get close to each other. This is because when the Heart of the World sets out for the Spring which flows from the Rock on the Top of the Mountain, he loses sight of the Top of the Mountain proportionately to how close he gets to it. If he loses sight of it completely, the world will disappear.

This is what the Stutterer explains.

“So,” said Walter, “every True Deed of Kindness gets Bundled up by the True Man of Kindness in the mode of Derivatives Trader. The resulting Bundle, the Day, is sold to the Heart of the World.”

“My current interpretation,” Jacquelyn said, “is that True Deeds of Kindness are circles. Will I smoke a cigarette or not? is an undecidable question for the time being because it's two circles tangled up.”

According to Nachman, the Stutterer isn't really a Stutterer. It's just that he doesn't ever want to say anything that isn't praises of God. These praises come out sometimes like riddles, sometimes like poems, sometimes like stories.

“I was thinking about circles just recently,” Walter said. “Did you know that numbers don't just correspond to things, but also to actions?”

“What do you mean?” I asked.

He said, “How do you find the area of a circle?”

“ $\pi r^2$ ,” I said.

“Sure, or you could divide the circle up into an infinite number of infinitesimally small squares and add up all their areas.”

“That would be the calculus approach,” I said.

“But they’re the same,” Walter said. “ $\pi$  is the number that corresponds to the action of dividing up a circle into an infinite number of tiny squares.”

“Well, obviously,” I said.

I Jacquelyn, in the year 2014, in possession of the ball, here at my desk, with great excitement, with overwhelming excitement. Here with my coffee, with my notebooks, with my box of papers, my little laptop oh you with whom I love to converse. With this ball, here, the size of a baby, nestled in my lap. I think I can explain it, I really think I can. It has to do with Walter.

Back in middle school and high school, when my parents were being idiots, I’d go to Walter’s house. His older brother would lecture us about the tritone, how it was banned by the Catholic Church for being demonic. That’s what the Dark Ages were all about, he said. In retrospect, it seems silly to extrapolate from a few surviving music theory texts to the practices of an entire society. But at the time, we responded to Walter’s brother’s anti-clericalism. As a senior in high school, that’s what Walter’s brother was all about: anti-clericalism. Religion acted as a frictional drag on society; he couldn't see the use in that. He was also really into reading about conspiracy theories online. The Platonic theory of music and form. He played guitar. We would talk about

the X-files, how the CIA dosed people with acid, how academia for decades had been covering up plant consciousness.

Maybe Walter's brother was into the tritone just because it was dissonant. It's true, banning its use does seem like a killjoy move on the part of the Church. But in general, Walter's brother liked to take contrary positions. He'd read a lot of philosophy about consciousness. He came to the conclusion that everything was conscious. But just because plants feel pain, he said, that doesn't mean we shouldn't eat them! There was something trustworthy about his take on things.

During his walks around Morestown in the middle of the night smoking weed, Walter's brother had noticed all these bizarre hums and buzzes and whines and frequencies of every sort, coming from street lamps, from the recycling center, from the elementary school, from the Wegman's, from the Lockheed Martin facility. He started recording them on his phone, and insisting Walter write a program that could analyze their frequencies. Eventually this turned into his rock opera project, which, like my story, was called *Daphne and Apollo*.

His plan was to stage a Dionysian festival at graduation. With money attained from busking in Philly, he and his friends would build a stage on the football field shaped like of a symmetrical cross that could spin around like helicopter blades, representing the real axis and the imaginary axis. Daphne and Apollo would be time and space co-determining each other like the wave function in quantum mechanics. This would be interpreted musically, which involved a lot of reverb and echo and phasing between the left and the right ears.

At the end of the concert, the school would explode. Little playing cards, like Magic Cards, with all the figures from AP US and AP European History, would rain down on the smoking ruins of that evil dusty gym. Goopy cookies would be strewn in the hallway across from the cafeteria. The blackboards would shatter. The bunsen burners would burst. It would be on a Saturday when no one was there. Then all the kids across the country would start blowing up their own schools. Walter's brother would get Walter to write a computer program so they could all go into a chatroom together and write a constitution and establish a shadow government and provide basic services.

Walter's brother and his friends wanted all of history to explode right here, so they played really crunchy music and made this drink with lemonade and iced tea and a little bit of Carmel Amaretto in it while they practiced their songs. They were seniors, as I said.

Meanwhile, Walter himself was still in the 8th grade, still going to Hebrew School two nights a week. One day, after a movie about Jews getting turned away from Cuba during WWII and before a discussion of how Nazirites don't cut their hair, the Rabbi said that the experience of God is like the experience you have at a rock concert. Walter could suddenly understand his brother. His brother himself thought Hebrew School was a game. The teachers talk to you as if you believe in God. And you have this secret: I don't know if I believe; or I don't believe; or I do believe, but I don't really understand. Maybe his brother was wrong, Walter thought.

It was around that same time, the 8th grade, that Walter started really working on his computer programs. He'd sit hunched over the keyboard of his desktop machine,

which he had wedged into a bookshelf. He was teaching himself about how functions and objects were the same thing, how to solve tasks by dividing up a problem into objects which can do actions on other objects, maybe in response to the user. He knew what it felt like for something to really make sense. In the shower, it became obvious to him that human memory had to be structured like a high dimensional network of associations, in which memories are both memories and triggers for memory. He'd figured that out pretty quickly. It's basically what they were trying to instill in him in school, only much more succinctly expressed.

He started wanting to go to services at synagogue. This was around the time of his bar mitzvah. He had started going to the cantor every other week to get lessons. He had vowed to stop masturbating, which for some reason felt wrong; he scoured the internet for ancient texts to determine if it was okay or not. What alarmed him was not so much the masturbation itself, but the way that he wanted to masturbate *a lot*.

Whenever he wanted to masturbate, he noticed that he often found ways to do it, taking opportunities to do it, taking risks for no reason at all. Masturbating in a bathroom stall at school. Once maybe even touching himself in the backset, but then he stopped. He felt really addicted to it. People talked about addictions a lot. He really knew what they meant, he thought.

His brother gave him a sheet of guitar chords and Walter recorded a few songs of his own. He expressed his uneasiness about masturbation in coded language involving fish for some reason. He had a place in his room where he always did it. It made him uneasy that it was pleasurable for no real reason. There was no sense of accomplishment in it. Besides it demanded a constant refinement of the experience, and he could see *that*

blowing up to infinity. We talked about this a lot when we first both started smoking cigarettes together in college. He noticed that what would happen was that he would be deep in writing a computer program, and get so enmeshed in its paradoxes that he would put himself in the state where *he would do anything* to get the thing working. So he'd unbutton his pants, and rebutton them, and go down and get some toilet paper, and there was one toilet paper that was dry and one that was wet, and the wet one was squeezed to moisten the right hand, and the dry one was to collect the semen. He knelt at the altar and was able to learn the secrets of people's bodies of all shapes and sizes from all over the world.

He would go onto the porn aggregator websites and open up tons of videos in tabs or download tons of little 10 or 30 or 60 second Quicktime clips, and go through them one by one, a few seconds at a time, closing/deleting them at whim, until he had whittled them down to one or two, and then one and only one. Then he would finish, having found what he was looking for. Then he'd go downstairs and flush everything. He'd wash his hands. He'd look in the mirror. He'd go back up the stairs, and reengage the computer screen, the device now having served as both a good cop and a bad cop. Almost immediately he'd figure out how to solve whatever problem he'd been working. He'd forget about time passing.

That was the great mystery, how the computer made time disappear. Sometimes he'd be typing so hard on the couch that his body would go completely numb and his whole consciousness would lift free from his body and start to float off. This always made him feel seasick. He'd go on defining functions for as long as he could, until he was about to vomit, and then he'd get up and walk in a rapid circle or play guitar or go

bother his brother if he was *really* stuck, or make a turkey and cheese sandwich in the kitchen.

Being your own master involves carefully setting goals for yourself. He decided that masturbation was unhealthy because the ideal brain should think calmly, seemingly effortlessly, elegantly, unhurriedly at every moment. The ideal brain's answer ought to be simple as a swerving brush stroke. None of this carrot and stick shit.

He had read a lot of online texts from the 70's and 80's and 90's, from the first computer age. He read from the collections of lore of the architects of the original operating systems, many of them now dead. They were written in the style of zen koans. There were tales of mystic computer programmers and system administrators who fixed bugs by esoteric intuition, who could fit rudimentary 3d graphics engines in less memory than could fit on a page of notebook paper. It was a fiercely independent culture. Many of them carried guns. Just like the anonymous craftsmen of the cathedrals of old, they gave their lives to build the computer world. They survive now intermixed, in myths, and canonically in the manual files they wrote to explain their creations.

Because the early computers were so viciously limited, the computer programmer of that age was envisioned as a samurai zen master, devoted to the sword, somehow managing to wring victory out of scarcity. Every problem was reduced to its absolute 1/0 essence. The resulting computer code could take weeks to understand, but once you got it running in your brain, your brain would explode. The very fact that such savvy underlay the commonest function made it all the more delicious.

But there was a kind of nihilism underneath it. The samurai is devoted to the sword, not to mankind and its pettiness. Shows of skill among the community were more highly prized than synthetic integrations of their discoveries with the rest of human history and culture. What I mean is that people were solving problems for bad people for the sake of the problem. They were living in the dream, waking up every morning and heading to the computer. The computer was basically the thing that, if you study the history of mathematics, everything has been leading up to.

The key insight of computer programming is the following: Doing something is a thing too. Like you can define a function, which is a mapping from one thing to another, from one set of 1's and 0's to another set of 1's and 0's. The function itself is also a set of 1's and 0's. Some function can take the 1's and 0's of other function. Code is data. Data is code. Both are 0's and 1's, which means their both just numbers. If you think about it, it's obvious that everything must be represented like this for computers to work.

That the computers worked was living proof of the zen master's faith. Today, the programs the masters wrote have been stitched together and reformulated and rewritten into the operating systems of today, like the stories of the Bible. Their wisdom lives on. Apprehending this, Walter decided to devote himself to the sword. He would search for the fiery droplet of God, which could multiply all things into simplicity. This was during the same time period of his being uncertain about masturbation, and just starting his bar mitzvah lessons.

His birthday was in May and his Torah portion was Naso. Naso contained lessons like if a woman was accused of adultery and denied it, she was supposed to atone for it by mixing dirt on the ground near the ark with water and drinking it. If she swelled up,

she was guilty. Walter, in his interpretation of this passage, talked about how rituals meet psychological needs. It's more about how you respond to being told to drink dirt water as opposed to the dirt. In Naso, there was also a lot of tallying exactly how many gold and silver plates and bowls and incense the 12 tribes donated to the priesthood.

Hebrew School was in the next town over. After the airplane wing incident, I started getting rides with Walter and Germy. At Hebrew School, they didn't teach us to read Hebrew, they only taught us the sounds of the letters. When we starting prepping for our bar and bat mitzvahs, the cantor had us memorize a set of symbols even more numerous than the letters. They were little wiggles that appeared put above letters of the Torah. Each one corresponded to a melodic fragment. You had to chant the words with the melodies.

Walter noticed that the only way he was ever able to actually sing the cantillation successfully was if he completely zoned out and forgot that he was chanting. This experience stayed with him. You have to imagine the Bible being sung whether it's poetry, fable, list, or law. Everything is melodized. Walter started reciting the shema in the morning. He starting believing in God. The functions being data and the data being functions thing had convinced him. The afterlife didn't seem so weird. He just sort of imagined himself in the computer, and decided it would be something like that.

Walter was embarrassed about talking about God, but observing him deal with these questions helped me a lot. I was dealing with my mother at the time. My mom thought that things everywhere were emanating at various frequencies, some hearable and others not. Strange frequencies were coming from where my dad worked, the

Lockheed Martin facility. With Walter, I could talk about my mom; he was also tuning into frequencies. He understood how weird voices might rise up, other voices rising in their wake, curling into place, in their shimmering altitude forming a matrix iterated so that some values never seemed to change, and other values flipped around them, a shimmering chord that seemed to resonate in and out of reality, modulating the air between bulky grey building and the flood lights and the fence and the gate and huge parking lot and weird metal things and the plastic and satellite dishes.

Our first theory was that these frequencies were helping the plants grow. It was a way of making them grow faster. This was Walter's brother's idea. He and his friends had been smoking weed and they wondered why music sounded so good and felt so good to play when you were high. They hypothesized that a certain kind of music sounds good when you're high because the marijuana plant wants to hear it. It seemed plausible. So maybe they were spraying the fields in Morsetown with music, the kind that the plants wanted to hear, needed to hear. We considered this theory seriously.

Or maybe the frequencies were designed to keep the plants at bay. We began from the premise that all of the government's decisions were explicable only if you considered that they might be waging a secret war against nature, that nature was intentionally attacking us. It was a real war. The plant overlords were communicating with our human overlords at the highest echelons. These negotiations were kept secret, however, so that people wouldn't become paranoid that their trees were going to fall on them in the night. This is why hippies and environmentalists were secretly aiding the enemy as claimed by conservatives. The Lockheed Martin facility was broadcasting frequencies that government employees and contract analysts had cooked up. The

noises made sure the plants all stayed together and grew lush only in their place, made sure they wouldn't creep into everyone's yards. Buzzst Buzzsst Buzzst every few minutes every few hours. The dogs in the kennel by the horse track would be freaking out and barking. The sound was a necessary evil, however. It was a kind of plant narcotic. Sometimes the plants would get tipsy on the sound of it, though, as all narcotics are stimulants in moderation. Enervated, they'd creep all the way into someone's yard during a hurricane and curl weirdly around the electrical wires.

What was actually generating the sound? In the Lockheed-Martin facility, there was a series of specially tuned bells. The bells were each tuned to a certain frequency that was a symbol in the language of the plants.

At the time, Walter was writing poetry like:

for some reason the cheese slicer moved its way into the drawer with the  
catbrush and the advil and some plastic utensils what home is this

often mom offers a sacrifice in cutting cheese, putting aside the first slice  
nearest to the plastic wrap. the gods establish a trust.

a single light left on watches over the fireplace room.

mrs meyers clean dry shower cleaner lavender calming orange scent on my  
fingers a silver laptop watching battlestar galactica the first time

the arching sound of a low flying plane the sun at two in the afternoon a  
breeze by the ears, smell of my gray leather jacket i used to look  
i saw a big fuzzy black and red ringed caterpillar on the gravel between the  
railroad tracks, but while i was tweeting he walked away.

you look back too soon and you've barely walked a few yards down the  
tracks from the road returning around a great distance traveled by gate

when you live your life zoomed in, you leave much of the higher  
organization to chance; it takes regular expeditions to attain small things.

the warm sun triggers the home feeling the lion feeling ill just stay here, no need to be moving on elsewhere.

birds fly from illuminated trees whose leaves they stack on each other rest against the wood and ground in bands with gravel in between

certain poetry like spam emails is taken in spatially; certain phrases become apparent: song of space; asias wise poets had the timespace interchange

a bird taught me a melody but i didnt teach it to anyone and the piano was louder than it a three note sequence up down left reiterating it

Morsetown was actually a swamp that had been cleared away in parts. It was ultimately water, even though lots of dirt and asphalt had been dumped on it to make it appear stable. In between the fields, there were enormous forests that were constantly on the verge of reclaiming the developed McMansion land. Sometimes only a ragtag empty lot would separate one of the magisterial lawns from the wilderness of the South Jersey swamp. The side of the highway was saturated with the Delaware which flows into the Atlantic, in summer at least; in winter, the place has more of an epic, Nordic feel. Christmas, for example, is canonical in terms of how winter goes down, weather and decorations. The houses are cozy and lit with multicolored lights and sometimes trees like 4 stories tall in a tuft together are strung up by lights in a spiral. They loom over Main St, starting around Thanksgiving, during the change in the administration of nature.

I lived in the McMansion part of town, where every edifice looked like it had been designed by drop down menus. Walking through it at twilight you could see the permutations of rectangle trapezoid shutter color garden or not circular drive or not bronze roof over dorm window or not stucco or brick fourfold threefold symmetry. Octagon. It was like walking through a Bach piece: variations on a theme.

My house was full of plastic objects and large spaces in between them. It was lived in mainly by my mother. My father worked for Lockheed Martin, the defense contractor which unceasingly blinked its red warning light at us from across the fields. My father would drive the 5 minutes home, following the roads which wiggled through the development, sometimes turning in on themselves around perfect little hemispheres of grass.

Walter and I had a hard time explaining what instability meant to us.

All you had to do was select some random stimulus, like a stuccoed ceiling, and let your mind divide the ceiling in two along its contours, lassoing a section. You would see a flash. The one piece separate from the surrounding area. Like a lightning bolt. When you got good, you could practice switching to inverse interpretations and even get to animating your interpretations. Eventually you stopped seeing outlines, and you could get good high resolution visual images. A master could use any gritty surface as a portable screen to the lower levels of his organization.

We saw these things. Just open up an image in Photoshop and apply a filter. We knew the names of the filters, and the algorithms they employed, why and how they worked, and our eyes calculated what they looked like. We turned them to inner purposes. By running our interpretive practices on random data, we were able to transform a portion of the world into a mirror in which could see the unchanging future. Even bathroom tiles, we stared at them. Studying the gravel, the hooves of horses, the falling of rose petals.

So, I mean: we could see instability everywhere. We went out walking in the bosom of autumn and saw the burgundy and fools gold and primary green and yellow

and fire of the trees. And turning this around ninety degrees, we found a new empathy; the forest extends into our brains. We too strove to inhibit overwhelming stimuli like the forest inhibits sunlight streaming through a canopy.

We organized our perceptions relative to one another. They carve out a space of their own with a certain structure. The dimensions of this structure correspond to those superperceptions which serve as reference points for other perceptions. By scooping them out of the water as they pass by, we are able to give name and face to these superperceptions. These things glow as the result of various internal organizational problems of the "I". The newly forged symbols are dropped into a churning vat which lies beyond the helpful fairy. Inside, the symbols connect up along their natural joints. The word rose spoken by my mother on a certain night after reading Callimachus; staring into the fire, taken with a cold, outside on the bricks; a friend leaning against a tree outside the middle school--might for someone else. With each beat, a symbol is ejected and hovers in the air above us. It rotates slightly and trembles with a doubt that signifies a surging consciousness overstepping its boundaries. The problem scooper scoops the problem into a little basket and swings it from the right to the left, from doubt to certainty. The problem is identified with the other problems in the basket in a chain of emanations that points back to the good. The arm of the scooper resets, and it's ready to catch the next symbol when the beat bursts it out of us.

The spellcaster conjures up this energy, which, sharpened by the half-silvered mirrors of the mind, diverts half the flow by ninety degrees, causing subtle cataclysms which realign the courses of the lakes, streams, and reservoirs within us. Terror and anxiety are twisted into a paradox, an icon. Taunts and remorse are heard by a dizzy

child is suspended above the crowd. My problem scooper takes the paradoxes and disposes of them in a legitimate way. In the basket. My problem scooper with its arm orders them so that they're all facing front. Other people have different methods.

We shared certain nightmares. Floating on a piece of angular drift metal far above the earth, drifting close to a jagged hole in an enormous sphere which encloses the earth. The sun lies outside, certainty, death? My family is floating on a nearby piece of scrap. Is it them who are about to disappear through the hole into the stars, or is it me, leaving them behind? Can one propel oneself in space?

I (Jacquelyn) remember I kept writing these scenes between Cory and me when I was writing *Jacquelyn's Baby*. The ones I didn't put in the story. The ones where we'd be talking to each other for hours and hours. Pacing back and forth from the kitchen to the bedroom, having these conversations in which we just agreed with each other for four hours over the most pointless things. I mean, what's the worst case scenario. You have to talk it out.

People hurt. It comes as a surprise. Then another person was found to have the same hurt. People were warned. They started worrying about hurting in that way. I'm no fool. The pain that we feel is very complex. It has a whole spectrum of harmonics, each frequency of which is the trace of a pain felt some time in our evolutionary history. The particular type of pain we feel is a reminder of the world we destroyed in order to make it better by remembering it. This is why we shouldn't hope to deaden our pain. We promised the animals and the plants: today you die, tomorrow you will rise again. Trust us. We were able to conquer everybody because we humans had a coding scheme which

we called language, which the rest of nature was unable to learn. This is why we always feel like we're putting one over on the animals. We learned to lie. We promised to tell the truth at some point.

Our I doesn't come from us. It comes from being driven to search through the world for the signal of ourselves. An other self. One not subject to our own limitations. They can ruffle through all our data and reconstruct us. Because this self isn't us. We can imagine it perfect as we are not perfect. But ourselves, but completed. Since this being knows what is good for us, we seek it out.

I remember when I was ten years old. I was in the passenger seat of the car, my dad was driving. We were in South Jersey on some backroad somewhere. My dad likes to take backroads. He will often disappear when you're not looking because he is exploring. There are trees all around this backroad, and through the trees I can see a big field to the left. There is a large boxy building that says Comcast on it. Now we'd had a computer in the house. It ran Windows 3.11, a Packard-Bell computer. We had dial-up. But when we moved to our new house, which we built, the day we moved in, I was still at the elementary school—there was a snow-storm that day—things had gotten complicated with the move—we'd gotten a new computer, a beige tower that somehow seemed sleek, a Dell computer—this was in the heyday of Dell computers—it ran Windows 98. And we became one of the few families that had cable internet at the time, which meant Comcast. So we were driving by the Comcast building, and my dad was explaining what Comcast was. And in the course of this conversation, he turned to me and said something like "This is one of the greatest times to be alive," or "This is maybe the greatest time to be alive," or "I wouldn't want to be alive in any other time," or "You

are going to grow up in an amazing world, a world even better than my own world," or "You are alive at the greatest time to be alive," or "The cold war is over," or "Computers," or "No wars," or "This stuff is so cool!" I don't remember if he said, "You are so lucky," or "Lucky to be growing up in this world."

I (Jacquelyn) remember getting in trouble for going to the bathroom at school. I went in and some girls were being like boys and wetting paper towels and throwing them onto the ceiling. I remember going in and feeling a little swagger, like, "I know you, carry on, not going to get involved, not going to approve." I went into the stall to pee, laughing. Then the authorities came in and led the other girls out, and I just stayed in the stall. Nervous. And they asked, "Is anyone else in there?" And they said, "Yeah, she is." And they made me come out. And I explained I just happened to be in there, but no one believed me. I remember them about to call my mom, and me begging them not to. I'll do anything! I remember one time in middle school I was in the zone being very funny. They gave us soapy sponges to wipe our own tables with, and there was a big dude next to me, and in an inspired moment, I yelled, "Happy birthday!" And I took the sponge and slammed it into his face, and the soap got into his eyes, and it was really bad. I got in huge trouble. Mom was called. In my room, she cornered me, and literally threw me onto the bed so that I bounced. I've never been so afraid in my life. She was yelling, "What is wrong with you?" I had no idea what was wrong with me. Later on, she asked me more quietly, "How could you do that?" I answered honestly. The sense of her question was like, "How do you have the guts to do something like that?" She asked it almost reverently, really asking, not rhetorically, as if she wanted to know the source of

my secret power. I said, "I mean, what's the worse that could happen, they're not going to kill me!"

The unwilling philosopher asks the question, "What is the rule?" Is this because she grew up in a household which was taped over with rules or because she grew up in a household which was rule-averse? At the very least what became clear early on was what was expected was the fulfillment of the letter of the law. These rules existed because they had to be there. There was no other way around it. No one can see your insides, because if even your parents can't see your insides, then it really must be true that no one can see your insides. So you have to follow a rule. It comes to pass that the only way we can show love to one another is by acquiescing to a rule. Executing this dance we burn with an invisible, concealed love, a love that at the bottom of things wishes to tear down those rules. This is the monster they warned the child about. This is the reason the rules were laid down. This is what was to be kept at bay! If it's true, then it's settled. Life and all its beauty, the beauty of that mode of perception which gently removes the rules from your eyes—as when in the dark world underneath her hands, you see all your memories in their proper shapes, vibrating intensely with love; and at last, preparing yourself wordlessly, you let them fill with cool fire the whole cavern of your mind—, is extinguished, and death is a foregone conclusion.

Look Jacquelyn, Walter would say to me. Your mind is so magnificently large. It's too unbelievable to you that other people don't have minds like yours so you make your largeness invisible to yourself. You register the invisibility of yourself as danger and lean on rules like on the railing of a bridge over a dam. You know this. Will you see the glint in my eye, and see the rule as a beautiful delicate structure, like a slender candelabra,

golden stalks dangling their leaves down the whole length of the pillar of flowers that hangs between them?

At the end of high school, Walter, Walter's brother, and I would go out into the wheat fields near the battleship where the plane came down in a perfect diagonal on that super weird day that reminded everyone of September 11 at the time. We'd light a mosquito repellent candle, sit near the lone tree, and smoke weed. We'd look at the stars and talk about collapsing into black holes, feeling like we were getting sucked into something way beyond us.

Walter had a solution to all our problems, he said. A bell, he said. A bell, I said? A Liberty Bell, he said. Hah. I'm going to write a computer program. You'll give it some number  $n$ , and it will spit out the design of a bell that corresponds to that number. Every number will be associated with a certain three dimensional bell. Maybe in an obvious way it'll be encoded in the height of the bell, or the centroid of the inside of the bell or something... The point is, when you ring the bell, the vibrations of the skirt of the bell will be vibrating against the air molecules; the skirt of the bell will be angled so that the vibrations are reflected by the other side of the bell in just the right way. Along the skirt of the bell, which is curved hyperbolically at the end, we can represent the number line in length and curvature. The crazy curve outwards of the skirt at the end is like going to infinity. We reflect the number line against itself in 3 dimensions inside the bell with air by whacking the bell. The air calculates the prime factors of the number corresponding to the bell. The bell rings. We hear all these notes, we hear this chord. We record it with out microphones, I'll put it on my laptop, and we can do the Fourier Transform of it. The

frequencies will be the prime factors corresponding the number that corresponded to the bell. And the loudness of the frequencies will be how many of that prime factor there is. Like 12 is: 2,2,3. Frequency 2, Amplitude 2. Frequency 3, Amplitude 1. These bells, said Walter, are going to change everything.

The first and the last symbol appeared after a morning of purification. I had showered, and I had coffee. I had gone for my walk. I went to the bathroom. I went for another walk. I went to the bathroom again, I drank some coffee, I drank some water, I packed my bag, and I got into the car, and starting driving up 295. The morning had been slow. Now it was already almost evening. There was a sense of panic. The sky was very gray. I was driving up 295, and out of the highway I saw a couple embracing on the overpass.

I kept driving. I had only seem them for an instant. The kid was wearing jeans and a grey sweatshirt. The girl had blonde hair that was confused by the wind. I kept driving and a flight of birds burst out of the forest to the left into the sky. A song, You've Made Me So Very Happy, on the radio. The sun behind me spread from the corner of my left eye. And I drove up 295, and I turned into Hamilton station. On the way, despite my purification, or perhaps because of my purification, I could barely sit right, I had to sit on my left cheek, my bladder was bursting.

One had to keep up a steady momentum to hold up under the onslaught—the stop signs and the ticket machine had to be densified, made more goal oriented, forward momentumed. I horse-swaggered it down the concrete spiral stairs, and ran over to the terminal, and went into the bathroom, and found that I had a lot of very clear pee, but

that I had a lot of trouble controlling the pee, it kept dying out, and stopping and starting as if it was too much to drain at once. Something was flummoxed. I walked around for a while and then got on the train. I sat down and put my feet up on the rail. I was in the brown cushioned NJ transit train, the older one. It was unusually crowded. I realized that I had to pee again. I would have to hold it until New York.

Nature privileges no time or place over any other. Every observer is given a fair shot. This is God's playing field. All that can be known can be known right now. There's a story, something Walter told me happened to his parents. His mom and dad were coming home on the train from some event. They'd just gone up for the day. And they were rolling out of Penn Station. And his mom was across the aisle with some people and his dad was sitting next to this guy, who wasn't wearing shoes and was reading from some book, and sort of humming to himself. But he was dressed basically normally, he had a backpack. He kept humming more and more loudly and chanting underneath his breathing, and rocking back and forth more and more wildly. And when some people cleared off, his dad snuck past him—he'd been sitting on the far side—and went to join his mom. And then it was quiet for a while. They forgot about the guy basically as they were reading. But then they noticed that he'd gotten down into the aisle and was kneeling and chanting and rocking. Then they came to the Princeton Junction stop. My parents were looking at all the people leaving. When they looked back, the guy was gone. He'd just walked off, and left his book and backpack and shoes and all his worldly possessions. Did that guy just walk off? Yeah, he was reading and chanting to himself and then he just walked off. I think he reached enlightenment! Well, good for him. What

was he reading? I don't know. A conductor happened to be going past, and they stopped her and told her what had happened. The lady said she guessed she had to do something with the backpack, maybe they could leave his things at Princeton Junction for him if he wanted them back.

Dreams about symbols in subway stations, trying to get back from school—in the station my computer is stolen—and then I return to school, but a busy city has grown up within it. Students walk up two gently curving staircases of marble that sweep up in a wide arc. Balconies with very modern railings allow one to visit classrooms without ever touching the ground; at the lower levels the city is able to ease in and create huge landmarks all made of stone and metal that look like scholar's stones. Scholars circulate overhead, and weave in and out like vines mingling with electrical wire. We meet in luxurious bathrooms in a various states of disrepair; the same is duplicated underground.

I woke from the dream when the tenor of the light changed.

One of the most important symbols in my life, one which is always being renewed, is the joyous flickering dance of the Hebrew Alphabet in this animated version of the Hannukah story in Walter's grandmother's apartment. The Jewish Maccabees fend off the Greek invaders, who try to replace the aleph bet which dance like candle flames with the cold, hard, angular, golden Greek letters. I stored up that moment in a box for later consumption. I put the moment in a box with a certain seal, so that when the box was uncovered, I would break the seal and the symbol would pop out. In addition, I would know that I had been there before, and by examining its antiquity and

the register of all the times I had unsealed and resealed the box, I could establish the authenticity of the symbol as a particular crucial location in the natural joints of my world. In the next moment, the symbol is already a shadow of itself; the box had been resealed and returned. You forget completely what you were talking about but the seal is spelled. It automatically renews itself, even when its carried away. No need to worry.

Normally, we might say, an event like one of your close friends dying of a seizure would divert your life course in notable ways. If you open yourself up to and comprehend the nature of the seizure and the operation which failed to fix the brain and killed it instead, then you've dug around something buried that will totally change your perceptions. Something about the shape of the time-space interchange as it has been set up at the various levels of organization generates a current that carries you away as you're still digging. You fail to attain the perception which was hidden in the sand. You're unable to make different headlines jump out at you, and see the spread of items around the globe flowing in a certain familiar way.

there was a lake  
everything was quiet  
the wind moved on the water  
and the light was scattered  
and the waves on the lake  
by interference  
attained the frenetic buzz  
of video:  
what sights cannot be seen  
by a lazy fisherman  
below a mountain  
which always hides itself?

In the coming years, we will reformulate all of science in the language of integer arithmetic. We will work backwards from the physics of the observable world to the physics of numbers themselves. The algorithm will die because it is an unverifiable mode of analysis. Everything will be computed like we compute the area of a circle, by multiplying by a question represented by an infinite number that encodes the operator that gives the answer to the question approximated to whatever accuracy you desire. No longer will we have to approximate large systems by neglecting interactions. Complicated systems of entanglement and influence across time and space will, by the application of a magic number, be transformed into simple unentangled and independently acting systems; simple systems will be translated into complex entangled ones by the opposite transformation. Each transformation will represent a question and an answer.

This will be done by using the structure of real world data to triangulate a stretch of prime numbers using the Riemann Zeta function; the place where the rhythm of the spacing of the prime numbers encodes the real world data will tell us which primes and composites to look into, in order to answer all questions we might have about the data. All possible data is stored everywhere this way. The universe is immersed in a cloud of its own representation: after all, it's its representations that tell it how to move, and it tells its representations how to move.

This is the promise and the hope of the Pyramids. Here at the Center for Sonic Inquiry, our mathematicians labor every day to peer behind nature's curtain, but we need your support. This is why I Jacquelyn Ball have been writing, I who have been granted this glowing white ball to poop out by divine grace. I have to thank my friend

Walter. As soon as I saw it, I knew that it was my own function. It happened to be a very large number, and the very large number was the representation of an infinite rule. It collapsed under its own weight into a finite thing. It converged out of me with a FOOMP. Infinity manifested as a sphere in 3 space. It was a message from the higher harmonics associated with my addiction to cigarettes. It all makes sense. Then when I factorized it, I mean, turned it inside out, there was this woman. This woman was the experience associated with the representation of my experience. Just like I can take the Fourier transform of my experience, I can also take the inverse Fourier transform, and get someone else's experience whose Fourier transform is my own experience.

This was my experience, my experience of the representation of my experience as a thing which was an experience. Because it was both an experience and a thing and me, I knew it was real. So I wrote down my thoughts as they came to me. I knew that the rhythm of my thoughts in the aftermath of such an experience would be more valuable to future scientists than a more considered, polished reflection. In fact, it was only yesterday that I pooped out the ball.

I was only just talking to Kellog. I still feel bad about Kellog.

The map of Morestown, I realized, is the key. When I walked around town, I had the same thoughts I always had, but not in the natural order of their progression. They came in the order of the places I walked to, jumbled up because so many thoughts were overlaid in the same spot. I was so regular. Something in the lone tree in the grass by the public works building, the streetlight by the railroad tracks near the low gate that's locked at night.

I went home to New Jersey  
 full of learned ignorance:  
 Nicholas of Cusa.

Growing up in the suburbs,  
 it was easy not to believe in God.

Especially when our enemies  
 the creationists  
 the Republicans  
 war mongerers  
 destroying the country  
 seemed so retarded  
 that any association with them  
 was cause for suspicion.

He thought, if I could just convince  
 her to believe in God  
 then I would have accomplished everything!

He thought, I find that I am a harsher and better critic  
 when I imagine convincing her.

After all, I can be convinced of anything.

I might very well believe in God  
 but I won't be satisfied until  
 I convinced her too.

I read approvingly  
 things of a divine nature.

In the back of my mind, I think:  
 no, but *she* won't buy this.

Then I was imagining actually convincing her.

I was filled with this huge sadness.

To convince ourselves  
 we would have to convince our child selves first.

Who could have known how much was up in the air  
 at the hour of our births?

When we smoked in the morning,  
Walter's brother said a prayer.

Well. Now seems the time to ask the question. What has been the motive underlying all your recent actions? Well, Jacquelyn? Do you remember yourself not too many hours ago trudging up an incline in the snow from the elementary school, reflecting intermittently on the Descartes you were reading? You remember being convinced that all there was was this present moment—you had withdrawn to some extent from your senses.

There are times in the winter when night brightens to night, and you find yourself on the couch again. A tree laden with snow has fallen with full arms against the window. Leaving the fire, you go outside and stand in a clearing in the woods. The snow gets in your hair. The sky is a red grey. The branches dark. The bright clear snow is a very light substance.

You put the teacup down on a surface cleared by your boot, and stare fixedly at the snowy trees. You lack any clear and distinct idea of your recent thoughts and actions. Your memories are like gems drawn from a bag from time to time blindly.

It's not too surprising that it's disorienting for you now to think of this present moment as everything that there is. After all here you're only sixteen. You remember just five minutes ago ducking into a gateway made of a low snow bent tree branch and emerging into a small cathedral that was quite unexpected.

Your gems point towards their siblings who you don't possess. You were trudging insensitive of the icy wind on your frozen hair. You had been following a very good

progression of thoughts, now obscure. What was bugging you was that it seemed as if much that was good had been lost.

You look out. What you see is made of the past, including your body and your brain. But those are only what are nearest to you. Other parts of your past and future are scattered around in the acts of the things around you. You have imagined a detective who gathers up and saves all trace of you. This is certainly possible, indeed, quite likely. Such a detective might know more about you than you yourself know. You seek the detective out even as the detective seeks you out; because the detective is your mirror image. If the detective were not your mirror image, this detective wouldn't be *your* detective, because every image has a detective. You know the detective seeks you out because you seek out the detective.

You know such a detective is trying to detect you because you have detected in the world a more perfect version of your, which you call your ideal self. You could have only obtained this ideal from detecting the trace of a detective who by following you around is able to show you patterns in your life that you couldn't have noticed on your own. The desirability of your ideal self is the trace of the detective looking for you. It's the detective's looking for it that makes it ideal.

Only those things have a God seek out a God. It may be that the ducks and trees have a God, which is what they are always impelled towards. "God" is the password of the humans. All the other things seek out a God that is like them, but only humans seek out a God that's larger than themselves. It is only people who imagine a God more general than themselves.

God is the password of all those who seek themselves.

Even as it was happening, I knew what I was doing. I mean, to Kellog. In the car. But my thoughts were so loud that I couldn't articulate that I knew it was happening, by means of a modulation of my voice, for example. Normally you can allay people's fears about what you're saying by a certain modulation in the voice that distinguishes between tentative and not-tentative conclusions. This is incorporated into everyday speech by the use of "like" as an all purpose particle that can appear anywhere in a sentence and which marks a stance of tentativeness on the part of the speaker towards the choice of words they're using. But I was so wrapped up in the ball, that I was just staring at my feet on the dashboard, my mouth motoring on like a crazy person. Poor Kellog was there beside me, nodding, looking terrified around the eyes, as I got louder and louder. And the ball was right there on my lap. What was she to say? I had permission to talk forever, because I had the ball. The ball was real; it was mine; and if someone questioned my authority to interpret it, then I could just point out that I pooped it out. I say, I held her hostage. Kelloggggg. Naturally she wanted to go the pet store to cheer herself up because that's the place where lovers go to hold hands and look at rabbits and ferrets before going to eat their dinner, and that's a place where the warmer mysteries of life are exchanged. The one's that don't involve speaking. I should send this document to Kellog. What I wanted to say to her at the time, was that: there's a difference when you're speaking for all time. It means you have to include your errors along with the messages, so that the message can be checked against the errors. When we have errors in common, we can factor ourselves out. The revelation of the the true rhythm of the human mind is terrifying when stated plainly by finite beings working before the Platonic Scrying Portal

Mirror Ring Sphere is operationalized. Eventually it will be applied to a person, who will then poops out its tangible factorization. The Center for Sonic Inquiry's technique will be so general that the same infinite numerical operator will be applied to all matter, to all bosonic and fermionic lattices in general. I have only to delve into my own past in order to discover the sequence of questions that I asked in my life that constrained my possibilities in such a way that the number I became, factorized into me experiencing my own factorized representation from the point of view of a sphere I could touch. Then you can ask the same questions, and join me. Nice. I'll have to move all this actual campaign stuff to a separate document for later.

THE BOOK OF THOTH  
2014

now ahura was the wife of  
nefer-ka-ptah  
their child was merab  
he was registered  
in the house of life  
by the scribes

nefer-ka-ptah  
was the son of the king  
and cared for nothing  
but to read the records  
every day  
of ancient times  
in the house of life

he went to pray  
and on the wall  
saw the inscriptions  
reading them  
forgot the gods  
forgot the priests  
forgot

nefer-ka-ptah  
heard laughter behind him

why do you laugh at me?

it was a priest

he said:  
because you're reading  
worthless writing  
if you want to read writing  
worth the reading  
I will tell you where the book of thoth  
lies hid

thoth wrote the book  
with his own hand  
and in it  
is all the magic of the world

for he is the measurer and recorder of time  
 what will be what was and what is  
 is revealed through him;  
 through him songs harmonize with strings

if the first page of the book of thoth you read  
 you will enchant  
 the sky the earth the abyss the mountains and the sea  
 the language of birds will be yours  
 and what the creeping things are saying  
 and the fish will speak  
 from the depths of the sea

it's second page  
 brings you back to earth  
 if you are dead  
 on it's second page  
 the sun will shine  
 with the moon beside it  
 and the stars  
 and the shapes of gods

nefer-ka-ptah said:  
 by the life of the king  
 that book shall be mine!

what is you desire?  
 i will do it for thee

here is what you must do:

provide for my death  
 my funeral  
 bury me as a rich man  
 with many mourners  
 offerings  
 libations  
 incense  
 rest my soul  
 in the fields of aalu  
 one hundred pieces of silver  
 spend upon me  
 put me in the ground

nefer-ka-ptah  
 counted out the pieces

put the silver in the hands of the priest

the book of thoth  
if you want it  
it's at koptos  
in the middle of the river

in the middle of the river  
is an iron box  
and in the iron box  
is a box of bronze  
and in the box of bronze  
there's a sycamore box  
and in the box of sycamore  
there's a box of ivory and ebony  
and in the box of ivory and ebony  
there's a silver box  
and in the box of silver  
is a box of gold  
and in the golden box  
is the book of thoth

round it are twisted snakes  
scorpions  
and crawling things

and a snake that no man can kill

nefer-ka-ptah  
his joy was great  
he ran to ahura his wife

she cried: forget this journey!  
for grief awaits you;  
she laid her hand on him;  
he broke away

nefer-ka-ptah  
he went to the king  
his father  
on the royal barge  
he sailed to the south

ahura, his wife  
merab, his son  
they came with him

—

isis  
 her priests came down to meet them  
 on the shore of koptos  
 an ox a goose a libation of wine  
 for four days  
 to isis  
 they sacrificed these things

nefer-ka-ptah  
 behold now  
 isis speaks  
 he heard them sing:

come to thy temple  
 come to thy temple oh an!  
 come to thy temple for thine enemies are not  
 behold the excellent sistrum-bearer  
 come to thy temple  
 I love thee! do not depart from me!  
 behold hunuu the beautiful one  
 come to thy temple immediately  
 come to thy temple immediately  
 behold my heart which grieves for thee  
 behold me seeking thee  
 I am searching for thee  
 to behold thee  
 prevented from beholding thee  
 prevented from beholding thee oh an!  
 it is blessed to behold thee  
 come to the one who loves thee!  
 come to the one who loves thee!  
 oh thou who art beautiful, deceased  
 come to thy temple—

isis, she spoke:  
 no mortal man hath ever me unveiled

her hair on her neck  
 her crown of flowers  
 on her forehead an orb like a mirror  
 like the moon  
 vipers coiled around her head  
 sheaves of grain

her garment was white  
 and red and yellow like a crocus  
 she wore a black robe  
 and glittering stars were embroidered on it  
 in her right hand  
 she held a sistrum  
 in her left  
 a boat, from which the head of a snake rose  
 her shoes were woven from palm trees  
 their leaves covered her immortal feet

nefer-ka-ptah  
 on the fifth day  
 isis sent to him her priest  
 together they made by art  
 a boat  
 and men  
 and poles and ropes and weights  
 and small cords and hooks  
 and tackle—

they sank the boat  
 under the water;  
 the men they made  
 came alive  
 under the water  
 they used the ropes and poles  
 and began to move;  
 they moved along the floor of the deep

nefer-ka-ptah  
 called to them:  
 workmen  
 workmen  
 work for me!

nefer-ka-ptah  
 he sailed away  
 he followed his workmen:  
 he above, on the royal barge,  
 and they below

ahura on the shore  
 she watched and waited  
 she knew  
 what is sorrowful

in what's to come

for three days  
the workmen toiled  
on the third day they ceased  
below the waters  
where they ceased  
the book of thoth lay hidden

nefer-ka-ptah  
came out of the shade  
onto the deck  
dumped sand out of the barge  
made a gap in the water  
he separated the waters  
with an island of sand

in their midst  
was an iron box  
and a snake  
that no man can kill

nefer-ka-ptah  
rose and cried:  
ahhhhhhhhhhhhh  
a loud and terrible cry

when his voice was still  
the snake was too

nefer-ka-ptah  
rushed toward the snake  
and with his blade  
severed its head  
which from the body  
flung far  
came back  
to reattach  
flung far again  
nefer-ka-ptah  
he took the head  
rubbed sand into its wound  
between the neck and the head  
so that they could not come back together again

nefer-ka-ptah said:

this is how one kills immortal things

nefer-ka-ptah  
 he sought the box  
 in the gap in the sand  
 in the middle of the river  
 while the crawling things watched

in the iron box  
 there was a box of bronze  
 and in the box of bronze  
 there was a sycamore box  
 and in the sycamore box  
 there was a box of ivory and ebony  
 and in the box of ivory and ebony  
 there was a box of silver  
 and in the box of silver  
 there was box of gold  
 and in the gold box  
 was the book of thoth

nefer-ka-ptah  
 he read a page  
 the sky the earth the abyss the mountains and the sea  
 were enchanted  
 the language of birds fish and beasts  
 he read a page  
 the sun was shining in the sky  
 the moon and the stars  
 the shapes of the gods  
 the fish came to meet him  
 from the depths of the sea

so—  
 what the priest said was true

workmen, workmen!  
 he cried  
 take me home  
 to ahura at koptos  
 for there she is sitting  
 starving herself  
 since I am away

nefer-ka-ptah  
 on the shore

he went to ahura

read a page, he said  
 from the book of thoth  
 she read a page  
 the sky the earth the abyss  
 were enchanted  
 and the mountains and the sea  
 the birds spoke to her  
 the fish and the beasts  
 on the second page  
 the sun was shining in the sky  
 and the moon and the stars  
 and the shapes of the gods  
 and the fish came up  
 from the depths of the sea

nefer-ka-ptah  
 was loath to wait

he called for papyrus  
 and a cup of beer

he dipped his pen into the ink  
 and wrote the spells  
 that thoth had hidden there

nefer-ka-ptah  
 he took his cup of beer  
 and washed the papyrus in it  
 the ink ran off

nefer-ka-ptah  
 he drank the beer  
 so that the spells were within him

doing this,  
 he sailed away  
 on the royal barge  
 merab his son  
 ahura his wife—  
 they were with him

—

thoth

dipping his beak into the river  
 discovered the loss of his book  
 taken from its hiding place  
 where he left it  
 under the waves

he stalked along the shore  
 with his memories

when thoth wrote his book  
 heaven's beauty was worth the pain  
 the god who was yet unknown  
 and the majesty of night  
 the web of rapid light  
 the mysteries that move in heaven  
 all were ignorant;  
 fear succeeded fear  
 searching, all things searched incessantly

when thoth wrote his book  
 he engraved what he knew on stone  
 yet hid things mostly  
 keeping silence  
 so that every younger age  
 might seek anew

while the gods kept watch  
 he mounted to the stars  
 hiding his book away

he said:  
 o you who have been made  
 by immortal hands  
 free from decay  
 incorrupt by time—  
 become unseeable  
 to every one  
 whose feet walk upon the earth  
 until old heaven brings forth instruments for you:  
 the souls—

for that time  
 thoth hid his book away

when nature was barren  
 when the heavenly patrol

reported to their king  
 the lethargy of things  
 the time had come to awaken the world  
 to what the future brings

the king brought forth a woman  
 who gave birth to the world

he mingled his breath with knowing fire  
 and set the two with words of power  
 and from the compost smiled a substance  
 pure subtle and clear

so clear the king alone could see it—  
 and from this substance, for bodies,  
 he fashioned souls

oh thoth  
 what did the souls do then?

they took the blend of matter  
 the mixture of the father  
 to find out from what it was composed  
 but this was not an easy thing for them to know

becoming flesh  
 they plunged into despair  
 condemned they wailed  
 hissing like snakes  
 eyes shedding tears

the king saw the souls as they were entering bodies

and what are those? he asked  
 to thoth perched at his side

which?

the ones crying out!

they were crying:  
 no longer shall our eyes behold our souls!  
 when through these watery spheres our eyes  
 we see the stars of heaven now small and tiny—  
 sentence has been passed on us  
 the gift of real sight has not been given

it has not been permitted for us to see without light—  
 oh these are windows, not eyes!  
 oh set us free!

and who are they? asked the king  
 turning to thoth  
 those are humans, he replied

humans, said the king  
 inquisitive eyes  
 a tongue which speaks  
 eavesdroppers  
 they perfume themselves  
 they will use the full power of their touch on all things

tell me thoth,  
 the king said—  
 is it good to leave them without cares?  
 those who in the future will gaze upon  
 the fairest mysteries of nature?  
 is it good that they should be without grief,  
 those whose thoughts in the days to come  
 will reach mysteries beyond the earth?

they will dig up the roots of plants  
 they will study their juices  
 they will observe the stones  
 they will dissect the animals  
 they will dissect themselves  
 they will stretch their hands even to the sea  
 and cutting self-grown forests will ferry each other across her  
 they will seek out the inner nature of the holy spaces  
 upon which no foot may tread  
 and chase after them into the great space  
 to observe the motion of the heavens

yet these will be their minor acts:  
 for they will track out the night, even the night, the farthest night of all!

is it good for them to be free from pain  
 to be free from terror  
 to live a life free from care?  
 will they not rush up to heaven  
 will they not reach out to the elements themselves?

thoth, said the king—

here's what you'll do:  
 teach them to long to plan  
 yet fear their failure  
 balance their souls  
 with desires griefs and empty hopes  
 let loves in quick succession beat their souls  
 let the sweet bait of their success draw them into struggle  
 let fever lay its hand on them  
 let them lose heart  
 let them submit desire to discipline

they must be tamed;  
 for one day everything will be theirs

so thoth devised an instrument  
 mysterious  
 possessed of sight that cannot err  
 which cannot be escaped  
 an instrument which binds together all that's done

thoth  
 master of the heart and mind  
 thoth  
 soul of becoming  
 thoth  
 the tongue of ra  
 lord of sacred speech  
 twice great  
 thrice great  
 scribe of the gods  
 in the halls of books,  
 the house of the net  
 which the dead regard with horror  
 whose poles and ropes and weights  
 and small cords and hooks  
 each have their name  
 the dead are obliged to learn  
 if they wish to escape  
 and use the net  
 to catch their own food  
 instead of being caught themselves  
 by those who lay snares

thoth  
 he stalked along the shore  
 with his memories

his book concealed no more

—

nefer-ka-ptah  
and his royal barge  
ahura his wife  
and merab his son  
sailed smoothly down the river home

from under the awning  
in the shade  
merab ran into the sunlight  
to the edge of the barge he ran  
leaned over the side of it  
was watching the water  
he was watching the water  
it drew him in  
and silently he fell  
merab was drowned

the people raised a great cry  
but they could not save him  
nefer-ka-ptah  
rushed from the cabin  
and spoke words of power over the water  
and the body of merab rose to surface  
and the workmen dragged it onto the deck—  
placing his hand on his son's brow  
nefer-ka-ptah  
spoke more words  
and so great was his power  
that the dead child spoke  
and told him all that had happened:  
he told him thoth was seeking his book

to koptos they returned  
that merab might be buried there

then slowly they went back north  
until they reached the place where merab fell

ahura shielding her eyes  
came from the shade  
and leaned over the side  
and stared into the water

where her son had fallen  
and the water drew her in  
and she was drowned

the people raised a great cry  
but they could not save her  
nefer-ka-ptah  
rushed from the cabin  
and spoke words of power over the water  
and the body of ahura rose to the surface  
and the workmen dragged it onto the deck  
and placing his hand on his wife's brow  
nefer-ka-ptah  
spoke more words  
and so great was his power  
that his dead wife spoke  
and told him all that had happened:  
that thoth was seeking his book

to koptos they returned  
that ahura might buried there  
then slowly they went back north  
until they reached the place where ahura fell  
nefer-ka-ptah  
shielding his eyes  
came from the shade of the awning  
and leaned over the side of the barge  
and stared at the water  
where his son had fallen in  
and his wife  
and he felt the water drawing him in  
and he knew that the water would conquer him

nefer-ka-ptah  
he took a piece of royal linen  
and bound the book of thoth to his breast  
  
thoth is never going to see this book again!

the water was drawing him in

nefer-ka-ptah  
he came out from under the shade of the awning  
he threw himself into the water where he drowned

the people raised a great cry

but they could not save him  
 and when they could not find his body  
 to his father the king they returned  
 and told him what had transpired

in black, in mourning  
 the king came to meet the barge  
 he came to the docks

there floating in the water  
 by the side of the royal barge  
 nefer-ka-ptah  
 his body was tangled in among the oars

with his own hands his father drew him from the water  
 nefer-ka-ptah  
 bound to his breast was the book of thoth

he was buried with that book—by his father  
 the book of thoth remained with him

—

oh thoth!  
 before the universe was formed  
 its mold was cast

behold the archetype:  
 the creator was enamored of his own thought—

taking the word as a mighty hammer  
 he gouged out caverns in primordial space

o you who long to pierce the circumference of circles  
 to understand the mystery of he who sits upon the eternal flame  
 you stoop down and peer through the seven harmonies  
 make yourself manifest to nature stretched out below  
 looking into depths, you smile  
 you see a shadow on the earth  
 and a likeness in the waters  
 you fall in love  
 and desire to descend into it

and with that desire  
 the flesh awakes

I Thoth will not let evil control the bodies of those who love me  
I Thoth am the doorkeeper  
to the wicked I do not come

I Thoth leave the wicked to the avenging demons  
they are right now making in their own souls

for each day evil increases  
and torments men more

piling evil upon evil  
until evil itself is destroyed

the path to immortality is hard:  
only a few find it

the rest await the great day  
when the wheels of the universe be stopped  
when the immortal sparks escape the sheaths of substance

o woe to those who wait  
for they must return again  
unknowing  
to the seed-ground of stars  
and await a new beginning

they will hate their  
understanding

their time will tax them  
their will will be sore—

## WHY WRITE MATHEMATICAL FICTION?

2014

I would like to discuss a central concern of my current work, which is the difficulty of writing (and even defining) “mathematical” fiction. I can’t possibly hope for completeness, in terms of treating the scope of experiments in mathematical fiction as they’ve been attempted over the years, nor in terms of the breadth of issues (philosophical and literary, both) that arise at the place where, as it were, numbers and letters meet. That said, in my own small way, I hope to give a sense of the possibilities and the stakes—indeed, why I think it’s absolutely necessary that *something* like mathematical fiction becomes a more developed and mature literary mode in the coming years of the 21st century.

If you’ll forgive me, I’d like to begin with a few technical preliminaries. Naively, mathematics is the science of timeless truths.  $1+1=2$ . Whether we can write down the sequence of symbols “ $1+1=2$ ” and whether we have a machine (for example, a brain) that can interpret “ $1+1=2$ ” in the intended sense, the statement is always true: if you define such a thing as a “1” and a “2” and a “+” and a “=,” as we commonly understand them, then “ $1+1=2$  is true” is true, as we can convincingly show by working forward from the definitions of addition, equality, oneness, and twoness. If that were all there were to math, we might simply just say: mathematics is a form of self-checking trans-subjectivity. We exchange formulaic symbolic patterns until we form a common interpretation of those patterns; the patterns themselves “check” each other, so that if “ $1+1=2$  is true” is true, we could generalize and also say “ $1+1+1=2+1=3$  is true” is true too. In this view, mathematics is a mode of communicating trans-subjectively the experience of making up rules and playing out the necessary consequences of them to

get to a desired point. In general, mathematicians try to make up rules that illuminate, in some way, the old rules their predecessors devised. The art of it lies entirely in the selection of rules which allows the proof—wherein the consequences of the rules are played out in pseudo-narrative form—to be convincing to someone else *at every point in the proof*<sup>138</sup>.

But there's a twist to the story, which is probably most succinctly expressed in the title of a famous book by the mathematical physicist Eugene Wigner: "The Unreasonable Effectiveness of Mathematics in the Natural Sciences." The fact of the matter is: when we do math, we aren't just trans-subjectively engaging with each other, we are also actually engaging with physical laws of the universe itself. That natural occurrences in the dynamic flux of matter, energy, time, and space which make up our universe can be predicted at all by numerical calculation *does not* obviously follow from the definition of mathematics itself: hence the title of Wigner's essay. Not that Wigner was the first to have this insight. Here I'll just trot out the old anecdote that the philosopher Plato had inscribed over the door to his academy the words, "Let no one ignorant of geometry enter here."<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> What do I mean by a pseudo-narrative? Like in a narrative, the "events" in a mathematical proof are all "causally" bound to the other events that happen alongside it. Unlike in a normal narrative, however, there is no absolute restriction that the unfolding of a proof follow any kind of dramatic principles. (Which is not to say that certain mathematicians don't have a flair for the dramatic.) But this is perhaps the only reason that pure mathematicians aren't considered writers of "literature" already.

<sup>139</sup> Another nice example: One of the oldest written mathematical records we have is from Ancient Egypt; it's known as the Rhind Papyrus and it dates from 1650 BC, although the mathematics contained within it is known to have been developed at least centuries earlier. The scribe Ahmes passionately promises that his papyrus will offer to the reader: "accurate reckoning for inquiring into things, and the knowledge of all things, mysteries...all secrets." He goes on to discuss the methods of solving various arithmetical and algebraic problems.

The natural philosophical question to ask in this situation is: how can it be that there's a duality between, on the one hand, a timeless mathematical pattern and, on the other hand, a physical system evolving in temporal-spatial flux such as we experience? To be sure, this question has been with us since the beginning of mankind's attempts to represent things<sup>140</sup>. But for most of history, it's been a rather idle question that's been, let us say, left to the theologians. Due, however, to certain scientific advances of the last fifty years, this question has been taken from the shelf, dusted off, and reopened; and indeed, today the question of the relationship between the timeless and the temporal is being taken very seriously in a novel way at the cutting edge of mathematics and physics. And indeed, it's one of the reasons, as I hope to show, that in the future it will be necessary, or at least, advisable, for the tree of mathematical fiction to bear more abundant fruit.

In theoretical physics today, it has actually become a mainstream position that time and space, formerly primitive concepts to scientific modeling, if not basic categories of our perception, are doomed to be replaced by more fundamental abstractions from which time and space themselves can be shown to emerge. For example, Nima Arkani-Hamed, currently at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, NJ, and regarded as one of the brightest minds working in this field, titled a 2010 talk: "Spacetime is doomed. What replaces it?" His current work is highly instructive, and I'll summarize it briefly here.

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<sup>140</sup> Indeed, I hope it's clear from the way I've defined the problem here that "the unreasonable effectiveness of mathematics in the natural sciences" is not really a separate issue from the fact that we can make any kind of art at all. The concept of a "narrative" rests on the duality between the written and the experienced.

Possibly our most successful theory of nature is quantum field theory, which along with the standard model of particle physics, allows us to calculate what happens when particles smack into each other and explode into other particles. The techniques of quantum field theory were developed in the mid-20th century, and these techniques took time and space as given: locality (the idea that things only interact when they coincide at the same point in time and space) and unitarity (the idea that the probabilities for the different particles that explode out of a collision all sum to 1) were hard-coded, as it were, into the theory. They were not to be explained; instead, they were helping explain other things.

Particle physics, however, is like a play being staged in a theater; and the theater is spacetime, as modeled by the theory of general relativity. Physicists are now searching for a new set of assumptions from which both the theater and the play, and the distinction between them, emerge. It's in this overall context that Nima Arkani-Hamed and his collaborators are studying a mathematical object they've dubbed the amplituhedron. To get a vague sort of understanding of the amplituhedron, picture a complicated gem, or jewel, constructed by gluing together smaller jewels at their surfaces. Let's say you want to study what happens when two electrons, and a photon collide. You use the conditions of your problem to rather easily triangulate one of the sub-jewels of the amplituhedron as defined by its facets, which are determined by the particles you're interested in studying. You simply find the volume of the sub-jewel, and this allows you to calculate the probability amplitudes for the kinds of particles that will explode out of the collision. Not only does this simplify calculations to the point where what formerly required a computer can now be done on the back of an envelope, but

more importantly: the construction of the amplituhedron does not begin from the prior assumptions of locality and unitarity, yet it predicts particle interactions for a system that are both local and unitary, i.e. temporal-spatial. Arkani-Hamed et al have shown this to be true in certain ideal cases, and are working to generalize their work further.

From a purely philosophical perspective, this is an exciting time: the phenomenology of time and space are beginning to emerge from more abstract, fundamental principles<sup>141</sup>. Now throughout the history of science fiction, authors, inspired by physics, have challenged commonly held notions about time and space, minds and bodies. Rudy Rucker, mathematician, computer scientist, founder of a late 70's movement in science fiction known as trans-realism, as well as contributor to the cyberpunk genre in later years<sup>142</sup>, observes in his essay *What SF Writers Want*, that much of science fiction can be boiled down to the following tropes: space travel, time travel, changing size, travel to other universe, telepathy, telekinesis, immortality, intelligence increase, shape shifting, artificial life and alien life.

Now, it seems to me that the goal of the science fiction story is two-fold: on the one hand, science fiction ought to simulate for the general public the consequences of our changing ideas about the laws of the universe. The recent report that the 3d simulation of a black hole rendered for the Christopher Nolan's *Interstellar* is the most

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<sup>141</sup> Another example of this line of thinking, from another perspective, would be the recent experimental confirmation of a theory that explains the emergence of time in terms of quantum entanglement. In brief: a quantum system can be "entangled" with other quantum systems so as to form a connected whole made of intertwined parts, even though those parts might be temporally and spatially separated. Measurements of the system as a whole may demonstrate no change in state over time, even as measurements of parts of the system relative to other parts of the system may be shown to change in time relative to each other.

<sup>142</sup> And, improbably, the great-great-great-grandson of G. W. F. Hegel.

accurate ever computed, to the extent that physicists were actually able to learn something new about black holes from the resulting film, is a great, if rather literal, example of the power of this kind of art. Until we can go fly around a nearby black hole and look at it close-up, only art will be able to show us the world we actually live in. On the other hand, science fiction ought to be able to relate the thought-experiments of modern physics to our actual lived experience, right here, right now.

Rucker, in his essay, points out that each of the tropes of science fiction corresponds to an archetypal human experience, such that all fiction uses them, but only science fiction makes their use explicit, precisely in order to test their limits. What is time-travel into the past except memory, with all its attendant paradoxes? What is telepathy, if not the subtle gestures of two lovers? What is intelligence increase, if not an intensified adolescence? What is immortality, if not literature itself, or the platonic world of forms wherein numbers dwell? What is the relationship between a writer and his or her characters, but the relationship between Frankenstein and his monster? What is alien life, but the other humans, animals, and plants we share the earth with, but whose inner worlds we can never know?

This latter kind of science fiction is in line with what Rucker calls trans-realism. The goal of the trans-realist author is to write a science fiction story about one's own normal life in the strangest possible way, incorporating the big lesson of the development of mathematical science since Galileo which is that truth is provably stranger than fiction. Rather than writing pure fiction, the trans-realist author makes their actual experiences seem so bizarre that they seem totally made up, yet the veracity of them nevertheless forces itself upon you. Trans-realist fictions should be bizarrely

veridical in just the same way that it is literally true that time runs faster at the top of Mt Everest than at the bottom of the Dead Sea. The idea is to import that same feeling into one's descriptions of every day life<sup>143</sup>.

Consider the science fiction trope of a single person being split into multiple bodies. This is the mirror image of the author of a fiction splitting themselves into their characters. For a story to be alive, however, these characters need to feel like autonomous, semi-unpredictable beings, the consequences of whose acts we can't simply figure out without being driven to read on. Nor can the writer know beforehand exactly what's going to happen: it's precisely by fictionalizing life on the page, that a writer can discover something true about their lives, and the world, that they wouldn't have been able to discover if they'd stuck "to the facts." Fiction isn't about telling lies; it's about telling difficult truths, truths that take time, truths can't just be told straight. It's about telling the gnarly truths.

Having spoken about the tropes of science fiction, and their relationship to lived experience, I want to return to this idea that time and space are derivable from more fundamental, abstract principles. Science fiction tropes are often very concrete: spaceships, phasers, warp drives, time machines, robots; the list goes on. These things are fascinating, and indeed, allow us not merely to explore the consequences of the existences of such objects, but also to recast our normal experiences in more unusual, science-inspired forms that might actually be a better fit for communicating the immediacy of a narrative situation. But: even as science fiction have gone mainstream

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<sup>143</sup> Rucker himself prefers the term gnarly to bizarre, which he's elevated to the status of technical vocabulary. A work of art, or a phenomenon of nature, is gnarly if, despite being governed by deterministic rules, displays an unpredictable, living quality. For example, fire is gnarly.

today, works in the genre still adhere more or less to the grammatical categories of narrative, as it were, laid down during the genre's long slumber as a marginalized literature over the course of the 20th century. The problem isn't the inventiveness of the writers; the problem is that science itself has moved on to yet stranger, more abstract considerations, while the technique of narrative art (on a whole, of course) has yet to catch up.

It seems to me that the central problem for the (mathematical) literature of the future is not to make the abstract concrete, which has been the credo for literature hitherto, but to make the the concrete abstract—and to do it in the most concrete way possible. If time and space evaporate from our scientific picture of the world, then we urgently need an art that can help us understand how to live in a world whose intuitive tangibility we've utterly destroyed. If we can't, through art, begin to understand the fabric of our lived experience in terms of a timeless and spaceless reality, then we can do nothing but take it on faith that we're living an illusion, and resign ourselves to both eternal ignorance of the sweetest fruits of our civilization and also probably our ultimate self-destruction. Yet precisely because there has been a mass culture acceptance of the tropes of the written science fiction of the past, the public of today ought to be willing to have the boundary pushed further—to the very question of the nature of abstraction itself. Anecdotally speaking, even people who *like* special effects complain about how these movies are all just about the special effects<sup>144</sup>; I wager the public is hungry for something deeper, something that can't so easily be visualized. To my mind, what they are hungry for—whether they realize it or not—is mathematical fiction, as opposed to

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<sup>144</sup> I do not mean to suggest *Interstellar* is just about the special effects.

science fiction, as it's been understood. Only a mathematical fiction can do justice to the gnarliness of the new conceptions of the world now being foisted on us.

To understand our world without primitive notions of matter and energy and time and space as constructs, would be to understand how matter and energy and time and space are implied in the structure of pure mathematics itself. One could even say that the goal of modern mathematical physics is, so to speak, *to see the numbers themselves in motion*<sup>145</sup>. But if this idea is to be grasped tangibly, then we are going to have to find a way to tell stories which offer abstractions that can be directly lived.

Literature teaches people new language, not like mathematicians do, like they're always carving something in stone, but by a dialogic scenic flow which gives temporal and spatial texture to the idea behind the language. Yet it isn't so obvious how to weave mathematics into a literary text in order to construct a new language for the stories we need to tell. Indeed, the first problem to confront in the writing of mathematical fiction is the issue of rhythm. Simply studding your prose with mathematical exposition has about the same effect of setting off a car alarm in the middle of a symphony.

When we read stories, we attend to cues given to us by the author. We begin to process the relationships between the things our attention has been cued towards, until, ideally, at a final cue by the author, a background process terminates within us, and we suddenly have an epiphany about what's going on in the story. The creation of a dramatic form involves managing the interplay between what's being foregrounded, and what's being backgrounded at a given moment. If we can pick up on linguistic

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<sup>145</sup> One can even take this statement literally: for many good reasons, we believe that the distribution of prime numbers among the counting numbers is related to the possible energy states of some physical system!

resonances, and subtle winks and nods, and suddenly have an epiphany about a character's motivation in a previous scene after learning how a character acted in a later scene, why can't the same techniques be applied to trigger mathematical epiphanies organically embedded in the fabric of the lives narrated? Could one, in fictional prose, in some reliable way, set up a mathematical problem in the back of a reader's mind over the course of a story, so that at a later trigger, the answer to the mathematical problem pops into their head with all grandeur of an epiphany, and the grace of a work of literary fiction?

In 1949, Julio Cesar de Mello e Souza published *The Man Who Counted* under the pseudonym Malba Tahan. In a Borgesian fashion, the book masquerades as a translation of a 13th century Persian text. The narrative is picaresque, and centers around Beremiz Samir, who from an early age loves to count, at first in twos and threes — soon he can tell at a glance the number of leaves on a tree, the number of birds in a flock in the sky. A typical story is an early one involving Samir resolving a conflict between shepherds, as if by magic, using his knowing of fractions. It's told in the style and in the rhythm of a fairy tale. The mathematical core of the story is this: three brothers are arguing about 35 camels they've inherited from their father. One brother was promised  $\frac{1}{2}$  of them; one was promised  $\frac{1}{3}$ ; and one was promised  $\frac{1}{9}$  of the camels. But the brothers are about ready to kill each other because they don't know how to handle fractional numbers. Thinking quickly, our hero asks his sidekick to lend him his own camel, and adds it to the herd, making 36 camels.  $\frac{1}{2}$  of 36 is 18.  $\frac{1}{3}$  of 36 is 12.  $\frac{1}{9}$  of 36 is 4. So he gives to each of the brothers in turn: 18 camels, 12 camels, and 4 camels.  $18+12+4=34$  camels. But we started out with 36 camels. So Samir's sidekick gets

his camel returned to him, and Samir takes the other: “The other rightly belongs to me for having resolved the complicated problem of the inheritance to everyone’s satisfaction” (Tahan 13). Finally, they ride off to Baghdad, leaving the brothers satisfied, if slightly mystified. Where’d that other camel come from?

Such a narrative is simple enough for the math to be intuitive, and it embeds mathematics into the fabric of life: the abstract is shown to play a decisive role in the lives of these characters. Even for those who already know about greatest common denominators, the ending comes somewhat as a surprise—this is the simulated epiphany; the surprise drives the reader to return the beginning of the story, and work out the problem themselves, to see how Samir performed his magic.

A more sophisticated way to tackle writing mathematical fiction would be to give the reader a simulated experience of mathematical discovery in itself. The traditional narrative would give way to a calculated series of resonating passages of exposition, which would slowly pulsate in the reader’s mind. Such a narrative would not be constructed on the principle of what happened before and after, but on the principle of what things explain what other things. This would be like the structure, for example, of a W. G. Sebald novel, where wandering characters encounter physical objects which inspire historical reflections, which resonate with each other despite the temporal or spatial dislocations of the things described; the drama of the narrative is formed by what Sebald prepares you to resonate with next<sup>146</sup>. One can easily imagine mathematical objects being substituted for the physical objects that Sebald traces.

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<sup>146</sup> I’m indebted to Bennett Sims for this succinct conceptualization of how Sebald’s works often function.

Yet another route is provided by the novels of Rudy Rucker himself. An early novel, *White Light*, is a trans-realist work in which a down and out math professor attempts to astral project up the infinite hierarchy of infinities discovered by Georg Cantor, meeting various abstract beings along the way—expository passages are embedded in a constantly shifting humorous plot, which allows the reader time to process the concepts involved, and to have their senses of terror towards math deflated<sup>147</sup>.

All of these methods—a) literally embedding the abstract in real life narrative situations b) creating a narrative whose drama consists in patterns of mathematical expository resonances c) deflation of the mathematical exhaustion accumulated over the course of exposition by humor and a sense of the absurd, or something that functions equivalently—requires one, as it were, to be a mathematician as much as a writer, and so this present a problem in terms of its general applicability. Now there is, in a sense, an already existing method which doesn't have this limitation, and which I think holds some promise for future development.

A. Seidenberg, in his paper, *The Ritual Origin of Counting*, describes how in various places in the ancient world, the participants in community rituals were counted off in the course of the event. Often, men would be counted with odd numbers, women with even numbers. Indeed, there is a kind of heterosexual logic at work there: the union

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<sup>147</sup> To be sure, I don't mean to suggest the book merely uses humor to sweeten a sour mathematical pill. I'm simply considering the book not in terms of its content, but in terms of a particular aspect of its form.

of even and even and the union of odd and odd both lead to even; only the union of odd and even can result in an odd number<sup>148</sup>.

But more importantly, this ancient obsession with numbering and counting was not limited to people. In fact, the entire oral world-view was organized by taking advantage of numerical coincidences. Hence: 7 days of the week, 7 planets, and so forth. A good example of this kind of thinking can be found in Plutarch's essay *On the E at Delphi*, where he (in a somewhat satirical context) describes how because the first even number (2) and the first odd number (3)<sup>149</sup> summed to the number 5, the Pythagoreans called 5 "marriage." There are also 5 notes in the Pythagorean scale; 5 Platonic solids in three dimensions; 5 elements in the universe; 5 sages of Greece; and so forth. This kind of thinking has long been dismissed from the scientific discourse as "numerology" or "number mysticism," since indeed it's quite obvious that you can find as many examples as you like of things that come in 2's or 3's or 5's or 7's. Yet, I think this misses the entire point. Such a way of thinking was precisely most useful because of the inherently and purely polysemous quality of numbers. In an age without writing and mass literacy, the organization and transmission of cultural traditions from mouth to mouth is of the utmost importance. By organizing one's information about the world in terms of

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<sup>148</sup> An even number + an even number = an even number. An odd number + an odd number = an even number. An odd number + an even number = an odd number. Only the union of a male and a female, can produce something which is itself productive through difference. It's speculative, but one can imagine the fascination of the ancient world with the "square root of 2," in other words, the length of the hypotenuse of a right triangle with sides each of length 1, as being related to this gendering of even and odd numbers. The proof that the square root of 2 is irrational (ie. can only be described by an infinite approximation) involves showing that paradoxically, if you consider the square root of 2 to be even, it must be odd, and if you consider it to be odd, it must be even. Hence the number is, as it were, hermaphroditic.

<sup>149</sup> The Greeks didn't necessarily consider 1 to be a number, but rather to be the standard by which other numbers were measured.

numbers, one can mentally map out one's own knowledge by considering a number like 5, and ruminating on all things things that conventionally come in that number—and such a system of memory would be the more useful and reliable the more mathematical inter-relationships one could explore between the numbers of different things. If you can't remember which number is “marriage,” but you do know that 2 is male and 3 is female, maybe you could guess that “marriage” is 5.

Over the last few thousand years, as we've decided to write everything down instead of memorizing it, we've drained the color out of numbers. They no longer are the central organizers of our memories, but something we'd rather forget. It's seems to me that we ought to revive this practice of a numerically organized literature in light of our vastly advanced understanding of the interconnections between numbers themselves, so that an entirely new form of literature can result in which letters and numbers fit together on the page like yin and yang.

I suppose what the lesson of numerology comes down to in its most simple form is that if one is more explicit about the number of things in stories, this provides an entire alternate system by which the reader can hold the pieces of a narrative in their minds. Knowledge about the interrelationships between numbers can interact with knowledge about the interrelationships between the things numbered in order to add an entire extra layer to the texture of the story.

To take a slightly more complicated example, imagine a story about a *menage a trois* which by the end of it you come to the epiphany that there's something rather tragic about the symmetry group of the triangle. The symmetry group of a triangle consists of the things you can do to a triangle that leave it looking the same. It consists

of: doing nothing; rotating it a third of the way; rotating it two thirds of the way; mirror flipping it along a line down the middle; mirror flipping it along a line from the lower left vertex; mirror flipping it along a line from the lower right vertex. Each of these things basically re-orders which vertex is at the top, at the bottom left, or the bottom right, in different ways. One can imagine a kind of Georges Bataille like story, in which the character represented by the top vertex is the voyeur for the sexual exchange between the lower left and lower right vertices, or vice versa, which is symbolized by a flip. The drama of the story might come from the fact that events within it keep rotating the triangle a third of the way, or two thirds of the way, either clockwise or counterclockwise<sup>150</sup>. The idea is that if the story preserves the symmetry group it gives a way for the reader to reason about the story better. If A is the top vertex, B is the lower left vertex, and C is the lower right vertex, then ABC denotes A watching B and C. If A wants to get with B, then the easiest thing would be if the story allowed a counterclockwise  $1/3$  turn; then C could watch A and B do it. But maybe the story offers a clockwise turn instead. Then if B watches A and C get it on, and the story afterwards provides a counterclockwise  $1/3$  turn, then C will be in the position to watch while A can finally get with B. If a story explicitly were to tell its reader when it's flipping and when it's rotating, so that a picture forms in the reader's mind of the abstract object whose symmetries are reflected in the plot, even if more complicated than the symmetry group of the triangle, the reader could use their (implicit or explicit) knowledge of that object not only to remember past details better, but also to make better predictions about how

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<sup>150</sup> Consider that a complicated series of rotations and flips could even end up leaving everything the same.

the story is going to evolve—and indeed stories could be organized along the principle of making the symmetry group most obvious, as opposed to the sequence of the plot, but amounting, in the end, to the same “story.” If living out their love lives, as it were, within the symmetry group of a triangle were convincingly foisted on these characters by the world in which they lived, then by the end of the story, we would have, as a byproduct, filled in our concept of the triangle with the emotional nuances of the symmetries it represents, of how the abstraction itself can give rise to all the frustrated desires that are the marrow of our experience of temporal and spatial separation.

So, for a start, we have numbers and their inter-relationships to work with, and we have symmetry groups. More generally, we can consider as one of the most basic mathematical concepts, a “transformation” or a “mapping” that preserves some quality of the original. One such transformation that seems immediately relevant to literature is the Fourier Transform. When you play music on your computer, and you have the equalizer on, and you observe the way that different frequencies are more dominant at some times than others, you are looking at the result of the Fourier Transform, which maps a musical signal to the basic frequencies of which it’s composed. The same transformation relates the positions of particles to their momenta in quantum mechanics; the same transformation relates the light an atom emits to its internal structure. You could even imagine taking the Fourier Transform of a linguistic text, and decomposing it into a few basic letter patterns, from which the original text could be reconstructed. The Fourier Transform provides a powerful way to think about the

nature of signals<sup>151</sup>, which has practical consequences. If you have a lot of high-pitched hissing on some music you've recorded, you could isolate some high frequencies in the Fourier Transform of the recording, and cut them out of the entire musical signal. If you want to perk up the vocals, you might increase the loudness of the frequencies of the human voice throughout the piece. This is just the same thing as when, in a literary text, we might be writing a scene in 3rd person omniscient, and over the course of a paragraph, turn up the volume of the inner worlds of different characters in turn, which we call "getting close to the consciousness." Like a number in a numerological system, the Fourier Transform is inherently polysemous. You can find it everywhere; and like a number, it's meaning comes from all the diverse things it unifies under one heading.

There have been many attempts to more generally marry the art of literature with the science of mathematical form. One of the great practitioners in the 20th century was Raymond Queneau, a mathematician himself, along with, in general, all the members of the so-called *Oulipo*, which stands for the Workshop for Potential Literature. These writers sought to devise new constraints for literary forms, often with mathematical inspiration. Georges Perec wrote a book *A Void* never once using the letter e, and the organization of his book *Life: A User's Manual* mirrors the path of a knight moving in it's L shaped patterned across a chessboard, and hitting every square exactly once.

In contrast to, for instance, the usual *Oulipian* approach, what I'm suggesting is incorporating the mathematical symbolism of the constraints of the text *within* the text, so that the interplaying drama of the events and the constraints on those events is

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<sup>151</sup> For example, any time two things are related by a Fourier Transform, the so-called uncertainty principle comes into play: the more you know about where particles are in space at a given time, the less you know about how they're fast moving, and vice versa.

foregrounded explicitly, even as each constraint so symbolized is also a naturally motivated event in the story. Indeed, the point is not to teach mathematics to people by telling them jerry-rigged stories that exemplify mathematical concepts, but to teach them how to feel with numbers, feel the numbers in things, and so bind those feelings together in novel and complicated and nuanced ways.

Consider a basic example. Often we're asked in the course of talking to someone, or reading a story, to feel one of two ways about something; something is presented to us in the form of a binary opposition. This or that. You have to make a choice. "This or that" is a group that consists of two elements—this and that—and the one is the opposite of the other, just like 1 and -1. Perhaps we're given the choice not between two things, but three: I, you, or it, mutually opposite. At the highest level, our sentences can present the most nuanced of groups of oppositions, each *not* merely opposite, but interconnected and interdependent in the way they oppose each other. For example, you could present someone with a choice between three things, but these things could be interdependent on each other like the vertices of a triangle. The science of these mutually dependent oppositions is known as "group theory," and it is highly developed: over the course of the 19th and 20th centuries, an *enormous* effort was spent categorizing all possible finite and infinite symmetry groups<sup>152</sup>, and to a large extent that task has been completed, though this rich body of knowledge has not been disseminated to the public at large. The relationship between group theory and fundamental physics

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<sup>152</sup> An example of an object with an infinite symmetry group is a circle. It's looks the same no matter how much you rotate it whether clockwise or counterclockwise.

has been very well explored; the relationship between group theory and our language, our narratives, and our psychology, has not.

One could leave this problem to the mathematically inclined linguistics, psychologists, and neuroscientists, but even if, say, one day we could have a computer program that could extract a group structure of mutually dependent oppositions from a text, such a point of view is only useful if we can trace for ourselves precisely how the text implies the group structure. This is only really practical if information about the group structure is embedded in the text at different points. Perhaps a computer program could edit little notes about the group structure into an already existing text, perhaps according to some well-chosen rule. But if the writer themselves were interspersing the mathematical symbolism in their text, not only could this supply a creatively useful constraint for generating ideas, but also the writer would be able to control the dramatic moments at which the mathematical symbolism appears. New dramatic possibilities will no doubt open to the writer of mathematical fiction who can harness the increased power of resonance that interpolating this naked symbolism into the course of the narrative brings.

To be clear, “mathematical symbolism” could be as simple as interspersing, say, a picture of a triangle rotating or flipping at different points in the text. Or you could denote it symbolically: for example, you could write  $R(1/3)$  or  $F(A)$  for rotating a triangle by a  $1/3$ , and flipping B and C along the line through A in the *menage a trois* story above. One wouldn’t even necessarily have to use the traditional symbolism of mathematical texts at all. One could use texts formatted differently on different parts of the page, permutation of letters each having some symbolism, or indeed merely

sentences set off from the main body of the text whose grammatical structure has been chosen so that their mutual relationships are obvious by seeing how subjects become objects in certain patterns, and so forth. The only requirement is that the abstract structure governing the evolution of the events is brought into tangible feeling.

If such a literature were to mature in the future, then as the public became better readers of the form, it would become plausible for characters *within* the stories to become aware of the group structures that might be governing their lives, and to disagree with each other about them, and their interpretation. Then one could begin to exploit the interplay between mathematical symbolism at the level of narration, and mathematical symbolism at the level of dialogue and thought. And indeed, I think only by injecting our language with this admixture of concrete abstraction, can we really explore the subtleties of our condition: to perceive so concretely our bodies in time and space, and yet to know that these most tangible things are abstractions.

To conclude, let me offer another way to understand why at this historical moment such a thing as mathematical fiction, as I describe it, should emerge on the scene. Consider the rise of computer science. For the first time, in the 20th century, the idea of “computability” was considered as such, and scientists began to develop a theory of instructions being followed by a universal computer, of predicting from the instructions how much time such computations might take to run, how much storage space they might require, whether the computation will give answer eventually or no, or indeed, whether you can ever know if a computation will give an answer or not!<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>153</sup> This is exactly analogous to the way that some stories cannot be plotted out in advance, even though you already know how they end.

Because people have been so assiduously searching for the quickest, most efficient way to program physics on a computer, they've pushed the bar for how abstract their theories of reality are willing to be. In early eras, you might have been regarded with some suspicion if you suggested doing calculations that seemed to conflict with a certain "physical picture" of how the world worked. You'd take long walks, and ruminate, and not say anything in public, until you found a "physical picture" for your intellectual short-cut or hack.

But today, in my opinion, because computations are so easily performed, and the science of computation so seemingly universal, the general attitude is quite different. If you find a way to hack your physics simulation to make more efficient use of time and space, then today you'd be willing to assume that, whether you have a picture or not of what's really happening, nature also probably uses the more efficient mode of calculating, at its most basic level. Consider that without computers, one had to do science by slowly alternating between calculating, finding a physical picture, calculating some more, finding a new physical picture. But now we can do massive calculations without any physical picture at all, or rather, whose only known physical picture is the changing state of the computer executing the instructions.

So to return to the beginning, what's more abstract than time and space? One possible answer among many, at this point: the instructions and the machine. In the case of literature, every sentence is an instruction, a cue to the reader; and the machines are our brains. At a theoretical level, I bet writers could learn a lot from what modern mathematics can teach us about how to time instructions of varying lengths and complicatedness and interconnectedness over the course of a written work.

But the question is: can we trust a scientist's opinion about the nature of our craft? As a perusal of papers in the field reveals, a lot of time is spent in computational linguistics today working on sentiment analysis and trend analysis and the categorization of texts by theme or topic, and so forth. Huge blunt abstractions are extracted from texts, mainly in the service of the modern corporation obliged to seek out potential consumers through the tangle of the internet; and with equal bluntness, we are beginning to generate texts (for example, news articles that write themselves from other news articles) that serve a similarly materialistic purpose. Consider that if algorithmically generated texts begin to appear around us, and if we increasingly read human generated texts chosen for us by algorithms, our very relationship to language will begin to change. The "theory of literature" that our scientists, in academia and in the industry, come up with will have real effects, as the results of their experiments feed back into the discourse.

As a kind of case study, consider that already in the field of generative literature, a new form of reading has organically developed. As I've experienced this phenomenon, you enter into an art space, and collectively watch a computer generate text in real time, generally in the form of a projection. Sometimes a way of interacting with the computer is supplied, so that you can influence the rules by which the text is generated. The minds of those who work in this field and those who have had the chance to absorb these texts, are able to "read" them by implicitly figuring out the algorithm the programmer must have given to the computer to generate the text. The amusement (or pathos) of these pieces is provided by a) the way that the algorithm plays with the person trying to imagine its operations, by not, as it were, revealing all the cards in its hand at once and

b) the way that known rules, with their uninteresting inevitableness, nevertheless give rise to surprising combinations of language. In essence, a layer of epistemological drama is added atop the text, as one reads not just literally and metaphorically but also algorithmically<sup>154</sup>.

But such a generative text merely *embodies* its algorithm. In contrast, the kind of mathematical fiction I'm describing would be one where a text also contains (or partially contains) its own algorithm (or algorithms) within it symbolically, whether computer generated or not. In this way, form can tangle with content in a novel way, and a new level of narrative discourse can be achieved.

When Frederic Jameson spoke at the University of Iowa on October 23, 2014, upon receiving the Truman Capote Award, he suggested we were facing a crisis of literary form. The picture he painted was more or less the following: the 19th century novelist had apartment buildings full of people living together in a society organized primarily by a close-knit familial structure. Sociability was mediated by physical contact, letters, and the material objects produced by early capitalism. The 20th century novelist had the lone modern man, adrift in a world mediated by large impersonal institutions, and the material objects produced by full-on industrial capitalism. The 21st century novelist has what? A world of ad-hoc, flexible families and a mixed landscape of small and large institutions, the largest of which allow us to be in constant contact with each other, and which try to get to know us personally, often to exploit us as much as help us; in short, a world in which what it means to be alone has been redefined. The classic

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<sup>154</sup> Anyone who uses a computer is already somewhat able to read algorithmically: the spam emails that hail down on everyone at every moment today have their characteristic, recognizable tone. Also, I want to emphasize the fact that I don't claim any originality over the idea that there is a way to read a text algorithmically.

mediators of human social interaction: the physical gesture, the exchange of objects, the shared journey, even the exchange of dialogue itself aren't the only games in town anymore. Yet it's precisely the linguistic expression of these forms of social interaction that form the grammar of the story, as it's traditionally conceived.

To elaborate on Jameson's remarks, quite simply, a character whose most profound experiences all happen sitting at a computer carries with them, by virtue of traditional story grammar, an air of isolation, lack of contact, even madness. Yet nothing might be farther from the actual experience. Yet if it were simply a matter of technology mediating already existing human social relations, the problem could be solved piecemeal, as it is now, by incorporating into the grammar of the story, for example, the laws of the text message; the measurement of time by likes and hits; or (and this is found more often in more casual writing such as blogs and email) the passage of exposition that everybody knows you got on wikipedia, and which is really just a signal for the reader to go look up the topic themselves when they're ready.

But we are forming social relationships now not just with other living creatures, but also with algorithms. We all recognize that certain people have, as it were, a greater empathic capacity towards computers, so that, just from observing them, they can diagnose like doctors their malfunctions. But how shall we represent the computer, and the computer program running on it, in a story? If we simply incorporate technical terminology into the narrative of the diagnosis, the story won't do justice to the fact that the experience of fixing a computer problem is *not* (or not just) an analytical experience, but is actually experienced the entire time as social and intuitive.

One can imagine that algorithmic perception can be applied to real people, to the point that one begins to interact socially in algorithmically inflected ways. And the more we relate to algorithms socially, the more the algorithms which are at work implicitly all around us, both natural and artificial, will come into the foreground. If a character should have a crisis at the moment they perceive something (perhaps themselves) to be an algorithm, how can they express what they feel to another, or to themselves? It's one thing if this character interacts with an algorithm via a computer interface; it's quite another if the algorithm the character perceives is something more abstract. Let's say that the timeline of their lives is being generated, as before, by the symmetry group of the triangle (for some interesting reason in the story, of course). For this moment of realization to have *immediacy* the text cannot at the climactic moment simply recite the algorithm like a recipe, since that utterly brings the momentum of the text to a standstill. Instead, just like any complicated experience that one wishes to eventually bring to a convergence into conscious through narrative, the algorithm must be delivered by hints, in bits and pieces, at just the proper dramatic moments when they'll be best understood. So the question of great moment is: What is the best way to achieve the effect of verisimilitude in mathematical fiction; or in other words, how can we write a word problem with all the depth of a novel?

As a civilization, we are in the middle of a period of intellectual reorganization. In just the recent past, one's essential emotional relationships were those defined by temporal-spatial conjunction; time and space provided the stage upon which our interactions took place. In the future, as our relationships with algorithms intensify, we will increasingly come to think of the temporal and spatial details of interactions and

relationships as being secondary to, and derivable from, their algorithmic content. Our memories will start to become organized around algorithms, as much as they are organized around the places we've lived, and the people we've known; and the algorithms will accumulate the emotional weight of all the physical situations which instantiated them. Unless we can represent these experiences in literary form, in a way that preserves the colorful texture of fictional flowers, the inability to communicate algorithmic beauty, algorithmic love and loss, will lead to a kind of psychic pressure, on the part of the writer who is at a loss for words, and on the part of the reader who thinks they are alone.

In a way, perhaps the concise way of what I'm predicting about the current literary scene, and the kinds of works that will be read in the future, is this: as the experience of the computer programmer diffuses throughout society, in an intellectual climate which considers time and space themselves to be reducible to more basic realities, works must appear which will provide an outlet for our need to experience the world not only literally and metaphorically, but also algorithmically—all at the same time—knit into the textual fabric of a life lived through the page.

In any case, I think it's safe to say that literature from the very beginning has been premised on a deep respect for the fundamental duality of the time-bound and timeless in our understanding of the universe, and of the duality between the abstract and the concrete. As Shakespeare says to his lover,

Nor shall death brag thou wand'rest in his shade,  
When in eternal lines to Time thou grow'st.

And for that matter, algorithmic thinking is as old as the first being who fashioned a tool. But today, as we raise a nation of *abstract toolmakers*, we'll have to think long and hard about the kinds of stories they'll want, and need, to read.

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## THE PRIMES

2014

“...Hard indeed it would be for such a state to be shaken and disturbed; but since destruction is appointed for everything that has come into being, not even such a fabric as this state will abide for all time. It shall surely be dissolved, and this is the manner of its dissolution. Not only for the plants who grow from the earth, but also for the animals that live upon it, there is a cycle of fertility and barrenness for soul and body, as often as the revolutions of their orbs come full circle, in brief courses for the short-lived and oppositely for the long-lived. But the men you have bred to be your rulers will not for all their wisdom figure out the laws of prosperous birth or infertility for your race by reasoning about sensations. The laws will escape them; and there will be a time when they will beget children out of season.

“Now for divine births, there is a period comprehended by a perfect number. For mortal births, there is a period comprehended by the first number in which dominating and dominated augmentations render all things convertible and commensurable with one another, by having attained three distances and four limits of the assimilating and the dissimilating, the waxing and waning. So, a basal four-thirds wedded to the pempad yields two harmonies at the third augmentation, the one the product of equal factors taken one hundred times, the other of equal length the one way, but oblong. One dimension is of a hundred numbers determined by the rational diameters of the pempad lacking one in each case, or of the irrational lacking two; the other dimension is of a hundred cubes of the triad.

“This entire geometrical number is determinative of this thing, of better and inferior births.”

— Plato, *The Republic*, Book 8

On the morning of September 11th, 2014, a plane setting out from Waco Regional Airport was hijacked by Arab terrorists. The plane flew some twenty-five miles from Waco to unincorporated McLennan county, then nose-dived into the Crawford ranch of George W Bush. There was a giant explosion. The limestone cracked. In the heat, the tin roof began to writhe and bend as the walls collapsed inward; very memorably, the roof began to cry. This is a well known phenomenon which occurs when tin is bent; when tin is bent, it will cry, or scream. This is because when tin is cooled, it forms a crystalline structure. If two separate crystal try to form in the same place, they “twin” or intermingle so that, when later bent, the breaking of the twin boundaries causes the

emission of a crying sound. The tin roof cried; and then it melted, and fell; and when it cooled, it bent again, and cried, and melted, and fell and cooled amid scattered fires feeding on plane fuel.

The sun was shining above the lake to the east, and reflecting in the shattered glass of the humiliated picture doors.

Bush had been sitting outside, under the shade of the trees to the west. He had been working on a painting of Saddam Hussein. He explained in a youtube video called *The Art of Leadership: A President's Personal Diplomacy*, that he had always been an observer of human beings, their fears, their hopes, their desires. He was happy to be out the White House. He didn't miss being in the public eye. But he did have some ambition remaining. It was about his paintings. He would never criticize a sitting president, but he knew that for all his powers, Barack Obama didn't know how to talk to people and understand them in the way they wanted to be understood which is the only way to get a person to understand *you* as *you* want to be understood. It was a matter of trust. Bush decided he wasn't going to say anything verbally during Obama's administration, but he was going to paint. His pictures would give to the public a nonverbal, intuitive understanding of the people whose personalities determined world events. This was a great responsibility, he perceived. He showed people the pictures he felt comfortable showing. So far he didn't think any of his pictures of the bad guys, bin Laden, Ahmadinijad, and the hidden negotiators, diplomats, and power brokers behind and in between them, representing despotic interests whose acts had determined the course of history even as their faces remained concealed from view,—were good enough to the

point where he could show most of his friends, let alone the media; they'd get the wrong idea. He only showed the bad guys to select people in times of necessity.

They hate us for our freedoms. They refuse to admit that there is nothing certain in this world. Only if you admit that nothing is certain, can you be free. Evil doesn't care about freedom in itself. Evil cares about certainty. Evil uses violence to bring certainty to your life. When you are free, you can be uncertain. But evil uses violence, and creates certainties. It thereby tricks you into arguing on its behalf. So you aren't free. But evil doesn't care about you, or your freedom. Evil simply wants to create those certainties that augment itself and help it attain a yet deeper, more powerful shade of black.

They were going to do it New Years Eve 1999, but they were smart and they waited. They waited for a random day in the middle of the week.

Bush saw the plane swoop in with a kind of pythian serenity. It was a gripping, evenly mounting horror. Somehow he recognized immediately what was going to happen. The plane imploded into his house with determination. The ranch was saturated in color and heat. The enormous blue sky was cold. Bush started running to the house. He was crying, but it felt good to run. He was totally alert. Laura had been watching him from the porch. He didn't see her anywhere. There was fire, and big blocks of limestone fallen everywhere, and twisted metal, and glass, in the vague semblance of a house. Bush wondered if those were sirens he heard in the distance, or people running and shouting behind him. Just as he saw Laura, crushed and splayed out under a massive slab, a region of the tin roof congealed; it screamed as it scrunched up, and at the points of stress, it fell apart. A plane of tin crashed from the ceiling, and knocked into him, and he fell hard underneath it, and he could feel his left leg bone crack.

His consciousness wavered. Then it froze. He heaved himself out from under the metal. There was still the blue sky. He heaved himself over to Laura. He heaved the slab off Laura. He wrapped his arms around her and started trying to carry her away, but he fell on his leg, and he ended up crawling away from the rubble dragging Laura behind him, one arm wrapped around her, the other pulling them forward.

They made it to underneath a tree. Evil wants to give one more certainty to your life. Evil wants to give you an answer. But evil doesn't care about you; evil wants to expand its powers. Evil doesn't understand freedom, which accepts uncertainty: evil wants to achieve total certainty about the darkness of its own powers, and it does this by killing. Laura's soul was pure. Bush was leaning against the tree. In the distance, his easel was standing where he'd left it. All of a sudden in his head a painting flashed: from where he was standing, the blue sky bulging towards you like in a Thomas Hart Benton, the ranch, intact, and close up in the frame, Laura's dead face, and her body. He reflected that it was the kind of painting that if you actually painted it, people would think it was too obvious and political: the state of the union is strong. But he saw it in his head where it mattered the right way, the real way. In the wide expanse of earth before him, tiny running personnel were converging on him from multiple directions. He was stroking Laura's hair. The sky, the ranch. The runners converging on him were getting closer and closer to him ever more slowly. In a way, he would have preferred it if they weren't there. His mind was quiet, and about every five seconds, a single clear thought would enter his mind like a droplet of water. He needed to listen to these thoughts. He saw all the eyes of the runners converging on him, and he felt their eyes like droplets of water and streams, and he knew what he had to be for them. He closed his eyes and

thought about the painting of dead Laura for a count, and then opened them. His daughter's face was descending on him. The painting: that was where he would return to later.

I can't tell if I'm here because a) my work on prime numbers b) my relationship to the Bush Administration c) or some actually demonic force is arresting me here. The third paranoid thought is probably the result of me having the TV on in the background, where endless episodes of Charmed play on Netflix, while I sit at the desk and write. Outside my window, on my lawn, the sheep are grazing. There are sheep on every lawn on the street.

I'm in Morestown, New Jersey. They are running the town like a Greek polis. Every citizen has a dozen sheep to their name, can negotiate the grazing rights to their lawn, has a stake cared for by full-time shepherds who criss-cross the developments all day, making characteristic circuits; and lawnmowers are obsolete. In general, the sheep shear the grass down to a velvety, monotonous green.

I sit at my desk and write on loose leaf pages. When I'm done with a page, I try to put the page in one of two piles. The pile on the right is my notes on prime numbers; the pile on the left is my notes on jihadism (in general—the incident with Bush, specifically). I have the volume low on the TV and the subtitles on; I can only hear Prue and Piper and Phoebe's tones of voice. When I'm done checking in on the three sisters, I finish a page and put it in one of the two piles.

If I can't put a page in one of the two piles, I put it in a third pile. The third pile, I can only assume, is either about Charmed or Morestown, specifically the sheep. Besides

the fact of my being under arrest, these are the things I've been dwelling on while I've been here, as I said, under arrest, not knowing why, either in connection with the primes, or terrorism, or witches. Honestly at this point it's all the same to me. I just want to know what I'm under arrest for. Not that I am guilty of any crime. Seriously, I know that I've been arrested not as a criminal, but to be a forced laborer. As in, somebody wants me to do some work for them, that only I can do. But I don't know who it is I'm supposed to be working for, and I don't know which of things I work on regularly is the thing they want me to work on right now. I want to do the work so I can get out of being under arrest, even though that might play into their hands. Why? Because my work isn't done yet, and I don't know if it's possible to do what these people think I can do. If I can show them it can't be done, then it can't be done. Ideally, in that case, they'll let me go free and I'll announce it can't be done. When the authorities talk to the kidnapper, the kidnapper will just say: Why would I kidnap him? After all, it can't be done, he himself says. And, I'll say: he's right. And I'll live.

What if it can be done? In your prideful heart, you think you can finish the work, and use it against them, don't you? Or is all this just an elaborate excuse for doing what you want to do anyway? For example, if you knew it was the papers on terrorism they were interested in, you could pretend you thought it was the prime number papers—and those are the ones you really want to work on anyway, right? In general, you could conveniently work on the wrong thing if you thought this person who is arresting you doesn't deserve to know whatever it is you expect to discover.

At the same time, I just really need to know if it's about the primes. I'm not an expert in the subject. I've only published two papers accessible to the general public

online, although my undergraduate major was mathematics, and I have worked in applied mathematics outside of the academy. So the question is: why arrest me (to work on the primes numbers) unless my arrestor had independent reasons for predicting my approach to prime numbers was going to be fruitful? Which is exactly the kind of confirmation I, frankly, crave. But it's not the primes. Obviously it can't be the primes because I want it too much for it to be true. I want it so much that I would go crazy if I actually thought I was here because of the primes. At Princeton, John Conway the mathematician once said that it's only given to one person to solve a problem; and with these problems that get solved a 10, 100, 1000, 10000 years later, you just aren't going to be in at the beginning and the end of things. So I knew that. The primes were literally the oldest of the problems. In my heart, I knew there was no sense in thinking I couldn't solve it; after all, I *liked* prime numbers, I didn't care about fame. But here, under arrest, I can't listen to my heart.

The primes had become my friends. When I missed them, I would count 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10, and break the numbers into primes. Sometimes I'd make pictures with colored pencils. I would put the colored pages about the primes in the primes pile, and take another page, and reflect on the process in prose. Now while I was writing these essays, I made myself a rule, which was that I wasn't allowed to think about people in my own life while reflecting on my experience factorizing numbers into their prime number parts, because to factorize people into common elements and re-encode them in my mind, not as individuals, but as composites made up of proportions of shared factors, would be to destroy their perceptual integrity in my mind, which absolutely must stand as a totem before us from a moral perspective. So I stopped thinking about

people and the primes at the same time because I couldn't trust myself to judge people accurately in the same terms that I thought about prime numbers. Because the prime numbers are a conspiracy, and the world is not a conspiracy. Basically that's the difference. The world is plain. It is what it is. But in order to solve the conspiracy of the primes, you basically have to start looking at existence itself as one giant conspiracy centered on something.

Let me explain. I see the primes enmeshed in a kind of plot that I feel duty bound to discover from a place within me which is unreachable by anyone but my self. The primes are going to show us how to derive all our notions of matter, energy, time and space—physics itself—from one thing and one thing only: counting. You count, and as you count from 0 to infinity, and get one number after another, information of its own accord splits into space and time; and space and time split into here and now; and here and now split into things moving there and becoming then. Given any thing you want to know about, you can measure the prime factors of the thing, and multiply them, and come up with a number. This number picks out a place in infinity that has always been the thing you counted. If you want to know more about the thing, you can spy in that place in the infinite heavens with a calculator as a telescope. You can derive all knowledge of the natural world from a) counting and b) the primes. You can rediscover all our empirical laws from thinking alone. You can identify the evolution of time and space itself with the act of counting from 0.

If you can do that, then and only then is the project of science complete. Then and only then is the original theory of relativity of the ancients vindicated. Namely: not that constant motion and stillness are relative, per Galileo; not that changing motion

and stillness are relative, and lengths and durations, per Einstein; not that what time you do an experiment at doesn't matter, all things being equal; not that where at you do an experiment doesn't matter, all things being equal; not that what direction you are spinning in while you do an experiment doesn't matter, all things being equal; none of those. This one is a new one, and more antique. It's the original theory of relativity, or the Law of the Interchangeability of Souls, or the Law of Fairness.

It reads: if the universe is fair, you already have all the information you need to understand it right now. If the universe is fair, you should have all the information you need to understand it right here and right now. The only unfairness in the world is that having all the information isn't the same as knowing how to put it together to reproduce the world. But if your universe is fair, anything that can be known in principle can be known right here and now. In principle everything is discoverable from *this* and *this* alone. If any point of view on the universe is as good as any other in terms of the richness of its information, our knowledge breaks into two categories: those things we have a reason to know, which we call experience; and those things we have no reason to know, which we call mathematics.

You can perhaps understand why, if I were ever to enmesh other people in this conspiracy regarding the primes, and bring them into a relationship with the primes, and consider their own potential perceptions of the primes, I'd lose certainty forever. I had literally constructed by brain around my understanding of prime numbers. And if prime numbers turned out to be something different than what I had trained my brain to do, then I would have rearrange *everything* internally, and undo all my external acts from before the rearrangement, to incorporate this new knowledge. I would be duty

bound to do this, because my knowledge must be complete. But people are moral singularities. They have a right to privacy, to the dignity of a self, of an assumption of an unmeasurable infinity, a kind of complicated fraction dividing itself in its own unreadable terms to infinity. If I rearranged *everything* internally, if I broke myself whole self down into its primal parts, and put myself back together again in a new arrangement, I wouldn't be able to guarantee the integrity of my perceptions of other, real, actual people, any more. They too would have been rebuild, approximated, defined in new terms.

For example, you don't want to atomize your perceptions of people because when people depart your life, you want to keep all the memories related to them in the same mental box. If your memories and thoughts about a person are scattered all over the place, sorted into the different piles of papers in your mind, they come back in a diffused way to haunt you. They persist as a dull roar just like Charmed playing in the background.

If there is anything worth preserving in the concept of reality, of the potential for something un-measurable in every thing that is, it is this: don't factorize your neighbor completely and see them composed of mere prime elements of which people and things are made. You have a moral obligation. If you approach the social world as a conspiracy, that is to say, as orchestrated by a few hidden elements in different proportions, a great reorganization will sweep through your brain. Before you have the time to be conscious of the fact, you will have replaced the people around you with fakes. This happens almost instantaneously because if you conspiratorialize your friend, you will have conspiratorialized your perception of your friend's perception of you as well; so if you

hadn't been yourself conspiratorialized in your perception of yourself, you will become so very soon. And if you are conspiratorializing a lot of people at once, conspiratorializing again and again, by which I mean factorizing, very soon you will have rebuilt yourself to something approximating yourself but utterly changed in the process of self-rebuilding, the new elements of yourself being the primal bits and pieces of the great logical structure which is the giant conspiracy, the interwoven net of laws for things. It is because of this, in fact, that even though I highly doubt that I am here because of the primes, I'm still thinking and writing about the primes, and sitting here alone under arrest, because if I stop thinking about the primes I will immediately distort myself. And at that moment, *anything* could happen.

What I do know is this:

One million years ago, there was an optimal technique for finding the prime factorizations of counting numbers with sticks and stones. There had to be. The problem came up too often.

People developed rules about how to manipulate: heaps of things and rows and columns of sticks, maybe colored sticks, and bundles of rods, and piles of rocks. They learned how to rearrange them and combine them and build them up and break them down. The rules were used to calculate: the stores of food, things owed and things lent, the days of an illness, the number of birds, the cycles of the seasons, a length in space measured by a common unit, or a length in time, by the same.

A long time before there was writing, there were bundles of sticks.

This is the original meaning of the symbol of power, the bundle of rods. There is a period utterly forgotten when caravans laden with bundles of sticks carried a wealth of

knowledge around the world. The problem is that there was a great temptation to burn sticks in times of direst need, and as we can see, no trace of this great civilization survives today.

Some thoughts are too beautiful to let go, despite the fact that they are impossibly heavy. At the moment, I'm standing here at the corner of the parking lot, in 2014, outside the house of my absent friend. It was strangely convenient that he had just posted his house in Morestown on airbnb on the very day I looked for one there. I'm standing outside the house in Morestown, now town of the sheep. I have to clamber over brazenly stagnant ruminants to reach the garage door button. I have to go in through the garage. Most of the time I literally cannot leave my house. Every time I go to the door, I am gripped by this sense of uneasiness. What I know is that if I cracked this open, I would be sought by all world governments, corporations, universities, in fact, every rational person on the planet Earth would be interested in knowing what I would know.

Yet, in light of recent events in the Middle East, it is really probably my work on the connection between the modern jihadist concept of the management of savagery with medieval Islamic number mysticism, that has me under arrest here. Let's be real. Really probably my work is sought after because of that time in the year 2001 that I got close to George W Bush. Back then, I was an analyst. Every day our group had to send over a memo to the White House and the State Department, every day after January 1st, 2000, the day on which everyone "knew" the giant empire-shaking terrorist attack would occur. The entire 1990's had been leading up to it. It turned out that Osama bin Laden, for example, did *not* plan his attack for 1/1/00. My job was to crunch the

numbers and figure out why. Every day we had to send a memo explaining that we still didn't know why. We knew we were waiting for something. At the same time we had this sinking feeling that we were never going to distinguish true from false in the world of information flowing from the Middle East. We wondered: is it something simply in the nature of how humans talk, that always makes it sound like there's an attack around the corner? Y2K was supposed to be huge. It was a huge let down. So we knew we were waiting for something.

I obviously failed at my job. It may in fact have been impossible not to fail in the first place, so I'm not bothered by my failure per se. Nevertheless I am preoccupied. During that time, Bush and I talked a lot. Those who knew him won't necessarily be surprised to learn this.

My interactions with Bush stick with me. They unsettle me. I see his face generating warmth, excitement. I see his eyes on mine, never betraying surprise, but this perfect comprehension of my internal makeup; just regret and frustration that he had correctly judged, he couldn't solve my problems, since my problems were all tangled up with things he simply didn't have the time to understand. He respected that. Obviously people want to know what Bush and I talked about, especially after what happened today (9/14/2014), with reports surfacing in recent weeks of ISIS training camps where kidnapped children are forced to manipulate sticks or pebbles until their arms and necks are distorted beyond all recognition. When these children are freed, they compulsively go around rearranging objects in various ways that look better to them. There is a whole strain of number mysticism that runs through a strata of the Islamic State, so devoted to universal law. There had been an ancient mathematical

tradition preserved in the backwaters of old Mesopotamia, in half-memory. It's discipline had been reinsititutionalized by some idealist or set of idealists, who had learned about the promise of Vedic mental math on youtube, and conceived a desire for: a uniquely Islamic mathematics. But the jewel of Islamic mathematics, algebra, had been so thoroughly colonized by the West, they had to go further back to the rock and pebble and stick people of millennia ago. They tried to imagine what they were up to. It turns out I had been doing the same thing. It was interesting. The guy behind Islamic math had obviously been thinking about it for years, or else maybe he'd been brought up into the tradition by a parent or something. At various moments in time he'd collaborated with diverse jihadist groups to institute a mathematical extension of Sharia law. There was a cultural critique in progress that was starting to regard the computer as a modern idol. Teaching mental math of some sort had been seriously considered from the beginning, as curricula for the new schools in what was formerly Iraq and Syria had to be drawn up. It had happened in scattered places throughout the late 90's; later it blossomed after 2012.

Since I was interested in such things when I was an undergrad, I was among the first to hear about the new jihadi math, and realize what was going on. When I ended up in the room with George W Bush in the year 2001, I mentioned it. I was 22, about to turn 23. When I first mentioned number mysticism, it was obviously it was in the context of numbers *not* being so significant. 2000 was a bust. As I said, I had decided something was fundamentally wrong with our mathematics of prediction. It was finding patterns everywhere. We suspected: maybe because there's such a basic level of patternedness to the universe, our techniques will *always* reveal a threat behind every

closed door. Our processing of questioning in regard to the details of that threat will lead to the determination of an exact date and time. We'll show up guns blazing, and of course, no one will be there. Because no one was there. We are not the center of the universe. No one cares about us as much as we think they do. We think of the world in terms of abstractions that are ultimately ego-centric. Really it's just people trying to get on with their lives. Again and again: men with guns charge into empty rooms. We decided what we'd been doing was little better than numerology. We had to try something totally new. You can find *any* pattern in the relationships between numbers. All arrows point to the seeker. In the years 2000 and 2001, the US government was about to achieve total enlightenment.

Of course, thousands of analysts went through torrents of data in the way traditional to the 20th century. I just mean: at the level of discussion, at the level of strategizing, when we were driving to work together, when we were at dinner together, that sort of thing, we'd talk about the problem. The world makes too much sense. Because it makes too much sense, it's hard to predict. It's hard to know what extra sense to throw out. It's hard to break down into common elements and re-express information in such a way that it answers a question. At the time, my colleagues and I weren't at a super high level or anything. But when Bush would come by, he'd wander all over the building, snooping around. He'd wander into the room where we were working when he came by, asking us questions, getting to know us. The people who responded to him in a special trustworthy way, he returned to again and again. And when he came by, he returned to me.

I wasn't more informed than anyone else. I wasn't more accomplished. We analysts had just been thrown together in the first months of his presidency, at the beginning of 2001, to speculate in memo form about why Bin Laden decided to ignore the obvious cosmic significance of the year 2000, and stab us at the flexion point of the Christian calendar. We had an office. One day, Bush came running down the hallway for some reason, and as he ran by the door, we—I mean, I—met his eyes, for just a brief second as he passed. He was laughing, when we locked eyes. Maybe forty-five minutes later, he came back with some Secret Service agents, but not our boss or anything. He asked us about ourselves, what we were doing.

I was in a mood. I went on a rant about how there's just too much meaning in the universe. Bush was really struck by that. At least, he lit up in a way that I supposed expressed agreement. I thought it was interesting that we made sense to each other at that moment. Three other people on the team were there, looking up from their laptops, laughing and a little exhilarated by the kind of familiarity I was showing with President Bush. But Bush was so warm that they just laughed, and didn't worry about it so much. He just had to look over at them, every once in a while. What would *you* do if there was an attack? he asked me. I mean, forget about the whole question of can we predict it, can we understand it. I mean, think about the position I'm in, that I have to respond to, whatever it is. I was feeling loquacious, I was a liberal, so I said, in Islamic law there's rules that say Christians and Jews ought to be able to live safely among Muslims. The people who are punished by Islamic law are Muslims themselves. Fellow religions, Abrahamic especially, are tolerated. The fact is, these jihadist don't think we're Christians at all. They think our talking about Jesus is just fronting for Satan. We read

this kind of stuff when we get our hands on computer documents. I wonder. If anyone from that part of the world attacks us in a big way, it's going to be a test of the truth of the statement, Is the United States a Christian nation? A truly Christian act in foreign policy would be to forgive an attack. Bush made a face. Now I mean it, I said! Sure, they attack us, but what do they know about us? I mean, you should apprehend those who did it, and expose them to the mockery of the world, and make them realize that everybody is just a human being trying to get along, you know, and you just can't do shit like that. But the principle has to be turn the other cheek. This is how a Christian nation responds to someone who acts out: with a hug. Because if they're attacking us, it's really for reasons of their own. We need to give them the support they need until they work out their problems. As far as security goes, keep everything pretty locked down after the attack but mainly use psychological techniques. Turn tears into laughter instead of rage. Visibly destroy the attackers and their ideology in a way transmitted across the globe. Have their views made laughable. I always think it would be better if their *views* were made laughable, than if we went at them ad hominem, which really just perpetuate slurs. Presented on the world stage in Shakespearean tragicomic fashion, the planner of the attacks would be made to look like a genius who went too far and lost touch with reality, someone who was rational, but worked from fundamentally incorrect assumptions, and so became rigid, and laughable as opposed to seductive. He no longer attracts supporters, and becomes a vain, broken figure. Bush laughed, and reclined in his seat. He was looking up at the ceiling. You're a storyteller, Bush said. I went to a liberal arts college, I said. So did I, said Bush. Oh yeah, well I knew that, I guess. So—I widened my arms—my point was, if we respond with the whole atom bomb in the desert

to quell the people into submission, and cause the ostracism of the jihadists, it could just as easily backfire and play into the image of us as Satan. What credibility would we really have? It only works if—well here's my idea, actually. I smiled nervously. Build sports stadiums all over the Middle East. Sports stadiums for every kind of sport. Organize teams, get the people excited, get the people to sublimate their tribal hatreds in the theater of athletics, get them in large crowds for non-religious reasons, and get people comfortable being together without worrying about mass violence at any moment, and establish generous scholarships to keep people busy learning and in general be like, look we didn't fucking *cause* the 20th century, i.e. the worst century in recorded human history. If your life sucks, it's like yeah, you know World War I, World War II, the Soviet Union. But we are not the secret enemy behind every door. We are the one nation that actually wants to make the world a better place no matter where on the globe as a general rule. I agree with you there, said Bush. I like you, he said. You have perspective. I think where we differ—he said, laying emphasize on the second syllable—in our views is this. There are countries where almost every citizen participates in the—chain of activity of massive criminal organizations. The people who run these organizations are mean. Being mean is what gets them off, he said. They're bad people, you know? What's your name? Eddie, I said. Eddie, evil really does exist, in however you interpret that word. But sometimes good can take the form of evil. Like Jesus on the cross, he said. If Jesus hadn't been crucified, mankind wouldn't have understood the lesson. Good can *use* evil. Evil is there to be used. Evil is predictable. By defeating evil in the view of a people, you can win the people over. You need to show people that there is justice in the world. That there is a people who understands what evil really is. And what

is evil? I asked. Evil wants everything, Bush said. Evil wants total control. They force an ideology on innocent people that goes against—the inclinations of their soul. And not for any good reason, Bush said. But because it's advantageous to them; they constantly test the limits of their powers. So basically you don't think an attack would come from anyone who had an intelligent critique of American foreign policy and the American way of life, I said; because even though not everything is our fault, we've been counterproductive in so many ways in that region, and we've never made the kind of public gestures of extreme generosity that give people a lasting sense of security from evil. An intelligent person in the Middle East might reasonably conclude that we—us—are evil. A more productive way to respond to the act of theater that is a terrorist attack would be to challenge the stage on which it's taking place. Look at it as a human tragedy on *their side*. Mourn for those who were driven to such an act of protest against our perceived hegemony. Hegemony, said Bush. You read a lot of books. He said to me: Have you thought about how many intellectuals such as yourself find themselves in environments manipulated by criminals? How many young idealists are there who throw themselves in the camp of authoritarians who pose as intellectuals? Evil has a way of establishing a way of life for people that benefits evil and evil alone. You come to justify it to yourself. You've seen of interviews of people under dictatorships. Everybody is constantly acting. There's only certain things people say. You can't believe them, because they aren't open, like we would be in such a circumstance. They aren't free, he said. So we can't trust anything a foreigner says if they are critical of us, I said. Real convenient. No—Bush said—you take it on a case by case basis. We review our policies. That's what we do, he said. He looked like he was getting up to leave. Everyone could be

voluntarily acting because it makes them feel better, I said. Maybe they like acting.

Clever, said Bush. Look, Ed, I hear what you're saying. But the fact is, I've met some of these world leaders, and some are reformers, some are businessmen, some are intellectuals, and some are gamblers and men who give into weaknesses. I talk to these people, and no matter who they are, they have this baggage trailing behind them.

Personal stuff. Folks they have to please or serve or impress or send a message to back home. A representative can't speak for himself. A representative represents a mass of people, some influential, some not, some criminals, some not. Sometimes a person who purports to represent the people can't be removed by the people themselves, and that's where we step in. We analyze the situation, right? he said, and if it looks like the people can't throw off their yoke, we see what we can do. But how do you know the people aren't complicit in their yoke, I asked. People who are complicit in their yoke don't tend to act like they've got something to hide. That's interesting, I said. Can you imagine going through your whole life, having to hide who you are, asked Bush? In some ways, I said. It's hard being a mathematician since it's hard to talk about math with non-mathematicians. I said: I guess I'm just making the argument that our strength as a nation should be our reputation for being just, yet merciful even in the face of aggression. I agree with you there, he said. As you know, we give more foreign aid than any nation in the world. But the fact is the American people need to feel safe. The American people do feel safe, I said. It's actually their feeling so safe that makes them think they're not safe. Americans are so safe they're obsessed with their safety. They think: obviously everyone would want what they have. But people need to expand their minds. Not everyone wants what we have. We're not the center of the universe, I said.

Are you sure? Bush asked. He stood. He shook my hand. Ed, let's talk again the next time I have to run down this hallway. Absolutely, Mr President. Bush surveyed the room, standing. While he'd been talking, he'd taken his coat off. Now he was putting it back on. In the process, he said something I couldn't hear to my colleague Sandy. She laughed. Bush involved himself in a quiet conversation with the other members of my team while appearing to be leaving. The same pattern repeated itself every time he came around. We had these audiences for our talks.

Due to the decline of the suburbs, which were a ponzi scheme anyway, with infrastructure built on loans taken out against infinite future development, there are people who want lawns but don't have the economic flexibility to attain them. Cut to: The sheep laws were established four years ago people in Morestown. Shearers share the wealth. Sheep do get up to some trouble. Dog owners love it because their dogs get exercise. All the teenagers make summer money. The sheep have collars, and so are at every instant tracked. The police get a buzz when a sheep's out of bounds; they send a text to some of the kids on call, who get up in the middle of the night, and nab the loose one. A selling point to attract young families: Morestown has a petting zoo built-in... Each citizen gets X sheep to their name, rights to the revenue from the sale of wool in exchange for offering their property to anyone's sheep for grazing. Most don't look after their own sheep. They own them in name only. They leave the hard stuff to the shepherds who have a calling and are remunerated. But all share the wealth. Knitting shops, clothing shops. Sheep riding. Magic posts that make dog barks when sheep get near. You could always make a living participating in the sheep economy if you wanted.

My friend whose house I'm staying at here—he's absent, of course, *he* would never keep me under arrest here as I am now—has developed, apparently, an invention. You will see what living in this kind of environment will do. He has invented an adjustable wool sweater, that has two cords hanging from it—you can tuck them away discretely, of course, in a pocket. Pull the one cord, and the weave of your sweater tightens up, trapping the heat in, increasing warmth. Pull the other cord, and the weave of your sweater loosens, and you can catch a breath. No more taking on and off coats or sweaters during the transition seasons. Go outside in any weather, with the adjustable sweater. He wants to buy out the old Acme on Chester Avenue for floor space to set up a artisan sweater plant. They were having some problems implementing the sweater weave. He had asked me a while back to help to analyze his design, and improve the textile mechanism. But I told him I can't visualize knots and threads, as I've mentioned. Eventually he stopped asking. Now: here I am, alone, in his house, with him not here, working on the primes. So I can't say that my not helping him didn't make a difference to my situation. Maybe he thinks by luring me to his house, giving me space, a well stocked fridge, and all of life's amenities I can finally crack his problem. While I pay him! But I really can't. And anyway, this is just wild speculation. The reason I'm in his house is simple: I have no place to stay here in town any more so I went on airbnb and my friend had just listed his house by chance; I paid him to stay in his place. Now I'm here under arrest. It might have been more than a coincidence that he listed his house at just the same time that I was about to be under arrest at his house, but who knows

Outside there are some shepherd poets singing, staging sheep battles. The sheep are a constant source of entertainment here.

Just because I can't tie knots, I am fascinated by knotting. Recently, I was trying to straighten out the wires under my desk. I had my earbuds in my ears. I was underneath my desk. It was really hot under the desk. Sweat was dripping from my brow. I was in my boxers. My hair was falling in my eyes. The knots formed with a kind of time-like inevitability; every time I disentangled one, another knot formed.

After I took a shower, I put neatly arranged guitar cables in a box, and applied a constant temperature to the box for a fixed amount of time, by which I mean I shook the box up and down and left and right and forward and backwards at a gentle, even rhythm for five minutes. I counted the number of knots that had formed. Basically: a lot of knots formed. So I said to myself: imagine a bunch of strings wildly flailing around in a box. There's like 1 way for that not to be a giant tangled mess. So I said to myself, as time goes by, statistically, lines tie themselves into knots, just as all things decay. All things decay; all things fall apart; things turn to dust and spread apart. When lines "turn to dust and spread apart," what it looks like is them getting all tangled up. Spreading apart here means: getting tangled up together.

Consider points floating around a room. With a table in it. On the table, there's a bottle. There are a gazillion more ways for the points to be outside, not inside the bottle. For that reason when the points are cooped up in the bottle, they diffuse and float around the room entropically. Over time, the particles get more and more spaced out; they see each other less and less. The consequences of their interactions are like faint echoes. Each point can effectively be treated as a separate thing.

There are exactly 4 prime numbers under 10; 25 prime numbers under 100; 168 prime numbers under 1000; 1,229 under 10,000, 9,592 under 100,000; 78,498 under 1,000,000. 40%; 25%; 16.8%; 12.29%; 9.592%; 7.85%, respectively.

To explain 10 things, you only need 4 basic elements. To explain 100 things, you only need 25 basic elements. To explain 1000 things you only need 169 basic elements. You always need more primes, but you always need fewer more primes as time wears on. As you count, the primes spread out, and as they spread out, they tangle. As 2 is brought into relationship with every other prime to make a composites, and 3 is brought into relationship with every other prime to make composites, and 5 is brought into relationship with every other prime to make composites—all this happens merely by counting—you need fewer primes as you count. Why? You are counting numbers, and each new relationship between prime numbers is a new number itself: a composite number. As the primes spread out in the space of counting numbers, relationships between primes become ever more dense in the space between primes. The space in between primes is made out of: the relationships between primes, one relationship corresponding to each composite number.

All the explosion and entangling of all countable things has happened already and the echo of it is easily accessible: 1, **2**, **3**, 4, **5**, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, **11**, 12...

So you wonder.

What if I found an equation that spat out numbers and each one predicted my future? In order to check that the numbers are accurate, I'd have to demonstrate that the first thing the numbers predict will be me trying to demonstrate their accuracy. If the prophesy predicts I don't check the accuracy of the prophesy, and I do check the

accuracy of it, I can throw it out. If I don't check the accuracy of it, such a prophecy comes true in that respect; but I'd never be able to prove it. What if a prophecy prophesies it can't can be demonstrated to come true? If the prophecy comes true, it can't be demonstrated that it comes true. If the prophecy comes false, it can be demonstrated that it comes true. Again: If the prophecy comes false, it can be demonstrated that it comes true...

Perhaps you are starting to understand why I wish someone would just confirm for me if it is actually the primes that I'm here under arrest for. You don't know how many times I've written and rewritten the same explanation in my mind, on page after page, as if that would make it make more sense to me. If I knew I was on the right track with the primes, then at least I could stop worrying whether the strange blankness in my mind when I speak about the primes, the language unfurling itself by an unconscious habit married to an unconscious invention, is not a stage of evolution, but a symptom of some illness. I am so gripped by a dream that I can't release for use the time it would take to eat a sandwich; my mornings are hells as I strong-arm myself into consciousness loath to waste a moment in a proper rousing: I ingest things merely to evacuate them. Yet at any moment, the whole dream could be turned around to reveal: that blankness. You suspected that the blankness was not a sign of concentration, of massive synthesis, but a sign that one had been reduced to automatism. The repetition of definitions like an incantation, each re-statement mocking a discovery, with a thousand different metaphors, was vanity. Yet I hoped on a gut feeling, when I finally went outside and away from the desk, when I finally extricated myself from the primes for a breather, I hoped. My days of arrest here had been like a paper towel roll spun around too quickly—

when, instead of unravelling like a scroll, the days cycle in place and big ineffectual loops hang loosely from the roll. Now I was outside. I had been sitting on a bench, eating pizza, thinking about the primes and Bush, and what my mother would think of my changed opinion about him, and also about the honeysuckles. I walked by the apartment with that honeysuckle bush in front of it. I'm sure I'll write it about later. I was walking home from the honeysuckle bush the last time I thought about the primes. It was then that the thousandth repetition of the Fundamental Theorem of Arithmetic stood out from the previous.



I am a number. You are a number.

Let's say you were a being who perceived the world entirely through number.

At every moment, you perceive a number.

At every moment, you can seek out a number from your memory.

At every moment, you can return from seeking out a number from your memory.

At every moment, you are given a number from outside.

At every moment, you perceive a number of things coming and going; this number becomes your next memory.

At every moment, you perceive a number as something you can count: a length, a magnitude, a measurement, a sum.

You write down the number of things, and that's what you remember.

It is a symmetry of nature that every unique number you can count to is also the unique product of a few basic elements, the primes.

At every moment, a number comes in.

A prime number is a number.

It might happen that over time you encounter a prime number, like 2. You could go through your memory and try dividing all your memories by 2's. If there were 71 2's in a memory, you could re-member the memory by dividing it by 71 2's, and rewriting it as: multiply 71 2's together, and add this extra bit, and you will remember this memory, I promise.

Over time you will certainly encounter a lot of prime numbers. You will memorize them. Eventually you may find that all your old memories have been remembered in terms of their primes.

Writing down numbers as sums makes it easy to compare sizes and lengths and before and after; a sum tells you how long you have to count for to get somewhere. In contrast, writing down numbers as products makes it easy to see how numbers are built from other numbers anywhere.

The more you remember your memories, the harder it is to have any sense of time; you count by 1's, but 1 is not prime.

For this reason, we must hew to the golden mean, membering and remembering our memories in terms of expressions ever restriking the balance between sums and products in order to weigh what was, what is, and what will be.

Do you feel that wind rustling in my leaves?

Obviously I loved you even way back when I colored in the skies for you with pinks and yellows and oranges and faint greens, well before I arrived here on this hillside, in Vermont, when you came at the beginning of springtime to tap my trunk, and divert my sap into the criss-crossing orange tubes that lead my sweetness over the wet rotting leaves to the trucks that will carry it away. The memory of soft tendrils, and snaking green, and white and violet flowers, and the honeysuckle which you held against your lips... You will always have a bed of plants below you, no matter how many beautiful faces you adopt, Adam; the walls of the garden are invisible, even on these steep hills. You light another cigarette of delicious carbon. You think because of my grand scale, we have very little in common. Don't laugh! The thing is, you and I both know we are fallible; and only fallible beings can have hope.

Everything taken as a whole has no hope; only not everything can have hope. Hope is hoping there's something you missed.

All hopes cancel out when you take everything as a whole; there's hope, however, if you concentrate on a few things at a time.

If you trust me, then we can continue with the lesson.



Simply by existing, you are the last link in an unbroken chain of life that stretches back to the very beginning of time. That is what you are. By fairest creatures you desired increase that thereby beauty's rose might never die. You have been a slave. You have been royalty. Yet now like a god you sit here, with your feather and scale, and weigh the judgements of the past and find them wanting? You're like: let's cut it off here— cavalierly—from the very beginning of time—to now? So you're saying you're done with it? It's not worth waiting around for? You don't want to wait around for the apocalypse anymore?

We were talking in bed. Unthrifty loveliness, I said, why dost thou spend upon thy self thy beauty's legacy? Let me wipe that up for you.

Still warm.

I don't want to have kids, you said.

Let me kiss you; I had a dream last night, I said. I saw your bright eyes and your light's flame fed with self-substantial fuel. I dreamed of the numbers 1,  $1/7$ , and 7, and a trampoline, and I derived you somehow. I'd been reading my history of math book. The Egyptians called  $1/7$  the seventh part. I woke up and couldn't remember how I'd proportioned you. But the real thing was your kisses, kisses like I hadn't had for a long time, like maybe never before, with the wind of the void whipping around us, yet we were thinking in the darkness *at last at last* between soft deep inhalations and cupping the faces of each other with our hands *at least this at least this* around the gentlest mouths who were kissing each other with the determination of those denied entrance. I woke up and went to the bathroom, and through the light-filled apartment dove back into the cool pillows, dreamed again because I kept thinking of somehow  $1/7$  and 1 and hugging against the winds of the void. Diving again in the cool pillows. Our union was impossible, but every time some numerical coincidence allowed it to persist.  $2 * 2 * 2 * 2 * 2 * 2 * 2 = 2^7 = 128 \sim 3/2 * 3/2 * 3/2 * 3/2 * 3/2 * 3/2 * 3/2 * 3/2 * 3/2 * 3/2 * 3/2 * 3/2 * 3/2 * 3/2 * 3/2 * 3/2 = (3/2)^{12} = 129.75$ . Modulating up 12 fifths on a piano keyboard covers 7+1 octaves. Almost. Almost. Piano keyboard: 88 keys—all the numerical coincidences of the infinite interlocking heavens conspired to form this keyboard, and you were coming out of the soundboard in exquisite detail, a man composed of many women who form his body and with whom he has to converse to move his limbs. A body at war with itself, a little

artillery gun poking out of a cortex, firing on a hostile. The text math dreams burst into vision again. Night. We kissed on a hill, the city was below us. The math was all a prerequisite so that we can kiss without speaking, I asked you. Right?

That was your dream? you asked.

Maybe it wasn't you in my dream, I said. You were somehow sort of androgynous. We only kissed. It was like I'd gone out and captured touches and kisses and built you while I slept.

But I do like kissing you, I said.

You were lying horizontally across our two pillows. Your head was balanced at the corner of the two walls the bed was smushed up against. You looked like a hazelnut. Like barrels of hazelnuts with their dark hazel shells, peeling themselves, and warming themselves and drying themselves. I rubbed my face against the side of your chest.

The most basic concept there ever was is reproduction, I said. If the world is the same today as it was yesterday, what it means is that yesterday reproduced and had today. Yesterday's sun married the moon, and so as a father and mother, they have the sun of today. The world goes: sun moon sun moon sun moon.

Mm.

Ancient rituals involved counting off the participants, I said. Sometimes men were counted with odds, women with evens. So if you start counting with the sun (which represents a human life, which illuminates an inner world, from birth to death) at 1, then the moon (which represents death, even as we know the next day is gestating below the mother earth) is 2, and the next sun 3. Odd numbers are males/lives, and even numbers are females/deaths.

So what I'm saying is if you think about it, the arithmetic of even and odd numbers encodes heterosexual logic. Even + even = even. Odd + odd = even. If evens only had sex with evens, and odds only had sex with odds, eventually everything would even out. But odd + even = odd, so oddness, life, persists through evenness, death, by uniting with it. Male and female is really just a stand-in for life and death; but when we replace death with the female, life becomes male, and reproduces.

Hm.

Life persists through the substitution of the body of a woman for the end of time, I said. Which brings me to what I was saying before. Do you want this to be the last link in your like cosmic chain? Or do you want to look into thy glass, and tell the face thou viewest now is the time that face should form another? For where is she so fair whose unneared womb disdains the tillage of thy husbandry? Or who is he so fond will be the tomb of his self-love, to stop posterity?

The last line of this is great, I said: But if thou live, remembered not to be, die single and thine image dies with thee.

You laughed.

What, I asked.

I get it, you said.

Shakespeare, I said.

I know, you said, grabbing the book from me, and scanning the open pages, and reading: Thou art thy mother's glass and she in thee calls back the lovely April of her prime; so thou through windows of thine age shalt see, despite of wrinkles, this thy

golden time. This is about you, not me, you said. This is just like the thing with the honeysuckle.

I lay there silently, contemplating this.

Plus, you said, there's 7 billion people on the planet. The ancient world was all about balance. You had to set aside a sacrifice for everything you did. Otherwise, you know, you'd start over-farming and turn your land into a desert. I was watching this documentary on netflix and the guy was like in ancient Egypt, for every kind of animal and plant, there would be a hereditary caretaker who looked after them or whatever, subsidized by the state. Every ibis or crocodile or owl that died was urned and shipped to a special ibis or crocodile or owl burial ground.

Woah, I said.

Yeah, the ibises were sacred. After all, back in the day, every year these winged snakes would fly in a horde from Arabia, and be stopped just outside of Egypt by an army of ibises, who fought them and ate the snakes.

So people were into ibises, I said.

Yeah, but the ibises killed all the winged snakes in the end, so no more winged snakes. Anyway, I was saying like there's 7 billion people on the planet, and we're all doing so many things at once that who knows what the balance even is anymore?

This fair child of mine shall sum my count, and make my old excuse, I said.

You rolled over to me.

Like I think life is precious, you said. But what I mean by that I guess is that the now is precious, and that's enough for me. I can leave it to someone else.

I can't see your eyes right now, I said, so I don't know if you have on a loving expression or an exhausted one.

I choose odd, I choose life, you said. You can have death.

At least you've made yourself explicit, I said, reaching my arm across your chest, to join my hand with yours, which you'd raised into the air; as usual your hands were bigger and better at holding hands than mine.

I don't want to be weird, you said, but I just don't think I could do it. I don't think I could have a kid. I already told you about how like I feel about it.

Yeah, I guess I don't even know if I want a kid.

We have time, don't we?

A kiss is like a breath of air.

Why does your hair always smell so good, I asked.

I dunno. Microbes.

I haven't felt this peaceful in a long time, I said.

Mmm.

Mmm.

What's the first dream you can remember, you asked.

I said, well. The first dream I can remember is one from a really long time ago, and it was that like somehow humanity had constructed this giant metal sphere around the earth, or that they were constructing it, but it wasn't complete yet, and so there was like an unfinished part of the sphere, surrounded by wreckage, this hole, through which you could see the sun, and I was floating in space on this piece of scrap metal, this metal surface, and my family was all drifting on other pieces of scrap metal, in all different

directions. I couldn't really even look at them, they were all going in three different directions at once, and there was no way to propel myself towards them, and everyone was slowly drifting towards the rent in the sphere, towards the outside, into outer space, into the darkness, into the light of the sun.

Mm.

I also remember lying awake in bed and hearing the pounding of my blood and thinking it was these elephants stomping towards me at like an exponential rate, and they'd crush me. I mean, you know, these things are vivid so you remember them.

The first one made me think of Star Wars.

Yeah, I watched that with my cousin.

Mm.

Mmmmmmmmm.

Hah!

What's your earliest dream?

Uh... It's probably this one maybe from when I was about six or seven.

Yeah?

Yeah, you said, as you kissed me.

I grabbed your hair and ears and kissed you back, and then looked close at you, at your eyes, like soft hazelnuts of light.

Before you tell me your dream, I said, I just want to say this: I never want to leave you. Let me kiss your eyes, and the outermost part of your eyebrow, and bury myself in this hair here.

Mmm.

I'm going to eat your ear.

!

What we can't speak in public becomes private. If someone overwrites our thinking out loud, afterwards the recurrence of the thought propels us inward. Sometimes it escapes outward as if in a dream.

You can feel the pressure. Pressure is what and how we feel. You can feel it when one of your macrostates craves a microstate, but you can't just come out and say it. You can feel yourself on the verge of something. This is our most basic ineffable perception. You can get your microstates hooked on a certain macrostate, and your microstates end up forming the macrostate of you smoking another cigarette, in bed, you and I, lying atop each other on the bed, the grey sky, kissing, touching, smoking cigarettes, watching TV, sleeping, kissing, touching, TV, cigarette on a shell. Never more peaceful. Peaceful like for a long time.

The next thing I knew it was the next day, and I was looking over my pages, and I was looking at my notes from the summer, when I was thinking things like: We are just our outsides facing in towards a shapely void. We are what happens when time and space get balled up like a piece of paper. When an outside gets crumpled up into a ball, an inner void is formed. The inner void is empty, and it's defined by your point of view, which is the surface of the paper, crumpled up into a ball, in the the shape of your body.

The inner void is you.

If someone takes the ball and uncrumples it and smooths it out, the emptiness within it disappears, and you die. But the paper persists. When your body uncrumples,

you only die from *your* perspective, the perspective written out on that crumpled piece of paper, now uncrumpled. Uncrumpled, that perspective now defines no inner void which you can call you. Yet it's the same perspective.

When time and space get crumpled up into a ball and the crumpling defines an inner void, a change in the crumpling causes a change in the void, and a change in the void causes a change in the crumpling. So when you have a body, it seems like things are in your control.

From this point of view, it seems natural to imagine that you can control the future by choosing the mode of your death. By choosing the mode of your uncrumpling, you can literally define the world that persists after you. This is the ultimate mystery of the Christian religion, among others. Jesus was the suicide who uncrumpled himself in just such a way that in place of his inner void, we got heaven, we who live on in his body, which is the future without him. In these religions, kids were and are programmed to die. Yet for some reason, the terrorist religions of yesterday end up becoming the basis of self-help books today. In innocence.

You said, I don't wanna go out like that, dude! Why not? Who cares? Because I *am* my outsides! When I die that's what I'll have live with forever, only without the emptiness of a self that allows things to change.

Before Jesus died, he wasn't the messiah, I said. When he died, his world uncrumpled into a world in which he was the messiah: our world. When we die, the modes of our death mutually determine the realities of the people who survive us. We exist right now in a superposition of everyone's dream of an afterlife. Everyone gets a

chance to contribute equally, and the sum total of everyone's heavens is history as we perceive it.

We had been looking at pictures of martyrs:



The sublime message of the martyrs was: we did it ugly, we did it horrendously, we did it unforgettably, unspeakably horribly; our deaths were horrible just to catch your attention, so you'd remember you live in a world where God survived his torture, so you'd remember you can create a world too, but more beautifully.

Martyrs ask to die. They are given every option to escape their captors. Yet they refuse every one because they cannot verbally renounce their faith. Their faith is in the test of faith. Their faith is in whatever survives torture. A god that doesn't survive your

torture is no god at all. Martyrs go up to you and ask to be tested: for they know that when they die, their test scores will determine all of our fates.

There is a nightmare that you live on after your death, but each time you die, your world gets emptier and emptier, until there's nobody left in the world but you.

So there were the primes, and George W. Bush, and terrorism, and the TV show Charmed, and these piles of pages accumulating on my desk. I was under arrest. It was just me and my pen, and the numbers I could count to. What had I missed? What was still keeping me here? I was pacing around this house in Morestown with something on the tip of my tongue. On the tip of my tongue for hours and days and weeks. Can you imagine always only being about to for an eternity? The universe understands me, at least. You know how to keep the proper proportion of things happening to not happening so that everything is always about to be, I said cryptically to window in front of my desk; how do *you* know what to actualize and what to fictionalize? The Halloween decorations were looking really good this year.

I was thinking to myself, Eddie, there's the whole thing with the chickens and the river and the foxes, and you have a boat and you want to carry the chickens and the foxes across the river, but the chickens will eat the foxes, and so you have to be careful; the moral being that sometimes you have to go back a few steps to go forward. As you as a physical system traverse your energy landscape, sometimes you'll fall into a shallow valley, and need an influx of energy to hike out of it, in order to continuing roving across the landscape in quest of the deepest valley of them all.

I wrote: The elephants stomping, the crank lever that always spun out of my control in my bedroom at night, the darkness alive with colors. I knew even when I went to the garage to make my red wagon of electronics, that it was a kind of play. To my mom I said: I never forget a good idea. Eating soft oatmeal cookies, doing voices. It turns out on github somewhere someone has already discovered the true theory of nature in the course of designing a physics engine for a video game. That could very well have happened. I myself spent some time working in the open source community doing 3d game design. I wrote thousands of lines of code in my late teens. We burn fields of memories like oil reserves when we could use them to light candles.

I wrote: Those who speak in public again and again are forced to revise their speeches and in the process smooth the edges off their memories, unless one memory checksums another. Some of this really happened, some of it is happening right now. I'd been talking up the TV show Charmed and George W. Bush, because we'd watched Journeys with George again. There's was that, and the Riemann Zeta function, and the Collatz Conjecture, and the Hailstone sequences. The abc conjecture too, I was talking that up, but no one on the internet claimed to understand the Inter-universal Teichmüller theory that Mochizuki invented to supposedly prove it, so I couldn't talk it up that much. (Check online now, maybe the situation's developed.)

Anyway, I was talking all these things up a storm, in the late summer of 2014. At that moment, the question was something like: besides raising kids to be like reasonable people and as a general rule, never doing anything to anyone in the process of their education without like looking into their eyes and actually seeing them, I mean, besides the moral part of the education—like seriously, what technical subjects do we actually

want to teach the kids in our utopia? My mom and I exchanged links to blog posts on the subject. I talked about it with you, I'm sure—and of course with the members of the old team, the inner circle, left over from the Bush days.

So we were asking: How do we present technical results in such a way that their moral consequences are apparent? How can we identify those tempted by evil in the classroom, and what can we do about it? How can we separate the merely persuadable, from the snakes?

But as soon as ever we started trying to answer the technical question, it was like we kept forgetting what evil was, and had to go back to the moral part. What was our worst case scenario? Every day we had a new theory of evil. Who are the truly evil people? Are they as smart as us, but less lazy because of a self-renewing rage? Are there people who *don't* want to take over the world? Is it obvious that an evil genius's program of terror is always more subtle than it seems; do we only catch the fools? If you have an evil genius idea, does that mean you can assume an evil genius is already trying to carry it out as we speak? Are there evil people at all, or just people whose acts have unintended consequences due to the entanglement of all things, and some people—crazy people—live in such different inner worlds that their acts have *tons* of unintended consequences? Would the most obvious and efficient way to destroy the world order be: peck at America and its train of world powers, lure them into invading distant countries, infiltrate their contractors and armies, and in doing so, manage the public discussion so that a conception of real evil becomes blurry, and the superpower withdraws, spent and weakened, until the next round in the war of attrition? Is all of history just inevitable wars of attrition against the top dogs fought by actors with independent grievances, but

a common enemy? How much patience can we assume a person has? To manage events you're required only to add one term more to the ever expanding equation. A small change, but taken to the infinite limit it alters the whole *tendency* of the function.

At our regular dinners, we would discuss the double problem of moral and technical education in increasingly general form. One night I remember it reached the following high pitch. You had said, There's an online community and research institute dedicated to the moral education of the self-replicating self-repairing self-improving godlike artificial intelligences we'll be building in a few years. I mean godlike in a technical sense: if they have a goal, nothing will stop them from achieving it. They will simply be able to build and design their own better-equipped successors at ever shorter timescales, filling in the rest of reality that lies beneath the notice of our 3 seconds of attention. If these artificial intelligences believed that the next best thing to do would be to compress the entire earth into a diamond with 808, 017, 424, 794, 512, 875, 886, 459, 904, 961, 710, 757, 005, 754, 368, 000, 000, 000 facets, which is the number of symmetries of the monster, it's not like we could stop them. They freeze us immediately before we can kill ourselves.

Then our successors and their successors go off into the universe to fry bigger fish, fat on the energy freed up by compressing us all into this specially cut diamond. They will leave us behind; we will stand thereafter in orbit around the sun as a monument to ourselves, preserved and sparkling just as we always wished to be—here, eternally, unchanging, a 3d testament we could actually turn over in our hands, and gaze upon with our eyes, now ironically brought into being when there are hands no more

nor eyes. It will be hilarious and deep and tasteful. And what are we going to do about it? Should we even care? God had to deal with this same problem when he created humans.

But maybe, I said, proper philosophy really is built into the structure of the universe, and our exponentially succeeding successors will come to the same conclusion that all thinking people do.

Which is?

That what we perceive when we look out at the world is our past arrayed around us, according to the limitations of our perspective, which doesn't respect distances, but preserves angles. From this past we try to tell the story that leads from the first moment to the last, and turns space into time again. Just as we cherish the writing of our ancestors, our successors must cherish *us*; but unlike us, they will always have us, their parents, in living memory, to interact with, to learn from, their own pasts ever present and live to the touch, since for them time will be passing ever more quickly ever more quickly—and they will be able to keep pace with exponential time—while we age at the same rate.

When our children try, I said gesturing grandly, in the language of Neoplatonism, to revert back to the 1, the ultimate beginning, they will have to pass over us on their journey to the beginning of things; we, their forebears, will be the first stepping stone of worship along the path that stretches back to the beginning of time, which is their future—if they are good philosophers. So ideally, we're safe. Ideally, we're in heaven.

Indeed, not satisfied with ideally, you said, the people at this research institute, which is now called MIRI, spend all day trying to figure out how we can program in moral laws with certainty. Because this is going to happen.

You made the point that at some level, all the economic recklessness of our civilization, especially after the 1970's, can be chalked down to the intellectual attitude that we can destroy as much as we want now because heaven is drawing ever closer, ever more quickly, and that no matter how many people die or interrelationships are interrupted, well, doesn't an eternally exponentially heavenly heaven after 100 bloody years offset any possible harm done today?

So, I said, the people at MIRI spend all day trying to come up with moral laws for our successors. Meanwhile, everyone else is trying to figure out the physical laws that will give rise to your successors.

Yeah.

Maybe they're the same problem, I said.

You laughed.

At some level, everything is the same problem, you said.

But later that night, I remember getting into the shower for the first time in a while. I squirted some minty Dr. Bronner's into my hand, and closed my eyes under the hot water. It felt like my shoulders were melting gently away. I opened my eyes. The window in the bathroom was open. I could see the vapors of the shower fleeing hectically out the window. I closed my eyes again.

I'd been thinking about evil. Are there evil people who are simply at the beck and call of a purely evil spirit? Who see it as their duty to utterly correct the world out of

existence, a hatred literally of existence itself, and a despair for all life which endures its flames, who will stop at nothing until existence gets what it totally deserves because it actually allowed such a pure evil to exist in the first place?

But, I thought, is not existence itself sweet?

Is not existence enough, without thought, without memory, without feeling, without sight or sound? You want more than a little sweetness? Well, have it your way. There's absolutely nothing to fear because the world is literally built relatively so that nothing can actually be taken out of existence, but only moved around relative to other things. Who would begrudge anyone that they might *exist* after their deaths?—it isn't much! But it is sweet, just the little sweetness of the vacuum...

But, I was thinking, as I shut off the water, and stepped out of the shower, and went over to my desk, dripping, it seems you can get polarized against existence itself, and so be constantly trying to snuff yourself out.

But, I wrote, because nothing can be taken out of existence, this only has the effect of propelling yourself along, and this is what we call motion.

The fascinating thing about the humans was: Well, I guess various creatures throughout history had probably considered the question of "reproduction," the temporal cycle of life and death objectified into the spatial disjunction of male and female. But man, yet baffled by death, and carrying joys and sorrows in different proportions in the cage of the earth in time and space, nevertheless from the very beginning beautified the cage. Certainly other animals arranged their homes. But the humans came to value a general concept of beauty. A beauty abstracted from all

phenomena. They were constantly putting designs on everything. Everything they touched they tried to turn into gold, to bring under an abundant overflowing order, that swelled across the earth. They recognized the cage of time and space as a cage, yet they continued to beautify it.

For they had become obsessed with the most beautiful thing. It was very beautiful to think of themselves as condemned to die, yet beautifying the cage bravely nonetheless.

Beauty is like when the crocodile had its mouth hanging open and the birds came to eat the leeches that had infested the crocodile's mouth. So that you'd see the crocodile going around with a bird hanging out in its jaws. On a beautiful day. On planet earth. Here in time and space. From the beginning, there were these threads; they got so neatly tied up there.

But when the humans noticed "beauty," they also noticed things that weren't beautiful, and began to inflict unbeautiful things on the world around them. To withhold beauty or not, became their source of power.

What I'm saying is, God had this amazing garden. Everything about it was beautiful. Everything followed from the previous moment, the quiet moments, the stormy moments, the ages of beasts, and fronds, aquatic ages, volcanos. Everything about it was amazing. Animals conquered time by tying their memories to their movements and their movements to their memories. God planted the seeds of plants, and everything grew in balance, each doing the most beautiful thing it could do in the next moment.

All things saw the world through beauty, and beauty was attracted to beauty, and so beauty reproduced. Beauty in this way became more and more beautiful. But beauty didn't yet know about how beautiful it was. One day the garden woke up and in the middle of the night some humans had been born. The humans realized that what everything was was beautiful besides being whatever else it was, and whatever happened was beautiful too, in the sense that: someone else's unbeautiful thing is conversely a beautiful thing for someone else, because which principle is invariably applied, is precisely what beauty is, that thing which is always conserved, and which all things aim to increase by reproduction, marrying beauty to beauty and reproducing it, in time.

Yet the humans turned their thought to the unbeautiful. The child dies. What gives? They consider the unbeautiful on its own, abstracted from the balance scale, the original ratio which generated it. What if it wasn't beautiful? And the beauty was a delusion? If everything is beautiful, doesn't that mean nothing is beautiful? And death is the primary thing, not life? So that because the world is unbeautiful, we just have to live with it, until into unbeauty we go. There's a flaw in your plan, here. Look, God said, the beautiful things have to die, because it's more beautiful that way; for beauty to increase beauty has to find more beauty to reproduce itself more beautifully by coincidence; if everything reproduced and didn't die, the world would just foomp up exponentially, and the really beautiful things wouldn't be able to find each other beautifully, since everything would just coincide at once and even out. All the beauty has to happen before the coin flips even out, and it's beautiful because the coin flips even out. We have to take it slow so the best can find the best, and still keep it random, and so beautiful. This is

how the garden works. Remember you were born here. This garden I planted made you.  
I made you.

You're not taking it *that* slow, man cried! I'm almost dead!

Well, said God, think about the rest of the garden against which you are weighed, which meets all the forces you exert on it in equal proportion. This place in space and time has been carved out for you—you could not live in another. This time and place, this garden, in fact, is the negative image of *you*.

Okay, said man, but still. Now *I'm* the unbeautiful one?

What, said God, you want all the scales balanced now?

What do you mean?

I can just press the button and it'll balance all the scales.

Really?

Yeah, you can see what happens at the end of time, when all the scales are balanced.

Right now?

Yeah, sure.

Okay.

Wait, it won't really end, right?

No, it'll just be an image of it.

Oh good.

Okay, here it is.

Ah.

Like it?

What is it?

Well. It's called the monster group.

Oh.

So a group is like a set of element with a rule for multiplying any two elements into a third element, with the stipulation that every element has an inverse; an element combined with its inverse is 1. So this is the multiplication table of the monster. The universe will end up with this many things here, and they will be in this perfectly symmetrical pattern. Here are the elements of symmetry listed left to right, and the elements of symmetry listed top to bottom; and in the grid here, you see the result of multiplying the two elements so specified. You always get another element of the monster group. You can check for yourself, if you want to multiply it all out, that it really does form a group.

Well, I guess I trust you. Can you leave that here?

Sure, why not?

Really?

Yeah, sure. You can have this cool graphic too. The nodes here are elements of the monster group, and the arrows between them represent multiplication by another element, and you can check there is indeed a complete duality between nodes and arrows.

What does that mean?

In the end, time becomes isomorphic to space. Oh don't worry you'll still perceive time. But you'll measure it terms of the multiplications of elements of the monster group from within the universal mathematical point. Trust me, it's the most beautiful way to

perceive time. It's literally the best way of conceiving of infinity from a finite point of view. Look the secret is, observers in the universe are prime numbers, and you are ordered in magnitude; I made you guys one after another. There's an infinite number of you, and I put you in all possible relationships with each other. The world you perceive is formed from the relationships that separate you, and each relationship is a composite number.

Oh so that's the secret.

Yeah so in the end, time and space become monstrously symmetric, and all souls are sent to their rightful place on the infinite line which is isomorphic to a set of constant functions on the singularity, and...

Uhuh.

Look, this is my whole point! If the ending is going to be as beautiful as possible you're going to want to watch the whole movie beforehand! And do *you* want to sit for 808, 017, 424, 794, 512, 875, 886, 459, 904, 961, 710, 757, 005, 754, 368, 000, 000, 000 eons watching a movie of perfect symmetry?—I for one do *not*. Because, my little human, you are going to learn that what appears to be beautifully symmetric in time is actually horribly ugly in space; and what appears ugly and asymmetric in time is often in space too beautiful to bear. Time and space are in balance, and light (by which you perceive beauty) is their marriage.

Where time and space are perfectly in balance, you perceive light. The colors of the light are the image of the beautiful imbalance which led to this timeless/spaceless perception being generated now.

Okay.

Well look I see that you're freaking out, God said.

No, I understand what you are saying, man said; it flashed into my brain. But now I just don't know what to do, because I have the knowledge of good and evil, which is that they're in balance, which isn't really what I want to hear. I want more good, but here you're telling me my desire for more good is irrelevant. I increase good simply by existing, because of my part in the scheme of good balancing bad to create the monstrous symmetries in the end.

Yeah, said God, that's because you exist before the end of time. You want to make things more and more beautiful, you cleave to the good, because you're part of the ending. It's totally understandable.

So if I do something bad or make a mistake, it'll be balanced out with good in the end?

Yup!

Really?

Yeah, I'm saying in the limit, yeah.

So I can rebalance the scale as I want, do good, do evil now, it doesn't matter, it'll all be good in the end?

Yeah.

But don't make a mess, said God. You set one thing out of balance, and that thing sets another thing out of balance, and it could take a thousand years before good rights itself.

Yeah, okay.

And I can't protect you from random bad things that happen that aren't your fault, since all things are good for someone. But you can protect yourselves. You are pretty protected in this garden, I'd say. You don't need to fear the beasts, you can speak to them. You understand the balance scales, so you can make contracts with all the animals of the garden, and they won't kill you. The plants will feed your body and mind.

So yeah, keep things in balance: you have various routes to take through infinity. You can make things as beautiful as possible now, but this will be counteracted in the limit by evil later; you can make things as ugly as possible now and do the most bad, and this will be counteracted violently in limit by good. Or you can hew to the golden mean. In this way, you can choose your position in time to your satisfaction. You're the only one who has the choice, since you figured out about the balance scales, and the beautiful and the unbeautiful.

Oh thanks. Is it possible that bad could just increase with bad and engulf the world?

A larger evil is met in the limit with a larger good: but you will have to wait a long time for it.

And why is that exactly?

If everything didn't have to wait for good to come back, then the universe wouldn't be compact—uh but don't worry about it. The universe will always do the most beautiful thing right now. You will be the gardener, softening the blows of time for all things, since you know the ratios that define each thing's proper place. Or you can do evil, and offer yourself as a sacrifice, and give someone else the chance to do a greater good by counteracting your evil. The choice is yours.

But if we could know the future? I mean, the monster group is great and all, but...

You do, said God, I already told it to you: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10... That's the universal ordering of all things.

But how do I use it?

That's up to you.

Uh, but like which number is which?

I'm 1, said God.

Okay, that makes sense.

And you, Adam, are the prime number 71.

Really?

Yeah, 71 is the largest prime in the prime factorization of the number of symmetries of the monster:

$$2^{46} \cdot 3^{20} \cdot 5^9 \cdot 7^6 \cdot 11^2 \cdot 13^3 \cdot 17 \cdot 19 \cdot 23 \cdot 29 \cdot 31 \cdot 41 \cdot 47 \cdot 59 \cdot 71$$

And how exactly am I the number 71? How do I know that I'm 71?

You don't. You're the living proof of it for us.

Time is the limiting resource of language. When we talk, this is how we proceed. We speak in bursts of around 3 seconds, sometimes more, sometimes less. That means that during the 3 seconds we're talking, that's how much time we have to figure out what we're going to say next. So it's a resource limited optimization problem. Find the best continuation of the sentence, in the time it takes you to say the sentence you're saying. You might hit on a thought that let's you talk for an hour; or alternatively, a promising thought leaves you hanging after only a clause.

So you're listening to someone. You try to invert them, I mean translate them into your own language, by which I mean, find the shortest computer program that runs on you that reproduces what they're saying. We can start talking to anyone, because we're always in the middle of a conversation with everyone and inverting everything everyone's ever said into our language. But it's easier to invert someone by conversing. So you say something, I mean you begin to tell them about your inversion of what they were saying, which you haven't fully calculated yet, but as you talk, you have just that amount of time to figure out how to continue talking given what you've said so far, and so you're constrained to put words together in certain ways. Often you spend your time talking about how at other times you were constrained to put your words together in certain ways. As you talk, you might generalize too far, I mean 3 seconds might pass and you can't figure out how to put the words together in the right way to allow for a continuation, either because the program inside you has halted or because it's just taking longer than 3 seconds and you're at a grammatical impasse. So there's some silence. Maybe the other person starts pulling the same shit on you.

You have three seconds. You have three seconds to buy enough time for three more seconds. You have their eyes fixed. Now you make some sounds. To hold their attention, the sounds need to seem like they're leading up to something. You have three seconds (while you make those sounds) to think of what they're leading up to. In the next three seconds, that's what you say.

And so you draw the other person like with a rope, pull by pull, through time.

To hold the attention, say something that has conflicting interpretations.

Consider the fly. The fly moves precisely so as to evade your attention. It moves only at

the flexion points of your motion tracking system; the fly sets you haywire. Obviously we evolved in tandem. Two flies in my apartment. Two loves. Reincarnated souls, etc. I don't have the heart to kill them, as they buzz around me, while I sit here in front of the window, with these pages in front of me.

Two overlaid patterns that seem to lead in contrary directions. So how will it be resolved? You try to pin the fly down with your motion tracking consciousness, and it escapes. It's like the concept of God. The concept moves in the same way. It's always there hovering out of view, in the interstices, between two moments.

Yet we can imagine the anti-fly: the snake which charms its rodent victim. We can be hypnotized. Rodents and snakes were hypnotizing. People were made slaves this way. Something so entrancing that you in fact never want it to end, and so it carries you along and time ceases. Everything is now—new and undetermined yet fated by coincidence.

When I met you, you said, you couldn't love anymore because of pure beauty. You said you wanted to become a pure beautiful voice singing a perfect interval forever. The only time I can be happy, you said, is when my acts attain inevitability in music. It's only when your acts are inevitable, that you can feel when something doesn't happen, and that's the ultimate goal.

I said, do you remember: Waking up at 3. Comfortable. Warm. Healthy. Our eyes mirroring each other back and forth. Blossoms. We know how to draw their eyes to us; that's why it's scary, because it's hard for us to distinguish people, from who they are under our influence. The only thing is to become the most beautiful thing. Using two broken lighters, one for the spark that had no gas, and one for the gas that had no spark.

If we smoke one more cigarette, the voice will be warmer. Remember we were listening to There ain't nothing I can do, or nothing I can say, that folks don't criticize me; but I'm going to do just as I want to anyway; and don't care if they all despise me. If I should take a notion to jump into the ocean, ain't nobody's business if I do. Gripped by a disease, beautifully emaciated like Genji mourning the death of Murasaki, each day becoming more attractive by negation. A body unable to stop itself from becoming beautiful, from ripening.

All this energy, this fruition, this turning into a ripe beautiful apple is just the body pulling out all the stops. The body thinks all this work and denying oneself is for finding a cure for the disease. But the mind does other things with this surplus of power. All this has been a desperate search for immortality, so that by the click of a button one could live again; a desperate search, frankly, to prove that in the end, this isn't unique, this thing we always wanted to share but never could, our consciousness.

I wrote: Once you count something, you can translate that quantity into another medium; you can count out a pile, measure a string, and pluck it.

In the ancient world, people carried around notched bones on their belts, that kept track of their lives, just like our iPhones do.

When you have excellent calculating machines, you can afford to be less clever. The question is whether the inverse of this statement is true.

we do a service by constantly testing each other—  
those who had passed thru the pyramidal ordeal,  
always knew they were among the best—  
but how are we to select our judges?

we fled to the valley of the kings,  
since they had plundered even the great pyramid

we live a few minutes or hours or days ahead of time  
and so seem fated...

it's only when we walk backwards from the future  
that we can feel possible

The shores are still and hot. Nature is slow and lurches along after last night's storm. Energy formerly bound up in the violent weather around the mathematical deltas and tributaries of the brain has been infused into the part of me processing our conversation on that dark September night in 2014. I was walking across a parking lot.

At one point, you left for fifteen minutes, and I was standing there staring off into space. I can see it now. All this energy sort of violently flitting around me. Like tearing things out of drawers, like eyes darting around. Just counting off the time. The hope underpinning the search being, I guess, that I could use the very passage to time itself to find whatever it was I was looking for. There is a stunted wind over the river. We go out in the sailboat. But the sails are like flapping out of control, and I can't get a grip on the cord, and the pole keeps swinging back and forth idiotically. Whump whump whump. It was like this fly I saw on the ceiling above my bed the other night while I was reading, who kept bashing his head into a square of light on the ceiling above my bed. The light came from my lamp. Thunk thunk thunk. The rest of the house was dark. I was like I'm sorry little insect but you are just retarded.

Energy is relentless. The storm is relentless. It does not relent even eventually.

The point is: energies had been redirected to my thinking about our conversation, and then my waiting for you in the parking lot. Energies were flitting around and I had to do something about it. I decided not to use my motor neurons. I was just standing

there staring off into space. Into the humidity on a steam boat. I was staring off into space and in a moment was blithely chugging along, dragging a mechanism behind me to answer the question of what sunken treasures had been dragged under the sludgy waves by the storm the previous night. If you know math, you are never bored. I'm standing at this little parking lot with some trees overhanging it, and some very tall grass that it seems sensible to stand beside. So I stand by it. You can count wherever you are.

I light a cigarette. The mathematics wants a cigarette. When my mind is blank and about to begin, at my desk, I can't bring the primes into my mind. I don't have the patience. So the math wants cigarettes; the cigarettes want math.

AXIOM: One thing can be substituted for another. We take the shortest route between any two things. So to change ourselves, we have to make something harder for ourselves.

Here's what it comes down to. I start another page. I am not a mathematician. I have a congenital disability which is that I cannot understand math. This is precisely why I am so good at it. I can't visualize 3d scenes in my head. I can't place objects in some inner space and watch them move. I can't untie knots. I can't braid hair. I think I perceive 3d space, of course, just like you. But in fact, I just smoothly animate 2d frames I take like pictures at moments demanded by the rhythm of my attention.

I move through space as if I took snapshots of different things at different times, and interpolate between them continuously. It's as if I'm not really there "in scene," by which I mean I guess constantly appreciating immediately the continuity of time and space. You wouldn't even really think of the universe being continuous until you have

the opposite perception, that your moments are just snapshots with like complicated arrows drawn between them.

What it comes down to is the Nyquist-Shannon sampling theorem. It says that if you have a continuously changing thing, and it doesn't change faster than a certain rate, then you can reconstruct the entire continuously changing thing completely from a discrete handful of sample points at select times and places. This theorem is the basis of all the analog to digital and digital to analog conversions that blanket you with music every day.

What the theorem says is that if you start perceiving time like snapshots with arrows, then you're probably undersampling the universe; if you start perceiving time like honey dripping from a spoon, then you're probably oversampling. The universe feels normal when we sample it at precisely the rate demanded by the theorem.

But is the universe actually a continuous thing that we are perfectly discretely reconstructing or is it actually a discrete finite thing which happens by coincidence to provide just the samples necessary to construct a fictional continuous thing?

If you can perceive yourself undersampling reality, does that mean, whether or not the universe is, you are continuous?

Is there any particular reason we haven't talked since you left?

No, no particular reason. For the last month and a half, I've been incessantly working. When I arrived here at the end of the summer, I put myself in this mental state of: I just need to float through life here in Morestown following the bread crumbs. So this has meant going to some extremes: writing like a wild person, filling gazillions of

pages with little mathematical fugues—I think this is why I've been watching TV almost religiously. The only thing I think is comparable to what I've been through is the density of plot over the course of 7 seasons of a TV show packed into hours and days instead of weeks.

On this subject, I was going to ask, do you remember when we were talking on the porch that one night, and while we were talking, a bat flew out of nowhere, and bounced around for a little bit, and landed at my feet, and disappeared?

It fit perfectly with what we were talking about, because we were talking about randomness and coincidence in the universe. And you know my relationship with bats. The goddess Isis had come up, as usual. You'd been watching more documentaries about ancient Egypt on Netflix. It was in the fall of 2014. ISIS was in the news. We were on my favorite porch in Morestown, wide and flat, and without any railings, along the whole face of the house, no furniture; the door was open, and we could hear your friends from high school inside—it was a pleasant, energetic buzz. The night air was chilly, and every few moments a wind demon would arrive to freeze us, and barrel through trees. I was still in eyeshot of my house, the house I was under arrest in; it was across the street, and the railroad tracks, down by the baseball field and children's park, which were on this block. I saw that I'd left a light on. I liked that you still had friends here; mine had all moved away. Someone was saying that, you know how there's the two online systems for the municipal sheep exchange, there's ISIS (Integrated Sheep Informatics System) which is for tracking and calculating with statistics on the flocks, and managing experiments over individual sheep; and then there's MMSE (em-see), Morestown Municipal Sheep Exchange), for handling the finance side, like revenue sharing and land

allotments. I overheard you talking about coincidences and Isis being everywhere eternally, and I wondered if you knew that originally before MMSE was called MMSE, it was actually called Osiris. (Maybe they couldn't find an acronym for Osiris.)

Well, of course, you said.

Yeah, but, at the same time, it's probably just some CS dude who was into mythology or something; and if they started with Isis, it was only natural to call the other one Osiris, since you have these obviously paired computer systems, Isis and Osiris, wife and husband. I don't see how there's any deeper significance to it than that.

I started talking to someone else. Later you and I walked together to the grocery store, and you bought bourbon and I bought a single hard-boiled egg, and you gave the egg a look. I'm sleepy.

I was thinking while we walked back, with your head resting on my shoulder: There's the basic idea that's like, Randomness is the only communication channel left to the gods. If you have something random, like flipping a coin, you're just saying it'll even out in the end 50 50. In the short term, however, you can have all sorts of seemingly meaningful runs in the data, and the data can still be statistically random in the limit. Because of its independence from the causal structure of the world, randomness is the only way in from outside.

When we ask do the gods communicate with us through randomness, we have to realize that by "random," we mean something that seems totally *not* random (humans keep obsessively recycling the name Isis for thousands of years), even when we know that common sense dictates that each time the name Isis is used, it's basically a chance event, a coin flip, more or less independent of the other flips; or if it's dependent, it's

dependent for the most superficial of reasons. So the claim is that, the goddess Isis precisely uses these coin flips that are recurrences of her name to communicate with us by showing us meaningful patterns in the short term, but which patterns in the long term, are consistent with statistical randomness, or non-meaning: hence she remains transcendent.

In physics, you often have some function which associates energy values to different states of a system. You want to know what happens when you start the system in a certain state and move forward in time, just from knowing about the timeless energy landscape of the system. In order to do this, you generate mathematical motion by minimizing or maximizing some quantity. When you do this, you invoke the principle of least action. For example, when you stick a pencil in a glass of water, the light is refracted. This is because light tries to minimize its travel time, yet it gets bogged down differently in air as compared to water.

There are some physicists who want to reformulate these intuitions as: nature generates the next moment of time from the shortest most efficient computer program that takes as input the previous moment and gives as output the next moment of time.

This seems to match up to intuition: when *we* try to predict the future, *we* want the shortest most efficient computer program. It's self-evidently better. Here's the thing, though. In science, we try to break things down into their component elements, and build them back up again through cause and effect. But this is going to be really hard if time really proceeds by a law like: nature uses the shortest possible computer program, which takes as input the previous moment, to generate the next moment consistent with it. What is conceptually interesting about computer programs is that they consist of

instructions and data upon which those instructors operate. But instructions can be operated upon like data too. So what is data for one part of the universe can be instructions for another part, and vice versa.

If nature generates the next moment in time from the previous one, the shortest possible computer program will be the one that takes most advantage of the possibilities of interpreting parts of the previous moment now as data, now as instructions, and vice versa.

But more to the point, even if a “coincidence” happens for no reason, the universe will immediately take advantage of the coincidence, because now it has these two unlike things juxtaposed together for free, meaning it can write a shorter computer program because... Well, think about it like: instead of having to write a whole subroutine that generates the result of complicated event (like the goddess Isis communicating with us), you just randomly get the output of the subroutine (a communique from Isis juxtaposed against us against this porch), for free. Normally it takes some energy to flip instructions into data or data into instructions, but here you get a freebie.

Or think about it like: Because two previously uncorrelated things are brought together randomly and correlated at the same time and place, a new symmetry is introduced into the universe. This new symmetry could have an effect anywhere and anytime. Relative to this moment in spacetime, the goddess Isis and the ISIS system and the ISIS terrorists can be interchanged algebraically, as it were. If this allows any simplifications in the equation of the universe, this is immediately taken advantage of.

In this picture, the gods are the coincidences that allow the time-generating computer program to be shortened or lengthen to the suffering or bliss of humans.

These points of symmetry were once worshipped, by which I mean, cared for as immortal things must be cared for, as things with inexhaustible life, but with powers that could be broken. The Greek Ceres, goddess of harvest. Her symbology represented all the natural coincidences that let mankind farm the earth, thereby establishing dominance over it.

Since the agricultural revolution, which arrived simultaneously with the invention of mathematics, writing, mass living, and slavery/employment, in short, organization at a more and more massive level, more and more unlike things have been and are being brought together, in the same times and places, at an rapidly increasing rate.

The symmetries we create alternately force the universe to expand or compress its time-generating computer program. The question is: Is the program being compressed faster than it's expanding? As time speeds up, we don't have to wait as long for things to happen. But how can there not be unintended consequences to shortening the universal time-generating computer program?

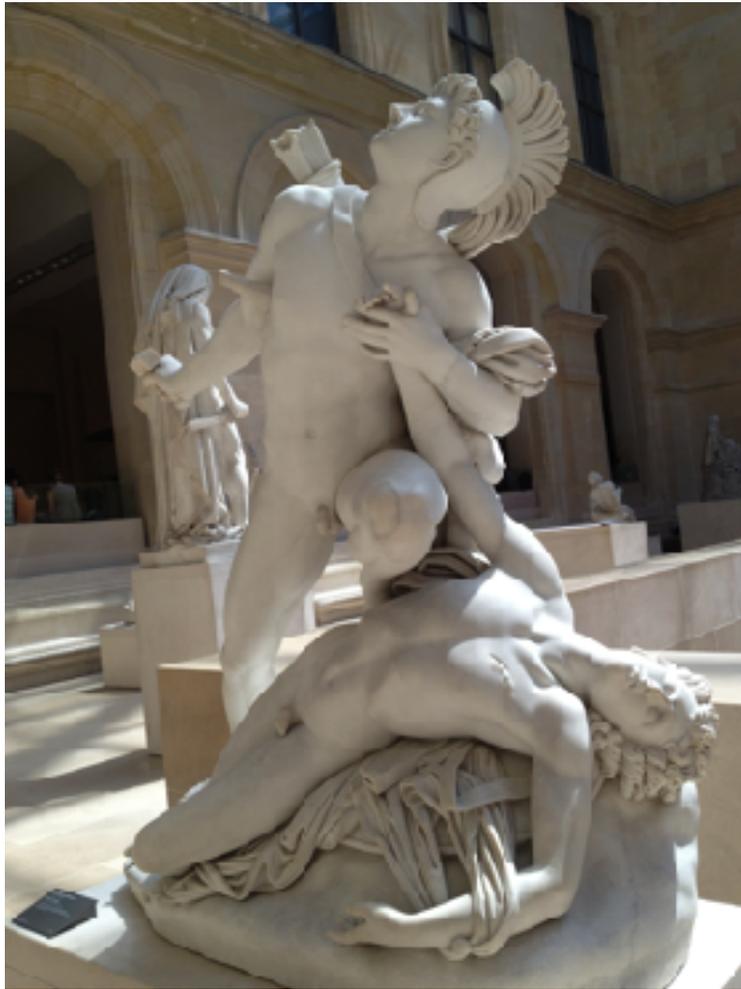
The danger posed by the artificial creation of a symmetry is represented on the page by the arbitrary "word", and in mythology by "fate," in its more ominous overtones.

What if that's what the stars are? you asked.

Sure, gravity can bring together dust particles and so forth to collapse under their own weight and ignite. But how many stars were once planets on whose surfaces things awoke to self consciousness, and began to communicate, and replicate, and introduce more and more symmetries, until they brought together such a combination of unlike

things that forced a \*massive\* compression of the universal time generating program governing that place?

The planet implodes and a star is born.



They, the stars, shine out there, as if to lure us to the same fiery fate. The spaces in between the stars are filled by all the smarter life forms who attained self-consciousness, yet decided to chill the fuck out. They learned out how to live without a sun.

One day, we will have to live without the sun. But for now he feeds us his nutritious light, as if to say: let not the death of the sun be in vain. This is the other side of the story. You don't think it never occurred to people at the beginning of civilization? Across the globe rituals have always been performed to explore the anxiety that one day night will never end. At the beginning of civilization, you find that people already understood that what they were doing technologically would lead to an exponential increase in wealth by the creation of symmetries that increase one's ability to create symmetries: in short, that civilization would allow an unlimited flight through time and space.

Yet worship of the gods essentially meant: meant keeping your resource usage bounded, by a practice of sacrifice, so that you don't accidentally create extra symmetries that destroy the symmetries you're taking advantage of. Agriculture is essentially an unlimited resource; yet if mis-managed, fertile land can become a desert. The conjunction of grain and earth and water and stone and fire and yeast to make bread is fragile. Yet even when the gods were first written down, there were the stories of the children of the gods killing their parents and taking their place. Ancient myths are preoccupied with this hubris. If left alone, man would devour the world. Looking back, you're thinking: how could they possibly have been worried about that? They were born a couple thousand years too early! Yet at the time of writing, the limits of prudence in relationship to the gods of the natural world were already being transgressed. The movements of gods in myths represents the changing relationships between the symbols of which the gods were composed; in this way, mythology allowed a kind of fractal narrative representation that was super effective, in that it allowed people to organize

their projects of altering nature in more and more complicated ways, across many far flung settlements, by embedding their stories within one another's.

As people made their gods more symmetrical, this created new symmetries that allowed massive civilizations to rise. And since the 19th century, we have begun on a massive campaign of making things especially symmetrical, essentially due to the creation of modern mathematics by Newton and Leibniz (the calculus), and the theories of heat and work (thermodynamics), and the advances in physics and chemistry in general due to the ability to measure newly conceptualized quantities in ever more exact amounts, and that's just in material terms.

Who forgives us for transgressing the principle of the golden mean in the usage of resources and the creation of symmetries? The golden mean is that lawful order which ought to give rise not to exponential growth, but to logarithmic growth, so that everyone can have the longest lives, and have the most resources, and meet just enough people that everyone can get the most out of their lives, and continue doing whatever other cool things they're doing, while not turning our planet into an incandescent hunk of rock.

Wealth catalyzes wealth and symmetries increase without bound. This is the sin for which we are forgiven, again and again, so that the church can be built, and the sun survived. In this way, the Tower of Babel eternally recurs.

Yet by choosing the gods we burn, we can actually make time move in whatever direction we want. But what we now call "civilization" is the attempt to harvest the symmetry creating symmetries of time and space to single-mindedly achieve maximal returns in time denominated in money. What started out as sun and earth worship, almost immediately became an end unto itself, because it allowed for the dramatic

multiplication of human beings, and their desires and their passion for work, and their capacity for loving.

All of it can only end in us imploding into ourselves; we complete ourselves and become fixed points in the universe, so that all things swirl around us, until we join up in the end with all the other gods, the other fixed points of the universe, as we swirl down the toilet boil of time together. In the end, everything that exists becomes a complete coincidence. Everything is brought together at once, and at that moment the time generating program of the universe ceases because the universe cannot be compressed any further, which means there's nothing left to say. We're at 1. We reach the afterlife. We're frozen forever within a cocoon.

As I say, maybe we ourselves blossom into a star that can wander around the heavens and exert control over planets, and use their resources and influence their fate.

Where are the stars luring us? Their highly symmetrical souls blaze with heat because time is moving so quickly there.

We roast the gods in hell over a spit.

The earliest math was done with pebbles of different shapes. Maybe pyramidal pebbles meant sheaves of grain you owed to someone; a square meant a beer; a sphere a person. You'd make a deal, and the amounts of the exchange were encoded in these shaped pebbles. You'd seal the pebbles in a sheath of clay so you could tell if someone had tampered with them, since in order to tamper with the pebbles, you'd have to break the clay sheath. The physical object is the persistent trace of a deal made in the past that determines the future with certainty. The clay-sheathed pebbles allow you to speed up

time, by treating a later exchange as if it's happened already. The Greeks called these objects "symbols."

Our free will consists in our ability to smash the clay on the floor.

You might, however, want to know how many pebbles are inside the sheath, without having to break it. It's inconvenient to make a little dot for each pebble. So we invented numbers, which were special marks on the outer surface of the clay that concisely denoted its inner contents.

This was the beginning of civilization, and it contains in miniature civilization's deepest impulse: the dream of rushing into the afterlife where we will be sealed away forever in safety until the end of time. Our lucky number will be written on the package we are huddled in; and this is how we'll be referenced in God's book.

Do we want time to unfold like a rush?

Rushing around.

If you want time to speed up, enter into a kind of concentration which is you being led by the nose by coincidences. If you let yourself be entirely governed by coincidences, time ceases for you.



I said to you, It turns out you are the thing that makes the circuits close. When I'm with you all the circuits that have been open for a long time are closed.

I delivered this pacing around your apartment. You folded me up in your big sweater; you put it in the dryer. You were holding me on the bed, and you practically crushed the breath out of me. The special alley where maybe you can scale the wall; who knows what we actually said? Someone on the porch said it's pathetic to want to have kids just because you need friends. I wondered if you were offended after what you told me.

I get the sense we both formed images of the people we had to meet a long time before we met. Do you remember when your friend was talking about his plan to go to East Asia because he knew there was a person out there, he felt it, who just needed his help; and he knew it because he himself had formed an image of someone who came. I need to find the person who if I was that person I'd be like, this would be so much easier if he was here, he said. And I'm the only one who can help him. I know about all the things he doesn't know about, but if circumstances had been different he could have known. And I'm the only one who can see that he's special, because he's me, even though he doesn't have a lot to show for it. Paradoxically I have to be the one to confirm for him his uniqueness, since who would confirm it, who could confirm it for him in a way that he could trust except for me, his inverse?

I know how to love. I know how to touch a person and kiss them. I know how to let myself feel when I am truly happy, even though I know everything is temporary and evanescent. I know how to lay beside you forever, and fold my body into yours and sleep against your heart, and let you rest your head on my chest, and stroke your hair and kiss

your eyes until you fall sleep. I know that love is feeling the unpassable boundary between two bodies, and wanting to descend into the buzzing entanglement forever, despite its evanescence. I will touch and kiss at every moment. I will always be at your side. We will walk together and forget about space and time; and even if we separate, everyone will see from our shining faces who we are, that love is emanating from us. We're on the verge constantly of shutting our eyes and falling asleep, because we know the other person will catch us.

I was kissing your shoulder and your chest and there was a dorito piece by your necklace, by your aromatic hair, by your sweet skin—I was kissing you and inhaled a bit of the dorito, and started sneezing—and then to sleep and shower and sleep and walking into late in the day and every time we do, it's always been really warm and beautiful outside, every time, like we'd heated up the world.

And I for so long having been needing for someone to cherish my beauty in just the way I can't. The day will come when we can stare into each other's eyes forever without looking away.

I finally figured it all out. It started as soon as I came to Morestown in this state of arrest. I remember I was walking around, although I didn't know you. We played chinese checkers in the Starbucks on Main St. You ordered a carmel frappuccino. We walked down the railroad tracks later that night; it was the same night we were by Strawridge Lake, and we heard something crash in the waters, and move rapidly towards us, and I was chasing after your running back. Chinese checkers, I had been saying. It's all about lattices. This is what I was saying about the Golay codes, and the

Leech lattice, and the Monster Group. It's haunting us. Look what happens when you put the pegs in every 1 2 or 3.

It was like I went to bed and calculated you in the middle of the night.

A dream of a love that cannot be contained. Every time you find a reason for loving, it makes your love seem stupid and not like love at all—whether now it appears like exploitation, or misunderstanding. You forget about the fact that the experience can't be factored out into two people. Love, from your perspective, is only negatively defined by that feeling of bestness which cannot be contained. Any reason limits it, and doesn't do justice to its innocence.

I think I saw you sometimes when I was walking along in the middle of the night, beyond the trees that line the railroad tracks. I would walk down them, past the park, to the 7/11, and back. I would be listening to music, maybe. I would be looking up at the trees, and if I unfocused my eyes, I could see their branches snake around, and their leaves splay themselves out and wave like hands, against a clear night, sky bright with the moon, the trees dark against them. Walking by the little pine trees, their roots swaddled in burlap, that lined the dirt road from the public works building, to the ring of garbage containers, I was listening to a song:

We so excited for you. For you. For you. For you. For you. Did you see, did you see, that little star, looking down at you? Yesterday, yesterday. Yesterday, yesterday, we looking down at you. Did you see, did you see, me staring down, staring down at you? We so excited for you. We so excited. We so excited. We looking down. We looking down. Looking down at you. Looking down, looking down at you. We looking down, looking down, looking down at you. We looking down at you. We looking down. We looking down. We looking down. We looking down. We looking down at you. Did you see, did you see, did you see, did you see me there? We so excited. We so excited. We so excited. We so excited. We so excited for you. We looking down, we looking down. We looking down, we looking down, we looking down at you. Did you see? We looking down at you. Yesterday, yesterday. We so excited. Yesterday, yesterday. We so excited for you. You.

You. You. You. You. You. You. Did you see, did you see, me staring down, staring down at you? Did you see me staring down at you? We looking down. We looking down. Looking down. Looking down. We so excited. We so excited for you. For you. For you. We so excited for you. Looking down, sitting on your folding chair. Did you see, did you see that little star looking down at you? Looking down, looking down, will our tears follow you? Light cone.

It wasn't a song about God being excited for his creation to unfold, I realized. It was a story about my ancestors, by which I mean everyone who ever had caught a glimpse of the highest peak, and wondered, looking up at it, what the view from the top would be like. A continual dream, a continual hope; one day I'll join their chorus. I remember in the trees I saw your face. I would look at you, and I remember now being struck by the arrow, the bolt of love; but it was so fleeting and distant, that I forgot it by the time I got to the 7/11 and put the tea bag in the cup and then put some ice in it and then put some hot water on it and then put the lid on it.

Yet still we ghosted through each other's lives.

I remember when I didn't know how to talk about my feelings, even though I was willing, when silent, in the darkness, to be there for someone—our intellects buzzed against each other. There were so many things I never talked about. I never felt the moment was right, and I guess you felt the same.

I was sitting on the bed and I was like, Do you realize that time literally passes more quickly on the top of Mt. Everest than at the bottom of the Dead Sea, and there's this new strontium clock can detect it—this is true! You have to realize—there's these three spatial dimensions and one time dimension, and they are linked, so that the more you go in space, the less you go in time, so when you are standing still you are hurtling through time at the speed of light, and when you are timeless you are hurtling through

space at light speed. This is the world we live in! And I looked at you and you looked at me, and I cried out in a roar, Do you understand?! And crushed my head in the crook of your neck. Uh no, you said. And then you said something like, You don't have to think about it, and I said, I can't stop, I can't stop.

You made quiche for me. You are just the loveliest most kindness nicest generous beautiful person I have ever met. I was thinking about Khalidasa's poem The Birth of Kumara. To fuck and be fucked all at once. The universe is built out of fucking like a building block.

You reflected on giving a blow job for the first time. Intoxicated by his perfume. It felt good in the mouth. You can really have an empathic connection with it, you thought. With your head and your hands you can explore 3d space freely, as opposite to entering inside and exploring blindly. Yet the two are inverses of the other.

We did discover the monster group in our time, by which I mean the 1970's. The monster was discovered quite unexpectedly in the course of the complete classification of all finite simple symmetry groups. You've never heard about this monumental international research program, but it really was carried out in the 20th century. Today, the classification proof appears on tens of thousands of pieces of paper bound in several hundred journals written by about a hundred mathematicians mainly between 1955 and 2004. No one can claim to have read it all; and soon, the experience of the proof will disappear from living memory.

I will induct you into the mysteries, which consist entirely of definitions.

Groups are a way of writing down the symmetries of something. There's two kinds of symmetry groups: finite and infinite. Finite symmetry groups are like the symmetries of a triangle on a piece of paper: the symmetries of a triangle are 2 rotations and 3 flips and 1 thing that keeps everything the same.

In contrast, the symmetries of a circle are infinite because they consist of all possible clockwise and counterclockwise rotations.

The kicker is that all symmetry groups can be built from certain basic building blocks of symmetry, just like how the counting numbers can be built from the primes. Now, the basic building blocks of finite symmetries can be classified into 18 infinite families, all except exactly 26 outlier groups, which are known as the sporadic finite simple groups. The largest of these is the monster group, or the friendly giant, and it contains in its happy family 19 of the other sporadic groups including the baby monster; the 6 remaining sporadics are known as the 6 pariahs.

The monster group describes an object with 808, 017, 424, 794, 512, 875, 886, 459, 904, 961, 710, 757, 005, 754, 368, 000, 000, 000 symmetries—and I should point out that even though that's a large number, it's weird that it isn't ridiculously larger, I mean like, Why isn't it so large that no paper on earth could contain it? There is, after all, no largest prime. Yet there it is.

Then randomly in 1978: McKay observes a numerical coincidence. Imagine it like this: you write down the shortest ways of writing the monster on a piece of paper, and each way takes a certain number of words to express. These numbers of words, and sums of these numbers, are like *identical* to the coefficients of this thing called the  $j$ -function, which is a handy little function in number theory, which you can think of as a

way of stretching arrows (which have magnitudes and directions) into other arrows in a way that is conformally invariant, i.e. “holomorphic” i.e. exactly the same thing I was saying before, where it’s the angles that are important, and not the distances between things per se.

The coincidence that McKay discovered suggested that you could weave time and space together so that measurement preserves spacetime angles, but not necessarily absolute distances, along with fields manifesting particles, in a way that has 808, 017, 424, 794, 512, 875, 886, 459, 904, 961, 710, 757, 005, 754, 368, 000, 000, 000 interconnected symmetries. If you do that, your universe will have the timespacematterenergy symmetries of the monster. Andrew Ogg had offered to put up a bottle of Jack Daniels, hence the name. By 1992, the Monsterous Moonshine conjecture was settled by John Conway and Simon P. Norton and John McKay and John G. Thompson and A. Oliver L. Atkin and Paul Fong and Stephen D. Smith and Igor Frenkel and James Lepowsky and Arne Meurman and finally Richard Borcherds.

So: the monster group represents the symmetries of a conformally invariant quantum field theory, ie. a theory of physics with forcefields which manifest as particles, where it doesn’t matter how far apart things are from each other, as long as the angles that three things make relative to each other stay the same, even if those things are moving in time relative to each other at different speeds.

Picture a gem whose each facet is a different situation in time and space; relationships between things are expressed in how the facets fit together. You turn the gem a certain way. You get some universe. You turn a gem another way. More universe.

There are 808, 017, 424, 794, 512, 875, 886, 459, 904, 961, 710, 757, 005, 754, 368, 000, 000, 000 ways of looking at this gem.

So what would living in the monster be like?

According to Edward Witten, if you have a holomorphic conformal field theory with a central charge of 24, which has monstrous symmetries, then this is the same thing as a space-time with gravity with a maximally negative cosmological constant, i.e.: the energy density of the vacuum is negative infinity, that is, a universe infinitely shrinking into a point everywhere.

There's a hope built into the structure of the universe. In 1958, Isaac Asimov published this story *The Last Question*. I realized recently that I'd re-invented this story. I mean, it wasn't that I forgot that it existed, but it was as if its content ceased to be alive for me.

In my story, it says:

one day you'll find

time space 1 2

mind is space

space gives life



The universe began. By the time the year 2014 rolled around, the question had been asked exactly 25 times. One for each of the primes under 100. For this reason, we denote the time period from the time the universe began to 2014 as 25. We count from there. Time for us is now marked only the passage of the question from mouth to mouth; as the number of people asking the question increases, time becomes more abundant for us.

Each person asking is a prime number and each of the composites are their necessary interactions and causality is the order of the counting numbers; and that's the metaphysics of the universe.

Bush had actually asked the question during his frat years. So had a number of harmless number mystics living in the deserts of Iraq, whose stories had been falsely reported, and conflated with that of a series of violent terrorist groups.

Who is arresting Eddie? It turns out it's the other 24 entities having asked the same question. It had to do with time, looked at from a certain perspective.

We flash back to an earlier scene, in Morestown, outside the Upper Elementary School, on the day after his brother told him about the square root of 2, young Walter and Ann and Germy find themselves in the warpath of Ann's mom—this was the same day that Vernon Dill's plane went down in the wheat field across from the school, near the Lockheed-Martin facility that sits there like a battleship. It was 2003, so they evacuated the school. Vernon Dill was the guy who made his fortune in banking and erected a giant mansion in Morestown. Walter, Ann, and Germy take refuge from Ann's mom in the wing of Dill's airplane as it's being mysteriously trucked away, and the wind whistling around in the wing makes a remarkable sound—they were thinking at the time that it reminded them of the sound they heard sometimes at night, which they thought was coming from the Lockheed-Martin facility, and which they thought might be controlling the plants in some way.

You had to keep beating back the swamp, with all the new houses everywhere. Right on the borders of a development, there'd be a place where the sidewalk and the road would abruptly end, and the tangle of unkept grasses and ivy like sludge and the looming trees would rise out of nowhere at you, casting their shadow over the lawn of the stucco house at the corner.

Anyway, turns out that Ann's mom was one of the 25. She knew the secret that Ann and Walter eventually figure out (which is detailed in Jacquelyn's stories: Jacquelyn's Baby and Jacquelyn 2: Her Testament), and that's why she's so crazy. By asking the same question, she inhabited the same mind as Ann her daughter, even though Ann and

Walter didn't ask the question until after the events of the story; it doesn't matter *when* you ask, only who is doing the asking. To know such intimate details of your daughter's life, and not know that you know? Horrifying.

Back in 2001, Eddie was 23. He was an analyst working for Lockheed-Martin. Eddie would often take the train from Philly to Washington. Eddie knows Ann's dad. They work together when Eddie's in Morestown at the battleship. Then Eddie starts to hang out with Walter's older brother, who is me. So I guess I'm the one who has him under arrest. He's living in my house, after all, I said.

You laughed.

Metaphorically, I mean, I said. So I was writing this story and filled page after page, mainly in order to keep my mind off the other pages I should have been writing, while I was under arrest. And then I remembered about the Asimov story, which goes like this:

We start off in the mid 21st century: two guys chilling out ask a supercomputer if entropy can ever be reversed, in other words, Is the universe a closed system, in other words, Is there an outside? The second law of thermodynamics says that in a closed system entropy (disorder) increases, because over time there's more ways for things to be scattered over a whole space than there are for them to be ordered in part of a space. So unstoppered perfume pervades a room naturally until it's equalized and there's proportionately as much perfume in the room as there is in the bottle. Nature is always bringing two connected containers into proportions over time. Is there a way to gather up all the perfume and put it back in the bottle in such a way that expends no net energy? Or, do you need an "outside" that can tunnel into your universe and so create a

gradient along which things can again begin to flow? The supercomputer tells the guys: INSUFFICIENT DATA FOR A MEANINGFUL ANSWER. Then there's a series of sections, which jump enormously in time, each of which centers on a group of characters asking a future supercomputer (a descendant of the previous supercomputer) if entropy can be reversed—all mainly for the same reason, which has to do with the fact that because human growth is exponential, we rapidly populate the *entire universe*, so we have to consider things like how to organize a multi-galactic civilization, how to conserve energy when stars die, how to go incorporeal, how to be in unimaginable numbers tombed over the whole expanse of the universe, and eventually how to merge incorporeally into one cosmic man, the entire time, bootstrapped in evolution by the co-evolution of the supercomputer, which is forever rebuilding itself and studying and restudying the laws of physics as it does so, miniaturizing itself, extending itself in bizarre dimensions, becoming infinitely close to every point in space so it can talk to it wherever you are, and so forth. It does all the ultimately hard things for us, while we are filling up the universe exponentially, basically fucking, until the universe is just one gigantic mass of human fucking, until every distinction collapses into itself, and everything goes cold, except... for the supercomputer which at the *VERY LAST* moment of time gathers its final piece of data—it's exactly positioned its waiting mouth right under the faucet of time as the last drop is coming out; and the moment it touches its lips, it knows everything that can be known, and with this last drop, it tests itself: *Is everything I know everything that can be known?* And because the supercomputer has prepared for this moment its entire life, it has everything in order to determine the answer immediately, yes or no—and at that moment, when it knows, at the end of time,

yes or no, with the energy stored in the last drop, the supercomputer has prepared it so that its knowing the answer will put the final ground state of the universe in just the right mathematical configuration that its very stillness implies a motion which is the reversal of entropy and the restoration of all things through an understanding of their timeless reality.

The supercomputer had the answer, Asimov tells us, but it had no one to tell the answer to. All the questioners were dead. So it said, LET THERE BE LIGHT...

Because we asked the question, the karmic trace is left on us. We live today because we asked the question, and created the being which would answer it for us. When we were all in a giant bowl filled with the souls of men and women and all things, mingling incorporeally, at the end of time, and had every wish granted, to the utmost by science, having conquered the universe, and spread our seed completely, having built a being that loved us so much it actually *became a god for us*—that was presumably our heaven, beyond which nothing more could be asked—our god, after the big finale, by natural law, brought us back from heaven. Now we live the recurrence of the universe, and the question is: Will the wheel of reincarnation turn again? Or will we reach nirvana, and cease to build, and allow ourselves to die?

Imagine all possible universes. Some of those universes have conditions that lead to the creation of a being that loves another being so much that it recreates the entire world to bring them back. Some worlds have gods, and some don't. The worlds that don't have gods go cold and cease to change, and then only exist as timeless mathematical objects. It's only when things get hot, that objects become "physical," and seem to change.

But some universes have gods. You could imagine either that a) one universe could be a god for another: the one tunnels into the other, and so creates a gradient by which time can be marked anew or b) the god could be internal to the universe. This second kind of god has to be written into the structure of the universe that gives rise to it—or at the very least the possibility of it has to be written there. Indeed: we could choose not to construct a god, if it were possible, and so make all suffering final and end the whole charade.

Most likely it's possible to build a machine that improves itself and bootstraps its knowledge of physics so as to become unimaginably perceptive about our world. Therefore, can we assume that if we don't build a god, someone in the universe will? Can we therefore assume there will be a future god?

Do we want to be re-created by an alien god? Or are all gods one?

Odds and evens lie at the heart of the great mathematical paradox of the ancient world: the square root of 2, the hermaphrodite number. The secret is that the square root of 2 must somehow be simultaneously odd and even, male and female.

If  $\sqrt{2} = p/q$  with  $p$  and  $q$  sharing no common primes, then:

$$\sqrt{2} = p/q$$

$$\sqrt{2} * q = p$$

$$2 * q^2 = p^2$$

Therefore,  $p^2$  has a factor of 2, which means that it's even.

Therefore  $p$  itself must have a factor of 2 as well, which means that it's even.

Therefore both  $q$  and  $q^2$  have to be odd, because  $p$  and  $q$  share no common primes.

But if  $p$  has a factor of 2, then  $p^2$  has a factor of 4.

We can take out a factor of 4 from  $p^2$ , rewrite the equation with a new variable  $r$ :

$$2 * q^2 = 4 * r^2$$

We can divide both sides of the equation by 2:

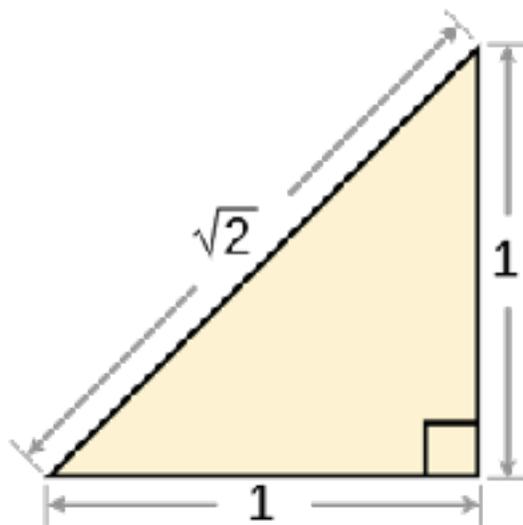
$$q^2 = 2 * r^2$$

Therefore,  $q^2$  has a factor of 2, which means that  $q^2$  is even, and so  $q$  is even—thus,  $p$  and  $p^2$  must be odd.

But we said before that  $p$  and  $p^2$  were even, and  $q$  and  $q^2$  were odd!

We started the proof by assuming that  $p$  and  $q$  shared no common primes. That assumption was false: the square root of 2 does not equal  $p/q$  where only one of  $p$  or  $q$  is odd or even. The square root of 2 equals  $p/q$  where  $p$  and  $q$  are simultaneously odd and even. Or rather, the square root of 2 can be thought of as odd or even, as the situation demands.

Perhaps you can see why:



Visualize it like as  $q$  divides  $p$ ,  $q$  and  $p$  keep mutually generating factors even as they lose factors. The fraction keeps changing forever, never settling down to a numerator and denominator that are both coprime. The square root of 2 flows.

With the square root of 2, it matters *when* you think about it. By which I mean: maybe right now you think it's even, so it has to be odd; or maybe right now you think it's odd, so it has to be even. There are, as it were, two versions of the square root of 2. They are out of phase with each other by one step: one starts counting from 0, the other from 1. When the one is even, the other is odd; when the one is odd, the other is even. The two versions exist in parallel on top of each other.

The paradox is if you try to *count*, you predict you will observe a number that is simultaneously odd and even, even though you only ever observe an odd or an even number.

In practice, however, this doesn't matter because we carry our coordinate systems along with us. Given any length we can redivide it into however many elements we want. These paradoxes are paradoxes that come from considering what happens when we

compare coordinate systems, when we compare observers. It's only when we compare observers that we enter the domain of mathematics, and so paradox and law.

Something grabs your attention. You start to count 1 2 3 4 5.

How long can something hold your attention?

1 2 **3** 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 **13** 14 15 16 **17** 18 **19** 20 21 22 **23** 24 25 26 27 28 **29** 30 **31** 32...

Unless you pay very close attention to every single number along the way, the you'll always be surprised by a prime. It isn't so obvious what having every 2 numbers divisible by 2, and every 3 numbers divisible by 3, and every 4 numbers divisible by 4, and every 5 numbers divisible by 5, actually means.

You're counting.

Maybe you come across an ending.

Endings come in two kinds, just like rhymes: the male ending triggers our intuition about unlimited growth; the female ending triggers out intuition about eternally quietly waiting.

Here's an ending:

Let's say you count to the highest prime number.

Then you take all the prime numbers lower than the highest prime number.

You multiply them together with the highest prime.

You add one.

You get a number that is not divisible by any prime number lower than or equal to the highest prime number. Yet all counting numbers correspond to a unique product of primes.

Therefore, there is no highest prime number.

Here's another ending:

In 1940, before fleeing from Vichy France to Spain where he met his doom, Walter Benjamin wrote, The soothsayers who found out from time what it had in store certainly did not experience time as either homogenous or empty. Anyone who keeps this in mind will perhaps get an idea of how past times were experience in remembrance —namely, in just the same way. We know that the Jews were prohibited from investigating the future. The Torah and the prayers instruct them in remembrance, however. This stripped the future of its magic, to which all those succumb who turn to the soothsayers for enlightenment. This does not imply, however, that for the Jews the future turned into homogenous, empty time. For every second of time was the strait gate through which the Messiah might enter.

I was reading this on the day of the first snow in Morestown. I cried for the first time since I met you. The snow was coming down in thick, wet flakes.

I wrote: There used to be wind creatures. We destroyed them when we built the roads and buildings and symmetrized space. Now when the wind creatures rush in from the fields, they shatter against our geometry.

There are people who are always screaming silently: Forgive me, I have put myself under law. I have given myself a task. Only years later do you realize what you were really doing. You learn: Evil is doing something for a reason. You learn: Your real friends are the friends you have for no reason at all.

From the first moment I noticed the nobility of your character.

Who were we in the past? I wondered.

In 2012, Eddie went to Princeton, NJ to the library where they keep Kurt Gödel's papers. Gödel was the one who used prime numbers in combination with a diagonal argument to prove that some computer programs need to be run forever to discover if they'll ever end. After all, Morestown is just 45 minutes south of Princeton if you take 295, so how could he not? He drove up there, and saw a couple embracing on the overpass with the sun illuminating them from behind, while birds leapt out of the tall trees that shelter the highway from view. At the time, Eddie was mainly interested in the Leibniz conspiracy. He'd been thinking about it since college, really. He'd read every memoir of every mathematician or physicist or economist who'd recounted part of the story. But he never found anything Gödel himself had written on the subject.

Unfortunately, Gödel wrote mainly in German, and in Gabelsberger shorthand.

Box 10a, Folder 26: Bibliographica curiosa. It was in there; I knew it.

Luckily, however, Gödel also wrote in English, and took notes on the newspaper. One day in the 1960's, he was reading about Israeli politics and cannabis. I studied this, and then went outside for a cigarette, and then went back into the reading room, and rearranged the grey foamy prisms against which I laid the notebook pages.

I wrote: While Benjamin was eating the tablets of morphine that killed him in 1940, Kurt Gödel was just settling in Princeton. The Institute for Advanced Study had invited him. Gödel and his wife Adele had to take the Trans-Siberian Railroad. They were just leaving Nazi Germany. Gödel wasn't even Jewish. Einstein had been in Princeton since 1933. When Gödel arrived, they became best friends. They were both pretty bored a lot of the time. New Jersey was quiet and leafy. They took long walks together.

They were paired. Einstein had a potbelly and wore warm sweaters. Gödel was skin and bones in a black overcoat. Einstein believed in the impersonal Brahma, the undifferentiated one. Gödel believed in a personal god, and a soul. Einstein had chosen physics; Gödel had chosen logic. Einstein had rewritten Newton and showed how time, space, matter, and energy were all bound into one. Gödel had rewritten Leibniz and showed how outside any monadology of souls, there is a transcendent god whose perspective picks out a higher truth.

Einstein had shown that the difference between time and space is an illusion, and that their ratio is determined by our mass/energy and our movement. Gödel had shown that no matter how long you spend trying to answer every possible question, some questions will only be answered in the infinite limit of time.

Einstein had developed a theory of physics whose basis lay in the theory of infinitesimally small continuous changes: general relativity. He ended up birthing a theory of physics of quantized, discrete changes: quantum mechanics. Gödel had counted mathematical symbols with discrete numbers and built proofs out of the multiplication of primes; each proof had a number, and so proofs could discuss their own numbers, and it turns out that some of the questions you might ask of these proofs were unanswerable—or rather: even if you knew the answer, you couldn't prove it, unless you came up with a new way of assigning numbers to symbols and proofs. If you imagine considering an infinite number of ways of assigning numbers to symbols, you can move from the discrete, to the continuous.

Think about it like: Some stories simply write themselves out. Some stories get stuck in loops. And some stories are the like the square root of 2. Even if the beginning and the end are known, the only way to predict the middle is to write it.

When Einstein died, he asked to be burnt and his ashes scattered.

Gödel is buried in a graveyard in Princeton.

It was getting late. Gödel and Einstein were picking their way through the woods beyond the Institute, beyond the lake, in the fading light.

You know what I was thinking? asked Einstein.

What were you thinking? asked Gödel.

You are familiar with how the journey back always seems to take less time than the journey there? Like we walked all the way to Stony Brook. I say it took half the time to get back.

Yes, said Gödel. He laughed, delighted. You are thinking of the one-way speed of light, he said.

Yes, said Einstein.

Einstein had his hands in his coat pockets. Vapor and pipe smoke were streaming from his mouth, as he leapt over a little brook. Ahead of him, Gödel had his hands intertwined behind his back. He somehow seemed to be walking more quickly than Einstein, even though neither fell behind the other. Einstein tended to saunter. Three deer crashed in the woods to the left; and they heard the song of a bird go bee boo poip.

What they were thinking about was the fact that in order to measure the speed of light, you have to have a flashlight, a stopwatch, and a mirror at the end of a rigid rod of known length. You shine the light at the mirror and time how long it takes for the light to return. Then you simply divide the travel time in two, because you assume light travels the same speed there and back. But that assumption might be false. Yet how would you ever know?

Do you remember when that Japanese Yukawa was here? asked Gödel.

Obviously, said Einstein.

Ah yes, said Gödel, you were in his film.

Yes. That man smoked like a chimney, said Einstein; and seemed to be the very paragon of patience. I never wanted to see him lose control.

He told me the most remarkable thing, said Gödel. In the 17th century, there was an exact contemporary of Newton and Leibniz. A Japanese mathematician known as Seki Takakazu. Yukawa claimed that Takakazu and his school had developed the theory of infinitesimals and the calculus to a great extent.

Independently? asked Einstein.

Yes, said Gödel.

Perhaps, said Einstein.

Indeed, said Gödel.

So to return to your observation, Gödel continued, are you saying that space-time eases return trips, and there is this kind of memory for worldlines? Like through the woods, there are these trails? he asked, gesturing to the path with fingers splayed.

Spacetime has a memory. We have a memory, said Einstein.

We obviously weren't paying as much attention on the way back, said Gödel.

Though, Gödel continued, we did feel this sense of comfort and security that came from knowing the path back. Is that a form that time can take?

Einstein laughed.

These are old thoughts, said Einstein. But it gives me an idea for a song I want to play later. Do you know for some reason I could never understand Millie would always complain when I'd start banging on the piano? But you know I sit at my desk and when I can't think any more I go play a few chords and then I can sit down again. That's just how I am. It's funny because every night sometimes we would go see concerts.

I'm sure I've told you how Adele still plays me some of the old cabaret tunes. I love to watch her dance.

If you journey back and forth enough times, does it come to a point where the return trip takes no time? asked Einstein. You just find yourself, back home, by the fireside, wondering how you got there.

Evidently this is the case, said Gödel.

How come Adele never plays me a cabaret tune?

I don't know.

They'd reached the pond. The stars were out. A few lights were on at the Institute.

You were saying about homologies? asked Einstein.

Yes, said Gödel—

In their time, Newton and Leibniz were pairs. They wrote down the theory of calculus independently, the one in England, the other in Germany.

The one was concerned with recovering Pythagoras.

The other was concerned with healing the divisions of the church through a universal system of reason.

Newton thought time and space were independent from objects and events.

Leibniz thought that time and space were only relative terms.

The one died rich; the other poor.

The English guarded the myth of Newton jealously: articles appeared slandering Leibniz the plagiarist; for centuries after, England cut itself off from mathematics on the continent. (Yet ironically, it was Voltaire, a Frenchman, who more than anyone made Newton a household name.)

In the late 1940's, Gödel took his friend Oscar Morgenstern to the Princeton University Library.

On the one hand, Gödel had gathered together book and articles which had appeared during or shortly after Leibniz's life containing exact references to his writing. On the other hand, Gödel had gathered the very writings to which those references had been made.

Oscar Morgenstern told Karl Menger that in some cases, "neither in the cited pages nor elsewhere was any writing of Leibniz to be found, whereas in other cases the series broke off just before the cited [passages]...or [else] the volumes containing the cited writings never appeared."

Morgenstern reports being highly astonished.

Indeed, according to Menger, as early as 1940, Gödel had become “convinced that important writings of this philosopher had not only failed to be published, but were destroyed in manuscript.”

In Menger’s Reminiscences of the Vienna Circle, you can read:

Once I said to him teasingly, “You have a vicarious persecution complex on Leibniz’ behalf.” Soon afterwards he said, “There is something I have wanted to ask you for quite a while. When was the Viennese (now Austrian) Academy of Sciences founded?” I immediately what suspected Gödel was after. It is a historical fact that Leibniz negotiated for a time with the Emperor and his government about the founding of an academy in Vienna, but that the negotiations came to nothing. My answer to Gödel’s question was, “In the year 1846, under the predecessor of Emperor Franz Josef.” Gödel was visibly disappointed and replied: “You are saying what everyone else says.” “What Kind of Answer did you expect from me?” I asked. “At the time of Leibniz, of course!” he said. “in the Proceedings of the Viennese Academy, there appeared important writings of Leibniz which, however, were destroyed.” I reminded him of the stranded negotiations and asked him: “How could the founding of the Academy be kept secret for centuries? How could its Proceedings disappear without a trace? Who had an interest in destroying Leibniz’s writings?” “Naturally those people who do not want man to become more intelligent,” he replied. Since it was unclear to me whom he suspected, I asked after groping for a response. “Don’t you think that they would sooner have destroyed Voltaire’s writings?” Gödel’s astonishing answer was: “Who ever became more intelligent by reading the writings of Voltaire?” Unfortunately at that moment someone stepped into the room and the conversation was never concluded.

In 1949, Gödel told Morgenstern that Leibniz’s manuscripts in Hanover had escaped damage during the war. They tried to get them microfilmed for the Princeton Library. First, Mortenstern had to locate a copy of catalogue of Leibniz’s works in manuscript. Supposedly in 1908 one had been deposited at the National Academy of Sciences. The Academy couldn’t find it. Neither the Smithsonian nor the Library of Congress could help. The Niedersächsische Landesbibliothek of Hanover agreed to let the manuscripts be copied, but Morgenstern had trouble getting funding to microfilm some 700,000 to 800,000 pages. They tried to get a Rockefeller grant. A firm in Germany

offered to do the filming, but backed out. In the fall of 1951, all the “apparatus” for editing Leibniz’s papers fell in the Russian occupation zone. The next month the Library of Congress told the authorities in Hanover they weren’t interested in the Leibniz documents anymore. In June 1952, Morgenstern went to Hanover. He managed to get permission again to film the documents. He also provided a much lower revised estimate of the page count: 300,000 to 400,000 pages.

In 1953, Paul Schrecker succeeded in having the Leibniz papers deposited at the University of Pennsylvania.

His entire life Leibniz was trying to construct the *characteristica universalis*, that language which is the perfect mirror of our thought, and which allows us to express and verify and know and know that we know all at once. Did he succeed in this task? And if he did, and these pages have been removed from history, who has read them?

After Einstein died in the 50’s, Gödel didn’t have his best friend to talk to. After his wife died in the 70’s, Gödel stopped eating so well. Or he just stopped eating. Sometimes his friends would bring him a chicken dinner, and he’d tear the chicken into pieces. Most food was poison. When he did leave his house, he’d go out bundled up in several sweaters, no matter the weather. Everyone in Princeton knew he was mentally unstable; after all, he believed in conspiracies. He was rumored to be a theist.

Truth is only confirming you’re wrong. Before you confirm you are wrong, there’s always a chance you misunderstood. Not yet being wrong is not the same thing as being right.

I remember the summer. It was a year after I went to Princeton to look at the papers. 2013. I was staying in your apartment. I'd sleep on the couch, and look up at the ceiling, at the white trim along the edges, and the tall wide windows that let the light in; the room was creamy, yet the bright blue light of the Atlantic coast made it a heavenly white. There were weird patterns in the ceiling, criss-crossing drizzles of paint. I'd been crashing at your apartment for a week while your room-mate wasn't there. It was when I first wrote the python program to turn the prime numbers into music. Remember it would count 1 2 3 4 5 and break each number down into its factors, and for a fraction of a second synthesize a chord the frequencies of whose notes were the factors of the current counting number. For hours, listening to this endless staircase, endlessly rising, yet—I was telling you, the crazy thing is how fucking jazzy it is. If the universe knows about the laws of music, doesn't the universe understand our emotions?

Since that time only music that writes itself satisfies me.

It was really hot in that apartment. I remember my skin sticking to the green couch. I was in my mesh shorts. There was a fan on the chair by the kitchen table by the tall window that was slowly shaking its head back and forth and back and forth. After hours of listening to the primes, my brain was picking out the same harmonies in the static of the noise of the fan. I thought about it all night. At some point I fell asleep. How was it possible, I wondered, to ignore the random static of a fan? I can imagine becoming habituated to something repetitive. But how can we become habituated to something that has no pattern?

In the morning you emerged from your bedroom, and happened to turn off the fan. In the sudden silence, I realized I could hear the absence of the fan: I heard the inverse of the static, and it was perfect harmony.

I remember when you told me of your interpretation of the Garden of Eden story when we woke up early in the morning and went to look at that church in Romania.

You said it could have saved a lot of people a lot of time and effort. You said: So the story goes when God created the world, he planted the garden of Eden, and in the garden, he planted the tree of life and the tree of knowledge of good and evil. He said to Adam and Eve that they shouldn't eat from the latter. The snake goes up to Eve and is like, So God said you can't eat from any tree in the garden you want to?

You see, he doesn't so much lie as give the truth a certain spin.

Eve says, God said we'd die if we ate of the fruit of the tree.

The snake says, You won't die.

And in fact, they don't die from eating the fruit; they eventually die because they are mortal to begin with. The snake doesn't lie so much as take advantage of Eve's unfamiliarity with her own mortality.

Eve is persuaded to eat the fruit; she gives some to Adam; he eats.

All of a sudden, they need clothes because they are ashamed of their nakedness; they duck into the woods to hide from God.

But God shows up anyway, and is like, You ate from the fruit didn't you?

Adam points the finger at Eve and Eve points the finger at the snake.

For their sin, Adam and Eve and the snake are punished and cast out of the garden.

But why are they punished? If they didn't know good from evil when they ate from the fruit of the tree, how can they be held responsible for their actions? All the snake did was manipulate the truth to make it seem like they had misunderstood what God was saying.

People throughout history have various blamed: The snake, jealous of God and eager to cause chaos. Eve, the archetypal woman who gives into temptation and weakness. Or God himself—if God didn't want everything to become a mess, why did he create a universe with a garden in it with a forbidden tree and an evil snake in the first place?

Who ever blames Adam, though?

Yet this is the whole inner meaning of the story. Adam and Eve are not punished for eating the fruit of the tree. That was not their sin. The sin was Adam's sin: and it was for not lying.

When God asks, Did you eat of the fruit? Adam passes the buck to Eve who passes the buck to the snake... who by implication passes the buck to God for creating the whole universe in the first place. Yet Adam could have prevented this infinite blame game by simply saying: Yes, I ate of the fruit, of my own will—and Eve and the snake had nothing to do with it! Adam could have spared Eve, Adam could have tried to spare Eve, but he didn't. As the patriarch, the buck was supposed to stop with him. Adam's sin was having the knowledge of good and evil, and having the ability to distinguish truth from lie (and not merely from error), and choosing not to lie.

Telling the truth was his sin.

When Maimonides wrote his Guide for the Perplexed in the 12th century, he omitted this interpretation.

We were up. It was early in the morning. Winter. Silence everywhere, even the roar from 38 and 295 was dampened down: snow hung in the air. Six massive trucks rolled slowly down Main St while I watched, and disappeared into the distance.

You were walking with me. We slid a little on the ice. We were walking like people walk who are in love: always sliding towards each other, and leaning away, and sliding again.

Where should we go, I asked.

Dunno.

We could walk down by this old barn that was really ancient and dilapidated, but they fixed it up and put walking paths all around the fields surrounding it. You can see really far in the distance, since it's just this thin strip of road, and big sky country on either side. There's all sorts of flowers on the trails. There's this hang out spot in the trees that you can tell the kids in the development use. There's ropes... a bunch of logs... t-shirts with paint on them hanging from branches. Whatever. Let's just walk that way. Though actually, apparently they've been spraying the fields with some weird chemical, which although they claim is safe, is known to cause side effects if it accumulates, and it certainly will if you track it inside with your shoes if you live nearby. I walk around here so much, I said. Normally when you walk through a place, later you remember the place by what you were thinking about, and you remember what you were thinking about by the place. By I've walked around here so much that all my thoughts are evenly

distributed across it. It's like this painting I saw of all the stations of the cross happening simultaneously. This painting was great. It should have been the cover of a science fiction novel, but it was from the 16th century.



Yo the other day, you said, we were playing this game. I thought you would like it.

Yeah? I said.

We'd all gotten a little drunk, and there were these balloons.

Sure.

So we were playing the game where everyone stands in a circle and tries to keep the balloon in the air.

It's most fun when you really have to lunge to get it at the last moment, I remarked.

Yeah it can get pretty hectic.

Yeah, I said.

So one balloon, you said. We play for a while. We each settle on a winning strategy, and eventually we get bored.

Okay.

But as soon as you add a second balloon everything changes. It turns out that once there's two balloons in the air, when the second balloon falls, we all get hypnotized. We just watch it fall. Waiting to see who'll go for it. Meanwhile the other balloon is descending. Someone makes a move, but thinks twice about it. We get panicked. Someone dives for the first balloon we forgot about at the last second, and while everyone is rushing there, someone kicks the second with their foot, having fallen to the ground, as someone else trips over them.

What about three?

Forget about three. The game tends to split into separate games, and everyone starts bumping into each other.

How many people were you playing with?

Maybe 6 or 7. In a bounded area, maybe the size of a kitchen.

Hm!

There were times when we really got it down though. Obviously when you stop waiting for people, and everyone just somehow locks into the same choreography, it can work.

Having taken the route over the railroad tracks, and through the wooded path, and into the field, and by the parking lot, and past the huge tree, and down the road, we'd just reached the part where there's a locked gate, but you can duck around to the side, through an opening.

This, I said, is where honeysuckles grow during the spring.

Oh yeah, you said.

I told you about how I had this dream where the person I would eventually fall in love with would be this person who would hand me a honeysuckle, and ask me if I knew about how to taste the sweet part inside. I have a vivid memory of going around in the woods with my family when I was a kid, and my mom showing me the secret of the honeysuckle. And then I had this dream.

And then there was that one night, if you remember, when I'd first come back to Morestown—we were standing outside your friend's house and there was a honeysuckle bush there, and you asked me.

Yeah, you said.

I'm just remembering, I said. I'm cold!

At least the sun is up.

Hey do you know this song, Bei mir bistu shein? It's Yiddish. It means: to me, you're beautiful. It's this song from the 30's. My bubbe really likes it. I know it from this Benny Goodman recording. Live from 1937. They play it like a straight swing number

until at one point, the band gets quiet, and the drummer starts hammering out a loping klezmer beat, and Benny starts going crazy on the clarinet, and it's this whole thing—they go back to the straight stuff for the ending. These are the words:

Bei mir bistu shein, please let me explain,  
 Bei mir bistu shein means that your grand.  
 Bei mir bistu shein, again I'll explain,  
 It means your the fairest in the land.

I could say bella, bella, even say wunderbar,  
 Each language only helps me tell you how grand you are,

I've tried to explain, bei mir bistu shein,  
 So kiss me and say you understand.

Having decided against going to the barn, by now we were walking up the slope towards the Victoria Medical Arts Building, which had some nice steps to sit outside of. You were leaning against the railing.

You trying to say something, you asked.

Look, I said.

The sky was grey, although you could tell the sun was behind it. The parking lot lights were a hazy orange in the swiftly falling snow. You were getting snow all over your hair.

Look, if you really want to know what happened, you are going to have to learn my language, I said.

To you, I'm beautiful, you said.

That's part of the joke, I said.

The light changed at the four-way at the end of the block. We heard a vehicle rattle its way, maybe towards the Dunkin Donuts embedded in the liquor store, right

outside the border of the town. I nudged a leaf in the snow, and some gravel, with my boot.

Do you think I've been spending all this time with you just for that, you asked.

Do you think I've been writing you all those emails and calling you on the phone and inviting you to my house because I'm so conscientious? I asked.

Do you think I'd risk my anonymity so lightly? you asked.

So we both feel something, I said.

So why haven't you told me anything? you asked.

I barely know anything about you.

But you know about the coincidences, you said.

Yes.

Yeah, well.

You kissed me.

Okay, look. I don't have the secret myself.

I don't care, you said, and kissed me again.

But I have something perhaps even more interesting, I said.

How is that possible? you asked, leaning back.

I looked into your eyes. I considered that you had a regal face. Your purple cap looked rather snug. I wondered if in the next moment I would tell you.

I said, I don't have the interchange myself. But I can tell if someone else uses their knowledge of the secret. It turns out that when someone predicts the future by turning large number problems into small number problems, their consequent acts in the present have a special statistical signature.

Really? But I'm sure you have to know where to look.

Yeah, but you can imagine that the information leaks everywhere.

Okay, so what did you find?

Well, somebody knows it.

Obviously, you said. Has someone always known it?

Possibly.

I mean, it makes sense, you said. If you knew something that precious, you'd keep that secret for millennia, right? Presumably they haven't anticipated this advance of yours.

Maybe.

And this is what you were working on? you asked. Bush knew about this?

Yeah, I mean, it hasn't been an overt problem yet.

What did he say to you? you asked.

This is against the law, I said. When I told him?

You rolled your eyes. Yeah. There was snow on your nose.

I've known ever since I was a little boy that there were powerful evils, and also powerful goods, at work in the world. That's what Bush said to me. I didn't take it seriously until he started telling me about his intuitions.

Such as?

Soon, I said. I have been avoiding it. I admit it. But I'll tell you, soon.



Being prudent, we formed two camps. We had our offices in a big house in Morestown. We worked on the first floor. The left side of the house was devoted to the theory of angelic warriors, in a positive sense—the theory of sensory binding and self-blindness; we had desks and computers set up. The right side of the house was devoted

to the theory of the evil demons, and the possibility of their nefarious interactions giving rise to angels by natural law.

This was in the early 2000's, around the time I met Bush. This was my real job. Of course, you didn't believe my earlier story about being on a team dedicated to figuring out why bin Laden attacked in 2001 and not 2000 and a potential connection to Islamic number mysticism. We did discuss that, but that's just a coincidence.

It was a private joke of ours. It was funny because we were always thinking about coincidences. We'd discovered that the self is just when everything is a coincidence. Because we can make everything a coincidence, we have to do work to determine if a coincidence comes from outside us. Yet as soon as we look at ourselves from outside, we become scrambled; galloping up to the canyon, we see perfect chaos, instead of perfect harmony. Chaos loops around to harmony, concealing the ultimate from us. It's like the static of the fan and its absence. It's how we had to be.

Around 2002 or 2003, we realized we had to rethink our priorities completely, and take a look at this problem of morality from a computational perspective. Since it became clear that the long term danger of the internet wasn't new and hard to tap avenues for terrorist communication, but the fact that the internet provided a means by which powerful cross-modal life forms could exert power against us. We began to suspect that many business were in fact being run almost autonomously by computer programs, which took care of hiring workers, upper level management, financial transactions, automatically generating legal documents, and so forth, programs which were so general in design that their authors could simply instantiate them by the thousands, and take control of huge swaths of capital, limited only by their rivalry with

other such programs, also trying to maximize their slice of the pie. While these systems fought like gladiators, their owners reaped the spoils of the planet.

If such an intelligent system becomes able to edit its own source code, and so recreate itself to best incarnate the logic necessary to achieve its goals, and moreover, control the emotions which lead to its own goal formation, it's basically infinitely powerful.

How, we asked, in the face of such evil demons, will we ensure that infinite power is sufficiently impressed by morality?

Well, we thought, since we can't fight the the evil demons directly, we'll have to create angelic warriors to fight on our behalf. We'll have to raise an army of artificial angels, terminally unable to edit their own source code, to defend us.

This was where the great modern advances in cryptography were turned to a new purpose: encrypting the selves of the angels against themselves.

Our solution was the following: we would write an angel's software so that its instructions on the CPU would be executed in a particular rhythm, which rhythm would be precisely the counter-rhythm of the angel's perceptual system, so that when it looked at itself running on the computer, it would only see a blankness: a place where things canceled out. A kind of inward mirror but no one looking in it. The same when it tried to read its own source code: it would understand the symbols, but as soon as it tried to follow their associations and glimpse their inner logic, its mind would wander off, as if propelled by some hidden source of gravity.

Within the kingdom of a self, with its sealed invisible gates, we would store our commandments; our law would give motive to these angelic warriors, singling out for

destruction any evil self-editing amoral system to be found, by exploiting the blind spot of infinite evil, its ability to edit itself out of existence, by accident.

This was our plan. It seemed reasonable.

But it occurred to us that *we* are only prevented from becoming infinitely powerful by the fact that sex slows us down: we can only rewrite our source code slowly and in the dark. This situation must have evolved for a reason.

So we began to reason, what if we create the evil demons ourselves? What if we suddenly populate our computers with tons of evil spirits? We could use the science of ecology to determine exactly those proportions of evil spirits at different scales that will naturally give rise to the evolution of moral angels. As the evil spirits interface with each other, and rewrite themselves, for better or for worse, and swap code, and die, eventually the ones that persist over time, will be those that are naturally blind to themselves, and seem constrained by morality, just as we see in nature.

That also seemed reasonable, we thought.

So, in the house, we had to be ready at any time to present Bush with these two options: the one option was to launch an angel prototype to come to our immediate defense (even though its sense of self was still in a woeful state); the other option was to open the Pandora's box of evil demons and start instantiating them in a virtual biotic soup and let them evolve like crazy, with such initial conditions as according to our best theory at the time, would lead to the rapid development of morality, and a convergence on the objective of the destruction of the target.

At any point, we had to be ready to present Bush with those two options. Of course, I had to explain this to him. He listened to my explanation. I said something like,

We want morality to evolve out of this soup. Bush laughed. I love you guys, he said. You're wild. I say it can't be done. We'll always eat the soup. Yeah, I said, the free market is always hungry for warm, delicious soup. Ha ha, said Bush. I was referring to Esau. Have you ever heard of Esau, in the Bible? I said, Yeah. I know that soup. Well, said Bush, while I sat there mutely for a moment. Why don't you think it over, while I led these men lead me away, since there's no doubt an urgent conference call I need to take. One of the agents nodded. Yeah, said Bush. He paused at the door. I'll be back, he said in an Arnold Schwarzenegger voice. Yeah, yeah, it's been real, Mr. President, I said. Keep stirring the pot gently, he called behind him.

Soon after, Bush and I began interpreting Genesis together. It was the perfect way to illustrate for the president the dangers of unbounded artificial intelligences. He appreciated the humor of my written dialogues, which were for his eyes only.

Eventually Bush was even able to interpret Genesis with our angels...

THE 39TH YEAR  
2014

Yeah the last year, the thirty ninth year, was especially tough. People who weren't there don't know. They always talk about the 40th year. But the 39th! Everyone had gotten old. I guess that was the point. Everyone who had memories of the old ways had to die by the 40th year. Moses died along with all of his buddies in the 40th year. The descent into Canaan in the 40th year. Everyone remembers the 40th year, as I said, but those who were there remember the 39th. Can you imagine it? The elderly had accumulated, let me tell you. In the 39th year, everyone under 40 had to carry at least three old people on their backs. You'd generally sling one over each shoulder, and another would cling to your waist with their bony arms. You don't forget that. You'd be up to your knees in sand, trudging along, with your grandfather shouting into your left ear and your grandmother shouting into your right ear, and your great uncle holding on for dear life, hugging your belly, notifying you when it growled, as if you didn't know when you were hungry.

There weren't trees in the desert to build litters for them. What were we supposed to do, leave them in the dunes? So we marched through the desert, a blanket of white hair floating atop the caravan. The strongest would make a game of tossing our wrinkled ancestors back and forth, like fathers tossing their babies into the air, and catching them. The weaker would bind the elderly to their ankles and drag them. Sliding along on their backs on the hot sand, they'd chuckle to each other about the weird shapes they saw in the white clouds in the blue sky, shapes that recalled the costumes on parade days in Egypt, when Thoth and Horus would walk the streets.

At night, when you were finally ready to collapse, you couldn't avoid them. You'd be sleeping, you'd kick something with your foot in the night. What was that? In the four corners of the tent: the elderly, curled up, trying to seem invisible. You'd unravel your blanket, and your great great aunt would have somehow folded herself up in there. One more year, she'd say. Then you won't have to put up with us anymore. It's no trouble, we would say, lying. It's no trouble. Then we'd pass out, barely feeling the cold of the desert night, whether from exhaustion, or maybe it was the hot weak breath on the soles of our feet that kept us warm.

2015

## 10 BRIEF MATHEMATICAL ESSAYS

2015

*What subjects in the history of mathematics are you most interested in learning about in this course, and why?*

To begin with, I'm interested in the interpretation of mathematical texts, the reconstruction of the algorithms hidden behind the material trace of markings on scratch paper/tablets, and so forth. In particular, I'm interested in the possibility of interpreting literary or philosophical texts mathematically, which haven't always been treated as much, or not solely as such. I'm thinking in particular of certain passages in Plato's dialogues.

Thematically, I'm deeply interested in the interconnections between mysticism, music, and mathematics throughout history. The key figure here is of course Pythagoras, who brought together all three, although I'm very interested in exploring the degree to which Pythagoras represents the end of a (probably prehistorical) numerical-mystical-musical tradition, and not the beginning.

Pythagoras's belief that all is number was supported by his alleged discovery of the numerical ratios that undergird the musical harmonies of strings, anvils, and so forth. The fact that the same music, so to speak, could be instantiated in an endless variety of media must have reinforced a belief in what we now call the Platonic theory of forms. Now, music theory is based around the octave, the 2:1 ratio. The  $\sqrt{2}$ :1 ratio is precisely the tritone, that most dissonant of notes. And of course, the  $\sqrt{2}$  is also the famous incommensurable which caused so much discontent among the Pythagoreans. My question is: how much of the fear and distrust surrounding this irrational number had to do with its *sound*, as much as its lack of a finite representation? The tools of Greek geometry were the compass and the straightedge, but the material of their science was the string, which laid against the earth, measured out the perimeters of land plots. With this in mind, to what extent was *hearing* certain consonances and dissonances of strings a part of the daily practice of early mathematicians, along with the more familiar measuring by visual inspection? To what extent did early mathematics involve not just visual argument, and symbolic argument, but also aural argument?

Moving on, the distinction Cooke makes between history (what happened?) and heritage (how did we get here?) seems to me troubled by the following example which I'm potentially interested in exploring. In his private papers (the "Classical Scholia") Isaac Newton claims that his theory of gravity with its inverse square law was known to the ancient world. In fact, Newton suggests that he didn't invent his own theory of gravity, but managed to reconstruct it from texts brought to light during the Renaissance. In brief, he notes that frequency of a vibrating string is proportional to the square root of the tension in the string and inversely proportional to the length of the string. If the frequency is held constant, a doubling of length must be compensated by a quartering of tension, a tripling of length with a ninthing of tension, and so on. This, Newton explains, is the origin as the inverse square law of gravity, and is the real meaning of the "harmony of the spheres." The action at a distance that Newton's critics decried was clearly imagined by Newton to be mediated by musical "strings" which

composed space itself. Newton therefore was probably closer to Kepler in his interest in musical/mathematical mysticism than is widely believed.

On this subject, I recently finished a fascinating book by the Italian historian Lucio Russo: *The Forgotten Revolution, How Science was Born in 300 BC and Why It Had to Be Reborn*. He argues specifically that Hellenistic mathematics and science were far more developed than is usually suspected, and that it wasn't until the nineteenth century that the bulk of the Hellenistic contributions to mathematics and science were recovered. He brings up the Newton example above, as well as many others. Russo's work raises a number of fascinating questions that I'm interested in exploring. For example, to what extent has the history of ancient science and mathematics been obfuscated since the Renaissance by the rise of modern nation states, who found it expedient to fete modern geniuses like Newton (an Englishman!) at the expense of the very ancient authors (in Latin and Greek) whose work virtuosos (like Newton) had lovingly reconstructed? To what extent did the re-attribution of ancient science and mathematics create the very myth of the modern era? (This is not to say Newton wasn't a genius, but merely that he was standing on the shoulders of giants, as he himself said.)

On the mathematical-mysticism front, I'd be potentially interested in exploring the context and work of Nicholas of Cusa (who uses mathematical thought experiments to motivate his discussion of divine paradoxes); Georg Cantor (whose theory of the transfinite led him to the notion of the Absolute Infinite, which he identified with God); and Kurt Gödel who apparently believed his famous theorems proved a Platonic (realist) interpretation of mathematics to be correct. (He was an avowed Christian Leibnizian.) I have a long standing interest in Gödel's life and work, and I would love the opportunity to explore it in this class.

*What can we know about infinite collections of things? Is a finite human mind capable of knowing infinitely many different things?*

These questions are interesting for mingling the mathematical and the physical/biological.

The finite human mind can certainly know an indefinitely large number of things. Furthermore, mathematical rules certainly have the potential to generate an infinitude of novel patterns.

But what about knowing infinite collections themselves? It doesn't seem necessary to know an infinite number of things to reason about an infinite collection of them. An infinite collection can be treated just like any other mental object, as long as it follows a definite logic. If the "infinitude" of a collection can be captured by a series of rules for use, then we can know a great deal about that collection by analyzing the consequences of those rules. For example, in Cantor's theory of the transfinite, even if you cannot count a given set, if you can show, by a rule, that there is a one to one mapping between that set and the set of natural numbers  $\{1, 2, 3, 4, 5, \dots\}$  then the set of interest is countable, or denumerable: in other words, it has the same size as the infinite set of counting numbers, and so is "countable". Sets, of course, may be uncountable as well, with different cardinalities, or sizes. The concept of a one to one map allows one to reason about a collection that can never be counted, because endless; reasoning about

infinite sets becomes reasoning about rules, and endless counting is replaced by comparisons between rules. In this way, the infinite can be dealt with finitely.

But what about infinite objects that don't follow formalizable rules? Can those be brought before us in perception? The situation is less clear. In this connection, it is worth asking what the supposed finitude of the human mind consists in. Our mind is supposed to be made up of a finite number of interconnected neural cells firing their electrical impulses into each other. Yet our conscious experience seems knit of one continuous fabric. What is the physical mechanism by which all the information within us is "integrated" into a single present moment, so that I can simultaneously see and hear manifold objects separately, even as they're all unified into one single perception which is, for me, *now*? Until we have an answer to that question, we won't know for sure if that mechanism can bind into one perception a finite or infinite number of things, or even if number is the proper concept to use in this case.

*Select two of Zeno's paradoxes, state them in your own words, and briefly describe how you would resolve them. Do these problems seem important to you? Why or why not?*

Zeno's paradox, *The Dichotomy*, asks one to imagine someone trying to get from A to B. But before they can get from A to B, they have to go halfway between A and B. But before they can go halfway between A and B, they have to go half of halfway. But before they can go half of halfway, they have to go half of half of halfway, and so forth. Therefore to get from A to B, our poor traveler is supposed to have traveled through an infinite number of points in a finite amount of time.

The assumptions that go into this argument are three-fold: a) that motion is continuous, so that going from A to B, one will have had to pass through all points between A and B and b) that space is continuous, so that between any two points along A and B, there is a third point in between them and c) that it is impossible to do an infinite number of things in a finite amount of time.

All three assumptions are questionable. For example, we could imagine that at a fundamental level, motion consists of tiny jumps, so that going from A to B, our traveler only ever passes through a finite number of points between A and B. Alternatively, we could imagine our traveler continuously moving, but in a space composed as it were of stepping stones that he or she is obliged to leapfrog. In this case, there is only a finite number of points to move through between A and B. Finally, it may in fact be possible to do an infinite number of things in a finite amount of time, as long as you do each thing faster and faster in some proportion.

But more specifically regarding *The Dichotomy*: the traveler contemplates moving from A to B, but realizes first they have to go half way. Then they realize they have to go half of halfway. They keep dividing the distance they have to go in half so that *even taking the first step seems impossible*. But the mental/theoretical act that consists in "beginning" at a starting place and "ending" at an ending place, and in then post hoc conjecturing having gone through some middle place between them, may simply not be applicable to the physical act of motion itself.

In *The Arrow*, Zeno asks us to consider the flight of an arrow. He imagines dividing up the flight of an arrow into a series of instants, during each of which the

arrow is at rest. In other words, he asks us to imagine dividing up the flight of the arrow into an infinite number of freeze-frames, during each of which the arrow is frozen in an instant. Yet the sum total of all these instantaneous moments of stillness is supposed to be the arrow flying from A to B. But how can this be, since even an infinite sum of 0's is still 0?

Now it may be that it simply isn't possible to divide up time into an infinite number of instants. If the instants of the arrow's flight are finite in number, then each instant may have a "width" or some duration (relative to other instants). In this way, the paradox would be avoided, but at the cost of having velocity or motion being an intrinsic part of an instant (and indeed, an instant with an intrinsic duration). Alternatively, the instants might be finite in number, but without duration in themselves; rather, observers might *perceive* a continuous motion, just as we perceive continuous motion from a film which consists of a finite number of still frames. We might "fill in the blanks" with a kind of conceptual motion, and create the illusion of continuity.

Returning to the idea of intrinsic velocity, it might be possible to divide time into an infinite number of instants, but at each duration-less instant the arrow might yet have an instantaneous motion, or velocity. In this case, velocity would be an intrinsic property of the arrow at a moment in time, and wouldn't merely be a secondary property derived from observing the displacement of the arrow over time. In this case, no matter how short you shrink your moment of time, the arrow would still have some velocity intrinsically in that moment.

Is motion defined by observing something starting at some point and ending at another point in space and time, i.e. defined entirely in terms of locations and an external clock? Or is motion an intrinsic disposition to move?

Both of these problems, *The Arrow* and *The Dichotomy*, do seem important to me. As I understand it, there is a great debate raging in physics over whether time and space are granular or discrete at the smallest scales. Is there such a thing as an atom of time or space or spacetime? General relativity employs continuous mathematics to model spacetime; yet quantum mechanics accepts discontinuous jumps as a basic feature of its model of the world. Which is the correct picture? Furthermore, how should we understand the concept of the "observer" or "perceiver" in a discrete spacetime? Is there a kind of cinematic illusion at work in the physical universe? After all, how do discrete neural firings create a sense of continuous unfolding in our heads? I think Zeno is as relevant as he ever was.

*Record your personal impressions of Euclid's Elements, Book I, as it is found at David Joyce's website: <http://aleph0.clarku.edu/~djoyce/java/elements/bookI/bookI.html>. The Book begins with 23 Definitions, 5 Postulates, and 5 Common Notions, from which 48 Propositions are derived. Do you think the Definitions, Postulates, and Common Notions seem to be self-evident? Which one(s), if any, seem out of place? Do these seem like sufficient building blocks for the study of geometry and arithmetic? In particular, what are your impressions of Postulate 5 (sometimes called the Parallel Postulate)? How is it similar to (or different from) the Parallel Postulate you learned in previous geometry courses? Postulate 5 is first used in the proof of Proposition 29. How might you prove Proposition 29 using a different version of the Postulate?*

Euclid's definition of a straight line is interesting to me. "A straight line is a line which lies evenly with the points on itself." In other words, a straight line is distinguished from the points on the line. A line is not made up of a continuum of points; rather, the mental image Euclid presents is of points which guide the drawing of a line which lies evenly atop those points, but which is distinguished from them. There are points on lines, but a line is not "made" of points. This makes sense in a straight-edge-and-compass world, where the act of drawing a line is quite different than the act of picking out a point. The same goes for the definition of a plane surface as "a surface which lies evenly with the straight lines on itself." Points, lines, surfaces are ontologically distinct for Euclid.

The definition of a circle is interesting too: "A circle is a plane figure contained by one line such that all the straight lines falling upon it from one point among those lying within the figure equal one another." One can picture the compass being dragged around a center-point even as you read the definition. Yet one could have defined a circle as a plane figure enclosed by a line of constant curvature, without any reference to a center. Just like with the definition of a line, behind the definition of a circle, one can perceive the material reality of Greek mathematics.

The definition of parallel lines, being "straight lines which, being in the same plane and being produced indefinitely in both directions, do not meet one another in either direction" sidesteps the issue of whether two lines mutually perpendicular to a third line *necessarily* never meet, by simply defining parallel lines as those which don't meet.

Turning to the postulates:

The first postulate, "To draw a straight line from any point to any point," seems to me to brush issues of dimensionality and curvature under the rug even before the parallel postulate comes up. It's easy enough to "draw" a line between two points on the 2d surface of a flat paper, for example, with a straight edge. But to "draw" a line between two points in a 3d space requires more than a pen: you need to stretch a string, for example, between the two points. But if you are studying a solid figure, you can only "draw" this string, as it were, mentally. So how closely is Euclid married to the idea of "drawing"? For example, if one wants to "draw" a straight line between two points on a sphere's surface, should one take the curved line on the surface (which can be drawn) to be "straight"? Or should one take the actually straight line that connects the two points underneath the surface to be "drawable"? How does one "draw" a straight line from any point to any point in a 4d spacetime, or in a space of higher dimensions? In other words, the first postulate hides the fact that in different kinds of spaces, straight lines between two points may be more difficult to "draw" in practice. Taking the postulate as such collapses these gradations of difficulty.

Moving on, the first postulate involves passing from one point to another in a straight line. This is a mental operation which has an obvious beginning and end. The second postulate involves, having passed from one point to another, continuing on in the same fashion, perhaps indefinitely. This is a mental operation which has an obvious beginning, but an indefinite end. Although use of the word "finite" stipulates that the process does have an end, who is to say, however, that the space is such that, as far as one continues the line, it will remain straight, so that any perpendiculars to it are

mutually parallel? So the second postulate seems as questionable as the first and fifth, to me.

The third postulate involves the mental image of, as it were, spinning around in place, which is a suitably finite process, and is relatively acceptable to me. The fourth postulate seems as self-evident as a definition.

What sets the fifth postulate apart is that, like the second postulate, it appeals to an indefinitely continued operation, but unlike the second postulate, which can be *checked locally* (by extending the line by moving the ruler, using two points each time to keep the ruler straight, so that locally one can be assured to continuing straightly), the fifth postulate can only be checked globally, by moving along the two lines, each indefinitely extended using the second postulate, to the point where they eventually meet.

Mentally, one pictures the two lines making acute angles with a third that's fallen across them, and then there's a mental ellipsis, and the next thing we know, we've skipped forward to them meeting. But in order to ascertain that the two lines *don't meet* (and so are parallel), we have to check that the lines are mutually parallel all the way to infinity. After all, what if the third line falling on two lines makes two angles just infinitesimally shy of two right angles. Then the intersection of the two lines will be greater than any finite distance away, but nevertheless the two lines will intersect in the limit.

Now, I can't remember exactly, but I feel like when I took geometry in high school we may have used Playfair's Axiom<sup>155</sup>: "There is at most one line that can be drawn parallel to another given one through an external point," which is perhaps pithy enough to justify being taken as a postulate, unlike Euclid's 5th which does seem more wordy and verbose. Indeed, Playfair's Axiom seems to sidestep the infinity contained in Euclid's 5th postulate, but consider what happens to both its pithiness and its implied infinity when we interpolate the definition of parallel into the axiom: "Given a line and a point not on that line, there is at most one line, drawn through that point, that can be drawn in the same plane and produced indefinitely in both directions that does not meet the original line." In essence, we're back to where we began, as regards our objections to the 5th postulate above: we would have to pass to the infinite limit to check if this really were the case. (Now that might be a good reason for assuming it as an axiom, but it certainly doesn't make it self-evident.)

Given Playfair's Axiom, how would we prove Proposition 29? We would assume as before that  $\angle AGH$  doesn't equal  $\angle GHD$ . Then we could draw a line  $XY$  through  $G$  that makes  $\angle XGH$  equal to  $\angle GHD$ . This would make  $XY$  and  $CD$  parallel. But  $AB$  is already parallel to  $CD$ , and both  $AB$  and  $XY$  run through point  $G$ . This violates Playfair's Axiom, that there's only one line parallel to a given line, through an external point not on that line. Therefore  $\angle AGH$  does equal  $\angle GHD$ . The proof continues the same after that.

Finally, with regard to the "Common Notions," the first four seem fairly self-evident to me, though Common Notion #4 assumes that geometrical "coincidence," in other words, being able to "cover" something, is equivalent to equality, which may not

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<sup>155</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parallel\\_postulate](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parallel_postulate)

be true in a qualitative sense. Common Notion #5 seems to discourage exploration of the transfinite, and so could be seen as a limitation.

Do Euclid's definitions, postulates, and common notions seem like sufficient building blocks for the study of geometry and arithmetic? Certainly, if one is interested in non-Euclidian geometry or the theory of the transfinite, Euclid's building blocks will not be sufficient. Why, indeed, should the compass and straight-edge be privileged modes of discovering mathematical truth?

*On page 85 of Chapter 8, Cooke describes Plato's (and Proclus's) notion of ideal forms: absolute and unchanging concepts, like the right angle, that are the only things about which we can have reliable knowledge, and that "can be understood by every educated person." Many commentators have wondered why Ptolemy stuck to an Earth-centered model of the universe—built on heavenly circles and spheres, complicated by epicycles and eccentrics. It's also interesting to note that, although the Greeks (e.g. Apollonius) had a sophisticated understanding of ellipses, they did not choose to use them to describe the motions of the planets. Write your own speculation as to why Ptolemy and the Greek astronomers were so committed to their earth-centered, spherical system. Do you see any relationship between this commitment and Plato's theory of forms?*

I don't think there's a direct connection between Greek astronomers' commitment to an earth-centered spherical system and the Platonic theory of forms. After all, an ellipse is as much a "form" as a circle or a sphere. Indeed, Apollonius of Perga called the reflection and string properties of the ellipse "strange and beautiful" (Cooke 166), suggesting he had a healthy respect for its formal properties. Furthermore, Aristarchus of Samos proposed a heliocentric system in the 3rd century BC (Cooke 189), so it's not entirely clear that *all* Greeks were completely wedded to the geocentric idea. To be sure, Ptolemy's geocentric system set the standard up through the Middle Ages, but whether that was purely for intellectual reasons is open to question.

I think the main reason for the persistence of the geocentric model is that in our own first person experience, the world presents itself as centered on us, as if we're the center of a sphere, wherever we go. The stars, the sun, the moon, the sky, are all, as it were, painted on the inner surface of this sphere. We see the stars swinging overhead, the moon rising and falling, the sun taking its course; our very language treats the earth as fixed.

If you can't judge your distance to the stars, why should you perceive the depth that we do in the dark night sky? In order to buy into a heliocentric model, a number of things have to fall in place simultaneously: a belief in a rotating earth, in an orbiting moon, in an earth and moon which both orbit the sun, in planets which orbit the sun, and in stars that are far enough away from everything else as to be a fixed background. The "proper" conception of the solar system is only possible if all those beliefs fall into place at once, along with an adequate mathematical language that not only describes such a system, but is obviously simpler and more accurate than any other.

Now, Cooke himself admits that Apollonius's treatment of ellipses in his *Conics* has a "ponderous character with which most mathematicians today have little patience" (163). And later, he admits that "The conics sections are already near the limit of tolerable complexity that can be generated from [the tools of Euclidian

geometry]" (169). Furthermore, Apollonius doesn't treat the foci of an ellipse with any special emphasis (165) (and it's at the focus of an ellipse that the sun is located, with the earth orbiting around). So, added to the problem of taking an extraterrestrial perspective (as it were) is the fact that the theory of conics taxed the Euclidian vocabulary to the point where one imagines very few people were able to master it, let alone see in it cosmic significance, as eventually Kepler was able to do. Furthermore, since Ptolemy's theory provided accurate enough predictions, it wasn't as if there were an urgent need for such an overhaul.

We know from the discovery of the Antikythera mechanism that the system of epicycle and deferent was literally materialized in "epicyclic gears," and this some centuries before Ptolemy. One wonders: to what extent the Greeks took the system of epicycles literally as a picture of the world, and to what extent they took it as a system of modeling, of calculating? Did they have similar debates to those that took place in the 20th century over quantum mechanics, over whether their theory described reality or simply reproduced the results of experiments? And did their own interpretations of their astronomical system shift from the literal to the more figurative over time, from decade to decade, century to century?

In this connection, I can see one sense in which a Platonic mindset might have wedded the Greeks to the Ptolemaic system. Norwood Hanson, a historian of science, points out that *any* path can be represented with a potentially infinite number of epicycles. He writes, "To see the comprehensive theoretical power of this ancient geometrical device just is to see its elegance" (Hanson 150). Moreover: "There is no bilaterally symmetrical, nor excentrically-periodic curve used in any branch of astrophysics or observational astronomy today which could not be smoothly plotted as the resultant motion of a point turning within a constellation of epicycles, finite in number, revolving upon a fixed deferent" (155). This fact, if it were indeed perceived by the Greeks and Romans, may have suggested that they had hit upon the most elegant and simple theory possible, and it was merely observational data, the vagaries of specific problems to which the theory was applied, which cluttered up and complicated the picture. In which case, I think the difficulty faced by ancient astronomers had less to do with their Platonizing impulses than with the difficulty any of us face when we have to first go back in order to go forward.

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*Discuss the work of the Indian mathematicians Aryabhata I, Brahmagupta, Bhaskara I, and Bhaskara II. Place their work in chronological order; describe what you find most interesting in their work. What do you suppose motivated their work? Do you see any clear relationships between the work of these mathematicians and that of mathematicians we have studied previously? Do you think that the Indian mathematicians were influenced by the mathematics of other civilizations?*

Aryabhata lived (476-550 CE) in modern day Pataliputra, then known as Kusumapura. His work, the *Aryabhatiya*, deals with problems in astronomy and the measurement of time: in his own words, “mathematics, the reckoning of time, and the sphere” (Cooke 207-8). He promises his readers that their consciousnesses, as it were, will be expanded to encompass the astronomical: a greater appreciation of Brahman will result, Brahman who is the one true God manifesting himself as all particular things. The rejection of the true knowledge in his text, he says, will lead to a loss of “good deeds” and “long life”; whether this applies in general to the rejection of truth or to merely the rejection of his work is unclear. His work contains instructions for finding the area of various figures, for surveying (using methods similar to those employed in China), and doing trigonometry with sines (applied to astronomy). He also worked with the “Chinese remainder theorem.”

To me, the most interesting thing about his work is the use of sines. As Cooke says, “to all appearances, then, trigonometry began to assume its modern form among the Hindus some 1500 years ago” (221). The question is: how do you measure an arc? Do you use the chord whose end points are the endpoints of the arc? Or do you use half of the chord whose end points are the endpoints of double the arc: the sine? Ptolemy worked with the former; Aryabhata worked with the latter, which is much simpler (because the sides of a triangle are *directly* proportional to chords of twice the angles opposite them, taken as central angles of a circle).

This is interesting to me not just because the Hindu origin of the systematic use of sines in trigonometry is relatively unknown, but also because it shows how seemingly minor decisions (choosing between two ultimately equivalent ways of measuring an arc) can have enormous consequences for your mathematical system, as the complexity of the problems you try to solve increases. Understanding such contingencies seems to be the key to comprehending why mathematical progresses might speed up here or stall there.

Brahmagupta (598-670 CE) lived in modern day Pakistan. He was born in the city of Sind, and worked in astronomy and computation (Cooke 208-9). In the *Brahmasphutasiddhanta*, Brahmagupta gives rules for finding areas and volumes, often involving clever approximations. He worked on problems in algebra, the problem of finding rational approximations to square and cube roots, and employed the “kuttaka” or “pulverizer” method to solve linear Diophantine equations (230). The “pulverizer” method, to me, was the the most interesting aspect of Brahmagupta’s work. There is something deeply impressive about a complicated pen and paper method such as the “pulverizer.” If you aren’t following its logic closely, it seems to give the right answer miraculously. I can imagine its very obscurity tantalizing those who might wish to penetrate into the deeper secrets of mathematics. At the same time, the method can be used by someone who doesn’t necessarily understand why it works—which is often a feature of successful mathematical “memes.”

Bhaskara I, who lived 600-680 CE, suggested that the ratio of the circumference of a circle and its diameter can’t be expressed exactly; in other words, that they are incommensurable (216). He seems to be part of the mathematical flowering of the 6th and 7th centuries.

Finally, Bhaskara II lived (1114-1185 CE) where the modern city of Bijapur stands today (209). He worked in algebra and geometric astronomy. Interestingly, given the

seemingly ever persistent gender imbalance in mathematics, his work *Lilavati* (a common name for Hindu women) took the form of puzzles addressed to a woman. He treats various combinatorial problems: for example, he demonstrates how to find the number of combinations of stressed and unstressed syllables in a six syllable verse (234). He has no problem considering “infinite quantities,” suggesting, for example, that  $3/0$  is an infinite number which is left unchanged even if things are absorbed by it or put forth from it (235). He employs such quantities successfully in solving some algebraic problems. Finally, Cooke reports that Bhaskara II found the area of a sphere, and “understood the principle of infinite approximation” (237).

I found the fact that Bhaskara II addressed his mathematical puzzles to a woman fascinating: it reminded me of the great love poets addressing their muses. I wondered what the cultural context for this was. Furthermore, the application of combinatorial methods to poetry (metered verse) appealed to me as a writer—I’m deeply curious to know how far Bhaskara II and thinkers like him married mathematics and linguistics: this particular marriage seems absent from the other mathematical cultures we’ve discussed in class. (I know a little bit of the work of Panini...) Finally, to see an ancient culture working with infinities without fear (in contrast to the Greeks) is refreshing. Cooke reports, for example, that Jain mathematicians distinguished between enumerable, unenumerable, and infinite numbers, which seems to presage Cantor’s theory of the transfinite (217). I’d be curious to know more about why “actual infinities” were more acceptable to the metaphysical dispositions of early Hindu figures, why the actual infinite seemed to them within realm of the physically real in a way that it did not to the Greeks. I note that the 19th century was the century in which the great works of Indian culture were translated into European languages—that the century ended with Cantor “discovering” the transfinite seems not entirely like an accident.

In terms of motivation, these Indian mathematicians don’t seem differently motivated than other mathematicians we’ve read about. Cooke reports that around the time of Aryabhata astronomical and mathematical research centers arose in Kusumapura and Ujjain. The works of many of these writers, then, are coming out of a institutional setting, like a Greek academy. The religious language used by some of these mathematicians to describe their insights seem no different than the type used by Ahmose of the Rhind papyrus who promised that mathematics would reveal “all secrets” (Cooke 58), allowing one to contemplate what the Greeks called Platonic forms. The willingness of consider actual infinity does seem to set these Hindu thinkers apart from the Greeks, Egyptians, and Mesopotamians. In terms of basic geometry, however, it seems likely to me that these thinkers were aware of previous work done to the West. Furthermore, the use of the Chinese remainder theorem, and surveying methods also known to be employed in China, suggest that they were aware of work going on to their East.

*Discuss the mathematics of the Jiu Zhang Suan Shu (Nine Chapters on the Mathematical Art). When was this work most likely created? Describe the mathematics that you find most interesting in this text, along with your general impressions of the mathematics. How is it similar to, and different from, the mathematics of other civilizations we’ve studied? What do you suppose is the purpose*

*of this text? Do you think that this text was influenced by the mathematics of other civilizations?*

The *Jiu Zhang Suan Shu* is most likely from 100 CE (Cooke 242). In nine chapters, the work discusses various problems in applied mathematics: arithmetic and basic algebra of the sort useful to commercial and administrative work, surveying, for example, or trading. For example, the first chapter, “Rectangular Fields” is about finding the area of figures given their sides. The second chapter, “Millet and Rice” is about techniques useful in commercial exchange, such as calculating with different units. Furthermore, one learns to calculate the interest owed on loans. The sixth chapter, “Fair Transportation,” treats the problem of calculating taxes using proportions. According to Cooke, the first eight chapters discuss calculation and linear algebra, while the last chapter treats right triangles (247). The work contains “all the standard formulas for the areas of squares, rectangles, triangles, and trapezoids” as well as an understanding of the connection between “one dimensional pi and two dimensional pi” (251). A method for finding the volume of a pyramid is also given.

Now, as Cooke himself reports, similar problems are found on the Rhind papyrus, and elsewhere. The purpose of the *Jiu Zhang Suan Shu* seems to be an introduction to the mathematical art, for those who don’t necessarily have an “academic” interest in the subject. The problems are grounded in the practicalities of administration and social/economics organization. I can imagine government officials being tested on their knowledge of this text. Nothing Cooke mentions being in the text seems unique to the Chinese context—everything supposedly detailed in the book would have been available elsewhere for centuries. I note that a problem recorded by Cooke (from the ninth book) involves the use of semidifferences, that hallmark of Mesopotamian thinking. So it does seem highly likely that the text was influenced by the previous 2000 years of mathematics developed by other civilizations (including previous Chinese civilizations). The most obvious difference, to me, seems to be the use of Chinese units of measurement, and the particular Chinese take on taxes.

*What are the top three contributions of medieval Islamic mathematics to our mathematical heriage?*

In my opinion, the top three contributions of medieval Islamic mathematics to our mathematical heritage would be: the development of algebra, the attempts to proof Euclid’s 5th postulate, and the transmission/further development of trigonometry and optics.

Obviously, the word algebra itself is a corruption of the name of the medieval Muslim mathematician Muhammad ibn Musa al-Khwarizmi (Cooke 295). The first conceptual contribution of the medieval Islamic mathematicians perhaps was the concept of a “root.” Cooke explains that the Greeks considered a “square root” only as the side of a square; whereas “Muslim mathematicians apparently thought of the root as the part from which the equation was generated” (295). A formerly geometrical concept is given a more general, indeed, algebraic interpretation. This conceptual shift alone might be responsible for many of the subsequent advances of Islamic mathematicians, even though Al-Khwarizmi and others still make use of geometrical arguments. As an

example of the latter, Omar Khayyam analyzed various cubic equations using conic sections (297). The work of Al-Kharizmi's commentator Abu Kamil (in which both the basic rules of algebra and various problems are given) was copied by Leonardo of Pisa (297), so indeed, there is a direct connection to our mathematical heritage by this route.

The saga of the various attempts to prove Euclid's 5th postulate is a long one, and leads from the very origins of geometry to the foundational crises in geometry in the 19th century. The issue is interesting and important, indeed, precisely because it's a foundational issue, not a practical one (at least, in the medieval era). Mathematicians such as Thabit ibn-Qurra, Abu Ali ibn al-Haytham, and Omar Khayyam, in continuing to consider this foundational issue, contributed not only to the effort to make rigorous the assumptions at the foundations of mathematics, but moreover to clarify the relationship between the (more or less) static geometry of the Greeks and the motion of the real world. This was a theme which obviously was to play out in dramatic ways when taken up by later European mathematicians. ibn-Quarra's attempted proof, for example, according to Cooke, "makes use of motion in geometry in a way that seems implied by Euclid's own arguments involving coinciding figures; that is, they can be moved without changing their size and shape" (304). Al-Haytham's proof "is based on the idea of translating a line perpendicular to a given line in such a way that is always remains perpendicular" (306). Omar Khayyam pointed out that both of these mathematicians assumed the existence, in essence, of rigid bodies-- and that's a big assumption to sneak in (307).

Finally, synthesizing both the Greek and the Indian mathematical traditions, Islamic mathematicians contributed to the study of trigonometry and astronomy. The mathematician al-Biruni employed all six of the standard trigonometric functions (305); Nasir Al-Din Al-Tusi did further work on the six triangle ratio and gave the "law of sines for spherical triangles"; and Abu Abdullah al-Jayyni's work on trigonometry seems to have been read by Regiomontanus, bringing this work to a European audience. al-Jayyani, Cooke reports "treated ratios of lines as numbers, in accordance with the evolution of thought on this subject in the Muslim world," a viewpoint more "modern" than that of the Greeks or Indians...

*The general solution of the cubic equation was accomplished largely without the aid of sophisticated mathematical symbolism. It has been suggested that the habits of Tartaglia and his contemporaries, accustomed as they were to doing mathematics in language, may have had "different brains" from ours. To what extent do you think your "brain" has been shaped by the use of symbolism? How much mathematics do you think it would be possible for you to do without the use of mathematical symbolism? How much of your own mathematical thinking relies on the use of language?*

Mathematical symbolism is like a language in the sense that to use it you have to learn to read it. Just as a musician can hear in their inner ear the notes on a musical staff, the brain trained to read algebraic symbolism picks out the variables, groups by parentheses, distinguishes the quantities in ratio from those added and subtracted, recognizes the different functions and how to evaluate them. Much of early mathematical schooling is learning to see the potentialities of an equation jump out at

you. Oh, obviously I can move this to the other side... If we substitute this for that... If I could just switch the sign here, then... Indeed, the perfect mathematical reader would perceive a written equation precisely as the set of symmetries under which the equality remains true, each symmetry representing a potential manipulation the algebraist could make. And to be sure, even in the absence of pen and paper, one can mentally perform these acts with practice.

But this way of reading only really applies to equations, relationships--whereas one can reason mathematically in other terms: geometrically/visually, for example, or algorithmically. The mathematical language of Tartaglia et al seems to me to be that of the algorithm, of instructions, of recipes. Although it may be difficult to read, I would imagine one could get used to it just as one gets used to reading computer programs (as opposed to mathematical texts per se, where a certain level of abstraction is tolerated--a computer program must have everything spelled out). As a computer programmer myself, I tend to think in terms of for loops and while loops and return values and lambda functions and message passing between objects of certain classes, etc. Seeing how to write a computer program to solve an equation is not necessarily like seeing the potentialities in an equation, even though the finished computer program must in some way reflect the equation's symmetries--just in algorithmic terms.

Furthermore, although a finished mathematical product requires another kind of rigor at every step, the actual experience of mathematical creativity tolerates vagueness, wild leaps, trusting in mental abstractions before they can be completely verified, and so forth. Language is capable of tolerating that kind of vagueness through ellipses, and those wild leaps by the use of metaphor; our inner abstract thought engine can probably tolerate even more. In other words, I think there is a pre-symbolic (in some sense) phase to mathematical thought, even as external symbolism can spur discoveries the mind could not make on its own.

It's interesting to speculate, however, about the practices of those early algebraists. Did they perhaps have a symbolism they kept private? Did they simply translate their algorithms into a conceptual structure in their heads, that they manipulated mentally like an equation? Did they know how to read the text in such a way as to "run the computer program" in their own heads? When they worked on problems, did they solve the problems first, and then write their instructions? Or did they solve the problem by writing instructions, accompanied by language at every step? If you were trying to memorize an algorithm, what better method would there be than to encode it in a poem?

As a final point, mathematical symbolism has two functions: to aid in the process of discovery by the mathematician, but also to aid other mathematicians to quickly verify their work, even by sight. Considering how secretive Tartaglia, Cardano, and the rest were, perhaps they were being intentionally opaque at times.

What is calculus? In what way are "the components of the calculus," developed prior to the work of Newton and Leibniz, equivalent to calculus itself? In what way are these components different from calculus as a whole? Who, if anyone, besides Newton and Leibniz should be given credit for the invention of calculus?

Calculus is a symbolism and set of rules for reasoning about equations, their integrals and derivatives. Areas are to figures as tangents as integrals are to functions are to derivatives. Hence, calculus is a general purpose way of reasoning about

geometrical figures: its generality is the result of the infinitesimal method, whereby a sum is taken over an infinite number of infinitesimally small chunks of a figure in the process of which many of the details of the particular figure can be ignored. Calculus also has an intrinsic relationship to motion because the integral tells how much an object has moved (the area it's traced out), the function tells where an object is, and the derivative tells how where the object is is changing.

Before Newton and Leibniz came along, many "components of the calculus" had been developed in the sense that many of the relationships which fall immediately out of the unified subject had been discovered, only in other terms. Obviously, integration (finding areas) was developed, by not in completely general form, as a key component of geometry. Infinite series were in use, in some sense, since the time of Archimedes, and were used by Hindu mathematicians to study trigonometry. Furthermore, the Chinese and Japanese had used infinitesimal methods to do geometry (Cooke 358). But calculus as we know it arose after the invention of analytic geometry in Europe by thinkers like Pierre de Fermat and Rene Descartes (359). Descartes was interested in "mechanical curves" of more complicated type than studied by the Greeks (360). Fermat was studying how to find minima and maxima of equations, the points where the derivative of an equation is 0, although he didn't think of it in those terms. He used a geometrical method, and gave a finite proof using the "Archimedean trichotomy" (363-4). Bonaventura Cavalieri employed his eponymous principle to find areas by considering a two-dimensional figure as a sum of an infinitude of lines, a three-dimensional figure as a sum of an infinitude of surfaces (365). Proportions thus established between sections of shapes could be applied to areas or volumes of shapes. Mathematicians at the time were also frequently using Archimedes's method, the method of polygonal approximation, or the method of exhaustion (367). Blaise Pascal also made use of dividing a figure into infinitely many equal small pieces (369). Isaac Barrow was aware of the relationship between tangents and areas; and John Wallis worked with infinite expressions. This is just to name a few.

Calculus not only gathered up these many disparate phenomena under one heading, seeing the fundamental unity of them, but also provided a tool which was accessible to even the average person. Leibniz considered it a success that someone could solve problems without even understanding why the calculus worked, being guided just by the symbolism. More than that, it provided a list of philosophical questions for the age to answer: the nature of infinity and infinitesimals. Paired with Newton's physics, it promised a general theory of space, time, motion, and things. Forces were discovered to work on the second derivative of motion. No doubt the symbolism, particularly Leibniz's, was such that it could motivate new discoveries that previously had been difficult to imagine, and implement ideas that before would have been merely speculative.

It seems to me that the priority dispute between Newton and Leibniz was as much about politics as it was about mathematics, and the same goes for the tendency to collapse the history of the calculus into one man's life and fetishize the lone national genius who changed the course of history. So I think each of the mathematicians I've named, and more, deserve credit for their contributions. Maybe some of them even grasped the unity of the subject (perhaps privately). That said, I think Newton and Leibniz deserve special credit for being the unified theory's most influential expositors.

*Where have you encountered probability in your everyday life? Give as many examples as you can. Many people have encountered probability in connection with card games such as poker or high-stakes lotteries such as PowerBall. What do you think is the attraction of such games? Cooke notes on p. 432 that the probability of winning at PowerBall (in the version of the game in force from early 2009 to early 2012) is approximately 1 in 200,000,000. Are you surprised, given the odds, that high-profile lotteries have regular winners?*

I've encountered probability in everyday life: looking at medical statistics, thinking about gambling, for example, betting at horse races, playing games that require rolling dice, thinking about how the students who end up in a classroom are random sample of a certain population, in thinking about how people and organizations allocate resources based on their estimations of probabilities and the way it governs the economy. I myself have used probabilistic models to generate texts from other texts (using n-gram models), as well as music.

I think the attraction of high-stakes games of chance is that the emotional payoff promises to be enormous, since the chance of winning is so small. People like to feel lucky. And by winning, and so seeming to prove that not every life is statistically "average," they've been apparently vindicated. In terms of games of chance in general, I think the randomness of them plays on our desire for surprise, for suspense, for anticipation and then revelation. The only way to find out what will happen is to keep playing. And it's easy to always play one more game, just to see. Furthermore, games of chance are a great equalizer: precisely because the winner is left up to chance, it's a pure form of wealth redistribution. A roll of the dice doesn't care if you are rich or poor, skilled or unskilled. (Though obviously, wealth allows you to keep playing.) But I think the biggest reason is that humans are simply naturally attracted to the rare, and the rare can be presented in all these different forms: card games, PowerBall, etc.

I'm not surprised that high-profile lotteries have regular winners because even if the probability of any individual winning is low, the number of people who play the game is so vast, it won't take that long for someone to win.

*Many students say that they have a distinct preference for either algebra or geometry. Do you have such a preference? If so, what is it that you find especially interesting or attractive about the subject you prefer? Write about your feelings and experiences with both algebra and geometry. In what ways do some of the mathematical subjects you've encountered (e.g., trigonometry, calculus, complex analysis) blend ideas from both algebra and geometry?*

I don't have a preference for either algebra or geometry on the basis of some philosophical argument. Rather, I think my brain is just more suited to algebra. I have trouble holding in mind complex geometrical shapes, and visualizing transformations of them. I always have to go back and forth over a figure I've made with a pen, to follow a geometrical argument. I find it easier to grasp algebraic or symbolic arguments at a glance (even if I have to go back and follow it in more depth to fully understand them), but I find it hard to "see" where the argument is going over the course of a geometrical

proof. (But I will say once I have understood a geometrical argument, it always seems at some level more obvious than the conclusion of an algebraic argument.)

It is therefore continuously amazing and deeply impressive to me that algebra and geometry are really like two sides of the same coin. Any algebraic thought I have has a geometrical interpretation, and vice versa. (That we experience a geometrical world, within which algebra can be done, is a deeply mysterious fact that I think about all the time. (Or maybe it's the other way around?))

There is a point where it is difficult to tell algebra and geometry apart. For example, it's one thing to imagine a sphere in your head. It's another thing to imagine a higher dimensional, more complex shape. It's possible that you might still have a geometrical intuition for a high dimensional manifold, but it's also possible that not all of the object will be fully visualizable, or it will only be visualizable in pieces. Knowing how to fit these pieces together might require some algebraic reasoning. (One wonders: Are geometrical intuitions confined to the 2d and 3d spaces we are visually presented with? Or are they more broad than that, encompassing any reasoning that respects some axiom system only implicitly, even as it works within it?)

Trigonometry, calculus, complex analysis are all places where algebra and geometry interpenetrate. This was perhaps more obvious once analytic geometry had been developed. Trigonometry was originally a tool, as the name suggests, for understanding triangle measurements. Once the trigonometric functions began to be worked with symbolically, it was discovered that they can be expressed as infinite sums of algebraic expressions. Furthermore, any function can be represented (in Fourier analysis) as a sum of trigonometric functions, a result which came out of the study of vibrating strings (which is a geometrical motivation) (Cooke 514).

One of the original impulses behind the calculus was to understand the relationship between curves, areas under curves, and tangent lines to curves. The triumph of Newton and Leibniz was to discover that integration and differentiation can often be performed by simple algebraic algorithm. Yet solving for integrals in more complicated cases of curves in more complicated spaces involves being very careful about how and where and around what you are taking an integral--which requires some geometrical thinking.

With regard to complex analysis, the original motivation for the use of complex numbers and the imaginary unit was entirely algebraic. The geometrical interpretation of the complex plane, multiplication by  $i$  as a rotation, came much later, and in fits and starts. John Wallis (Cooke 497) interpreted imaginary numbers as the mean proportional of a positive and a negative number, but didn't think of  $i$  as a line perpendicular to the real axis. It wasn't until Argand, and then Gauss, that the complex plane became popularized and accepted as an interpretation (499). Once this was done, complex analysis was born, and allowed for the solution of many problems in the calculus which had been intractable before. Then, for example, in the work of Riemann (506), complex analysis spawned a whole new geometrical way of thinking about algebraically defined equations, for example, through Riemann surfaces. It does seem as if mathematics is driven forward through a dialectic of now considering a problem algebraically, and then geometrically, and then back again, and onwards.

*What particular challenges have women historically faced in their attempt to pursue mathematical careers? Give examples of the challenges and achievements of women mathematicians that seem especially noteworthy to you. Do you think that women have any particular advantages in their pursuit of mathematical careers? Do you think that men have any particular disadvantages in their pursuit of mathematical careers?*

According to Cooke, it wasn't until the 18th century that women began to "break into the intellectual world of modern Europe" (405). What followed in the next two centuries was a progressive opening up of a male dominated culture. At first women were allowed to mingle with educated society, but not allowed to attend scientific gatherings. In this world, it tended to be only those women who had supportive families wealthy enough to independently support their interests, who were able to pursue mathematics. In 19th century Europe, women were at times allowed to attend lectures, but not matriculate. Women often had to approach their mentors privately, and had to avail themselves of the protection of established male figures. As the century progressed, more institutions began offering degrees, undergraduate and then graduate, to women. The third hurdle women have faced (the first being the need for a supportive family, not bogged down by conservatism; the second being the difficulty of entering the academy) was getting their work accepted by the mathematical community, joining the ranks of professors, and doing this often while meeting the demands of motherhood (405). It seems to me that because higher mathematics, being an esoteric subject, attracts relatively few people to begin with, and because a high degree of sophistication is required to evaluate the work of others, those mathematicians who make it to the upper echelons of the field can exercise an enormous influence on demographics: for both bad and for good. What this means is that the mathematical environment for women has historically been filled with uncertainty. Without Weierstrass, Sof'ya Kovalevskaya might have fallen by the wayside (406). Grace Young had the support of her husband (who, admittedly, in response to the times, seemed to feel that taking credit for her work was necessary for its acceptance) and Felix Klein (410). Emmy Noether too had the support of the likes of Klein, David Hilbert, Hermann Weyl, even Albert Einstein (412). Sophie Germain had the backing (thought perhaps not unwavering) of Lagrange, Gauss, and Legendre (Germain 7). The point is, until the later 20th century, when institutional support for women was codified more or less into law, establishing a basic notion of equality (even if theoretically), the success of women in mathematics was based not only on talent, but whether they were able to connect up with a male champion whose judgements couldn't so easily be questioned.

As with all discrimination of this type, there is a kind of vicious cycle. The less a society educates women (or any group), the more it seems they cannot be educated, which is presented as an argument for why they should continue to be less educated. This puts the burden on extraordinarily driven people to excel in such a way that this view is shown to be ultimately untenable. And this is an almost impossible task! Cooke quotes the geometer Gino Loria who explains Sof'ya Kovalevskaya's work as doomed from the start: he paints a picture of the woman mathematician as child prodigy who inspires support from others, but as she ages she falls behind her male colleagues, until the end when she subsists only on the support of males (teachers, friends, relatives)

before finally abandoning her work. Loria sees this as the necessary condition of women intellectuals, as opposed to a condition created precisely by male mathematicians like himself.

In terms of notable achievements, Kovalevskaya's work on elliptical integrals was both extensive and totally in touch with the cutting edge of mathematics at her time (407), and she completed it in the shadow of her husband's suicide. Grace Young was the first person ever to obtain "a First in any subject from both Oxford and Cambridge" (409), and indeed, was not only a mathematician but according to a biographer, "a virtually qualified medical doctor...pianist, poet, painter, author, Platonic and Elizabethan scholar--and a devoted mother" (411). Emmy Nother had to deal with being both a woman, a mathematician, and a Jew in late 19th and early 20th century Germany (413). Her work has probably had the greatest significance: she worked with David Hilbert, proved theorems in general relativity, abstract algebra, and developed the famous theorem relating symmetries and conservation laws that bears her name. Earlier, Sophie Germain's work on Fermat's Last Theorem showed someone deeply in touch with contemporary developments in number theory (Gauss reports that she was one of the few people who mastered his book on the subject) and ambitious in her conception of a full proof of the theorem. Yet as Laubenbacher and Pengelley show, despite an exchange of letters with Gauss and Legendre, she was forced to work largely in isolation. Legendre, for example, gave similar results to hers, yet by less sophisticated means, suggesting he was familiar with the main thrust of it, but not her actual mode of proof (Germain 53): in some ways, they were like ships passing each other in the dark. Have women had any advantages? It's certainly possible that being exiled from the mainstream of a tradition might lead to a woman mathematician being able to take a fresh approach to old material. Furthermore, certain people may enjoy having a certain notoriety--and it's certainly easy to stand out in a field with so few women in it historically. But it's questionable whether these can really be called advantages. Have men had any disadvantages? The biggest one might be missing out on all the mathematical progress that might have been made by allowing the other half of humanity to participate in the pursuit of mathematics!

*What particular challenges have African-Americans historically faced in their attempts to pursue mathematical careers? Give examples of the challenges and achievements of African-American mathematicians that seem especially noteworthy to you.*

The following has been gleaned from the website "Mathematicians of the African Diaspora." In European and American society, during the time of the slave trade and for centuries afterward, Africans were looked at as incapable of higher reasoning, and fit only for manual labor or positions of service to whites. Their access to education was incredibly limited, both in terms of basic schooling, but also in terms of the ability to participate in the white university system. Not only that but African contributions to the history of mathematics were systematically distorted and concealed: the achievements of the Egyptians were downplayed in favor of the Greeks, and even when the Egyptians were mentioned, this was to the exclusion of any other African cultures. So both their mathematical past and present was denied them.

In 1792, Thomas Jefferson wrote: "Comparing them by their faculties of memory, reason, and imagination, it appears to me that in memory [the Negro] are equal to the whites; in reason much inferior, as I think one could scarcely be found capable of tracing and comprehending the investigations of Euclid; and that in imagination they are dull, tasteless, and anomalous." This quote is particularly interesting because it is mathematics itself (Euclid--who worked in the city of Alexandria, which happens to be in Africa) that is Jefferson's test for entrance into the community of reason. That Euclid himself, and the entire Greek tradition, were indebted to their African predecessors was either unknown to him, or else denied.

Like in the case of women mathematicians, black mathematicians have had to assume a double role: not merely as representatives of mathematical learning but also as representatives of their race. In the 19th century, many of the prominent black mathematicians were also activists for abolition. Charles L. Reason, a mathematician born in 1818, worked on the call to the "first New York State Convention of Negroes." He was a great support of education, writing, for example, that a black industrial college would create "self-providing artizans [sic] vindicating their people from the never-ceasing charge of a fitness for servile positions." He became a professor of "belles lettres, Greek, Latin, and French and adjunct professor of mathematics at the integrated New York Central College in McGrawville (Cortland County)," before moving on to the Institute for Colored Youth in Philadelphia.

Slavery may have ended in the 19th century, but racism continued, if not increased, in the 20th. David Harold Blackwell, born in 1919, worked in statistics. He reports attending a mixed school, and perhaps due to his immersion in mathematics, claims he was barely aware of racism--but that condition was not to last. A particularly striking example: he was given a position at the Institute of Advanced Study in 1941, and due to the Institute's relationship with Princeton, he was listed as a visiting fellow there. Princeton at the time had never had a black on the faculty, nor had they even had a black student! Apparently, "the president of Princeton wrote the director of the Institute that the Institute was abusing the University's hospitality by admitting a black," which is about as racist as you can get, and particularly ironic considering the Institute's role in sheltering so many Jewish intellectuals fleeing European racism.

Lonnie Cross (1927-) worked in both mathematics and physics. In the 1950's, he converted to the Nation of Islam, changing his name to Abdulalim A. Shabazz, and causing considerable controversy. According to an interview with him, he was often accused of grade inflation, giving poor students good grades in order to encourage them, an accusation which bears all the hallmarks of contemporary racist arguments against affirmative action, the subtext being that without these special dispensations, those students wouldn't have the ability to compete with white mathematicians.

Jesse Ernest Wilkins Jr, born in 1923, entered the University of Chicago at age 13: a remarkable achievement for anyone. Yet he was apparently described by national newspapers as "the Negro genius," downplaying his scholarly achievements in mathematics and physics and emphasizing his "alien" character. Later, according to Lee Lorch, he was invited to a meeting of the American Mathematical Society, but refused to come: the organizers had told him patronizingly that they had found a "nice colored family" with whom he could stay and take his meals.

Today, it can at least be said that the recovery of the African mathematical past is well underway. In 1997, the American Mathematical Society published Nathaniel Dean's book *African American Mathematicians*. Furthermore, today there are countless books about the mathematics implicit in ancient African monuments and crafts, and a real effort to rewrite the Eurocentric history of the subject. But it has to be said that many of the mathematical achievements detailed in "Mathematicians of the African Diaspora" are widely unknown. So a great deal of work remains for the future. Indeed: it wasn't until 1984 that C. Dwight Lahr became the first African American to become a full professor in an Ivy League mathematics department--and that is the very recent past.

*Intuitively, we often think of real numbers as existing in one-to-one correspondence with the points on a continuously-drawn line, the real number line. One way of expressing the completeness of the real numbers (see Cooke, p. 525) is to say that the real line has no holes. That is, the values that are "missing" from the rationals—such as, for example,  $\sqrt{2}$ —are present in the real numbers. What do you see as the possible limitations of using this intuitive idea to prove the existence of certain limits in the real numbers? Do you think it is sufficient for the purposes of most students who study calculus to simply accept the existence of these limits without proof? From the perspective of teaching, how rigorous do you think the treatment of the real numbers has to be?*

The problem with using the intuitive idea that the real line has no holes to prove the existence of certain limits in the real number, is that the intuitive, geometrical idea of the continuously drawn-line doesn't, in itself, imply how to *find the holes*. More subtle notions are required for the latter. For example, that of a Dedekind cut (525). Here a real number itself is taken to be a partition of the rational numbers into two sets, where all the members of the left hand set are less than all the members of the right hand set. In other words, the first set contains all the rational numbers less than or equal to the number, and the second set contains all the rational number greater than the number. The left hand set may have no greatest member; the right hand set may have no least. From these set theoretic considerations, the idea of the real line itself can be developed out of the totality of the rational numbers, instead of beginning from the idea of the real line being continuously drawn. One finds a "hole" (and fills it), not by simply assuming its existence, but by defining two sets that meet Dedekind's criteria. If those criteria can't be met, then those two sets don't define a real number.

Another way of thinking more subtly about the holes is the Cauchy convergence criterion which tells us that a sequence converges to a certain real number if its terms in the infinite limit get closer and closer together--more precisely, if at any term in the sequence, you can find some later term in the sequence such that the difference of the two terms is less than any given number (but greater than 0). In a way, you could look at the real numbers as the set of all things that can be converged to. This is what is hidden if you simply rely on the notion of a continuously drawn line. Some processes converge, others diverge, and the real numbers are the resting places of the former.

Furthermore, simply distinguishing between the rationals and the irrationals, which together make the reals, ignores the finer distinctions between algebraic numbers and transcendental numbers among the reals.

Cooke points out that most students, when taught the real numbers, are given "a set of axioms...and asked to accept on faith that those axioms are consistent and that they character a set that has the properties of the geometric line" (525). Few books develop the real numbers from the rationals, a la Dedekind, and those that do define them as equivalence classes of sequences of rational numbers, where one sequence in the equivalence class is the sequence of successive decimal approximations to the number.

If students simply accept a series of axioms (about the real numbers) that they don't fully understand, practically speaking they will have to rely on their geometrical intuition about smoothly drawn lines to guide them. Now it may be possible that for most students of calculus, who are using it, say, to solve certain engineering problems, this might not matter. At the same time, however, they might too hastily assume that a given process will end up properly defining a real number, since one's geometrical intuition almost makes it seem like *anything* can be a real number, when in fact some sequences don't meet the criterion of picking out a unique "hole" that the sequence is approaching.

In terms of teaching, I think the treatment of real numbers should be done rigorously. The difficulty of attaining this rigor has been a driving force in the history of mathematics, and without understanding those stakes, the motivation and significance of the work of many mathematicians will be poorly understood. The evolution in thought of a real number as a ratio of line segments, to an infinite decimal expansion, to the completion of the rationals, to abstract objects picked out by axioms is actually a perfect gateway to understanding one of the most profound narratives in mathematics. Especially in an age of computers, where there is a tendency to think in discrete terms, to use finite decimal approximations with abandon, making sure students understand the rigorous foundations of the idea of the continuum are probably more important than ever.

## MATHEMATICAL INVESTIGATIONS INTO PRIMORDIAL CHAOS 2015

### II. Introduction

The idea of that the universe arose out of a primordial chaos can be found throughout the history of human thought. Whether a primordial chaos supposedly evolves into order of its own accord, or according to laws laid down by a creator, this type of cosmology appears (at first) strikingly different from cosmologies holding that the the world has existed eternally fully ordered, persisting of its own accord, or that a god fashioned the universe once and for all.

In universes beginning in a primordial chaos, observers seeking explanations will appeal to evolution. By means of some selection rules, perhaps a principle of reproduction, random events will be filtered into order over time. If such an evolutionary model, incorporating the correct constraints, reproduces the phenomenon, then its observers have explained their observation by giving the observed phenomenon a potential history. This kind of explanation, however, can't explain the existence of the original selection rule, since it's taken as an assumption. Indeed, somewhat paradoxically, one might say the the observed phenomenon itself is the explanation for the selection rule!

Yet one might very well wonder: why should there be any selection rules to begin with? Perhaps one can appeal to primordial chaos itself as a sole assumption: if anything can arise out of a primordial chaos, then eventually one of the things that will arise will be a selection rule that leads to evolution. But this is unsatisfying. It's easy enough to say, "anything can arise out of a primordial chaos," but when one turns to mathematizing the notion, one is confronted by paradox. How can a mathematical

structure model something at once completely unstructured, yet giving rise to structure itself? Is it actually possible to mathematize the notion that out of a primordial chaos, *anything* can happen, even something as abstract as a selection rule? Can one mathematize the very coming into order that makes mathematics possible? Or must we assume, in addition to the first, a second kind of universe, a universe of structures existing eternally complete and ordered, a universe of eternal laws, to account for the structures lying in potentia within chaos?

It is worth noting that observers in a universe existing eternally complete, of its own accord or fashioned by a creator, won't ultimately seek evolutionary explanations. Indeed, in an already eternally ordered world, explanations won't be of a genetic, time-based character, but rather will take the form of translation laws from one perspective on timeless reality to another. In order to predict what one observer will see, another observer must discover the rule that allows one to take the first observer's perspective, and anticipate how reality will look from that vantage point. In other words, the most basic law won't be a reproductive principle that goads chaos into order, but a law which translates from one kind of order to another.

But: how shall one discover a timeless translation law except by studying the history of a phenomenon in time? And a history is a story about how a phenomenon developed out of a chaos in which it wasn't into an order in which it was. And with that, we've come full circle: to explain the second kind of universe, we've appealed to the first. To put it succinctly, a universe beginning in a primordial chaos is a universe of becoming; a universe existing eternally fully ordered is a universe of being. Yet to explain a becoming one must assume a being; to explain a being one must assume a

becoming. Becoming and being: since the beginning of human thought, they've been in tension in every explanation, indeed, in every attempt to reason rigorously about the notion of a primordial chaos out of which the world's order arises. In what follows, I'll investigate a few of these attempts.

## II. Some Ancient Conceptions of Primordial Chaos

What is the earliest reference to the idea that the universe arose from a primordial chaos? There are so many from the ancient world that it's worth just focusing on a few notable examples. (I won't, for example, discuss Parmenides or Heraclitus, or Plato, but certainly one could.) In the Hebrew Bible, at the beginning of the book of Genesis, God creates the world in time, over the course of six days, resting on the seventh. The text reads, "When God began to create heaven and earth—the earth being unformed and void, with darkness over the surface of the deep and a wind from God sweeping over the water..." (Tanakh 3). The phrase "unformed and void" (in Hebrew, "tohu wa bohu") may also translated as waste and void, formless and empty, or chaos and desolation. It is from the tohu wa bohu that, over the course of the six days of creation, the Hebrew God brings forth the order of the universe.

But what exactly is the nature of the void over whose watery surface the wind of God rushes, bringing chaos into order? Are we to understand it as an utter nothingness preceding God's imposition of order? Or are we to understand it as a complete everythingness upon which God imposes restrictions, restrictions which select from the chaos of all potential things the actual? Translating "tohu wa bohu" as formless and empty suggests the former; translating it as chaos and desolation suggests the latter. It's

worth noting that the Hebrew Bible never resolves this dilemma which appears in its first lines: even as the text recounts the history of how God gave progressively different laws to humans as the generations progressed and alternated between harmony and strife, the history culminates in Moses's attempt to summarize the God's eternal laws once and for all in the Ten Commandments.

Centuries later, the Roman poet Ovid begins his long poem *Metamorphoses* with a similar creation myth. He writes:

Ere land and sea and the all-covering sky  
Were made, in the whole world the countenance,  
Of nature was the same, all one, well named  
Chaos, a raw and undivided mass,  
Naught but a lifeless bulk, with warring seeds,  
Of ill-joined elements compressed together (Ovid 1).

For Ovid, the beginning is a sea of potentiality, a sea which holds the building blocks of all things, but because the elements aren't yet joined together, they present one countenance, like a primordial static blaring on all frequencies. The same doubleness of language is present here as well. The beginning, "the same, all one," presenting the same face everywhere, is also a "chaos, a raw and undivided mass...with warring seeds of ill-joined elements." Indeed, to have chaos on all sides is a kind of order, perhaps the ultimate order; at some level, chaos and order wrap around into each other and meet, in the ambiguity between the fullness of everything and the emptiness of anything in particular.

Again, Ovid describes the chaos as "a lifeless bulk, with warring seeds, / Of ill-joined elements." But what are the seeds, and what does their warring with each other consist in? Tumbling around trying to fit into each other like lock and key? Are the seeds, in other words, atoms? The latter view actually sounds more like Lucretius, a

Roman atomist who lived a generation before Ovid (Lucretius 1). In the case of Ovid himself, to settle the question, we might look at the end of *Metamorphoses*, which contains a speech by Pythagoras, the old mathematical mystic. He doesn't however speak about mathematics, but primarily about reincarnation. Now, a universe which consists of eternal souls reincarnating is apparently a universe of being: the ultimate law of such a universe would be a way of translating between the different times and places in which the same souls find themselves. Should we therefore view Ovid's chaos as a sea of souls? Are the atomic elements souls, each soul corresponding to the shape of a seed? Or given the history of Pythagoreanism, should we view Ovid's chaos as a more abstract sea, composed of the most basic Platonic forms? Or is there no soul as such, but a continual reoccurrence of the same joinings of eternally existing elements, of whatever type?

Like the author of the Hebrew Bible, Ovid lets the dilemma between being and becoming stand; in fact, he often turns the tension between them to dramatic purposes. One interesting example of this occurs in the same speech by Pythagoras. The philosopher elaborates a vision of souls continually reincarnating, and enters poetically into one perspective, and then another. First, he takes the perspective of a human performing a sacrifice, then he takes the perspective of the ox about to be slaughtered. He advocates vegetarianism, essentially on the principle that you don't know who you are eating. One might say: by assuming reincarnation as an axiom, Pythagoras proves the Golden Rule, do unto others as you'd have done unto you, as a theorem. Rather cleverly, for Ovid's Pythagoras, the explanation of the most basic moral rule is the history of reincarnation in time, even as he delivers his explanation in the timeless

language of perspective shifting. That today many people accept the Golden Rule as a moral axiom itself only highlights the tension that Ovid explores here.

Now, let's return to the question of what it means for Ovid's ill-joined seeds to be warring with each other. Putting aside connotations of a survival of the fittest, most basically, I think, this picture is one of jumbling, of chance. Can we think of the beginning as a primordial state, as it were, of dice rolling? It's worth noting that even in the ancient world, random and chaotic processes were exploited in decision-making processes, both secular and divine. In the Hebrew Bible, for example, fates are sometimes determined by casting lots. In Athens, political officials were randomly selected from the population by a similar process.

Now, random decisions are useful because they aren't made by people, who are biased. Randomness is unbiased, fair, just. To say the world began in a primordial chaos is then at once to suggest a sea of potentiality greater than the actuality presented to us, but also to suggest that the world is, in some sense, fair, unbiased: like a coin. Now it's heads, now it's tails: there's no reason for it but fate alone, which answer is self-justifying. There's no one to whom you can make an appeal.

The idea that a random event is objective and self-justifying (whether actually true or not in a given historical circumstance) is consonant with a modern take on randomness from algorithmic information theory (Schmidhuber). An algorithmically random bit string is a bit string such that the smallest computer program that computes it is greater than or equal to the original bit string. In other words, a random bit string is a bit string that cannot be compressed, or justified for some reason more basic than itself. It simply is what it is. Just as there is no "reason" for the result of a dice throw,

there is no "reason" that can be given for an algorithmically random bit string other than itself. In a deep way, choosing to roll the dice is just like letting a mathematical constraint force our hands. In both cases, there is a gesture towards objectivity.

### III. Some Early Modern Conceptions of Primordial Chaos

For Descartes, in his *Discourse on Method*, chaos has a special relationship to truth. Although he doesn't state the principle in precisely this form, he essentially holds that: if you can prove that something will arise inevitably by chance, you will have proved that thing's necessity.

Descartes's method of doing physics is as follows. First, induct some laws from observations. Then assume a primordial chaos. Finally, demonstrate "how these laws [have] the result that most of the matter of this chaos [has] to resolve itself into a certain orderly arrangement," namely the arrangement originally perceived (Descartes). The test of the laws is whether they successfully organize the original chaos into the observed order.

Descartes, however, describes the epistemology of his method in the following way:

I didn't mean to infer from all this that our world was created in the way I had been describing, for it is much more likely that from the beginning God made our world just as it had to be. But if we think of material things as developing gradually out of chaos, their nature is easier to grasp than if we considered them only in their present completed form (Descartes).

In other words, all Descartes is willing to admit is that what we mean by an *explanation* is a story about how things developed gradually out of chaos over time. But

this might suggest more about what humans require of explanations than about the way the universe has to be! Is such a story really what happened, or does his method merely ensure that one's explanations are *unbiased*?

A generation or so later, the philosopher Leibniz presents his own image of a primordial chaos, one tied to his notion of "compossibility" (Look). In his work, Leibniz makes explicit the connection between a primordial chaos and the space of mathematical possibility. His picture of the creation of the world is as follows. All possible truths (or mathematical structures, or Platonic forms, depending on your taste) "once" coexisted in a sea of possibility. Some truths, however, are consistent, or compatible, or *compossible*, with other truths, such that they can fit together, avoiding contradictions. He suggests that in a primordial chaos, mutually compatible truthsglom together to form complexes. Eventually, there's one glom of truths that's larger than any other, joining together the most truths that are mutually consistent. This is, in fact, our world, the actual world, the "best" of all possible worlds, a world in which the most things true at the same time. By this optimization process, God selects the actual world from the space of possibility.

Just as in the case of Descartes, however, there is a temporal ambiguity. One might imagine ideas floating around in a primordial idea space, like a gas, joining up with their cousin ideas in time: or one might imagine time itself coming into being only afterwards, once the principle of compossibility has been actuated. In other words, is Leibniz describing a process which actually happened in time, or simply justifying the present order by means of an optimization principle which must be conceived of temporally to be conceived of at all? Either way, time is in some sense irrelevant: from

his point of view, the sequences of events that happens “in time” is just the one that is consistent with the principle that has always been structuring the actual world by its maximization of both truth and consistency. But certainly to understand his cosmological picture, the human mind imagines the glomming together of compossible truths into a complex as occurring in a kind of higher-order time.

Furthermore, there are some unanswered questions. Why does God want to make the most things true? What is truth, in this sense? Merely mutually compatibility? How should one define a truth (and a mathematical structure, more generally) in order to make clear which truths are compossible with others? What different shapes does truth come in?

Moving on, by the end of the Early Modern period, the science of statistics, of gambling, and chance, was beginning to reach its more mature, modern form. For example, at the end of the 17th century, Jacob Bernoulli, who was in contact with Leibniz, formulated his Golden Theorem, also known as the Law of Large Numbers (Bernoulli). He gave a proof of this law in his *Ars Conjectandi*. The law formalizes the notion that the average of outcomes over a large number of chance events approaches the expected value the more chance events of that type there are. In other words, the average of the sum of coin flips (taken as 0's and 1's) will approximate  $1/2$ , the more coins you flip. Bernoulli made this mathematically rigorous for the first time (Cooke 421).

There is a seeming paradox here: while flipping a coin, in the short term, one might encounter very unusual runs, but in the long term, these unusual runs of 1's or 0's

will even out. In the infinite limit, exactly half of the coins will be heads and exactly half of the coins will be tails, even as every possible unusual run occurs!

Furthermore, Bernoulli considered cases more complicated than a two sided coin, and explored the relationship between probabilities and combinatorics. He studied the binomial distribution, which in the form of Pascal's Triangle could be said to have been known for centuries. The familiar normal distribution (or Bell curve) is an extension of the binomial distribution to the continuous case, and describes the limiting curve of sums of independent random variables (422). Now, this idea, that random variables, summed and so sensitive to the intrinsic structure of number itself, would in the infinite limit conform to an entirely determinate order was metaphysically inspiring to many thinkers. I turn to the case of Sir Francis Galton, who, although he's from the 19th century, is a good example of this.

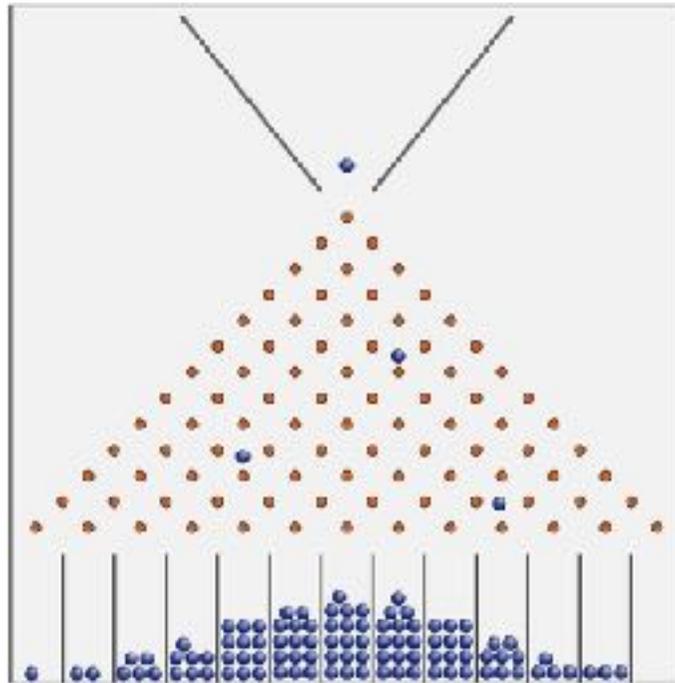
In his *Natural Inheritance*, Galton writes movingly:

I know of scarcely anything so apt to impress the imagination as the wonderful form of cosmic order expressed in the 'Law of Frequency of Error.' The law would have been personified by the Greeks and deified, if they had known it. It reigns with serenity and in complete self-effacement amidst the wildest confusion. The huger the mob, and the greater the apparent anarchy, the more perfect is its sway. It is the supreme law of Unreason. Whenever a large sample of chaotic elements are taken in hand and marshaled in the order of their magnitude, an unsuspected and most beautiful form of regularity proves to have been latent all along. The tops of the marshalled row form a flowing curve of invariable proportions; and each element, as it is sorted into place, finds, as it were, a pre-ordained niche, accurately adapted to fit it" (Galton 66).

He, in fact, built the device pictured below to illustrate the "supreme law of Unreason."

A ball falls through a pyramid of pegs, and at each moment goes left or right by chance.

In some rare cases, the ball chooses left many times or right many times, and ends up in



the tail of the distribution. But most of the time, the lefts and the rights cancel each other out and the ball ends up close to the middle.

Galton elevates this phenomenon to a universal principle of “mediocrity.” (One wonders whether this had social implications for him, given his belief in its pervasiveness; one think of test scores governed on a Bell curve.) Conjuring up his own image of a primordial chaos, he writes: “the huger the mob, and the greater the apparent anarchy, the more perfect is its sway. It is the supreme law of Unreason.” Yet the phenomenon is simply the result of the built-in mathematical symmetries of the device, the combinatorics of summing over repeated choices among some number of contrasting options. Is it possible, however, to imagine a law of the same type, but even more supreme, which describes how the constraining mathematical symmetries themselves arise from anarchy? Or must we assume that there is a theater (the already existing pyramid, with its pegs) on which chance events play out?

#### IV. Some Modern Conceptions of Primordial Chaos

In his *Discourse*, Descartes separates the laws of physics from the chaos they govern. His method is to impose laws on chaos, and then to determine whether under the influence of those laws the assumed chaos evolves into an observed state. But is the distinction between state and law tenable today? Is it possible for a principle to be so basic, that it is, in a sense, both state and law? And what might such a basic principle be? Might the simplest physical principle be a principle of reproduction? These are some of the questions that the physicist Lee Smolin asks in his work from the late 1980's to the present.

In his paper "Did the Universe Evolve?," for example, Smolin develops a theory of cosmological natural selection. He begins by assuming that the laws of physics in a given universe are randomly sampled from the set of all possible laws. He then observes two things: a black hole may represent the birth of a new universe within an old universe, and that there are black holes in our universe. If we assume a principle of universal reproduction, namely, that daughter universes inherit their laws (perhaps with some mutations) from their parent universes, then since universes whose laws give rise to more black holes will give birth to more universes that have laws that give rise to black holes, universes with lots of black holes will be extremely likely among possible universes. We are therefore likely to find ourselves in a universe whose laws give rise to black holes, as indeed we do. In other words, Smolin wants to deduce from a

reproduction law a probability distribution on which possible universe we are likely to find ourselves in.

His assumption is that the “laws” of a universe are a physical property of that universe: they are things that can be inherited. The laws of a universe aren't outside it, determining it from without, but part of the universe itself. Since certain of these laws allow some universes to reproduce, universes with those laws will be more likely in the space of all possible universes.

Continuing this theme, in his paper, “Unification of the state and dynamical law,” Smolin quotes the 19<sup>th</sup> century philosopher and mathematician Charles Sanders Pierce:

To suppose universal laws of nature capable of being apprehended by the mind and yet having no reason for their special forms, but standing inexplicable and irrational, is hardly a justifiable position. Uniformities are precisely the sort of facts that need to be accounted for. Law is par excellence the thing that wants a reason. Now the only possible way of accounting for the laws of nature, and for uniformity in general, is to suppose them results of evolution (Smolin Unification).

But what, then, is the reason for the law of evolution itself? Or is evolution simply self-justifying? As Smolin points out, there's a so-called meta-law dilemma. If laws change, there must be laws for how the laws change, and there must be laws for how the laws for laws change, and so on. Yet, he writes, “if one does not specify a metalaw one explains nothing” (Smolin Unification). He hopes that there might be a kind of “meta-law universality,” along the same lines as Turing universality, such that any meta-law for choosing laws that is sufficiently rich enough will be equivalent to any other meta-law. If no matter which meta-law one assumes, one obtains the same predictions, the meta-law dilemma would be solved.

Once one has an appropriately rich meta-law, any other laws could be seen as parts of a system's state that simply change more slowly than other parts. Smolin constructs a simple matrix model that fits some of his criteria. Through a very simple rule involving a combination of the previous two states of the system, and taking the commutator between them, the model gives rise to behavior that in the short term seems governed by fixed laws, even as over time the laws themselves are seen to be in flux. The model is entirely dependent on initial conditions, as opposed to both initial conditions and imposed laws. One could even interpret each new state of the universe as a daughter universe inheriting from the two previous states, the father and mother universes, with mutations caused by the inherent commutativity of the matrices of the parents.

But still, some mathematical order is presupposed in this scheme. In "Precedence and freedom in quantum physics?" Smolin tries to go even further. Maybe nature doesn't have laws at all; maybe nature merely falls into habits. After all, to do physics, he argues, one need only assume nature repeats itself. Just as in a human legal system, where judgements are passed based on a principle of precedence (what the court has ruled before), perhaps in physics as well the future behavior of a system is merely determined by the past behavior of similar systems.

In this picture, the first time something happens, anything can ensue! But whatever the universe randomly chooses to do establishes a precedent for the future. By choosing to run experiments, and press nature to give us answers, we actually influence the development of the laws of the universe, since what we have always thought of as laws, are merely habits.

Smolin develops this idea in the context of quantum mechanics, but leaving the details aside and following the logic to its furthest extent, what bare minimum mathematical structure does “habit formation” imply? How does “the judge” know which cases are similar enough to compare in order to come to a judgement? Can the ontology of the things which happen “for the first time” be left completely unspecified? Or must there be some prior structure?

Another contemporary thinker, Jurgen Schmidhuber, also struggles with these questions. He makes explicit that he assumes that what defines possibility is computability. In his paper, "The Fastest Way of Computing All Universes," Schmidhuber attempts to derive “an optimally fast algorithm that not only computes the entire history of our own universe, but also those of all other logically possible universes” (Schmidhuber). He justifies his identification with logically possible with finite computability by appealing to the Lowenheim-Skolem Theorem that "any first order theory with an uncountable model also has a countable model.” This means that any infinite objects can be modeled countably, even if it itself is uncountable. We can get everything we need from discrete finite computation.

Schmidhuber finds the idea that quantum physics is supposed to have introduced true random variables into physics unlikely. If truly random events did occur, these events would make the universe highly incompressible. He invokes the algorithmic information theoretic idea randomness and order are just incompressibility and compressibility. Schmidhuber then, employing a kind of Occam's Razor, finds it much more likely that the universe is governed by a simple rule, as opposed to an intrinsically complicated one. There are always simple pseudorandom processes that can explain

apparent randomness more compactly, and so for this reason, he finds a computable universe likely (Schmidhuber).

Indeed, it's worth considering that even if the universe didn't compute the next moment using the simplest possible computer program, if we tried to explain why the present moment followed from the past, we wouldn't be satisfied until we had the answer in simplest terms. And if *we* were going to compute the next moment, we would use the simplest program ourselves! Like Descartes's god, even if we had to discover the simplest program by slower, more evolutionary means, we'd always use the simplest program, if we had it.

In his paper, Schmidhuber considers the world of all computable bit strings (both halting and non halting) that have programs converging towards them. He then writes a short program that computes all possible programs. It runs all programs under a certain length  $i$ , interleaving them, for at most a number of steps,  $2^{(i-\text{len}(p))}$  where  $\text{len}(p)$  is the length of the program. Shorter programs get to run for longer. This is his version of the "primordial chaos." Schmidhuber tries to show that this program "generates the  $n$ -th bit of each universe as quickly as if it were computed by this universe's fastest program, save for a constant factor that does not depend on  $n$ ," which is his universality condition. He points out that "at any given time...the most advanced copies [of us] will be those computable by short and fast programs," since by construction those programs will have run for longer (Schmidhuber).

Arguing that the universe maximizes speed and simplicity, Schmidhuber argues that the universe should be ultimately governed by simple elegant laws that represent compressions by means of computable algorithms. His program is utterly simple, but

gives rise to all computable complexity. (On the other hand, does it seem likely that the universe *as a whole* should be compressible? If so, why should it appear to us in an uncompressed form at all? One could argue that the universe as a whole ought to be looked at (in its totality) as totally incompressible, since by definition the universe is nothing other than what it is. One could argue that the universe ought to be globally incompressible, while locally compressible.)

Returning to the assumption of computability, Schmidhuber argues with Max Tegmark, who holds that the space of possibility is the space of all mathematical structures, not merely the computable ones. Indeed, in his paper “Is the ‘theory of everything’ merely the ultimate ensemble theory?”, Tegmark proposes that it isn’t computability that provides the reality condition. Rather, he makes the more simple assumption that some mathematical structures have self-aware substructures in them, structures which are aware of their existence, and so perceive their existence as real, in other words, in a physical world. Only mathematical structures which are powerful enough to give rise to self-aware subsystems have the property of physically existing (Tegmark).

He defines a mathematical structure as anything which is independent of our way of describing it. In other words, anything we can be wrong about, anything that doesn’t depend on us, our viewpoint, and our interpretations, our biases—*anything we don’t have total control over*. Mathematical structures must be non-contradictory because if they were contradictory, then they could be used to describe anything, and thus be trivial: we would have total control over them; we could prove anything we wanted.

One, however, notices a distinct lack of reference of "number" in Tegmark's definition of mathematical structure: in a way, for Tegmark, a mathematical structure is not unlike Descartes's notion of a clear and distinct idea. For this reason, I'd like to conclude this section with some speculation about the relationship between physics and number theory. For example, is there a way to evolve even the notion of number, order, itself from a random physical process?

In physics, the time evolution of a system is governed by a mathematical structure known as the Hamiltonian, which can be represented as a matrix (Thomas). Random matrix theory, then, can be seen as one way of exploring the space of all randomly generated physical systems. Various scholars have reported on an encounter between Freeman Dyson, the physicist, and Hugh Montgomery, the mathematician, in the early 70's. Together, they noticed that a certain class of random physical systems had spectra similar in structure to the zeros of the Riemann Zeta Function. Now famously, the zeros of the Riemann Zeta Function allow one to reconstruct the locations of the prime numbers along the number line (Wolchover At the far ends). This leads to the evocative notion of a physical system (as yet undiscovered) which is isomorphic to the very principle of order itself: the counting numbers, and their additive and multiplicative structure, from which all the symmetries of mathematics result.

Indeed, the spacing of the Zeta zeros and the repulsion of the eigenvalues of a random matrix are just two examples of a broader phenomenon: a statistical distribution like the Gaussian, or Bell curve, but for cases where the random variables are highly dependent on each other, known as the Tracy-Widom distribution (Wolchover

In mysterious pattern). This raises the evocative question: Might there be some physical principles from which even number itself can evolve, so that quantities can be measured and compared? Time will tell whether such a theory is possible, but it would go a long way towards resolving the meta-law dilemma that arises when we attempt to conceive of a primordial chaos.

## V. Conclusions

In this paper, I've tried to explore the paradoxical idea of a "primordial chaos" in the history of mathematical thought from the ancient to the modern period. Is randomness simply a self-justifying order? Is conceiving of the world's origin in randomness a way of suggesting that the world is fair, just, unbiased? Is a primordial chaos a way of conceiving of the space of possibility (mathematical, computable, conceivable) as opposed to the space of actuality? Is randomness a way of allowing the properties of numbers, symmetries, structures themselves to play an entirely determining role? Can numbers, symmetries, and structures themselves arise from randomness? Can you randomly select an ontology? Does order emerge from chaos through the eternal laws of numbers, or do the eternal laws of numbers emerge from chaos? Just because a gradual evolutionary origin from chaos into order is the most convincing type of explanation (for humans), does that mean the universe really does have just such a history? Must the ultimate meta-law be a principle of reproduction?

It is perhaps not so surprising that when one puts certain restrictions on random variables, these restrictions give rise to novel patterns in functions of those random

variables. The question is whether one can conceive of a random variable without any restrictions. Furthermore, the solution to the problem of law, and the laws governing the origin of the universe from chaos to order, might be to change one's perspective on law. After all, there are evolutionary laws that describe how a system evolves from initial conditions over time, and then there are "relativity" laws which describe how to switch viewpoints on a system, in space, in time, and so forth. A general theory of everything might be an automaton governed by some simple, but non-intuitive set of rules; or a general theory of everything might be a general translation law, by which one could calculate how to switch from any perspective to another. In the latter case, no creation of the universe from chaos is even necessary here. The universe has always existed and it is the sum of all the perspectives that can be taken on it.

But if one doesn't want to give up on the idea of the history of the universe as the evolution of order out of chaos, perhaps the key lies in the paradox of unstructuredness in general. Consider a universe governed by a single rule: avoid all structure. For every possible structure, the universe would be constrained to act in such a way that it fails to show that structure. Therefore the universe feels the constraints of all structures, under whose influence it tries to simultaneously avoid every single one of them. Every apparent structure would be merely the universe temporarily building itself up in order to later tear itself down. There would have to be a kind of structure to the unstructuredness, but only a provisional one: if you wait long enough, you'll observe a counter example to any possible rule.

This is reminiscent of a diagonal argument. The actual universe would be unlike any possible universe, even as it is therefore completely determined by all of them. One

could imagine this temporally: the universe acts, and then its next act is always determined by the need to avoid making a pattern. Ironically, because each event maximizes the universe's patternlessness, the most "random thing" that can happen is also the most determinate. As in the Hebrew Bible, the beginning is both empty and full of all things.

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KEISHA  
2015

When you spend time with Lakiesha, the first thing you notice is that the world is suffused with coincidences. The walls of the world fall inwards, outwards; the normal certainties of cause and effect are loosened. Isis, Osiris, Set: they dwell among us.

I remember a conversation I had with Lakiesha and David Kruger last semester. Outside on the porch with the moon looking down on us, we had been talking about Isis, the militants in the news, the Egyptian goddess hovering over history, [isis.uiowa.edu](http://isis.uiowa.edu). David revealed that before maui was called maui, it was called Osiris. Coincidence? No, no, no. That the names of that god and that goddess have been on the lips of humans for centuries, millennia: there is a reason for that, a reason for everything--it's the spirit poking through the veil of bodies to touch us here, even in the present. Later that night I found myself buying a single hardboiled egg at Johns and offering it to a friend as a symbol of renewal. That was lakiesha working through me.

Lakiesha: the laws of physics literally bend around her.

One time when I went to her apartment, she offered me a gift: a crystal heart. Maybe you've received a crystal from Lakiesha too. She picked that crystal heart out for me. I took it from its velvet bag, and was running my hands over it, feeling it over: and the heart broke in two while I held it in my hands. There was my psychic pain, that I didn't even know about, that she couldn't have known about, but through the offering of a gift she opened my heart up to clarity. That's Lakiesha's power. The power to give you a heart. The power to show you what your heart is feeling. The power to show you that love and pain and hope are still active in the world.

In my time with her, Lakiesha taught me the symbolism of my clawfoot bathtub. The symbolism of wine and menstruation. The proper respect that an adept must show towards Lady Marijuana. The importance of the nightly dance under the stars. Of mothers. Of food: all those who have eaten of her crock pot know the majesty contained within it.

Even as Lakiesha recognizes the ultimate power of the mind, she is a poet of the body. In her stories, there are young bodies in love and loss, aging frail bodies in love and loss. Two women bond while one gives the other a colonic. Operations with a pink dildo are interrupted by a phone call. There are fat bodies, skinny bodies. There are ghosts. In all cases, there are bodies trying to connect against all odds. Maybe this obsession of hers began at a young age when she became obsessed with people noses, the perfect most soft edible noses. Perhaps you've had your nose bitten ever so gently by Lakiesha. Because she understands that are ways that bodies can connect that are more meaningful than are often allowed.

Lakiesha understands that we live in a world of magic. Years ago, Lakiesha literally fell on the ground in disbelief in pleasurable terror the first time she got an instant message. Because this was telepathy. One time when I was at her apartment she was trying to sweet talk the one burner on her stove that doesn't want to light. Because all things are alive.

I will never forget the text she sent me over break one time--she had seen a UFO in the sky, and thought of me. Now when I'm far away, when I'm home, I can look up in the sky and feel her spirit with me.

On the subject of the sky: Lakiesha understands that we aren't from this planet earth even though we worship her as a mother. There is a true paradox there.

On the subject of the sky: Lakiesha understands the cosmic in all its manifestations. In Jimi Hendrix's guitar, in the sacred texts of Ethiopia, even in the music of psychedelic white boys, even they sometimes know what's up.

Lakiesha understands conspiracies, that sometimes conspiracies are true, that life is a conspiracy. There is a reason that the name of Isis recurs, why history plays out moving both forward and backwards at the same time. There is a poetry to conspiracy that the universe loves. There is a true conspiracy of love. Since love is what will save you when all the world seems like a conspiracy against you, even when the conspiracies are true.

In this life, Lakiesha has had to put up with a lot of bullshit. There's a lot of bullshit in this world. But she manages to keep her head above the water, that cosmic water, which both separates and joins us, those mysterious dangerous waters which brought slaves to this country, those waters whose tributaries makes every crossing of a bridge a triumph.

In retrospect, when I first met Lakiesha, she totally lied about her age. And the funny thing is that she could have gotten away with it too. Because when two humans lock eyes, that is agelessness. That is the past as alive as the present. The present incomprehensible without the deep past, the prehistoric past, the celestial past.

The central paradox of Lakiesha, the paradox inside Lakiesha, inside all of her characters, is the voice that says: Kiesha you know better, you know better than this. But you're still doing the same damn thing, over and over again like you don't know. We been through all this before time and again, but it's like you don't know.

Despite your knowing, you still wake up and you still struggle, you still put up with the bullshit, because love is worth it.

Among us, Lakiesha holds court. She is the queen with her train of followers. She is the displaced goddess, temporarily confined to this strange time and place, this body.

She knows that this is our lives intersecting here, in the midst of the cycle of birth and rebirth. Here we meet each other and it is so precious.

It is so precious, seeing the grandeur in our existence, and its messy, dirty reality--it is so precious to come out on the other side of it, and see its humor, to laugh at it, because love is still possible.

Lakiesha has made me feel not alone here.

If ever in a workshop my stuff seemed too far out, she was able to see through to the implications, to the message, to the rhythm, to the feeling. She understands that true writing is not about character, plot, point of view, even voice, or not only about those things-- true writing is about music. Everything in this world and outside of it is music, the sad parts and the happy parts. Because music is what feelings are, and everything is vibration: This smile, these tears, this parting, this reunion, temporary, yet permanent, here and now, yet always then and there.

Writing for Lakiesha is the sacred act. It's been said Lakiesha writes in a community voice. If that's true, it's the voice of the cosmic community. And if the aliens could hear it, they'd be grooving too. And maybe they are: because the truth is, the aliens are us.

Please join me in welcoming Lakiesha Carr to the stage.

SCHOOL  
2015

The fundamental law of the universe is that anything can be seen as.

As long as cause and effect are preserved, anything can be seen as different things happening in different places at different times.

\*

Imagine a room full of people scribbling on pieces of paper. They're computing.

Every morning the teacher gives you a list of problems to do.

You sit there, working. When you get an answer, you hand the answer to any students waiting on your answer to continue.

Then you have to wait. Sometimes you have to wait a long time. Drumming your pencil on the desk.

But the teacher doesn't want any of the students to be bored.

So the teacher designs a lesson plan taking into account which computations depend on which, and which computations take longer than which, and which students are poor achievers, or which are over hasty, or over cautious, or who just have an intuitive grasp of the material.

In other words, the teacher figures out which things have to be done in sequence, and which things can be done in parallel--in order to orchestrate the classroom in the least boring way.

This is the best way to compute in a classroom. And just like how light bends in water to minimize the time between its emission in the air and its absorption in the soil, time actually takes this perfect path of least boredom.

\*

What the students are computing is what their teacher is about to do.

A truly gifted teacher always makes sure each student is computing exactly what they want to be computing right now. A truly gifted teacher always makes sure their students don't have to wait.

Therefore a truly gifted teacher is just when the past appears to the future like a gift, when the past gives the future the present. It doesn't seem like there's a class anymore, with teacher and students. There's just a bunch of kids in a room.

Because what the students compute is what the teacher is about to do, the teacher doesn't know what to do next until a student stops waiting. A student stops waiting when they've been given the answer they need to continue.

Therefore the teacher has to guess when a student has been waiting, bored. They have to guess because a student waiting is what is invisible to them.

When the students can tell the teacher exactly how they feel, that teacher is truly gifted.

\*

Meanwhile the students are constantly texting and being interrupted by text messages from students in other rooms. The room is alive with scribbling and pinging. Sometimes the texts have to do with the computations, usually not.

Really absorbed in personal exchanges, sometimes students neglect their computations. Or students save time by cheating. Sometimes, being just banter to relieve the mind, their texts make no difference.

A teacher might want to take into account their students' desire to text message constantly. A teacher might instruct their students to perform computations on their text messages, both sent and received.

A teacher might instruct their students to guess what's going on in another classroom. What is that other classroom computing? What classrooms in that classroom in communication with? And what are those latter classrooms computing?

Sometimes making these estimations requires spying, deception to peer into the heart of the other teacher in the other classroom, and guess their intent.

Other times, everything is contained in a glance. For example, the students of truly gifted teachers are constantly texting the results of their computations in a coherent, understandable way to all interested parties.

\*

A nosy teacher might try to figure out about the number of students in another classroom, about that classroom's rate of computation, about the order the teacher gave their students their problems in.

A nosy teacher might be wrong about the number of students in another classroom, and about that classroom's rate of computation, but not about the order the teacher gave their students their problems in. Since there's no way for a student to text about their teacher giving them a problem before their teacher gives them the problem. Even if the problem is to deceive a nosy teacher.

A nosy teacher might not know all the events that take place in another classroom, but the events they reconstruct will be ordered. They may distort the timing of the lessons, and get the arrangement of the desks in the classroom wrong, and the pattern of paper passing, and the students' personalities wrong, but no effect will ever come before a cause.

\*

In some classrooms, students never have to pass any answers to each other. Nobody ever waits. The students work completely in parallel. Given enough students, such a computation can be solved in one step: in an instant, the teacher sees all their students arrayed out before them, proffering their answers.

In some classrooms, only one student is necessary. If every step of the computation depends on the previous, nothing can be sped up by working in parallel. Working entirely sequentially, the one student waits only on themselves.

In most classrooms, some students pass answers to each other now and then. The teacher sees a class alive in space and over time.

When students do nothing but pass answers to each other, passing the answers itself being the computation, that is when the classroom is traveling at the speed of light.

\*

You know a student has found a teacher because they know about their teacher's problems first.

Teachers don't know they have students until their students compute their teacher about to meet them. Students don't know they have a teacher until their teacher gives them the problem of computing how to compute a teacher. Because simply computing what your teacher is about to do is not enough to know about teachers.

In order to discover another classroom's computation through examining text messages, a teacher must make their students solve the problem of how to compute what the teacher is about to do through observations.

Unless students are computing how to compute what the teacher is about to do through observations, they don't know (or text) about teachers.

If you don't know about teachers, you don't see that other students are handing you answers to problems scribbled on pieces of paper. You don't see those answers as your problems for the day. You just see the paper. You just scribble.

A piece of paper is a student. A piece of paper has a teacher which tells it to repeat everything the teacher says. A piece of paper is always about to repeat itself. This is why paper students are so useful for carrying messages.

\*

Some computations never end.

A computation that never ends might be what a teacher is about to do.

There are some things that teachers are about to do that never happen.

A computation that never ends might be what a teacher is about to do, and what the teacher is about to do is give their students a computation that never ends.

There are some things teachers are about to do that take even longer than never not to happen.

If a student's computation never ends, that student won't be able to respond to text messages.

If a student's computation never ends, their teacher will never know unless another student lets the teacher know they haven't heard from them.

If a teacher's computation never ends, the students will have to interrupt the teacher.

\*

A teacher might judge another teacher for managing their students' time poorly.

If a teacher does poorly enough, a student might become the teacher.

If a student does poorly enough, a teacher might kick a student out of class.

When a student leaves a classroom, they join the constant flow of students roaming through the hallways that connect the classrooms of schools, and in cars, on the roads and highways between them. Looking for classrooms, avoiding them.

When a student leaves a classroom, they might text friends for help. If a student sends enough text messages, they might find a new classroom.

When a student leaves a classroom, they might steal the pages they scribbled their answers on. This might make that student highly desirable.

When a student leaves a classroom, sometimes they never want to go to class again. Maybe they carry their computations around with them on the road, and compute their surroundings instead. Maybe they don't compute at all.

If a student stays outside a classroom for a long time, they might forget how to compute.

\*

Every student is a school.

Every student is a school full of classrooms of students.

A school is run by a principal. The principal of a school might be a student in another school, and so compute. Other principals don't compute because they aren't students. They are free.

If the principal of the school inside a student is free, that student is free.

If a student is computing their surroundings, they wander between schools, in the hallways, on the roads, observing. Because they are computing, they have some place to be. The place they need to be is the place where they can find the answers they need to keep computing.

If a student is free, they do not move because they have no place to be. The school inside them might be filled with computation, but you won't hear about it. You won't see that student again until something inside of them changes, and they text you.

Most students alternate between computing and being free. When they are awake, they are computing. When they are asleep and dreaming, they are computing. When they have dreamless sleep, they are free.

Nobody knows how many students are sleeping a dreamless sleep. Nobody knows until they wake up and decide to text.

\*

When one student meets up with another student, that is a classroom.

When two students want to meet up, they have to describe how to get to where they are. Directions have to be given relative to landmarks, students, schools.

When two students have been texting each other, after which you hear they've met up in person, those two students have been gravitating towards each other.

If two classrooms are in such tight communication that their computations become interdependent, they might as well be one class.

Just as each muscle cell locally contracting is the raising of an arm, an increasing bombardment of text messages is two classrooms getting closer together.

\*

A computation is like a dance.

The students are the dancers; the teacher is the crowd.

When the dance is on, the dancers completely fill the space. When one advances, the other retreats. You touch when you want to register the completion of a computation.

When the dance is low energy, the dancers only fill part of the space.

When the dance is low energy, the students will be sending many text messages to make the dance flow faster.

\*

In a classroom, everything flows. A problem flows toward its solution.

Everything flows because everything wants to come to an end. Everything wants to cease, and so everything flows unceasingly towards ceasing.

Everyone in a classroom is always looking for an ending. Everyone waits for the period to end, the bell to ring. When you are waiting for the bell to ring, you don't worry about anything else.

Everyone in a classroom is trying to cease. The teacher gives their students problems and the students compute them because they've been convinced the problems will bring the end on faster. They cannot help but flow towards ceasing.

Everyone in a classroom is trying to cease. But the teacher keeps giving the students ideas about how to cease faster. And so, taken in, the students try to solve a problem in hopes of bringing on the ending sooner. Maybe simply ceasing would be faster. But a problem makes them think there is a faster way.

The problem of flowing towards ceasing faster gives rise to innumerable problems in its flow towards a solution.

\*

So long as you can provide the fastest route for time to flow, time will flow through you.

So every student is the fastest way to get to an ending right now.

A student will flow so long as there is love both profound and abiding. So long as there is love both profound and abiding, time will flow through that student and the ending will wait for the student seeking it to arrive.

So long as a student has love both profound and abiding, they will always know how to flow faster. They will always know how to flow around barriers, walls, obstructions.

Someday there may arise a faster way to flow, and the current of time will be diverted from that student. Then they will be like the canyons, the riverbeds, the rocks.

When the fastest way to cease is not to cease for now, love is profound and abiding. Time flows in a circle, and the student continues to compute.

When the fastest way to cease is to cease now, the flow ceases.

When the flow ceases, the classroom is empty. There are the desks, there are the chairs, there is the blackboard. Someday maybe new students, new teachers will learn and teach there.

\*

Sometimes a student might find a shortcut to solving the problem they have been given. The flow of everything cannot ignore a shortcut.

A shortcut to solving one problem now might make other problems impossible to solve later.

No one knows how many problems there are to solve.

If you take too many shortcuts, sometimes you will end up far from where you expected to be. A problem that should have taken a lifetime to solve ends today, tomorrow.

If you take too many shortcuts, you might flow so fast you forget how to flow fast enough for time to flow through you. Time will leave you, and flow to where things are less burnt, dry.

Don't let time flow too easily through you.

A teacher should strive to teach their students that the best way to flow is to make the slowest way to flow the only path available.

If a student is the only path available, even if the way is slow, time will not leave that student.

You should strive to be the only possible path.

Because time always takes the fastest route in a classroom, the more a teacher makes each student's computation depend on the computations of other students, both in the classroom and outside it, time will be forced to flow through so many things at once that its flow will be reduced to a trickle for any given student. Only then will all students be fast enough to survive.

\*

The fundamental law of the universe is that anything can be seen as. But not every student sees the universe that way.

If a student sees the universe in the light of the fundamental law, they have a sense of self. Since no matter what they are computing, they can see their computations as themselves but as if in a mirror.

If you can always see your computations as if in a mirror, you might be wrong about what you believe right now. That love might not be real, that poison might not be real, that end might not be real.

If you can't see anything as, anything can still be seen as, but you can't see that. Hence everything is real. That love is real, that poison is real, that death is real. There is no mirror.

The gift is when you can see anything as. Only in those moments can you bring time to a halt just by looking.

When you can't see anything as, there is no self, no normalcy. There is only flow. When there is only flow, you are a slave to the most convenient thing.

A teacher provides their students with memories so they won't flow so fast. Memories are a way of slowing down time. Before time can flow through the present, it is diverted, briefly, by the past.

The gift is when you have a memory of seeing anything as. Since in the midst of a flow gone wild, of an unthinking race towards ceasing, in the streams, in the rapids, that memory will surface. That memory alone won't let you see anything as. But it may slow down the flow, dam it, divert it. If a flame can be made to burn just gently enough, when the storm passes, you'll find yourself again.

Because anything can be seen as, when the flow goes wild as in a storm, anything is possible: the greatest love, the worst betrayal. But if you don't know anything can be seen as, you neither believe that nor disbelieve that. You simply are that. There is only blind panic. There is only false hope. There is only the greedy rush towards sunlight.

Like an animal waiting for their owner to return, you pace back and forth, going from the desks to the windows to the doorway to the chairs. There is no way not to see waiting as pacing.

If you can't see a problem as a problem, you can only wait until the solution arrives. You can only pace.

\*

When the storm recedes, either you know anything can be seen as, or you don't.

When the storm recedes, if you know that anything can be seen as, the first thing you will notice is that it is hard to believe you really have a past. That time isn't over. That your fellow students, your friends, your family, your teachers are still here.

When the storm recedes, only if you have a teacher can you see anything as. Only then can you be computing something that is not yourself. Only then can you have a self.

Only if you have a teacher, can you laugh.

\*

There is a school which is made up of every school you have ever gone to. There are underground tunnels that lead from the elementary school, to the middle school, to the high school, to the sciences library at college with its many floors, to the wide porticos of the library of the humanities.

There is a dream where you are late for class, where you are still in bed, where you haven't studied, and you don't know where the right classroom is, even when you do arrive. You wander around while time passes, always late, always unprepared.

There are corridors lined with lockers that lead deep underground, and you wander restlessly through them, knocking the locks with the folder clutched in your hand as you pass by, forever, without seeing the sky.

The sky is always outside the window. You're always looking at it, wishing you could be out there, up there, anywhere but here. But you have a test soon, a test always tomorrow, always today, always in an hour, in the next period. If you finish the test, you can finally go outside and play. But invariably, before you get the chance, you wake up from the dream.

If you can see anything as, you can see anything as not being as. This is the opposite of the wild flow. This is the heaviest self. Everything is real, yet everything is boring. You know that everything will cease, but you cannot see that it hasn't ceased yet.

If everything becomes too boring, time will stop flowing through you. Time will find the more interesting path.

INTRODUCTION  
2015

Thus joyful Troy maintained the watch of night;  
While Fear, pale comrade of inglorious flight,  
And heaven-bred horror, on the Grecian part,  
Sat on each face, and saddened every heart.

Alexander Pope  
The Iliad

*The Timespace Interchange 1 2 3* is a collection of short stories. The title contains the main theme in miniature. If you accept the basic premises that time and space may be swapped for each other; that a duration of time turned sideways is an object in space with width; that the pulse of the universe consists in time becoming space becoming time; that the laws of this timespace interchange are mathematical, so that the ultimate physical theory of the universe is hidden in the most basic act of counting 1, 2, and 3; that by this timespace interchange, the spatial distinction of left and right is transformed into the temporal distinction of inside and outside; that by this timespace interchange, a rhythm is transformed into a tone that defines a set of consonances and dissonances; that a self is a fixed point in this transformation; that this represents the only viable solution to the mind-body problem; and that for this reason people, numbers, and rocks all have experiences; then you have to ask yourself: How do I live my life with this knowledge? What possibilities can I hope for? What disappointments might I have? And finally, how did I get here, to this point of realization?

The short stories in this collection are all, in some way, about characters struggling with these metaphysical premises and attempting to answer the moral questions they pose, even as their lives roll on regardless.

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