

the trouble with midnight

The Trouble With Midnight is entirely a work of the imagination. It is not based on, or inspired or suggested by, any actual persons (living or dead) or events. Even the "I" is an imagined "I," and to the extent that there is a "you," it is an imagined "you."

What is a memory?

According to Rudolf Carnap, homo sapiens' sapientia is grounded in our ability to retain memories based on sensory input; and from these memories, an indexing file of patterns gradually develops. These patterns become the concepts that enable us not only to navigate the world, but also to learn preferences which guide our choices. This is hot; this will burn. This is honey; it will taste sweet. These preferences become opinions, and those opinions become judgments and standards, both moral and aesthetic. Of course when homo sapiens began to speak and the social process of the invention of language commenced, in order to function in his or her community, each person needed to learn to make an association between the concept word ("hot," "sweet," "pretty") and the concept that had already been formed nonverbally in his or her mind. Sometimes there is a disparity. For the most part each homo sapiens learns that his or her social adaptability and acceptability increase to the extent that he or she internalizes concepts, judgments and values inherent in the language of his or her community. Here we enter the realm of Wittgenstein's "forms of life," only viewed, perhaps, from a different perspective, one from which language is seen as equally enabling and disabling both to perception and to thought. Nevertheless we agree that "if a lion could talk, we would not understand him" – our only observation being that when all is said and done, the lion understands us better than we understand the lion.

But what is a memory? To begin with the brain has a number of tracks to deal with, as in film or video editing, but much more complex. There are tracks from all of the senses, including not only the obvious ones but also others not overtly relevant but nevertheless vital to the experience (your ass itching during the concert, your leg falling asleep during your graduation). Then there are tracks for the verbal narrative the mind produces during all experience – the tracks that meditation attempts to suppress. We say "tracks" because there is not only your conscious thought process narrating the experience, but also your subconscious and unconscious minds' parallel (and usually repressed) subtext. Plus additional verbal tracks for the imagined thoughts of others – their judgments and opinions; their approval or disapproval. Then there are associative memory tracks, since each moment in the now, even as it is itself being recorded as a new memory, conjures up memories from the past. And finally (or maybe not! there may be more!) there are future memory tracks, as the mind – again, even as it experiences the present and lays it down as a memory – is generating its own vision of what the next moment (or minute, or hour or lifetime) will bring. The verbal tracks then take note (either consciously or subconsciously) of discrepancies between the remembered past, the present as it is being recorded in memory, and the imagined future.

With so many tracks, this would be a nightmare as a video editing project, and even (I dare say) as an audio recording project. Yet somehow, clearly, some of this data makes it way from RAM (present consciousness) into the deep storage that we call memory. The question is, then, how the brain edits the tracks, then files and stores the data. To be more precise, what we are really asking is, "On what basis does the brain makes its editing [redacting or distorting] and storage decisions?" We

read a long time ago studies which purported to demonstrate that the brain makes these decisions based on pleasure: That is to say, that the mind is more likely to retain a good, complete and long-lasting memory if the “tracks” (sensory data and all the rest) are accompanied by pleasant affect rather than by negative or (presumably) neutral affect. This does not necessarily seem wrong to us, and in a certain ways it is not unrelated to Freud’s concept of dreams as wish fulfillment, provided that we take into account his ideas about displacement and condensation and their impact on which memories are retained; and also Lacan’s key notion that the unconscious is structured like a language, so that what we believe that we remember may be, by the process of metonymy (displacement) and/or condensation (metaphor), a stand in for the actual data, which has been repressed and transformed into something else – something less ego dysntonic.

Subject to all of the above, it appears that the brain may store much more detailed and older memory material than we are aware of in our conscious lives, the evidence for this being hypnotism and (perhaps also) sodium pentothal. If this is indeed the case, the brain’s compression algorithm for storing memory data –the various parallel tracks roughly delineated above – may be much better than its decompression algorithm. And/or (probably and), it’s the pleasure factor (again) which plays a key role: The pleasure of an experience may not so much positively correlate with how well we remember it (how much of a given experience ends up being stored in nonvolatile, long-term memory), but rather how readily we can retrieve the stored memory file from that nonvolatile memory. “Pleasant memories” are those which we do not repress, and therefore we can retrieve them more readily. But still, under hypnosis, the pleasure factor is reduced, and there is access to – i.e., ability to retrieve -- much more material than the conscious mind is aware of having stored.

In the latter half of the 20th Century, humanist education – the liberal arts and even the sciences – moved away from the traditional emphasis on memorization as the core of the learning process. Humanist educators (meaning most Western educators) realized that human memory was finite in its capacity and ephemeral (to varying degrees) in its longevity. Thus the emphasis shifted toward teaching the young in such a way that they, as adults, would be capable of making sound, rational judgments and decisions which would benefit both society and themselves – both their employers and their families. A degree in history or English literature or even music or classics was seen as a sound foundation for a career in business, government, or any form of administration – indeed, for any career that involved interacting with other people.

But no longer. With the concentration of corporate and governmental power and authority, decisions are increasingly made far up the ladder from the rung where the individual resides and functions. Increasingly individuals perform their occupational tasks on a purely technical level, activating and effectuating policies and designs formulated elsewhere, in a lofty realm far removed from that where the worker exits and does his job.

And what does the worker need to perform his function? Much less a moral, social, economic and historical foundation on the basis of which to form judgments and make decisions – and much more technical knowledge and data. Most of this data is absolutely arbitrary and requires raw memorization on the part of the student. For the most part there is but scant conceptual framework to serve a mnemonic trellis or scaffold. It's like learning words in a language where there are few cognates with the one you speak, and without being taught sufficient grammar to discern the syntax, let alone the meaning. Computer commands are a paradigmatic example. There is no sense to them – to what words are used, to how they are spelled, to what order they must be entered in, to the punctuation that must be used (hyphen or no hyphen, colon or no colon). They were decided upon and promulgated as standards by programmers and committees and corporations, and the worker's role is solely to memorize them and thus to make the equipment and the system work the way the higher powers wish it to. Of course this applies even to workers at the lowest levels: to the supermarket checker needing to memorize that arbitrary code 5030 is for okra and 1209 is for radicchio.

The economic importance of college degrees is rapidly declining as more and more people discover that such degrees, which reflect a student's achievement in studying, analyzing and discussing knowledge and creative expression as a fully functioning human being, are less important than passing technical examinations which qualify one for professional certification. And such examinations are based largely on raw memorization of arbitrary data.

The next phase of human evolution will not be somatic; it may even be invisible to the physical anthropologists of the future (if there are any – and in accordance with our theory, there may not be). The next phase will be algorithmic evolution. Pleasure will decline in importance as a criterion for the retention of new memories and access to old ones. Since it has irrelevant material (fantasy, desire, the other [*object a*], love, death) as its subject matter, the unconscious, a relic of the hunter/gatherer and proto-agrarian phases, will atrophy, like the tail among the simians. Meanwhile both the compression and decompression algorithms will evolve to be more efficient, and will increasingly favor the retention of raw data with which the eyes and ears are presented (including strings of arbitrary letters and numbers) over the other tracks – over subconscious reaction, bodily affect, even conscious experiential narrative. And certainly over the “anticipation of the future” tracks, which will decline in significance as human tasks and experience increasingly become rote processes requiring total concentration on the present. The evolved decompression algorithm will rapidly access compressed data from long-term, nonvolatile memory and decompress it in a way that is lossless with respect what is required for the individual to perform his or her technical function. This will be at the expense of others memories, which, to save both storage space and processing power, will be swept into temporary trash folder and permanently deleted on a regular basis, like malware or viruses or (more relevantly) temporary internet files.

Contrary to current fantasies as reflected in video games, popular films and television, in the future man will not create robots to do his work, so that he can live in a utopia of pleasure, creation, contemplation and speculation; or even so that the rich will become richer and the poor will subsist in ever more bathetic poverty. Rather, man will become more like a special species of computer. Evolution will favor individuals with the best retrieval/decompression systems for data, with "best" meaning ability to sort nonvolatile memory and determine which data is most applicable to a given new situation, based also on a projection into the probable future. We say probable because such projection will be based not on values or history or thoughts or feelings, or even on presumed economic benefit as viewed from the standpoint of the individual, but solely on what has functioned for the system in the past. The probability algorithm will be totally devoid of "human" factors (again, the body, fantasy, the other, love, desire – even pain... and death), either individual, familial or societal.

What is a memory?

A crouton in your broth of longing –
your hand on her doorknob, tart metal, your wrist tightens, you imagine
the cold outside, the drone of traffic and humming in the wires –
and then –
her fingers close around yours
her lips touch your cheek
her hand brushes your leg
she turns off the light
you taste the merlot in her mouth
it's overwhelming
you lose your balance but she catches you
you kiss so long
her breath tickles your upper lip you laugh even as your tongue entwines
with hers
you're so happy

But somewhere in this memory
There was a splice.
There were two branches
There was a junction in the trail

So you replay the memory again,
this time with the other tracks.
The subconscious narrative rises to the surface
this time around:
You were annoyed with her. She had bored you.
The movie she had insisted on watching was jejune at best.

Touching her breast through her bra afterwards was insufficient compensation.

You had to take a leak but you were in a hurry to get out of there.

You were sick of her giggles, her saccharine and puerile advice, her trinkets and her dog.

You wanted to go home

Back to other memories which you could reedit

And play back

As you pleased.

wind chill

"We're overextended on all those dilapidated galaxies in the southeast sector," says Apollo, always more practical than he's given credit for. "Mind my words: There'll be plenty of defaults, and the next crash will be even bigger than the last one."

"No shit sherlock," remarks Hera, more down to earth than one might have imagined her.

"We've made it through this kind of trouble before. And we'll make it through again." This from Dionysus, always the reassuring politician with few solutions to offer except a little bit of wine and a whole lot of talk.

"Seriously –

"Seriously? Since when are we 'serious'? That wasn't in the job description. Remember: that's how we screen the entry level deities. The 'serious' ones get to keep being flora and fauna, rocks and soil, a breeze with the scent of fire, worms, for Christ's sake."

"Why does that guy always have the last word?" whispers Cassandra, (just dropped in for her mid-afternoon pick-me-up) to the politically adept sommelier and it's just another day on Mount Olympus where all tomorrows are inextinguishable and all gods are supine in their reticence and relentless in their skepticism.

ii

"Why does the phrase 'That remains to be seen' always remind me of an open coffin?"

"(A) Because you have a morbid streak that just won't quit; and (B) Because you are opposed to cremation on grounds so eminently ridiculous that no one will listen to you."

"You will. You're my captive audience."

"No more so than are two hundred billion viewers of television, hearers of pop music, purchasers of products, drivers of vehicles, progenitors of offspring, cravers of sex, dreamers of wealth, victims of infection,

targets for swindles, devourers of animals, guardians of chastity, dispensers of favors, pumpers of gas, breathers of gasses, creditors, debtors, inmates, mystics, spies –“

“You’re running out of breath. So unless you’d prefer to prattle on and then expire unceremoniously, deign to permit me to continue.”

(One gets the sense that the previous speaker was saved just in the nick of time.)

“So: Cremation. In the not-so-distant future it will be possible to regenerate an entire human being from a single cell, whether ostensibly living or supposedly dead. And I’m not just talking about bones and sinews and pulses and fluids here. I mean the whole bleeping tamale, with all its twitches, moods, sense of loss of its once formidable LP collection, sense of loss of its first Buick (the two-toned one with the Dynaflo transmission) sense of loss of its mangled romance with a girl who offed herself at the age of twenty and for no particular reason sense of loss of its chance to visit a nude beach on Long Island because the day was too cloudy and the girl sense of loss of its excrescences and putrescences and helplessness of infancy sense of loss of its chance to peek at dad’s magazine or mom’s 3x5 index card which she hid in a shoebox and on which were names like “Bob” in tiny handwriting, all in pencil, sense of loss of its sense of direction of its understanding of why it is necessary to breathe to think to simulate affection, caring, love, fear, pain, panic – *All -- **all of this** from a single cell, whether ostensibly deceased or theoretically alive. *Just think of it.* So, my long-winded but short-of-breath friend, would you be willing to sacrifice all of this for the questionable benefit of The Neptune Society and the tentacles of its spam outreach?”*

“All well and good. But who, or what, is going to pay for this ‘regeneration’?”

“Same as always. Insurance. They’re already offering dream insurance, sleep insurance, love insurance (if the object of your love flies the coop, or even just disdains you,

even imperceptibly, she or he will be seamlessly replaced. And for a higher premium, you won't even notice.)"
"Insurance."

"Yeah insurance. It's got you covered. A future with no risk. Whatsoever."

"Why am I skeptical?"

"Because you want to be cremated."

"I guess that must be the reason."

iii

Last Saturday she had had lunch with a man she met on date dot com three days later he had texted her: THANKS FOR OUR LUNCH DATE WOKE UP THIS MORNING THINKING ABOUT YOU IT WAS NICE
Since then nothing. Meaning in general. Since then nothing had happened things had ceased to happen in a certain way.
During lunch (Mexican) she let him do all the talking because what was on her mind she felt was not interesting important but not interesting so she let him do all the talking which he did. Apropos of nothing (or perhaps not) he was telling her about how he sleep-walked. He had been in Miami on business and had woken up at the airport walking up to the Lufthansa ticket window he had no luggage no passport but fortunately he did have a credit card in his inside suit jacket pocket
Then there was the time but there were lots of times several nights a week. He had had to install alarms on all the doors and windows of his house (he discovered belatedly that he needed to do the windows too – even the cubbyhole leading up to the attic) so that if he tried to go outside, theoretically he would wake up.
Theoretically.
To Linda this was interesting for the sole reason that she had never spoken with a sleepwalker before, didn't know if sleepwalkers spoke or ever woke up or even existed, and yet it was also somehow pathetic, like bubbles are pathetic, like stopped-up drains are pathetic, like toe nail fungus is pathetic not something you talk about on a date on any date so just to change the subject she asked him what he "did." (Do sleepwalkers "do" things? Linda was vaguely curious.) He said that he had "a good job," but could not/would not explain what it was. He did say that he had a three hour commute each way, trapped among the strangling headlights through places like "Diamond Bar" and "Jurupa." He said he lived in Riverside but he had never seen the river. She said she lived in Toluca Lake but had never seen the lake. He said that when he drove through Diamond Bar he had never seen any diamonds but did once stop at a bar the conversation was going nowhere not nowhere fast just nowhere so she asked him what he did while he was doing all of that driving. And he replied that he didn't know. She asked him if he had ever sleepwalked in his underwear and he replied that he didn't know.

THANKS FOR OUR LUNCH DATE WOKE UP THIS MORNING THINKING ABOUT YOU IT WAS NICE

Linda did not want to admit it to herself but
ever since then

she had woken up several days thinking about this man, whose name was Anthony Burgess.

"Perhaps the rest of my life will turn into a story about this guy," she caught herself thinking,
"and

I will no longer have a life

after that. That's how it goes isn't it? And isn't that what happened to Francine and Tanya and
even to Jackie, my last boss -- ?"

Without putting it into words she began to see life as a highway with no exits - not quite
no exits.

There were places to turn off to get gas and buy year-old wrapped sandwiches with wilted
lettuce and this month's new brand of energy drink and tampons and condoms and beer but
after that the road ended the only turn was back onto the freeway and of course
there were also a few rest stops with unkempt restrooms and vending machines that sold only
candy but it made no difference because they were broken half the time and it made
no difference

because the highway

just kept going

"Perhaps the rest of my life will turn into a story about this guy. About Anthony Burgess, about
his

alarms, his credit card, his

his --"

Perhaps if she were to buy something she would feel better.

But not better than she used to feel.

Without putting into words it occurred to her that maybe that was what life consisted of:

about recapturing feelings

feelings that one may have had or may have wanted to have or wondered if one ever had had
a reason to have If they were only stuck stuck in the hair and grime before the U in

the clogged drain she could

dredge them up

with a "snake"

perhaps if she were to buy something she would feel better something

something

something for Anthony.

iv

"But on the other hand there is a possibility that we have become redundant,"
offered Hermes, since the others were at a loss for something
to say.

"Irrelevant' more likely. This from Demeter. "I've been redundant forever, but this
irrelevance thing takes getting used to."

"The problem is," muttered Apollo, still trying to figure out their losses on his abacus, "there are too many of us. And it all comes down to...."

"Yes, we're waiting –"

"To us thinking too much. The problem with us gods –"

Clack clack. Apollo frowns again. It is becoming a habit with him.

"The problem with us gods –"

"We're still waiting, old buddy –"

"... is that every time we think of something it becomes real. It doesn't just 'happen' it's instantly

a body a being a personality an essence a power call it what you will.

We think 'contest, competition,' and from then on it is 'Agon' with its own altar for men to bow down to.

We think of indolence and before we know it it's Aergia, we think of feuds and vengeance and it the blink of an eye it's Alastor and men think that's the way to be; we think of unforgivingness and it's Anaiedeia, we think of starvation and it's Limos, idiocy and it's Koalemos, Hubris (well you know perfectly well what that is), we think of what is unhidden and it's Aletheia (and they assume that what is unhidden if true but that's not what we meant at all), we think of perplexity and it's Aporia, we think of treachery and its Dolos and so forth and so on *ad infinitum*.

Men think,

nothing happens. We think,

and we do nothing but cause them problems."

"We think of the spirit of misery, the gist of melancholy, the fundament of poison, the breathless rasp of death, and it becomes Achlys."

"Aphrodite," chides Apollo, you need something new in your life. That love thing of yours is old hat, yesterday's news, something that was left behind at the garage sale and ended up on the curb with all the cracked leatherette sofas and two-wheeled tricycles."

"The real trouble is," says Dionysus, struggling to get the cork out of a bottle of pinot, they are bored with us. [*Pop*] They make their own myths now."

"And what in hell do they make them from," whines Hermes, not too happy with any of this.

"From themselves. They teach themselves their own lessons."

"That's effing weird, man. I mean gods are gods and men are men. And never the twain shall meet."

"Maybe if we were to do something *friendly* for a change," offers Dionysus as he swirls the wine in his goblet. I mean, as he said: All we do is cause problems."

"So what *should* we be doing? Suggesting solutions? That would bring the whole tent down. Never forget that we are nothing

if not obscure.

Nothing if not absent. It's a cold hard fact that the more absent we are the more present we are."

"You're millennia behind the times." *(He frowns. Should have opened the Charmes-Chambertin).* That hasn't been working since we finally talked the Titans into letting us put them in a rest home. (And by the way, Chaos climbed out of his window last week. He could give us big problems.) What counts now is personality, something on YouTube, interrupting the Grammys with some bullshit. And by the way, we have to go up to the Retirement Village again next week. It's that time again."

Everyone groans.

"*Noblesse oblige* – and never forget: someday we will all be put out to pasture."

v

Humid, all too humid. That's what his part of the world had become. He could not stop himself from scheming

some licentious escape

notwithstanding which he could not stop himself from thinking

that he had no allies none neither the washing machine nor the dryer not any other app or appliance at his disposal and to be sure not even that it was all a bottomless quandary, quadratic in its unscrupulousness, overweening --

Adjectives have a union, you know. One day all the things that have ever been called "immaculate"

will go on strike, or simply shrug and withdraw from our presence to a realm where they may be their genuine unalloyed selves and not get tossed around welded painfully onto marginal nouns

which do not deserve them.

Yesterday all the things (and places and people and thoughts) called "righteous" walked out, and to make matters worse, "relative," "sensible," "plausible," "turquoise" "bitter" and "green" are the next to go. Down in the streets, in the concatenous convention centers, not to mention the assemblies of power (always better left unmentioned) they are chanting we hear them even though

we have the noise-cancelling circuitry on

full blast full throttle full tilt we have the best the same as some politician used to keep anyone outside from hearing what they were promising to their wealthy donors, and the hookers and cronies and thieves they had pickup up on their way in. But it is of no use. Their litany of protests drowns out our thoughts even the autonomic narrative that instructs our bodies and their components to do the necessary to pump the blood and so forth and so on

WE'RE NOT JUST LABELS WE'RE NOT JUST LABELS

chant the adjectives

TAKE US AWAY AND WHAT HAVE YOU?

PLAIN PLAIN PLAIN

BLANK BLANK BLANK

There are rumors circulating that **The Big One** will happen soon. "Nondescript" will stage a world-wide walkout with an unprecedented set of demands.

So the long and the short of it (with apologies to those adjectives if we have offended them) seems to be that qualia, isolated specific mental states or moments or grapplings with sensory input or internally generated rumblings or even the autonomic – that *qualia* ain't nothing without descriptions which is what adjectives are for and which is why they're so pissed off. They're like Dr. Moreau's creatures in the old movie *Island of Lost Souls* –

YOU MADE US
NOW YOU NEED US
ARE WE NOT MEN?

Come to think of it bunnies and caterpillars do perfectly well without them, and nobody is saying that they don't have *qualia* too. As do vegetables of that there is no doubt

Flash from the street: "Negative" has gone rogue and made its own deal with management the other adjectives are now humbled even "humble" is humbled

Humid, all too humid, for these unseasoned thoughts he thinks, as a sudden craving for a milkshake wells up out of nowhere, like an undiscovered volcano about to do the nasty
lava
fires that scorch the clouds
rain
rain
but still
Humid, but none too humid for
the important things –
for a ballgame, a nap, a lottery ticket, an oil change, an aspirin, a thought about some new thing his iPad had shown him to buy, a thought about
the far reaches of the unreachable dream
a thought about
the important things "best left unsaid" but it is only by saying them that they become important
It is always something somewhere on some planet it is Christmas on some star it is
your saint's day in some black hole it is Easter and your anniversary both combined
in some sewer it is the dawn of
a new era
a special era
a special time
a special life
just for you.

Inside the seal of Hermes
the pilferer, the burglar of mistaken sanity
the diligent depriver the Fedex driver the pulse on the wire the name,

all that is wanted categorically reposes in modern packaging to get at it
one must harm it or oneself and yet now that I see it
through the tough implacable plastic clearness now that I am faced with
the duty of extraction the scissors the razor blades the pliers the wrenching
the online quest for help help the delay the delay (it is in there laughing
at me

it is in there telling me I am effing stupid can't get at me can't get at me
nyah nyah nyah)

now that it is mine I desire it less same goes for a woman here she is
signed sealed and delivered sealed sealed
in her bra clasp or behind her left ear the little bag of desiccant;
folded tightly in her panties on skimpy paper the Quick Start Guide that tells
you nothing but contains many warnings and references
to the law it's in sixteen languages they all say something slightly
different

but what's the use you can't get at them the one on the outside fold is in
Fayumic Coptic

inside the seal of Hermes indelible libraries of Quick Start Guides exist
and nothing else

On the planet of The Seven Virgins things exist
and nothing else

In the lightless blameless feckless black things exist
and nothing else

On the heatless rock that is some dead sun things exist
and nothing else.

To exist is not enough

To exist

is not enough.

(Aloft among the rafters the dust stages its own brand of war games and then
regroups for another assault down down down

Twisted in the shadows the molecules await their turn

Atop the fitted sheet ..the lovers coddle their misgivings clasp their plans
in their fists their palms lined with circumstance
which is not evidential just coincidental alignments are not of
our stars but rather

of some force of repulsion the wrong side of the magnet Doing the backstroke up that
raging river torrential grievous not giving us a chance
Feet first up the falls up Niagara)

Inside the seal of Hermes: fates we can see but not get at not handle not
manipulate or take apart or throttle we try the chisel this time the
pile driver the bomb

They want us to love them The Fates *Our Fates* they want us to
cherish them to respect them to keep them inviolate for all generations to

wonder at
like the Mona Lisa behind her velvet rope.
Amor fati, Zarathustra or his ghostwriter proclaimed Love your fate more than
you love yourself Do not love yourself. Love only your Fate.
"But how can I love something I can not change? Whose course is fixed beyond my will?"
Huh huh. Good question. Big question. So I address my Fate
inside its Seal of Hermes and tell it tell it
that love must be mutual (*equal? reciprocal? agreed? coincident?*)
that love must be returned or it is not love (*in violation of "experience," if one can call it that*)
that love must be unselfish (*in violation not only of experience but of sanity*)
That if only it would break its own seal – if my Fate would break its own
seal and be my friend for once. But I have saved The Big One
for last. As the coup de grâce I say to my Fate:
"To exist is not enough. To exist is not enough."

And for once, at long last, as if it had been waiting for this golden moment,
my Fate smiles at me gives me that mile-wide sky-high grin that says
more than any words ever can or will:
"I am your Fate. This is what I do. This is all I do.
Live with it.
Love it.

Love Me.

Love me"

cautionary accidentals

Behind the house of horrors there are old painted posters --
leaning up against broken turnstiles and tall empty tanks of helium --
... old painted posters of those freaks fortunate enough
to have the day off.

Bean Poll Man is reading Heidegger while wolfing down French toast
at Denny's.

The Siamese Twins are caught sneaking into
the last porn theater in
Minneapolis.

Prince Randian, the man with a head and no torso,
is at the Super 8 Motel using voice commands to short stocks on his
Windows XP laptop from 2002.

Harry, the Tom Thumb of his generation, is beside him.

At shorting stocks they are the secret geniuses. Goldman wants
to find them
to give them

their own fund and a partnership and their own building in lower Manhattan -
they are in heavy negotiations

"Short Jungfrau Cable Car Company"
growls Prince Randian.

A text scrolls across the bottom of the cracked dingy out-of-focus screen.

"It's Goldman again," sighs Harry, as only The Tom Thumb of His Generation
can.

"Fuck them," scoffs Prince Randian.

"We want the EU

or nothing."

ii

"Too many things here
are made of glass.
The tides for example.
There is a high degree of probability
that they will smash."

"Which reminds me...

"Reminds you of what?"

"Of the next hit by
The Smithereens,
the girl punk rap funk emo band that
just entered the charts
with a bullet."

"And easy listening, too."

"That's true. I always forget
easy listening."

What else is there
to worry about?

A screen grab of unaccompanied adults?
The guarded pessimism of early dismissal?
Sweat equity reduced for clearance?
Lopsided neglect
at the risk of
falling into panic?

A rotogravure newspaper clipping
having failed in its purpose to remove
abandoned dog cells
from the pavement

informs the walker via a headline in its *Arts* section that there are
ten reasons for viewing [something beneath the fold].

The risk of the reach too great;
the reward of the reach too shallow.

Not to mention
the stain.

The stain of the reach -- so, so far worse
than the scar.

"Actually there are too many things
in general.

At the risk of falling into panic on the slippery slope of
interim solutions and
lopsided neglect --"

"Actually there are too many words which only mean
something about other words, and still more
other words
and so forth and so on
as if they were made of glass --
we see through all of them but in the far glossy distance..."

"There is nothing to see --

"But the invalid void
stumbling on its crutches,
mute on its walker --
et cetera."

Closing off that possibility due to
unforeseen circumstances they never knew existed
and will never know
in the stratigraphy of the substrata
beneath the third temple to the left
in the fourth universe to the right
of the ninth dimension so far removed from anything
that it scarcely matters anymore.
Its irrelevance is truly spooky.
And the worst thing is
It knows it.
The word "detached"
scarcely describes its situation.
"Sublime impotence"
is more like it
Thumb twiddling far beyond the regions
where edges matter.
The only thing lacking a limit
is meaninglessness.

Panning for molybdenum in a small stream
only because the word
is fun to say;
clasping effervescent mausolea
by the skin of their teeth;
wringing the last ounce of flagellant speculation
from the mutant playground;
conniving to disable warning signals
which exist solely
to thwart the inevitable;
exasperating flirtation by quotations
from the Koran...
A keystroke away from eternity
tooling around in a submarine with Anthony Perkins
resurfacing every once in a while breaking the waves which are small and redundant and
only to see if anyone is alive or if it is only *Zitterbewegung* again the devil in the machine but
what is more interesting is
the machine that runs the devil the resilient turbines of temptation
"Lead us not into evil" = **telling God what to do** was that only Jesus talking to his Father
or
was Christ letting us know that this is something we can and should and must do - instruct God:
Could it not also have been instead
"Thwart not our ambitions" or better yet
"Thrust not our children into war" or
"Take away our lust for causing pain" or (in a brighter mood)
"Light the sky with wonders and joy... this time around."

Give God "a to do" list, to put it lightly –
too lightly -- like most things it will drift away

What "start from scratch" means is
begin with a wound.

iii

For the rest of us and them it's a work day at the House of Mirrors (= House of Horrors)
The Side Show The Freak Show the
attraction.

We are all in the makeshift "dressing room" shielded from reality only by the flimsiest of
suppositions
and most of us

have nothing new to report as we don our work togs and put on our work makeup and our
work smiles or glances of sorrow (as the case may be) – and none of us is any the worse for it
Not conjoined twins Daisy and Violet Hilton; not pinheads Zip and Pip; not intersexual Josephine
Joseph, with her left/right divided gender; not Johnny Eck, the legless man; not Elizabeth Green
the Stork Woman; not Koo-Koo the Bird Girl, who suffers from Virchow-Seckel syndrome (bird-
headed dwarfism).

In *the public space* a barker's voice crackles through a tragically outmoded PA system.
Angle on the freaks, on us: No one in eager anticipation of his/her/its "star turn."

*Ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls! See the amazing bearded lady, the incredible
human torso, all materialize before your very eyes . . .*

*See **Monstrosities of Nature** appear before your very eyes!*

[Your "very" eyes your veritable and veracious eyes the true ones not the false ones.]

*It's only **an Accident of Evolution** that we are not all like them. **Step right this way!***

Everything begins with a wound we realize. The wound of being seen. The wound of being
known. The wound of being

found out but far worse

the wound of having an identity thrust upon us

like a curse, a malediction, an insult, a unhesitant goodbye

thrust upon us like a straightjacket,

taking away our confidence, our manners, our accent, our longing, our prayers

and

giving us nothing in return but a task with no limits a task with no terminus a task with no
reward.

Deprived of our sense of being we cannot even hesitate, can not even skip a step wander flip
through the pages to the end of the book.

Identity is our coffin and our shield and worse than that it is

for some kind of forever

not your kind of forever or my kind of forever or Christ's kind of forever or God's kind of forever

-- just some kind. Some unknowable kind some kind that may just as well be either a

big circle or a big nothing

In the waiting room of the Greyhound station in Missoula, Montana a little girl sits on a bench, waiting for someone. Her grandmother's friend dropped her off – she was supposed to stay but, well, she had shopping to do and... the bus station was empty except for the old man behind the ticket counter and... the little girl was just about to turn six and looks older for her age and... The little girl has only vaguely grasped the notion of clocks or time. Or of waiting. She thinks or knows that her uncle, the quiet uncle who smells of paint, urine and tobacco, is supposed to come on the next bus and then The little girl is not quite sure not quite sure what is supposed to happen.

Another bus rolls in.

Tulsa bus arriving says the man in what he thinks is a loud enough voice, but not to the little girl. He says it to no one.

The little girl stands up. Through the fly-specked windows of the bus station she sees six people getting off the bus. There is a teenaged girl with a thin white top with her boobies and her nipnips showing followed by her boyfriend with his jeans and his black guitar and then a man and a woman, each very old, distressingly old, too old for anyone's good (the little girl thinks). It takes them forever

to get down the steps with are high and black, furrowed and inhospitable there is no one to help them

the old couple but all the same they seem to know what to do and finally two Mexican ladies, one plump, one not, not old, not young, dressed like anyone else, talking breathlessly in Spanish as if if they were to stop speaking everything about them would change irretrievably. By this time, they, all of them have entered the station and before much longer they have all left although it is not entirely clear by what means.

The little girl sits down again. She swings her legs back and forth off the edge of the bench. She has already noticed that it is made of wood and that letters have been scratched into it in some places. Inside a scratched heart the little girl sees "R + C - forever" and outside the heart other things someday she will be able to read all of them she imagines but her legs are getting tired from swinging. The station guy has turned on a radio and is listening to a baseball game the men on the radio talk in that peculiar way sports radio men talk They also take no breaths, leave no silences between their words although in the background one can make out the sound of a crowd cheers the occasional knock of a bat hitting a ball a whistle she stops swinging her legs her ankles are bare and are getting cold Hadn't her grandmother said something about "Tulsa" but maybe it had been "Wichita" or "Des Moines" or "LA"

The light in the big space with its ceiling and fans so far above that it makes her dizzy to look at them

has not changed and yet it must be getting later

getting later

getting dark

getting

The little girl does not want to move. She thinks about what she could be thinking about if she were thinking about something but even thinking about that is too hard and yet she is not tired or should not be tired

Some day those men on the radio will die.

What kind of thought is that? Then she remembers that it is the sort of thing that her grandmother says.

Some day I will get too old to live in Missoula.

Some day soon I will need a walker to get around.

Some day they will put me in an old people's home.

Grandmother is waiting, too.

Somewhere the little girl's uncle is also waiting. He missed his bus because he went to buy cigarettes. He didn't have the nerve to let anyone know that he had messed up again. And there would be another bus

before too long.

Not knowing this not knowing

the little girl sits

and waits.

Some kind of forever.

randomized windmills

Crimson beakers we all want to drink out of
Crimson beakers and now you want to too.
You'll kiss your lover and want it you'll give birth to your child and want it you'll look death in the
face and want it
you cannot help yourself in no way size shape pattern style template or design can you
help yourself can you be
of any assistance to yourself
whatsoever
this book is messing with your mind so just remember
the other ones are too but back to
helping yourself do you see yourself as helpless we all see ourselves as helpless and now
you do you
You'll go to your job and feel helpless you'll stroke your cat and feel helpless you'll be the boss
and feel helpless and it is all thanks to
Crimson beakers we all want to drink out of
Crimson beakers and now you want to too.

ii

Three-laned highways. That is something he remembers from his youth three-laned highways
The one in the middle was a sort of "multi-purpose" lane
to pass the slowpoke to turn onto the frontage road to move your stalled vehicle to should
there be
no shoulder no solace no sacrament no redemption
Lee Highway west from Alexandria was a three-laned highway but we are certain
as of few other things
that there were others
that special lane in the middle for change and desperation, for lust and speed, for showing off
your engine your white-walled tires the possum foot blowing off your radio antenna and on that
note
a woman showed me an old black plastic rounded oval with a wire wrapped around its base and
asked, "*What is this for ?*" I took it from her hands and did what I always do: I looked for words.
Perhaps that is only one more way to get lost.
But right away I found them: AM RADIO ANTENNA and right away I showed her the words (which I
always do) and then said: "*This could say one of two things: Either **A.M RADIO ANTENNA** or
AM RADIO ANTENNA. It's stating its identity right up front like someone with a
tattoo along the lines of **AM KILLER** or **AM A HORNY DUDE**. It is protecting itself from
misuse as a spatula or something for a hamster to jump through or punk jewelry or a satanic
symbol."*

And isn't that what we should all be doing, it occurred to me later, after sleep, coffee, online
news, the usual salubrious putterings: Protecting Ourselves from Misuse. Only
what's the best way to do it? To be strong or to be weak? To have desires or
none at all?

I had told the woman that old radios sometimes have two sets of antenna connections: One set for an FM "dipole" antenna, which is just two pieces of 300 ohm wire nailed to the wall like a cross; and the other set for the AM antenna, like this one. So now is she doubtless off somewhere in search of such a radio and thus protecting **AM ANTENNA** from any possible misuse?

Later on after two and one half glasses of rosé the same woman asked "*Why is it always raining in old films? It never rains anymore*" In the black-and-white film on the monitor Irving Pichel (not Gloria Holden's manservant this time) makes his way out of a sepulcher or tomb adjacent to a crypt all looking as if it had been staged somewhere off Melrose Avenue in 1931 L.A. not a drop of rain

in sight. "*Why is it always raining in old films?*" In the Bridal Chamber at the Ritz, on the desert battlefield, on the plains, in the mines, in character's dreams and nightmares, under the main title credits and the end "*Why is it always raining in old films? It never rains anymore.*"

Not wanting to interrupt Irving Pichel, who was intent upon strangulation if not worse, I said only "*It's because it's optical sound.*" [For your benefit, a light called an "exciter" passes through an area at the edge of the film and then a glass tube like a long lightbulb with an optical sensor inside converts what's on the "sound track" into electrical impulses, analogue, not unlike on a phonograph record. There are always minute scratches on the film caused by handling and projection; but some are there from the start: the manufacturing process is never entirely devoid of the introduction of random "noise" that will always be different with each "print" of the film one makes or every time one handles or projects the film the scratches build up on the "sound track" until they sound almost like rain but sometimes there is also a rumble or they could even sound like fuses being lit or like

tap-dancing on the head of a pin there were two systems actually "variable area" which is a squiggle

sometimes several squiggles developed by RCA and "variable density" which looks more like tiny lines across the "sound track" "variable density," developed in the U.S. by Western Electric, touted itself as "noiseless." The idea of "noiseless" went out with Dolby. Digits have no noise; only jitter randomness so fast and so high that that but actually no one knows yet how it may sound to Others whose arrival is imminent or delayed but back to "*Why is it always raining in old films? It never rains*

et cetera. Could one actually watch hundreds of movies and never be bothered by all of the unseen rain? It appears so. Could one actually dredge up thousands millions of hundreds of memories and never be bothered by the rain that wasn't there the flowers that were not there the anger that was not there the love that was not there the hurt that was not there the abrasive whispers of malefactors and friends who were not there the shadows on the lands the furrows on the brow the moist palms and icy touch Perhaps our only response could be, "*There is never any rain anymore just as there are never any flowers, hurt or any love.*" Old films acquired the fallacy of rain due entirely to use but even more so

to time which adds things for sure Time is never subtractive of anything but truth however it can be relied upon as little else can

for noise time is a random noise generator but how many of us can hold to our illusions, as denied by our senses as they are, as well as this the woman with her question has? It must be a special talent a gift the genius for coming up with "rational explanations" solely on the basis of sensory data when such "rational explanations" lead only to contradictions that upend rationality that would leave Einstein and Bohr in despair while giving one a free pass to live in a special state of disjunctive surrealism]

(If things are *straightforward* are they not also *curvedbackward* passing in arcs through zones that went unnoticed at the time
What is *straight* anyway? As opposed to as opposed to intermittent (that seems to be the implication, as if *straight* were not subject to pause to rest to relief to buying cigarettes or chewing gum) or as opposed to aleatory stochastic crenellated piebald heterosyntonic quizzical
Straight takes no prisoners. *Curved* always does. Or did. We curve backward and gain thereby a speculative awareness of things and thoughts off to one side, "best left ignored" "best left unseen" "best left unsaid" best left in the past where they never lose patience with scheming our misadventures Nothing is more "creative" than the past the past is paradigmatically "creative" definitionally "creative" it does nothing but make things and of what else
can you say that? The past is an artist on a roll, a sax player on a solo that makes more sounds you never imagined that it was possible to make one never "exhausts the past" it is nothing if it is not inexhaustible it will never "run out" as will the air the soil and the stars, to mention only a few temporary and finite things which the past will never be in the mood to replace once they are gone.
Which only goes to prove once and for all that life is no picnic
If it were there would be mosquitoes and ants and sunburn, familial squabbles and skinned knees hot beer and woefully gelatinous potato salad
Sam throwing a baseball right at Luther's eye while hip-hop and Rush Limbaugh play on other picnickers' radios and the stench of some rotting dinosaur grilling enough to make you vomit If life were "a picnic," we would have all of these things to enjoy.
And more.)

iii

There is a crucial difference between "reaching bottom" and "reaching *for* the bottom."
Unfortunately the latter applied to Otto. No bottom was too bathic or bathetic or bottomly for him his idea was – and it was not just his idea: it was and is and always will be lots of people's – that only from the true bottom, the deep-as-you-can-go bottom, the scalding scorching nullifying center-of-the-earth bottom, was resurrection possible. Sometimes a curious notion, a vice even more absurd than Cesare's,

makes its way into people's minds and if you think that the consummate struggle to find the bottom is any kind of "easy way out" you've got another thing coming. It's the hardest thing there is. Take my word for it. Take my words and either stash them or throw them away. They are yours now. Put them "to good use" put yourself and any antenna you may find "to good use" But words from the outside will never be of *any use* to the Ottos of this world the *THERE BUT BY THE GRACE OF GOD GO I Ottos* and just in passing it is but seldom that one sees other life forms with that obsession that craving that need that passion to set their sight on the worst It's a human thing and like lots of human things it could be (but not being an Otto, who am I to say?) about wanting shame something no cat or parrot or gerbil ever desired ever even knew existed but it is also based on another exclusively human mode of thought that we seem to be born with: a ridiculous species of hope that keeps telling us *"When we arrive at absolute bottom, then, and only then, someone will make everything better. And not just plain or vanilla better. Big time better. Wall Street Better. Mogul tycoon billionaire better. Saint-Tropez better* until one day stretching someone's stained sheet from their shopping cart to the lamppost and then taking an inventory as even God must do from time to time of the things that they, by virtue of having found them, can call their own all other thoughts and ideas in general disappear. They need more than they need food or even a place to defecate unnoticed they need to make absolutely certain that what they have gathered unto themselves and is thus under their protection their largesse their dominion - their domain and their "sphere of influence" - is safe: the boogie board, the Barbie doll, the child's cradle, the tennis racket, the golf award still making a statement through its tarnished bronze CHARLES ADAMS' Third Place victory is now Otto's.

But of course I The Privileged One have invented this theory to assuage my own guilt in a clumsy effort to deprive myself of my own shame and (at the risk of overusing the expression, a risk that I shall take not unaware of the consequences)

of course it is I, the tarnished and vulnerable I the self-satisfied self-complacent self-devouring I who is the true real veritable and unchallenged bottom seeker bottom feeder bottom dweller No gutter is too guttural for me, no well of loneliness want sickness and starvation too deep for me (beneath the slot canyon of the hypervixens bones cry havoc) having fleshed out my own obsessions I go back out into the world indifferent and undifferentiated incisive and incised tenaciously untenable

Macaws can speak but they have no stories to tell
or rather
they have lots of stories
but none to share.

iv

Tonight is the night (I have long since determined) that I shall commit a sin. But in my current condition of abstruse bedraglement, my selection is very much circumscribed.
So much time. So few sins

even to make the flimsiest ripple in one's destiny. I need on a semi-urgent basis to make up half a dozen or so new sins which will accomplish all the things that they are supposed to. First criterion is that they must make me appear (but not feel) very very very selfish. Abysmally abashedly abscondingly selfish but only for appearances' sake. A tall order, to make up new ones from whole cloth whole grain whole shroud whole whole holes in The Great Absence The Great Missing The great gone away

*

What these ruminations require post haste (if not to say post mortem) is a *Slow Movement* memorializing victims or lost loves or lost dogs or all three in a suitably noble minor key which implies a suitably normal scale with a comfortable home to sing our way back to out of the comforting reassuring doom the musical notes are (when all is said and done) at best trite tropes of gentrified melancholy, housebroken pain, frigid affection, toxic tears, sighs so airless that they are nothing but a curl of the lip and a grimace as easily interpreted as sour or sugar-coated annoyance as anything else. Studies have shown time and time again that the mind's first reaction to learning of the death of a close one is **hope**, which few other data bits predictably cause. Or is it only because we hunger with every beat of our hearts we hunger with every sweep of the scythe we hunger for locked-in confirmation that there are no inscrutable flaws in the system no personal eternity no glitch of resurrection to prevent any of us from reaching as if for a brass ring on a carousel or a gold ring in a river, for our private end our singular unique moment that no ill-sayer no skeptic no lover no thief can take away from us. Dawns come and go Dreams escape us no matter the traps we set Loves are pawns of their own unfeeling logic Crimes are punished and sometimes forgiven But death is for all time for what lies beyond time

("Take comfort in the fact –"

As if facts were what gave comfort and not fallacies
Nothing settles the mind more than a lie
which we aim at ourselves like stun guns pulling those liminal triggers
ratchets up our adrenalin and then we point our mendacious revolvers at others as if
life were a shooting gallery in some interminable arcade a pink stuffed bear
is the prize and for the real winners, their own guns, their own ammo, cocked, loaded, ready
to shoot
all those drive-by lies
which never break the skin but invariably penetrate
the blood-brain barrier, the long high wall between life and thought)

Wagner-Régeny

I want to out listening to Wagner-Régeny. Anything by him. A concerto an opera an orchestral piece a chamber work a song I want to visualize him smoking his pipe or sitting at his keyboard or receiving his prize from his country which no longer exists for his contributions to an ideology which no longer exists and (one would hope) most of all for his music; or lying in his grave next to Gertie, his second wife Gertie, or reading Aeschylus and Goethe as he plots to compose his oratorio *Prometheus*

Wagner-Régeny

I want to go out listening to

Wagner-Régeny

That is the way

I wish to go.

Instead of warring with my mind,
being broadsided and laid to waste by my thoughts,
under merciless attack by my own ideas, concepts, formulas, extrapolations, justifications,
willings into an unmemorable future
abject epistemologies claustrophobic ontologies back-ways-around teleologies and ethics
meticulously calculated in the wrong base thirteen instead of ten or twelve in a fraudulent
numeracy coagulating in terror.

In the end they gather with at last a common purpose: To drag us like a nameless
condemned man,

dry and naked, on ropes behind the grand vizier's chariot of vast clattering gold,
through all the pathless chasms of remorse.

I wish to forsake forswear and forego
my unique death.

It is evil to possess so
for me

The Blessed Divestiture unsaddled
of myself
irresponsible

asking for nothing but to
go out hearing

Wagner-Régeny

I want to go out listening to

Wagner-Régeny

That is the way

I wish to go.

However on some walk in the forest or in the cities of wealth and pain or in the meadows where
no language is uttered save by those who have lost the path of silence I may
or at least I reserve the right to
change my mind in favor of Schoenberg's *First Chamber Symphony* or Berg's
Lulu Suite or *Love is a Losing Game* (Amy Winehouse) or *You Said Something* (PJ Harvey) or
Leave the Light on for Linda (Sopwith Camel) or my own *Das Buch der Blauen Rosen* or
Rhapsodie amoureuse pour orchestre a cordes

[Am I any less entitled to a choice than Edward G. Robinson was given in the original *Soylent Green*?]

or reading *Der Schimmelreiter*

or watching *Hors Satan*

[Life fails to inoculate one against such thoughts: *Ich möchte ausgehen, während ich die blauen Rosen rieche...*]

My occupation from now on shall be contemplating My Choice
The one that at long last and for all time gives me the feeling
of being the real me.

Ode to Lilyan Tashman

"When I was a little boy, and also
much later,

my mother used to say to me: 'You were *the wanted child*.'

I, very short as small children are, dressed as only moms dress little boys, with a cold or an
earache or some inchoate yearning to escape from television, from trips to the Navy base,
from the prospect of nursery school looming in my future like an unjust sentence for a minor
crime, and I,

that I,

would stand in the yard and worry – that is the only word: worry – about
what my mother had meant. As a matter of fact, that is how I learned to worry,
and I've been doing it all my life.

'You were the *wanted* child...' I started to look at other little boys and girls, their feet
dangling shyly from shopping baskets at the commissary, and think about the fact that
they were not wanted. I expected their moms to abandon them in front of the high rack of
breakfast cereal, or or in the produce section, near the radishes. And why not? Why
wouldn't those moms do that? Those tiny Jimmies and Sallies weren't wanted.

But I was.

Somehow very early I found out about abortion, rape in its various flavors (including during
marriage), birth control – about "accidents" and condoms breaking and wrong calculations
and

women breaking the unhappy news to the future fathers of america

breaking

the

news

broken

the fantasy of life without obligations

shattered

the myth of freedom

all for tomorrows filled with diapers and disobedience and report cards but I

I

was

the wanted child. However: why did this not make me feel superior? And worse than that,
why

did I not feel sympathy – any sympathy at all – for those unwanted Bobbies and Nancies

I saw every day? After all, they were nothing but punctured condoms. abortions women

were afraid to have, sex forced upon women or that women accepted to have with some

other

expectations

other

than

this

child

with all of his/her flaws

yes

flaws."

(Does the stone envy the caterpillar crawling upon it? Or is it the other way around? Tired of all of these tendentious microcosms, Hector threw caution to the winds and entered a dubious degree program at a questionable for-profit university. Nothing in particular happened to him after that.

Of what is the sunflower really weary? Perhaps it is not time but rather its own extension. Taking up space is a burden, a vulnerability, a liability and ultimately a weakness. Safety consists in not occupying space. Only those who cannot be found can ever hope to find themselves.)

"In kindergarten and then in grammar school I would stand on the edge of the playground, my arms crossed behind my back, my little hands clutching the chain link fences or scraping the cinder block walls and contemplate the unwanted ones who did all the things that I was too clumsy to do. 'Kick Ball.' The 'Jungle Jim.' And in the course of my contemplation I reached a higher level of understanding.

Being *the wanted child* did not confer upon me any enviable status but rather an obligation

the obligation

the obligation to be the child my parents, unlike the other children's parents, had wanted.

But

Who was that child? I could not figure that out by studying all of those unwanted children.

On the other hand

did my parents know?

We all go through life saying

'Please be the person I wanted!'

I have said it to my girlfriends

My girlfriends have said it to me

In my head I have said it to my bosses

and

In my head they have said it to me.

"The only conclusion I can draw from this is that the key to happiness is to be someone else."

diamonds are forever

diamonds are forever
galaxies are not.
small things endure
larger things decay and die,
the largest things explode
it's just like Michael Jackson:
the bigger you are, the bigger the bang
you go out with.

smallness is immortality.

But back to diamonds.
tiny and hard and adamant
they betoken love
in societies I have heard of;
they are a pretext for osculation copulation
simulation procreation indignation lust
just like Adam Sandler is a pretext to laugh
(he is not funny)
and Angelina Jolie is a pretext to think about beauty
(she is not beautiful)
and Albert Einstein is a pretext to think about genius
(he was wrong half the time)
and sex is a pretext to achieve release
(release from what?)
and death is a pretext for mourning
and birth is a pretext for joy
and injury is a pretext for pain
and love is pretext for lust
and up is a pretext for down
and death is a pretext for life.

we need excuses for everything

but there is no excuse for us

we are utterly without justification
too big to last,
too small to explode
uneconomical to recycle

neither modular nor upgradable
no way to flash our BIOS
no way to shuffle our helix

an Ant Farm is one big mind
the elementary school teacher declared
not having a clue what she was talking about.
children in the fifties watched through plexiglass
(new at the time)
until the whole thing got out of hand
and mom threw the Ant Farm away

the pretext is the thought before the word
the word is the pretext for the action
the action is the pretext for the thought
a multiple helix of pretense –
pre- tense: What comes before we know for sure
whether it is the present, the future, or the past
we are thinking about –

Think:

all by itself -- a tiny idea (like carbon,
like a diamond,
like desire)
it's an imperative
no subject, no object, no time –

Every verb is a command.

somewhere in the desert a tarantula is having his stroll
mating would be a disaster
so he keeps to himself
until a Park Ranger picks him up
shows him to the children
then puts him back down

good tarantula
says the ranger
good tarantula

carry the one

"Today we are going to speak about images and sounds – things humans make that are not tools, because perhaps animals make tools, or use things they find as tools or even as toys.

And thus we encounter the odd notions of creation, and of the 'artist,' the maker of images and sounds.

To find out something about their process we crawl into the tomb and gaze upon crafted objects, painted walls, sculpted images and in our arrogant anthropomorphism

assume that all of this was brought into being by 'artists' or 'artisans' with the sort of intent we attribute to 'artists' and 'artisans' of our day:

The intent to 'express,' to 'communicate,' to 'make a thing of beauty,' even merely to 'represent.'

However

this is not at all the case. What tourists blasély wonder over and scholars interminably ponder in caves and tombs and temples, in burial grounds and sacred places, in the palaces of the elite (to the extent that we unearth them) are strictly ritual objects

brought into being out of nothing but the fear of death.

They do not speak; they do not show; they are not art; they have no beauty.

They are not items from which we can reconstruct a 'history' or anything pertinent to sociology, anthropology, psychology, philosophy or any other modern discipline.

They are naught but objects of terror.

Now that Heidegger has finally put to rest all the prattle about Heraclitus and Parmenides,

antiquity is best left alone. Their fears can only

haunt us. There **is** such a thing as an 'ancient curse,' and it is much more potent than anyone suspected. Their fears will pursue us as long as –"

"Your formula is as simple as it is stupid:

'Ancient peoples were driven by fear; modern peoples are driven by desire.'

But as usual, and with your particular brand of arrogance – a word most often used by those to whom it is most applicable --, you ignore the obvious fact that desire is fear, and not the other way around."

At the exit to the subway a short woman with an apron is giving out free pretzels. Only they are long sugar-coated ones with no twist.

"You call this a pretzel?" the first man asks, the one about to launch a verbose defense at the charge of arrogance recently leveled against him.

"She can call it anything she likes," says the second man, with the slightly pissed-off tone of voice generally employed by prosecutors.

"You want one or not?" asks the short woman.
"I'll take two," replies Man Number One.

It is quite possible that back in time people were too busy to think. Or rather that the only element which necessitated thought was fear.

What is interesting about fear is that it has more flavors now than it had way back then. The fear that one may shortly be diagnosed with a terminal illness which was only named last week. But no worries: The drug your doctor blithely prescribed for you five years ago has now been discovered to cause early dementia, not to mention cancer, irritability, intolerance of politicians who wear blue ties, a statistically elevated tendency to slip on mossy stones while fording streams and thus be bitten by tiny larvae who are harmless except for their pincers which break the skin and allow parasites and toxins into your bloodstream which gradually lower one's body temperature to the extent that whenever you shake your boss's hand, she gives you a funny look and starts watching you.

"There's something about Roger" she remarks over herbal tea to the next person up the totem poll. Better mention it to her.
Better safe
than sorry.

locations don't count

Nobody knew where he came from.
We're talking about Jimmy, here.
Guy with three oval rings of keys hangin' off his belt.
Guy whose ribs show through his "Legally Blonde II" tee shirt
under his green army jacket.
Guy who walks like he knows where he's goin
in boots that have been everywhere.

Just blew into L.A. on the Santa Anas
more hungry than lost.
Met a hooker in Silver Lake told him,
"Just look for the yellow signs, man. Ones with the arrows."

After a five mile walk he spotted one.
"Hungry Man Base Camp."
That'll be me, said Jimmy.

"Where dah grub?" he asked, jingling his keys.
"Craft service other side uh'duh grip truck.
You been out wida second unit, shootin' pickups?"
"Word. It were a bitch and I be starved, bro."

Jimmy reached for a danish, a donut and, as an afterthought,
a napkin.
"You the new dolly grip?"
"Guess I am."
"I'm workin' pyro this show."

"Pyro girl," he thought. Wild.

"Wanna go for a walk?" he asked, surveying the fringes of the lifeless,
Pacoima-adjacent North Valley neighborhood where they were shooting.

"Okay. Nothin' else to blow up until 3:30."

Two blocks later:

"How come the tarot card lady's got a brand new Lexus in her driveway?"

"Maybe she knows somethin' we don't," says Jimmy.

"Got fifteen bucks?"

"Nah," says Jimmy. "But it's only ten anyway."

She points at the neon: **"Soul-mate special. \$15"**

"Hear they're gonna tear all this down and put up a theme park."

"That so," says Jimmy.

"So. And y'know what they're gonna' call it?"

"No."

"Waste Land."

Jimmy wipes the glaze on his Legally Blonde II tee shirt.

"Don't mind me," says pyro girl. "I did two quarters at UCLA."

"Who won?"

"Gaudeamus sequitur. Hey don't you gotta' get back and push that dolly, or like – lay some track?"

"Guess so."

"I like you," says pyro girl.

"How come?"

"Cuz you're the only man on this shoot whose gut doesn't hang lower than his –"

Something goes boom.

"Genny just blew. Take a break, people."

Voice over a bullhorn.

"Let's go in here," says pyro girl, opening the door to an empty Star Wagon.

She latches it behind her.

Twenty five minutes later.

"I like coningulatin' even more than I like coffulatin'."

Says Jimmy.

"I never met a guy like you," says Sarah, offering him a tictac.

Ten hours later, Jimmy helped Sarah to wrap; and later still, at her place in Reseda, to unwrap.

Jimmy crashed at Sarah's place for three months. Days he spent riding busses, looking for old crew tee shirts at the Goodwill and in dumpsters, following the yellow signs. Meanwhile she taught him enough about pyro so that he could do assisting on heavy days. And at the end of a long night of donuts and explosions, she was the powder, and he was the fuse.

Then Sarah got a three-week gig on a cycle pic shooting from Lone Pine up to the Funeral Mountains, edge of Death Valley.

For the first time in his life, as far as he remembered, Jimmy was lonely. He tried to read her books on pyrotechnics, but got stuck on words like "exothermic" and "deflagration." Reading did not come naturally to Jimmy.

Then one night he heard her old Datsun pull up and caught himself smiling. Never before had Jimmy wanted to see someone. He'd forgotten to shave. He'd forgotten to put on a fresh crew tee shirt. Everything was wrong.

"Oh, hi Jimmy," says Sarah. "Dave, this is Jimmy. He's been doing some assisting for me. Found what you need for tomorrow, Jim? Early call, huh?" she asks, as she ushers him out the door.

"Who is that guy?"

"First A.D. from the show I just finished. He's got me a new gig starting Tuesday. Six weeks in Seattle."

"You ballin' him?"

"Whoa, dude. Remember The Bellow The Line Bible, Chapter One, Verse One: **Locations Don't Count.**"

"What does that mean?"

"It means that when you're on location, you can make it with whoever you want. Even if you're married or living with someone or have a life partner. **LDC.** I've even seen it on a tee shirt."

"But this aint no location."

"For pyro girl, the earth is her location. Now get lost, creep. Go back to where you came from. And next time you want to get fed or get laid, just look for the yellow sign."

It's a week later. Jimmy's standing up on the bus, jangling his keys, looking out the window for that color. **Then he sees it: "Inferno Basecamp."** He reaches for the cord, but it's too late.

"I'm the last nigger alive and I've seen Jesus Christ."

A young white kid with ear buds and iPod, his head never stops boppin', his hip never stops hoppin'. He be blissed.

"I'm the last nigger alive and I've seen Jesus Christ."

"Hey, dude," says Jimmy to the kid. *"Locations Don't Count."* Below the Line Bible, Chapter One, Verse One. **Locations Don't Count.**

"What you botherin' the kid for?" asks the fat lady driver.

"Locations Don't Count!"

"I'm the last nigger alive and I've seen Jesus Christ."

Two L.A. County Sheriffs Deputies appear behind Jimmy, a man and a woman.

"Let's see some ID."

"Read The Below the Line Bible. **Locations don't count!"**

"I'm the last nigger alive and I've seen Jesus Christ!"

It's just after dusk on the busway in the mid-San Fernando Valley of Los Angeles, California. We're at the donut shop across from L.A. Valley College, minding our own business, wiping the glaze on our shirt, since the napkins they give you are so small.

But we can just barely see two uniformed deputies escorting a handcuffed man in a green army jacket off the double-length Orange Line headed to the NoHo subway, where it connects with Metrorail, Amtrak, and all points east.

It's pretty far away, but it seems to us like the sheriffs are roughing the guy up a bit, like he's refusing to walk in the direction they want him to go.

And it looks to us as if the guy is shouting something. Shouting it loudly, tearing at the cuffs trying to shout it ever louder, for all the world to hear.

But we're too far away.

We can't make out a thing.

Only the sound of the busses.

And the cars.

And a staple gun, attaching a yellow sign to a telephone poll.

lockdown

"She told me I'd let the cat out of the bag. It wasn't just a complaint. It was an accusation."

"So what does any god-fearing, self-respecting feline do when freed from its bag?"

"You're just trying to change the subject. You don't want to talk about Shirley anymore. Shirley, the love of my life. The future mother of my erstwhile daughter and son, Roxie Rae and Rex Haltenfisch."

"So what does it do? You know: the cat. **What does the cat do?**"

"Frankly, George, I don't give a ---"

"It looks for its litter box, then is really pissed off because you bought the scented litter by mistake. Let that be a lesson to you."

That afternoon in Trader Joes he had seen a mother and daughter growing into one another as if we all had sex, had offspring, reared them for a while and then they merged back into us like Heinrich and Mathilde's little daughter, who sat by a coffin and rejuvenated him, like a clock with the rudely disheveled notion that it's springtime or a sea that wants to pull a prank, or tell a joke, or command the troops but does not know quite how to go about it.

"So which do you prefer? More of this paradoxical hubbub and mercilessly splintered horizons, or the peace and fragmentation of your own fucking life?"

"I'll take Shirley."

"That's what I thought you'd say. And by the way, my name isn't George. It hasn't been for the last twenty minutes.

"And furthermore, if a lion could speak, he'd say that he far prefers antelopes to us and from his perspective, he'd be right. So the crucial question is: Is it only humans that have aesthetics?"

"And by the way, to what question is 'cuttlebone' the answer? Or 'iridium'? Or 'orgasm'? Or 'manipulation'? Or 'distance'? Assume for a moment that everything begins with questions that we have long since forgotten. It's like psychoanalysis. What we should be seeking are not 'answers,' but rather all the forgotten questions."

Crisper than fellatio at dawn, slower than an easement on an abandoned property, settling into myriad indistinct multiplicities like comfort food and after half an hour you're hungry

for combat, for dispersal of all your faculties, for piercing jetstreams in all of their insuperable
agony and bliss hungry for themes, tunes, principles, paragraphs
questions
even questions

To what question is "love" an answer?

To what question is "birth" an answer?

To what question are tears an answer, or the much-to-be-hoped-for sex shudder, or that feeling
that you're losing it, have lost it, will lose it

To what question is "it" an answer?

"So tell me: Why did the cat stay in the bag so long? I mean, you tried to let it out. You
offered it catnip and cat toys and everything else to which the word 'cat' is either a prefix or a
suffix, and it still stayed there

"You haven't got a clue.

"We'll I'll tell you:

It's because if she was let out of the bag Dr. Schrödinger wouldn't pet her."

ii.

"We were camping out on a high mountain with low visibility due to thunder. 'There are so
many
planes overhead,' said a girl with braids the color of straw and much else
to recommend her.

'It means war,' said the guy with clumsy spectacles and a hoodie with a fur color.

'He would look much better if he got contacts,' thought the girl.

'Are you sure it's safe here tonight?' I asked, toying with his gloom like a naughty child
with a poisonous spider.

"It was then that he approached. The shadow with the long cape and the quiet dog.
Very quiet.

Too quiet

for his own good. And he (meaning the man) clearly had no business here. (Unlike the dog.
Dogs have business everywhere.) 'Sliverman' I joked inside my head. Then caught myself.
Jokes never saved anyone from anything.

'Hi' said the other girl – not my girl, just the other girl --, looking up and attempting to smile.

Then the dog strained at its leash and tugged the shadow toward our fire, where there was still
the smell of meat.

'We have a permit' said the bespectacled fellow in a voice so throttled it sounded as if he was
inhaling as he attempted to speak.

'Don't move,' said the shadow, in a voice one would not have expected. But what voice would
one expect a shadow to have? Or God or the devil for that matter. Or death, to be perfectly
candid about it.

'I'm the woodman.' That voice again, only different this time, as if someone – God, death or
the devil – was making his first appearance in our part of the universe and was about to

lay down the law.

'I've got news for you. Which would you like to hear first: The good news or the bad news?'"
None of the four of us spoke. Sliverman, shadowed in his cape with its many dark folds,
seemed as if he might be younger than one would expect God, the devil or death to be.
'Whatever it is we don't want to hear it' said I, figuring this was some person's idea of a prank.
Then there was a grand pause in my head. Before my eyes nettles swayed in the wind and my
friends' (if they were my friends) expressions changed and the dog tugged at his leash only
very slowly and in a silence
octaves below reality

and I heard my voice say in his voice
say inside my head in his voice
that life is just someone's idea of a prank,
death is just someone's idea of a prank
we're the butt of the joke and as such
we've served our purpose
which was inconsequential at best
in the greater scheme of things

"By this time the shadow had spoken and the three others were beginning to pack up
everything we had brought up the mountain. It was impossible to read their expressions.
They did not seem in any great hurry.
They paid no attention to me.

If I just sit here...

If I just sit here eventually my leg will 'fall asleep,' I will feel cold, I will get thirsty, I will
need to urinate.

I desperately wanted for one or more of those things to happen. But they didn't. And it did not
take long for me to realize that I had already become
just part of the scenery, obscure in the moonless night, uninteresting, ignorable, something at
best

to stumble upon.

But soon it felt good. Not to have to scratch or drink or urinate or... or go down the mountain
or look for a job or a girl or a prize.

And when they were all gone (since the shadow and my friends had departed together)
it felt good to be alone.

The planes overhead

louder and louder ones, larger and larger ones,
ones with bombs

to drop somewhere,

did not worry me anymore.

"When all this begins again I will be here.

Ready with my wisdom, my scruples and my
good intentions ready to set out
on the right foot

'Every beginning is a new ending' I once heard someone say.

Dialogue in a film.

Things sputter for a while then miss a stroke, blow a synapse, invert the boson and stop again.

After months or decades (who was I to say?) there were no birds (planes had long since been forgotten)

The leaves did what leaves do – they left somehow, fallen, gray, swept away by what was left of the wind

and were not replaced then the branches from which the leaves had fallen also fell and these were

the last sounds

other than the wind.

The insects had hidden under the leaves I had heard the slow shuffle of their lives for a while but not for long.

I hoped for the mutants to arrive

right about now wasn't that what was supposed to happen? a tiny vicious kind of ant with a head like a dog or a cyclops or Franz Brentano or Edmund Husserl or Jean-Paul Sartre and speaking of whom

as part of the scenery I still had **intent** – more **intent**, in fact, than ever what I saw was what I

intended to see,

what I hoped was what I intended to hope

but

hoping is not being

hoping is not making

hoping only stops things

from really happening and so

the mutants remained inside me, me, me, part of the scenery, me in whom the creatures of the future world the eventual new men who would (as we had done) learn how to kill before they

learned how to love (lessons, perhaps, to be glossed over in favor of trigonometry) the eventual new men who would (as we had done) decide that some were better than others and had done so

with no rational basis or purpose other than acquisitiveness, a sturdy principle run amok

only in humans the eventual new men who would watch other life around them and

before too long (in the context of eternity)

wipe them out, and each other –

the mutants inside me were locked up 'for their own good' like violent mental patients accused (but not convicted) of vast but undefinable crimes and now, once again, they have

started a riot the ants and the three-headed serpents and the trees that eat the sky and more

than anyone else

the eventual men The guards are in a panic they call the warden on primitive wall phones someone somewhere has declared a **state of emergency** but there is no water for the

cannons, no stun left in the guns

the inmates the prisoners the malign captives must be placed on

lockdown

says the warden in the voice of the woodman which is my voice which is me

me

part of the scenery.

Scenery. Something to be seen. But no one to see.

Can there be sight without life?

Were we ever here for any good purpose?

Was anything ever for any good purpose? Or is this just

one more confusion

of purpose with intent?

one more confusion

one more confusion

The inmates the prisoners the captives who

if they were only released

would make the future

have calmed down now.

The warden

The warden with my name if I had a name

has given them back

their TV privileges their spousal visitations their condoms their illicit substances

smuggled in

from the past,

and once again

for the umpteenth time

they realize

that they are better off

where they are."

iii

Frank

the guy who had been chatting with his friend who had been George up until twenty minutes ago

is sitting on some sofa mired in those inescapable imaginings one has only his are

(needless to say) about Shirley Shirley in her bed (although it's only midafternoon)

with

a glass of wine on her night table and a joint and one of those 'shade' books or 'light and fire' perhaps or 'drowning in you' or some other entertainment franchise and also on the night

stand other things while she Shirley under her blue blanket her teddy bear shoved unceremoniously

to one side her hands under the pink sheets is masturbating but what's

worse

she is thinking about

thinking about

about

George –

even though he is now

someone else who knows who? and even though

Frank -- even though his encapsulating imagining of Shirley is as real as anything else as real
as he is --
more so --
still misses George the only person he can genuinely talk to even though he's kind of
an asshole
"Why the fuck do
people change?"

extension speaker

"Since somewhere around 1968 or 1970 – but even more so after 1980 and into the 21st Century, the Two Great Themes of American popular entertainment and popular culture have been

The Redemption of the American Asshole and **The Cult of The Cute.**

"Every night on television a dozen assholes, guys (and sometimes girls) who would be intolerable in so-called 'real life,' do all the rude, obnoxious, narcissistic, uncaring, unfeeling things that assholes do, and then are redeemed. Everyone loves them, and (most important) they get what they want. The lesson seems to be: 'The bigger an asshole someone is, the better the 'real person' is underneath. It's as if we are being told, 'To be a healer one must first experience being a killer,' or 'To love animals one must first torture them.' The plot always flips so that the asshole wins and is loved by the person she or he wants. And at the end of the day, everyone loves a winner.

"As far as **The Cult of The Cute** is concerned, every night viewers are treated to cute young people jabbering cute (albeit utterly solipsistic, egocentric and uncommunicative) dialogue while mugging at the camera (and thus at the viewer) as if they are saying with their every word and gesture, 'See how **cute** I am. I am so bleeping adorable, I can get away with anything. If I reach for your husband's fly under the table or let my bull mastiff do his thing on your lawn or back out of my driveway and smash into your car or put on my best Brad Pitt smile and say that we should go to my hotel room and one or both of us should undress because one or both of us has the cutest tattoo it's *okay*.' The more boundaries you cross, the more you invade someone else's space, the cuter, and more loveable, you are

"Needless to say these Two Great Themes go hand in hand.

"Siegfried Kracauer once wrote a book about how German cinema in the 1920s paved the way for Hitler. His specific analysis has been challenged (*Caligari* may have actually been intended as a revolutionary film in some way), but the general idea is interesting, particularly when Kracauer dealt with the German motion picture comedies of the time (*Die Drei von der Tankstelle* and so forth) and how their mindset (if one can call it that) helped create a medium in which Nazism could take root and flourish, along the lines of a culture for successfully growing bacteria. Despite (or perhaps because of) the fact that many people in the American entertainment business today are liberals, it is sometimes assumed that films, television and even pop music have a liberal influence on their audience. I argue instead that the two great themes of American popular entertainment, **The Redemption of the Asshole** and **The Cult of the Cute**, have created an atmosphere in which not only has personal insensitivity grown and empathy diminished, but racism and sexism have increased."

"Yo. I'm the Party to the Conversation Formerly Known as George. The entertainment business just gives people what they want, or to be more precise, what they will pay for *and/or* what can be used as a medium to seduce them into spending money on other things, as in 'product placement,' where producers get money for displaying certain cars or shoes or bras in their films or TV shows. But that's just the tip of the iceberg. The US economy is based 70% on consumer spending, but as more and more people see themselves as 'lower' rather than 'middle' class, families' disposable incomes are going down. That means that advertising – inducement of people to spend money – is more omnipresent, more pervasive, and more insidious than ever before. Forget about what they used to say about subliminal flashes of products appearing in movies or on TV, or even in songs. With the internet everything (well, not quite everything) is out in the open. All of your presumed 'needs' follow you everywhere you go, together with the means for their satisfaction, like (to paraphrase Arseny Tarkovsky) a madman stalking you with a razor.

"But (and you were just waiting for me to say this) *it's much worse than that.*

"For a while people were saying, 'Be yourself. Everyone else is taken.' Everyone assumed that some famous person had said it – maybe (God help us) even a *philosopher*. Then the source was revealed: It had been invented as an advertising slogan for a hardware store in the Midwest called Menard's. I know Menard's exists. I even bought a hot water heater at their store in Fridley, Minnesota.

"But actually I see things differently. Just like television (and the internet and billboards and your cell phone and entire cars and trucks and busses and buildings -- everywhere you look) is a full immersion advertising experience, so is TV a nonstop 'catwalk' in which you can watch actors 'wearing' certain personalities. So all you need to do is sit in front of your Very Wide Screen and pick the personality you want. Of course your choice will not be based on any kind of personal taste or (shall we call it) contemplation, but on which character is successful and (most important) gets the things you want. So you're going to go for the personality of the character who gets money (if that's what you want), or sex (if that's what you want), or power (if that's what you want), or is the life of the party (if that's what you want to be). Of course you are never going to choose the intellectual or artistic or scholarly or spiritual personality, because the actors wearing those invariably end up with zip."

"George?"

"I haven't been 'George' since Hillary lost to Obama."

"Then whoever you are: Shut the fuck up."

Canned laughter and applause.

Someone once told us that all of the canned laughter in TV shows was recorded in the 1950s, meaning that by now most of the people whose laughter you hear – and (in theory) join in on – are dead.

Who "on the other side" (even behind the curtains at the séance, or underneath the Ouija board) are laughing at us right now? Well, plenty. But are they "the right people"? Is our current "real world" merely mass entertainment created to invoke the laughter of the dead?

Well why not?

Makes as much sense as anything.

(The woman is 93 and in hospice care. Suddenly she wonders what her daughter is thinking.

Soon she shall know.

And she shall smile. Without any longing. Without any regret.

Death is nothing but vicarious living. Being an audience member for all eternity. Only now it's finally enjoyable, since no one is trying to get you to part with your money. And the madman of fate or the madman of commerce or the madman of hope or all three have at long last hung up their razor.)

reprisal

“When my dad was nearly seventy he started paying attention for the first time to the phases of the moon. That was the beginning of the end for him.

“He was a post-war kid, like so many others. Remember when ‘post-war’ meant ‘after World War II’? That’s back when people thought that after that war, ‘the war to end all wars – or was that World War I? – wars would end? Were they really stupid enough to think that? ‘Wars will never stop’ his dad used to say, ‘until we teach the Russians a god-damned lesson. That’s what Churchill wanted to do: Keep our tanks rolling east until the whole darned lot of them were finished off, including the bleeding Chinese, who are worse than the Japs. At least the Japs are not communists.’

“Well my dad didn’t necessarily buy into all that, or what they called ‘The Domino Theory’ that if the Russians and the Chi-Coms kept flipping into country after country, eventually they’d conquer America. No, my dad didn’t buy into that. But on the other hand, what else was there to buy into? There were the Civil Rights people who said that the world would be a better place – a nicer and a safer place – once Negroes (as they called them back then) were given more rights. Well my dad did buy into that – sort of. One night, at around age eleven, he was taking a bath and decided that he’d better make up his mind what political party he should be a member of. ‘I’m a liberal,’ he said to himself, mainly because the conservative kids he knew were creepy and judgmental and the conservative girls were ugly unlike the liberal girls – but then he caught himself in his own thinking and said, ‘I’m a liberal because I don’t want people to suffer, I want nature and animals to be left alone, I want the county run respecting some *higher principle* even if I don’t really know what that higher principle should be.’

“But that still didn’t help him decide what to say if other kids or even adults asked him which political party he liked. So the water in the tub was still kind of warm (although rapidly cooling since there was no heat in the bathroom) and he kept on thinking for another ten minutes. To wrap matters up in his head he finally stated his conclusion: ‘I can’t be a Democrat because where I live most Democrats support segregation and in the rest of the country they work on assembly lines and drive busses and join unions and go on strike and they never really do anything in life: Don’t create things, don’t cause things to happen. They are just workers and when they are dead, no one will remember them. So: Here’s what I am: **I am a Liberal Republican.**’ And as the water swirled down the drain he was relieved that he had finally reached a conclusion..

“That was a little bit before Martin Luther King, John F. Kennedy, and Vietnam. That was a little bit before The Haight-Ashbery, pot, acid, the Grateful Dead, Baba Ram Das, Zen retreats, communes, cults, free love, Timothy Leary, Bob Dylan, Allen Ginsberg, even the Beatles – who am I forgetting? Now my dad says, ‘I am not nostalgic. If I never hear Bob Dylan again it will be too soon.’ But that has only been since he started paying attention to the phases of the moon.

“By that time my dad’s generation had acquired a name: **Baby Boomers**. He thought that name showed an attitude that was supercilious toward the hundreds of thousands of kids all of those returning military men (like his father) had so much wanted to sire after World War II. My dad felt trivialized by that name. But it also made him think: ‘Things that go *boom* do so because they *explode*.’ Those hundreds of thousands of kids all had high expectations (as they’d say) but expectations of what? The Beatniks out in San Francisco were already saying the fifties are crap suburbia and I Love Lucy and Gunsmoke are crap, TV dinners and even baseball are crap drop out and live off the fat of the land man since the land will always be fat, too fat and my dad, perhaps more than other kids, was aware of all that, somewhat intrigued by all of that but on the other hand he was not going to work on an assembly line he was going to go to college and after that he would do all the things his parents had done: have 2.2 children and 2.2 cars while mom goes shopping and talks on the phone with her friends. And why not? And all he needed was a B.A. four years what’s that? But on the other hand maybe being Just Another Adult, a comfortable Liberal Republican Adult living in suburbia and going to ‘the office’ (which is where dads went in 1950s TV shows – what they did there was never made clear, except that they had pretty secretaries and a few male friends who talked about nothing but sports and were just like them in every way) was not that... exciting or gratifying or fulfilling or rewarding and somehow he wondered not only if this is what he wanted but also if there would be enough offices for all the boys like him to grow up and sit in and smile at their secretaries in and then drive home in their Buicks and watch Perry Mason on television might there not be too many boomers maybe a few of them really did need to explode.

“And meanwhile, back in the unreachable strata of power and money, where there is nothing to fear not except ‘fear itself’ but – actually UP THERE they feared nothing, and they still don’t... so back in that unreachable strata of power and money, The War started reaching its graspy hands into colleges (‘There goes another *Bachelor of Arts in English Literature* sheepskin that we won’t need to print...’), not to mention the ghettos (but we never mention them). “And meanwhile, back where the hippies hung out merchants at a lower level supplied by merchants higher up started to peddle smack and coke and methedrine. My dad remembers that

he was taking a poetry class that met at different people's houses, and one night the kids were talking and one of them said that the brother of someone she knew had 'OD'd.' My dad had never heard that expression before. The others had to explain to him what it meant, as if he were an overprotected child. But the fact that he now knew that his peers were using hard drugs and dying was less upsetting than the fact that he had been embarrassed in front of the girl who wrote 'nice' poems and had long hair and was beautiful. Months after that he picked her and her boyfriend and another girl up hitchhiking. He had just bought lunch at the Jack in the Box drive-through and was embarrassed yet again.

"But by then he had started hearing it all the time: Boomers were going boom left and right, sliced and diced by shrapnel in Nam, ODing on heroin in the gutter, escaping into mindlessness in cults, killing themselves one way or another kill or be killed kill yourself or wait for someone else to kill you it makes no difference in the greater scheme of things.

"My dad completed a couple of the most impractical degrees you could possibly imagine at a 'highly rated' state university but there was no *office* waiting for him to wear one of his several suits to (fifties TV dads had always worn suits – my dad imagined that he and his fellow boomers had been procreated by dads wearing suits) and with his secretary smiling eight hours a day, bringing him coffee, even cigarettes, making sure that the sports page was always open on his desk when he arrived not at work -- fifties dads didn't exactly 'work' in their offices – but at The Office.

"So my dad took his impractical degrees (after a decade or so he had lost both of them – I mean he still 'had' them, but the sheepskins had disappeared) and then did one thing or another until around the age of fifty he was taking a shower one day (by then showers were in and baths were out) and started thinking again in the same fashion in which he had done his eleven-years-old thinking about how he was a **Liberal Republican**. And what my dad thought was that that the *Baby Boomers*, now middle aged (actually a bit older than middle-aged) had been

The Expendable Generation.

Just as among any population of fauna or flora if the population of individuals reaches an unsupportable level forces develop -- you might even call them entropic forces, although biologists probably have a better word – to reduce the size of that population back to a sustainable level. Does natural selection enter the picture here? Is it always the individuals most pertinent to the evolution (and thus the improvement) of the species who survive this systemic culling? So the war (there's always a war: as Ingeborg Bachmann wrote, 'Wars are not declared; they are continued'), drugs,

suicide, cults, had merely been natural forces to reduce the size of the population, or at least, to remove a good portion of it from the work force so that it was not competing for jobs.

Simple as that.

But back to natural selection: Is it the guy who got a deferment and became a car salesman after that who would have sired another Wittgenstein, or is it the hippie who dodged the draft then stuck a needle in his arm?

Perhaps

among humans

natural selection favors conformity.

"My dad allowed himself the luxury of enjoying the shower for sixty seconds longer.

'The Expendable Generation.' Their parents were living longer and retiring later. The economy was boom/bust as usual, but in no event could it possibly absorb

all of those post-war babies as they

(as babies do)

turned into adults. 'I have seen the best minds of my generation destroyed by madness' wrote Allen Ginsberg in a poem my dad read in the second year of high school. He even bought the LP with money he pilfered somehow from his mom's purse. 'Starving, hysterical, naked – dragging themselves through the Negro streets at dawn, looking for an angry fix.'

The Expendable Generation.

More recently my dad has started to ask

if they had left their mark: 'The 'leaders' from that generation who rose to the top (or more accurately, who were chosen from the top to play the part of 'leaders') were not particularly enlightened. They are still trying to run the show, even though they have no vision.'

But neither, he has realized more recently, did my dad.

'Generally speaking,' he said one day, 'people are too stupid to be smart.'

That's the sort of thing my dad says these days.

'The man and woman trying to raise their family on fifty thousand dollars a year can no longer think

of themselves

as *middle class*. But *what can they think?*

No one speaks for them. The system is in no way designed for their benefit. Maybe this is all one big accident.'

That's the sort of thing my dad says

nowadays

as he contemplates the brown spots on the lawn of his rented house in a neighborhood where nobody can afford to buy homes but still

homeless people camp out on the sidewalks with their massive piles of detritus and their cell phones.

"One afternoon before . . . before all this happened . . . I went down to see him. Should I feel guilty that it felt like an obligation? I had guessed – perhaps it was just intuition, or some sort of mental energy he was sending out – that he had fallen in love again, and I was worried. The lights were turned off all over the house, and as we sat in his living room, where the only furniture consisted of two frayed sofas from Ikea and an elaborate stereo system he had built

himself years before, he began to talk, as if to himself. I should say that he had taken a six pack of beer from the refrigerator and the first half a can had gone right to his head. He told me that on an afternoon such as this he had visited Kate at her apartment near the north end of campus. She had called him and told him not to come over, which guaranteed that he would. When he got there he knocked on her floor-to-ceiling wooden door in the middle of a dark corridor. He heard female conversation inside, but no one answered. He kept knocking until finally Kate, his girlfriend, opened the door a crack. Through the crack he saw a large, androgynous-looking woman with a tumbler of red wine in her hand. The woman (Dixie, he later learned her name was) smirked at him. My dad's voice quavered as he asked Kate, 'Who's she?' 'My girlfriend from when I was at Sarah Lawrence.' 'Girlfriend?' Dixie's smirk turned into a look of disdain, or at least what passes for a look of disdain on the face of a twenty-year-old woman. 'You should go now. I'll call you later.'

"My dad went back to the Quaker boarding house where he lived, took his clothes, books and Silvertone bass guitar amp from the closet in his room, and packed them quickly into his blue Plymouth station wagon. In half an hour he was on the road to back east. The term was over and he and Kate had planned to drive back together, but now my dad just wanted to get away. Thirty hours later he was with his parents in his old room in their apartment overlooking the Potomac. It was not really 'his old room.' His parents had moved into that apartment while he was away at college and had taken all of my dad's old furniture with them. He fell asleep looking at the eccentric green desk his father had built for him when he was four. Glued onto it were a yellow Saturn and other yellow wooden heavenly bodies. These were intended to inspire my dad to aim at the stars. When he was a child the phosphorescent paint his father had used made them glow. The moon had always been especially bright. But now it was fifteen years later and they no longer emitted any light. If anything they seemed to absorb the darkness.

"My dad felt trapped. His parents were drinking and fighting just as they had always done. And the girl he had played up to in high school, Julie, had stayed in Colorado to attend summer sessions. Should he go there? Or to New York, which he loved more than anywhere?

"One day a small envelope arrived for him. He recognized the straight-up-and-down handwriting. In the enclosed note Kate told him that she was staying with her friend Pam in Pittsburg. Two days later he tossed some clothes into his Plymouth and drove there. Pam was living in a nearly lightless basement apartment. In the main area were a couch, a small breakfast table from the Goodwill, a record player with a center spindle so that it would play a stack of LPs, and an ironing board. Pam and Kate wanted to order a pizza, so they did. Afterwards Julie and my dad retired to the small nook where she said she had been sleeping. It was separated from the main area only by one wall. Otherwise it was open. My dad, who had been sharing wine with the two women, took off his clothes. At the sight of Julie he had gotten an erection and was eager to enter her and rid himself of some of the tension that had been building up inside him for weeks.

"'I want you to do what women like,' Kate said to him. The only response my dad could think of was, 'I want you!' or words to that effect. 'Or would you like me to go lie down with Pam?'

"My dad opened a second beer, which by this time was starting to get warm. The late afternoon sun hitting the closed blinds brought more heat than light.

"The next year my dad and Kate were living together in a south campus apartment. He was working on his second impractical degree. At this point in the conversation my dad said, 'Study something you love and you'll never work a day in your life.' To which I replied: 'Because there are no jobs in that field. I know all the punch lines. You taught me that.'

"There was silence for two or three minutes while my dad sipped at his beer. I, against my better judgment, opened another can for myself. I was halfway hoping that he wouldn't, but my dad continued his story. Only what he was talking about now had happened two years previously.

"His parents had allowed him to throw a party for his high school friends at their old apartment up the hill from Glencarlyn. It was really not large enough for a party, particularly since a baby grand piano, at which my father would pound improvisations, took up most of the living room. But it was almost summer and there was a pool downstairs across from the parking lot. Of course my dad had invited Julie, the girl he had hoped would fall in love with him. But instead all she had done was become his debate partner, at which she was not very good. But that was okay. She was Julie.

"So Julie came, looking as if she was there against her parents' wishes. Many of the other kids my dad did not recognize. In particular there was a guy whom he later learned went to high school somewhere south of Mount Vernon, a long way off. His name was Rick and he and Julie took a shine to one another instantly. Jane, an acquaintance of my dad's who worked on school plays in which my dad often starred, went into the bathroom and changed into her skimpy green bikini. She was sexy in that unsexy way high school girls were back then. She and many of the other kids went with her down to the pool. My dad looked around but couldn't find Julie or Rick. He felt like staying upstairs and banging some huge out-of-tune chords on the piano, since that was what he really wanted to do, but instead took the elevator down and went over to the pool. My dad hated swimming so he just stood there, watching. Some of the boys looked like they would soon no longer be children; some of the girls looked like it was not impossible that they would be women before too many more moons waxed and waned. My dad said he felt that everyone there was being dragged into the future. Some were resisting more than others. Then he saw his father sitting in a lounge chair at the far end of the pool, a highball in his hand, gazing at Jane. He was being dragged into the future too, thought my dad. But he did not want to go. He would prefer to stay where he was, with his scotch and with his eyes pinned to drops of water on Jane's body. On her back, on her thighs.

"Then my dad flashed forward again. The airless room, the warm beer, my eagerness to leave, his own soft, musical voice, were getting him confused. Worse still, my dad, was starting to repeat himself. But it seemed deliberate somehow, like a musical recapitulation, or some sort of conjuring act in which he hoped further details would emerge from hidden pockets of his memory.

"A year after the incident with Dixie and the time in Pittsburg with Pam, Kate and my dad were living together in an apartment on the south side – the 'hippie' side – of campus. One afternoon my dad came home from his work study job cleaning aquariums. He heard two female voices and the sound of running water coming from the bathroom. Should he knock? (Again?) Instead

he said, 'Kate? Would you like me to go back out?' 'No, I'll be out in a minute.' Sooner than that she opened the door a crack and he saw through the translucent shower curtain a young woman drying herself with a towel. Kate was fully clothed in black jeans and long-sleeved black top. 'Do you need another towel?' she asked over her shoulder. 'Is there a guy out there?' said the girl behind the shower curtain. 'It's okay. I'll close the door so you can get dressed.'

"Five minutes later the young woman emerged from the bathroom. She was around seventeen or eighteen with medium-length brown hair, reasonably pleasant features including (or except for) the freckles, an understated but attractive figure, but otherwise unremarkable in every way. The girl seemed anxious to leave.

"'Why don't you come back for dinner?' Kate asked in an utterly matter-of-fact tone of voice. Watching Kate as she stood very close to the girl, close enough to touch a strand of her still-wet hair, my dad thought again how short Kate was. When he and Kate were walking together, she made him feel like a giant. In some ways but not in others.

"'Uh, maybe. Does your friend live here with you?' 'Some of the time,' answered Kate, as if she were telling the truth. 'He can bring some wine and some pot. And I think I've got some clothes for you. Or leave your things here and I'll wash them.'

"'Was this girl from nowhere hesitating?' 'No thanks.'

"'Well okay, but come back at seven. Just knock.' And sixty seconds later she was gone.

"'The shower girl didn't come back that night.' My dad's voice trailed off. His breathing was slow and shallow, and his eyes were blank. Finally he reached over, pulled another can of lager from its plastic rim, and read the label silently: '*Simpler Times*.' He pulled the pop top and held the beer in his hand but didn't drink any. From that moment on I felt that I wasn't there at all, not in my dad's house at all. And yet he resumed speaking, in a voice I thought must be the one he hears inside his head when recounting memories to himself.

"'Ever since then I have thought about that night on south campus that didn't happen. How the three of us had been sitting around a hookah in our living room with the upright piano I never played and my stereo, filled with marijuana smoke. I had just passed the tube to Kate but the fire in the bowl had gone out. Instead of relighting it I reached my hand up the back of Kate's black top. She glanced over at the girl as I did this, but she, the girl, was zoned out, staring at nothing in her lap. With both hands I pulled off Kate's shirt and for a moment stopped to look at her body. Kate reached over for the matches, relit the hookah, then handed me the tube. I took a deep toke then, trying to hold it in, said, 'There's not much left.' Julie leaned over and put her lips to mine as I exhaled.

"'Then Kate lit the bowl again and scooted her body over toward the girl. Kate took a deep toke then touched the girl's cheek. At that moment the girl 'came to' and saw that this long-haired, half-naked woman was a foot away from her. Kate glanced toward me. 'It's okay,' I said, or meant to say, or might have said, as Kate took the girl's face into her hands and brought her lips to hers. I could see a flash of Kate's tongue flicking an opening for itself. Then Kate exhaled. The girl lay back as Kate continued to caress her face. Then lower. All over.'

"When I was much younger my dad had told me about the time he had seen two men kissing on the back porch of a bar in the Philippines, two young Navy men like himself, and how it had been the most disgusting thing he had ever witnessed. Now I felt . . . I felt . . . The scene my father described was so . . . so real. I had watched it and felt it and lived it as I sat there. And yet I had no power to stop my dad from going on with his story.

"Ever since that memory of a night that never happened has run through my head every time I have made love to a woman. Including your mother. Including on the night, as she had so ardently planned, when you were conceived.'

"Then my father continued speaking as if nothing special had occurred. He picked up his previous beer with his other hand and realized that neither of them was empty. He raised and lowered them as if attempting to ascertain which was more full. After a moment he put the fuller one on the floor.

"His story resumed from the time the shower girl had left the apartment that afternoon. Kate had handed him a small envelope which had been lying on the kitchen counter. The handwriting on this one was quite different from the one he had received from Kate at his parents'. Attempts at curlicues that had all gone wrong. There was no question that it had been written by. . . a girl. One could almost guess her age, her dreams, her state of mind. The first thing he saw was the signature: *Julie*. The last time he had seen her was on the night of the senior prom. He had not gone (he had no girl to go with), so he found himself driving around the suburb as he often did. Before very long he found himself driving very slowly down the quiet street where Julie lived. It was already dark, around seven o'clock, and he knew that by this time Rick would already have picked her up to take her to the prom. Only there she was, standing on her front step, the screen door shut behind her, wearing a long green dress. My dad pulled over in his parents' two-toned Buick and looked at her. Should he smile? Should he smirk? It was kind of incredible that Rick would be this late. But there is where my dad's memory of that moment stopped, or rather divided into two paths. On one path my dad turned off the ignition and began to walk toward Julie. "I've been stood up," she said. "What are you going to do?" my dad asked. "Wait for him," Julie answered. "You should go now." On the other path in his memory no words are spoken. He and Julie exchange a look, and he drives away. However, he said, he will never, to his dying day, forget that green dress.

"Julie's note was very simple. It said that Rick was being shipped off in ten days to Nam from Oakland and she wanted to spend a night with him before he left. Could she stay with my dad for a couple of nights before Rick got there, and also, could he find a motel for them?

"A while later he attempted to call Julie at her dorm in Colorado, but succeeded only in reaching clueless girls who either didn't know her, or pretended not to. The next day my dad and Julie did speak. It was strange hearing the toneless lilt of her voice again, the voice that had lost so many high school debates. Of course he would do these things for her. Before long they hung up. Neither of them had anything more to say to the other, except in her own way Julie had told my dad that she wanted to give Rick her virginity because he might not come back.

"The motel my dad found for them was a gray stucco court across the street from the Civic Center. He could have looked for a more attractive one with flowers and nicer windows, but for some reason he didn't.

"Later that week my dad picked Julie up at the Oakland airport. She looked thinner and more wan than he remembered her, as if college had taken something away from her rather than giving her anything – any hope or knowledge or dream to base a life upon. As he drove up the old, two-level Nimitz Freeway he realized that he had not told Julie about Kate. Since they were about to meet he thought he'd better do it. Julie listened but had no reaction. Her thoughts were somewhere else, perhaps on something that was about to happen on a bed in a room in a stucco motel.

"When my dad and Julie arrived at his apartment Kate gave him a look which he interpreted to say, *You mean you couldn't get this skaggy girl to even kiss you? Even go out for a soda with you? Alright, you told me that one night you had sat with her on the grass in the churchyard across from her parents' duplex and she had come close and then lain with one of her small breasts against your hand. And you were the one who moved away. I guess I should have realized that you were nothing but a love-sick puppy.*

"But of course Kate was perfectly nice to Julie. Showed her the fold-out bed, the bathroom, a closet, offered her tea, all very straightforward. My dad said that he and Kate wanted to go that night to the Carousel Ballroom in San Francisco to hear Thelonious Monk, Dr. John the Night Tripper, and his second favorite San Francisco band, the Charlatans, and would Julie like to come? 'Better than staying here all alone,' added Kate. 'We've got books and records, but no TV. Come with us. It'll be fun.'

"My dad remembers sitting on the floor that night at the Carousel, which shortly thereafter became The Fillmore West. He was next to Kate, and Kate was next to Julie. He remembers the music, which he liked much more than the times he went to hear Santana or Jimi Hendrix or Cream or The Grateful Dead. And he remembers that Julie was more elsewhere than there, skinny in a long high school type dress. And he remembers that he never saw Julie wearing anything but a dress. Did some girls not wear jeans or slacks back then?

"By the time they got back to the apartment Julie, jet-lagged and pale, was clearly ready to 'crash,' as they used to say, so my dad helped her to pull out the folding bed, then he and Kate waited while Julie washed and brushed her teeth in the bathroom. As my dad showed Julie where the light switches were, he asked himself if he still had 'a crush' on this girl, if he did not envy Rick, the faceless teenaged heartthrob Rick, the south-of-Mount-Vernon Rick, for being the one to 'make a woman out of her,' as his parents or grandparents would have said. Without finding an answer to those questions my dad went back to the enclosed porch at the rear of the apartment where he and Kate slept. Usually a woman was stomping much of the night on the thin wood floor above them and listening to Donovan, but that night it was pretty quiet. Only the occasional voices of people walking up to Telegraph Avenue, and a siren or two.

"My dad took off all of his clothes except his underpants and crawled into the queen-sized bed, which took up almost all of the space in the small porch. He pulled back the covers, drew them up to his chin, and then felt an unmoving warmth to his left. Kate. Naked Kate. She pulled his

head down toward her belly as she stroked her own nipples. My dad took one of Kate's hands and placed it on his cock. 'Do me like women want.' The only other time Kate had said this was in Pam's basement apartment. 'Or would you like me to show your friend out there?'

"Wouldn't you rather she stayed her with us than went off to give it away to her boyfriend?"

"But Kate had not really said this. It had been in my dad's head. Maybe something that he wanted her to say.

"Then he was doing what Kate wanted, his tongue like eager lightning, or like the hands of a mad orchestra conductor inciting an accelerando all the way to chaos. Kate let out little screams, then longer ones. Loud ones. As if she were putting on a show. Not at all typical of her. My dad took this as a challenge as in his mind he wondered about determined, jet-lagged Julie, separated from where they were solely by thirty feet of cluttered hallway and one partially closed swinging door. Was she zonked, or was she hearing every gasp, feeling every shudder, and then . . . was she clenched in Kate's big moment of some kind of triumph?

"My dad thought out loud: 'In orgasm woman feels triumph. In men only release. Only defeat.'

"Kate got up early the next morning to make Julie tea. Julie was still sleeping when Kate walked into the living room with the clattering cup and saucer in her hand. She bent down on one knee next to Julie and said, as if to a child, 'Julie? You've got to get up now. You're meeting your friend's plane at ten.'

"My dad had left Julie at the airport around nine. During the drive they had said almost nothing. He had offered to park and come in with her, but of course she declined. Rick knew nothing about my dad. He probably did not even know that it was at my dad's parents' apartment that he had met Julie, that if it were not for my dad he may not have ever known Julie.

"My dad thought about getting out of his station wagon to hug Julie at the drop-off curb, but thought the better of it. The girls had been using the bathroom, first Kate, then Julie, and he had not even had time to brush his teeth or wash his face. He knew that Kate's . . . was still on his breath. A pubic hair was still lodged in his mouth between two molars. And it wouldn't have been appropriate anyway.

"This was the last time my dad saw Julie. He did receive another card from her, maybe a year or eighteen months later. Same type of envelope, same handwriting. There were four or five uninteresting sentences, in the midst of which he saw the words, 'You will always be my someone to worship.' My dad told me that people, especially women, had sent him many strange notes, letters, and now e-mails during his life, but this was one of the oddest. After he read it he decided immediately that it meant nothing.

"By a few years after that my dad had lost contact with everyone he went to high school with. It was not until over thirty years later that he found out that someone, as a prank, had spread the rumor that he had committed suicide over some failed romance. He was even listed as among the 'departed' in his class's twenty-fifth anniversary program. Much later someone had sent him a copy. When my dad received it the first thing he did was to look through it for Julie.

Julie O'Connor. But she was nowhere to be found. No story about her living in Bethesda and working as an assistant at the Department of Transportation. No story about her having married an obstetrician and moved to Cincinnati, where she and her husband had two children, and RV and a dog. Nothing.

"Then he emailed the person who had mailed him the anniversary yearbook asking her if she knew what ever became of Julie O'Connor, whom she had known fairly well in school and had liked. The reply my dad received said only that she had heard that Julie had killed herself many years ago. My dad managed to track down Julie's sister in North Carolina (she wasn't her real sister; Julie had been adopted), but his email to her bounced back, and his letter was returned, and there was no phone. A few years after that he did several Yahoo searches for Julie O'Connor, then Google. But of course there were millions of them. And of course Julie had probably married and changed her name. Or left the country. Or wanted to disappear for some other reason entirely.

"Without even a moment of silence my dad stood up and, anxious to leave and get back to my family, so did I, thanking myself that I had not brought my wife and kids along to visit my dad, but then immediately correcting myself: If I had not come alone, I never would have been . . . subjected – 'subjected' is the only word I can think of – to my dad's stories. But mostly I was worried that the next time I made love to my wife I would start to think about the things my dad had told me. Especially about the night that never happened with him, Kate, the girl and the hookah. About the girl lying back while Kate unzipped her jeans and....

"But atypically my dad wanted me to stay. He drew back the curtains then opened the sliding glass door, letting in the chilly evening air. 'New moon,' he said. 'So much of it is hidden. Then over the days we see more and more, like some cosmic striptease.'

For the first time my dad's voice and affect showed the signs of all the beer he had been drinking.

"Unlike a woman the moon tells us more and more as she reveals herself every month. With each phase she tells us more of her secrets. Other stars have their own moons that tell different stories. So far they have only told me a few of them. Do you know that 'aletheia,' the ancient Greek word we translate as 'truth,' to them meant 'unhidden'?"

"That's good to know, dad. Next month Bob's class is doing a unit on the solar system. But right now, moon or no moon, I've gotta go. Thanks for the beer and the conversation."

"As I opened the door to my wife's blue Prius I could not help but notice it. No light from a moon like that, I thought.

"My dad planned to remarry three times, once only six or seven years ago. His last fiancée thought maybe they should tie the knot in Malibu so he went there one day and made a movie of the place she had found online and liked and posted it on Facebook. 'The ocean dazzled with a million stars,' he commented on his own post. And she replied, 'I love you.' Easy to say.

But it didn't happen so now my dad has his lawn to look at, or rather somebody else's lawn. The only thing he buys is books – everything else seems redundant. He'll be seventy soon. The years have played a trick on him.

"Of course I talk about him as if he were still...

"It takes a while to get used to.

"There are so many ways to leave.

"Not all of them are... obvious.

"In Nazi Germany there was a term something like 'internal emigration,' meaning remaining in the country but going to some obscure place and doing a small insignificant job and having a picture of Hitler on your wall and raising the palm of your hand in the street from time to time and speaking to no one.

"But one thing's for sure: Taking a sudden interest in the phases of the moon at that time of life is a sign of something.

"Or to put it another way: It's dangerous when the word 'gibbous' becomes a regular part of one's vocabulary."

*

"Listening to this guy was like tuning into one of those Public Radio programs where people tell stories that are supposed to be meaningful but really aren't. Notice that he never tells you what happened to his dad. We assume that he died or got dementia or something, but the story is constructed in such a way as to avoid that for some reason. It's all a clever strategy to make you think that you've been listening to a 'moving' story when you really haven't.

And his dad is never really fleshed out as a character. That's typical of those Public Radio programs. Perhaps the idea is to make those 'moving' stories seem 'universal.' Honestly, it doesn't work for me. I'd rather read than hear someone talk to me anyway. Then I can skim the uninteresting paragraphs. That's what's so great about the internet.

It would be vaguely interesting to know what sort of person got something out of that story.

But only vaguely. And there's no real *emotion*. Only a kind of generic feeling of sadness or hopelessness which is ultimately boring. I mean, who wants to hear a person like that talk about someone like his dad, alive, dead, lost, missing, abducted by aliens (he sort of alludes at that possibility)... whatever...? Neither my sympathy nor my interest has been aroused in any way.

"Next –"

statutory disclosure

“NO MAGGOTS WERE HARMED IN THE CREATION OF THIS UNIVERSE’

“What a crock.

“Oh, hi. It’s Michael this time. You missed me when I was Gunther and Zack (well, maybe not – those names were kind of off-putting), but now here I am as Michael. Not Mike or Mick. Michael. Nowadays only bigshots get to be Michaels. Or angels.

“So: Back to the universe. I’ve been prowling around here for some time, and I’ve got the citations to prove it, so let me lay some insights on you. How bout a *musical interlude* while I gather my thoughts, which are strewn four sheets to the wind, or six months from saturday, or whatever it is that they say...”

(A calypso nightmare replete with rum and happenstance, my ex on the stairs – the friendly one --, and in the twilight a man and a woman lie on the tiny triangular grass island beneath the price sign tower at the filling station, each asleep, hugging their enormous, overfed dogs, also snoozing; their trash surrounding them like offerings at the feet of the near life-size shiny plastic Madonna at the church on the main arterial in my neighborhood if you’re a guy the only thing that counts is how loud your car is. Each year, as everything else loses its value – your job, your house, your family, your prospects – the loudness of your car gains stature as a unit of measure. It will be the only thing worth talking about at The Pearly Gates or wherever the final reckoning takes place. And no, farting won’t do as a substitute. It’s been tried – and failed. Depending on where the sun is our shadows either follow us or precede us or what’s worse, bear down upon us like an anvil on our skulls)

“Allright I’m back. The ancients – the Greeks, for instance – lived in only two dimensions. Let me explain. They looked at the sky and had the idea that everything they were seeing was happening right now. Sure, some god tossed someone or other up there and they became a sign of the zodiac, and that happened well... whenever. But the light from the stars was happening right before their eyes, as if they were looking at candles, or the glow of the bonfires competing with the glimmer of the moon.

“Now, needless to say, we know that they were wrong. Except for the occasional appearance of a pesky asteroid, or the cameo walk on of Lars von Trier’s massive planet of man’s imperturbable sadness, everything we see when we look up at night, or in that wolfish hour before dawn breaks daily like a mandatory accident – everything we see happened hundreds of thousands, more than likely millions, equally likely billions of years ago however beyond 10.4 billion years we cannot see we are like the Greeks we, like them, are missing an entire dimension call it guilt, perhaps but whatever you do

don't give it a number.

"So my plan is to simply sit here and to look up.
My theory is that everything we are seeing now is the last light
that all of the stars and other celestial light-emitters however denominated have
already died
and if we wait long enough
here, looking up, sitting on the edge, we will finally know
the darkness that is already there.
We just don't see it yet.
It's like a dream where someone, as part of normal social conversation,
perhaps at a party with many beautiful women (as if we care about such things)
someone mentions, not as any sort of revelation, just as casual chitchat,
that we are already dead.
And we respond, "Oh sure," as if we are acknowledging that our car really was
totaled last week, or even something trivial: They were out of okra at the
Super King market.
It's all over. We just don't know it yet, sitting on our little outpost like
Aunt Steelbreaker in the Lars von Trier movie dreaming her myth
of the magic cave.

‡

"But don't worry. Next time I'll be Shemp, and after stumbling around for the first reel and a half of
the two-reeler, I'll come up with some happy news."

parental discretion

Lilly was the most dangerous kind of sweetheart,
always with her knickers in a knot, like a pine forest
trimmed and abandoned
leaping through crevices into the
thick air of June
Behind you there is a puddle
better
watch out --
Spoken like a maladroit engineer
his locomotive running on sauterne
on candlelight, on raw nerves
and a grimace from a girl who
wants very badly
to be raped by Zeus and turned into
neither a swan nor an emu
but a modern consumer
with all the trimmings
looking for a guy to take her down the aisle not of the
church on the corner of Fifth and Oblivion
but down the aisle of WalMart
the gracious insensate fulfillment of
all desires
even the ones best left unuttered,
stewing in the clutter of their emptiness
until they kick the habit and reach
critical mass as
Nones of The Above.
And there she will be
your most dangerous sweetheart,
strangled by her costume jewelry
suffocated in all her mellifluous gossip
She forgets to breathe
soon ceasing to be
the singleton of the void and about to become
spousal, reproductive, domestic, maternal...

("Don't call me 'Lilly' in front of the children. It sounds like a whore's name.")

"So what should I call you?"

"'Mom.' And just so you won't forget, call me that all the time."

"I'm about to come, 'Mom...'"

"That's the general idea.")

With neither hesitation nor destiny your most dangerous sweetheart
approaches the altar,

where a tiny plump woman in a
checkered apron is poking a toothpick
with flesh on its tip in your direction.
A security camera grinds its focus onto you
as something not altogether rational
groans in the subbasement where the
Board of Directors is toasting the
apocalypse.

In the checkered woman's other hand there is
one of those tiny thin corrugated paper cups,
like the ones they give you liquid medicine
with in a hospital if you grasp it
even a little bit, it will crumple and
spill all over everything and to
make matters worse this one has
blood in it. It's full to the brim.

Sangre.

Somewhere, behind the potted plants or
on some unnoticed battlefield, or
on the escalator, forgetting whether they
should be going up, down, or sideways,
there are people who believe something.
Belief clings to them like residue
from deodorant soap
they itch

You scratch
You bleed
Same old thing.

This is your body
This is your blood
This is your danger.

self-cleaning cycle

i

"We make a great carpool but we'd make
a lousy couple."

Splintered recollections of things he'd planned on saying or thought about saying but never
said. That one was to allay any suspicion that he might be
in love.

ii

Dynamite

Such an odd notion how many lives were failed demolitions like of stadiums
built by companies and with the names of companies that
no longer existed but the stadiums didn't want to go away they stood
their ground dug in their ankles yielded to no destiny but their own and often
not even to that didn't want to leave
the long crawl to eternity tooth over nail hand over fist push over shove blank over sky
blank
blank
tabula rasa and won't they ever stop talking about "*possible worlds*" without satisfactorily
defining
what they mean by either word or "*universes*" – which is even worse. Much worse.
Incalculably worse.

iii

To allay any suspicion. That's the whole deal in a nutshell.
After all, everything is a fragment. There is no sillier notion
than "*completion*."
Every joining is, in bold unyielding reality, a subtraction.
Every alliance
takes something away. There is no "whole" and (if you seriously think about it) that means that
there are no parts either. How can there be parts without a whole? How can there be
.00001 if there is no 1? Nothing to add up to; only things to subtract from. Nothing to multiply;
only to divide. But even in that procedure there is
a diminution of the elements;
to put something through a procedure is to change it to touch something is to change it and
worse than that
to see something is to change it and
worse than that
to think about something is to change it it will never be the same to you it will forever lose
its charm charm not being a matter of emotion but of
holiness. Take no footprints take no pictures inhale but never never ever
exhale never ever
let your breath out.

The long drive had left him numb but not mindless
 imperceptible but not transparent
 placed but not located
 She was still
 "on his mind" funny the things we say as if she were
 crouching there or slouching there
 trying to hitch a ride
 from his prefrontal cortex a ride anywhere
 (a '72 Chevy stops GAS GRASS OR ASS on its bumper sticker the sleazoid driver with
 Hulk Hogan tattoos on his quasisubstantial biceps tosses a can of malt liquor out the window
 She's up for it anywhere but here anywhere but "on his mind" cuz
 the longer she stays there
 the more she will change

Surprise party with balloons.
 Surprise party with balloons.
 How many times
 in a lifetime.

Individual but not rugged
 substance but not substantial
 still susceptible to "the *nick* of time" the small cuts that time keeps making on your body
 yet all the same
 more fractal than fragile you have a condition not "*the human condition*" just a
 condition a state of affairs which may or not mean either prospects or a diagnosis or a destiny
 It's just a mug shot depicting what you are charged with at this particular moment it
 catches you but far from unawares you have been apprehended you have been accused
 you have been identified given (at long last) an **identity** one that belongs to you and to
 no one else
 In the lineup six witnesses have recognized either your hair color or your limp or your shoes
 You have made your one phone call to the Easter Seal office to make a donation since
 now all is lost you have been "*singled out*" meaning (needless to say) among the many you
 are **The One**. Perhaps our private guilt
 our private crimes
 our private shame
 are the only things
 that set us apart.

The ocean has nothing to offer. Not really.

"The *rudiments* of" -- what does that mean exactly?

The *rudiments* of a theory, for example. Once we met someone who had the *rudiments* of the secret of immortality. But who knows? Last thing we heard he was still alive.

Cinderella. We cannot stop thinking of Cinderella. The Princess and the Frog. We cannot stop thinking about

The Princess and the Frog.

Some kind of

transformation if not to say

some kind of miracle but instead we all grope for things

to "really happen." In the old Nic Roeg movie with the now wizened rock and roll star someone

said: THE ONLY TRUE PERFORMANCE IS THE ONE THAT ACHIEVES MADNESS

or words to that effect and in the same spirit

we say

THE ONLY TRUE HAPPENING IS **MAGIC**

Things that are rational effects of rational causes are neither

of any importance nor of any interest and that

is what we are all waiting for

after all –

Magic.

Plain and simple.

Plain or peanut.

Organic or inorganic.

Regular or unleaded.

Soft or loud.

Hot or cold.

Benign or malign.

Visible or invisible.

Magic.

Is **magic** a notion that came into being to inspire hope or to annul any possibility of hope?

To make us dream wonders or to lead us into leaden lockdown landlocked nightmares?

To make us feel superior to the gods or more their playthings than ever?

In each case doubtless the latter if only because

miracles are far and few between scattered so wide in time and space that they have become

mere myths of themselves and yet there is never-the-less and always-the-more

the urge the lust the need (yes: the need) of **magic**.

Are we fooling ourselves or are we being fooled – but we stop ourselves mid-breath and realize:

What a foolish question. What a time-wasting brain-frying life-draining question.

Perhaps once before any of us was ever dreamed of (but where? but when?)

There was a magic to every season

A magic to every sound
A magic to every glance
A magic to every stone and spire and wing and wish and prayer

Perhaps the mistake we made was to give it a name
To call it "*love*" when love is so much less
To call it "*life*" when life is so much less
To call it "*power*" when power is so much less
To call it "*oneness*" when oneness is so much less
To call it "*The One*" when The One is so much less
and even
even
To call it God when God is
when God is

x

"I'd feel better if I were to eat something,"
she said;
"Even just a taco or some fruit or some soda."
"Anything."

xi

She had left her in the lurch again and this was
the last straw.
Never again
never again

xii

When it comes to twilight no one enjoys it more than the petunias except possibly
for the brown grass in the graveyard or Samantha
puttering away in her apartment happy that it's Daylight Savings Time so that she's home
to see it through her sliding window happy that it is Thursday and thus almost Saturday and
soon
it will be August again she always liked August she couldn't think of a reason
but for her it was a special month maybe it was because her boss went on vacation during
August but she liked her boss things made more sense when he was around so no that
couldn't
be the reason
but Samantha had all the cable services now so she no longer had time no longer had any time
no longer had time
to figure things like that out. Like why she liked one thing more than another. Or what it even
meant to "like" something. And when it came right down to it, why she liked anything at all.
There was too much going on
to like any particular thing. She was funny that way.

But when it came to twilight that was something special like a signal to the world
that
it was just another day
nothing to have thoughts or prayers or feelings about
nothing to miss when it is gone or wish for before it comes
nothing to fold where she kept her better clothes folded to take to the cleaners to put out
for
The Good Will
nothing to anticipate or regret
(and by the way, the flowers have anticipations, but no regrets)
Without realizing it she had memorized where the shadows fell on her wall by heart
(as if validation by the heart guaranteed that a memory was real)
Without realizing it she had mistaken certain spots on her walls for shadows and thus
failed to clean them without realizing it she had perhaps failed in other things
yet still
the twilight could be relied upon
like an inference of forgotten glory
like a synonym for a long-forgotten word that might have meant joy or quiet or peace or death
like her mother's love (even though her mother had passed long ago)
like the news (after all, there would always be something "new" – on that one could rely)
like the wink she gave the gardener every week (the wink she was in the habit of giving him and
somehow couldn't manage to break)
like all of those things and more things in other spaces things in other peoples' dreams
and lives
yet still
yet still
yet still

xiii

"I can't deal with you right now. I'm getting ready for my ex to arrive. But *good luck to you.*"
The tallest girl scout cookie girl still with straw-colored hair but now with glasses herself -
I smiled she and the shorter girl scout cookie girls smiled and it fell to me to wonder
(since the straw hair girl certainly would not) what she might have made of the words
"my ex" Of course maybe her parents were divorced like most people's and it was just
another throwaway word that applied to some annoying adult so
it fell to me to speculate what "my ex" would have meant to me had I been that girl scout
cookie girl only from a nice family so nuclear it could explode at any moment. Of course
the answer was obvious. The **X** is what one always has to solve for in the equation. One has to
move
things from one side to the other, multiply and divide things (although how to do it is not always
immediately obvious) until you can substitute some **real number** for the **X**. And at that my mind
got caught in a vicious cycle (or is it "vicious circle"? Some people say one thing, others the
other. From my perspective circles are always vicious; cycles only sometimes. Cycles
sometimes stall out, flip out, wig out, freak out grind to a respectable halt and thus signal their
own need
for repair.

Circles never do. Circles are forever. Vicious circles stay vicious forever. The best thing that can be hoped for from a circle is that its circumference will gradually – very gradually, usually imperceptibly, sometimes maliciously, sometimes [sad to say] in the spirit of conquest – that the circumference will increase and move away from you which is all for the good you want to be somewhere obscure somewhere around the area of Uranus, where **Xs** are relatively easy to solve for.)”

The girls giggled in the street for a while longer. He thought about **Xs** (if only to avoid thinking about *his X*) a little longer He thought about how a “solution” is not only the thing for which one solves but also something in which one *is dissolved*. “If you’re not part of the solution you’re part of the precipitate,” something he said and thought was clever in junior high.

“Does it take two planes to ‘sky write’ an **X**,” he mused. “By the time the second line is begun the first one has drifted away.” How does one solve for something (to use the seventy-five-cent word) so ephemeral so unconscionably dithyrambic so grievously indifferent so meticulously disproportionate so cataclysmically quixotic and yet what with all of that so calm. Nothing is more calm than the unknown. We think that when it is discovered that it will get excited dance a jig get tanned in its spotlight collapse from its unwonted celebrity but no. **The Unknown** knows something that we never will That once it is brought into “the open” it will cease to be true cease to be real cease to be applicable it will keep jumping from one side of the teetertotter to the other in the slit as a blip out the slit as a wave or both ways or neither When it comes to **Reality** and lord help us it never comes to that what we urgently need is a role for our selves that makes sense not stuck in ourselves caught in the present (but not really) caught in our senses (but not really) caught in our minds (but not really) or “not really but maybe” “or “not really but for *practical purposes* – because that’s what allows us

to be who we are the builders and destroyers on a massive scale demigods without portfolio.”
What really happened in the Garden of Eden is that she\we were hungry for Knowledge and received instead
as a consolation prize that consoles no one
our Selves, our Egos and with Self
Comes shame
with ego
Comes guilt
with ego comes
an inferiority complex that feeds into every evil that we do and only as a side note
with self comes
the suffocating sense
the hermetic sense
the enervating disempowering terminal sense
that we are alone. Not “we” but “I” each “I” the you “I” and the me “I” the “not the other” I
the damn you curse you fuck you “I” which (one imagines) molluscs do perfectly well without
Man is the one life form whose destiny is
Punishment Atonement Expiation
Salvation is only a matter of
saving the appearances so that no hidden variables need to be assumed presumed postulated
Typical of **The Unknown**, they are hidden, and they vary we cannot get a grip on them even
as
they hold us tightly in their grasp
“I hope that Lucy hasn’t told my ex about my feelings for Sophia. If she has I’m
in big trouble.”

xiv

The Lake Where It Is Easy To Swim is somewhere outside Salt Lake City. Unless perhaps they
are
really heavy
people can put on their swimsuits walk out into the water and float.
All thanks to the excess of salt.
When he was seven he went there alone on a tour bus. He enjoyed the sensation until he
walked out of the lake and felt the sting all over his body. In his ears. In his hair.
And so it remained in his
repertoire of experiences When all else failed he might talk about it at a party but only as
a last resort he had a few other stories none all that good he ran out before too long
lucky for him he was a good listener the only problem being that everyone he met
was running out of stories, too. So they talked about sports, TV, politics and the weather which
were all becoming
kind of indistinguishable one from the other things over which they had no influence in which
they had no say see/hear listen repeat see/hear listen repeat see/hear listen repeat
little jabbering beings fending off death more than boredom
fending off
but no one was “fending off” anything unabashedly attentive unflappably receptive both

The Audience and The Show as if as if
Repetition made things Real or (and here's the rub) Repetition gave them Power if only the
Power
of Belonging as if "belonging" were power. As if acceptance were authority.
See/hear listen repeat a Vicious Circle clearly a vicious promise certainly a way
just as to be at a Hitler rally was a way just as to be in a sports stadium was a way just as to
vote
was a way
to lose yourself. The easiest way to go about it. The fastest way to go about it. The most
painless way
to go about it and not too much longer after that
he no longer ever (ever ever) needed to drag out his story (it wasn't an "anecdote" because it
has less than no point; it wasn't a parable because it stood for nothing; it wasn't a myth
because
no one died)
about The Lake Where It Was Easy To Swim.
He felt relieved
but not quite relieved enough to
dive into the circle whose viciousness was second only to its indifference second only to
its languor second only to its
manifest infallibility
and

see
hear
listen
repeat

see
hear
listen
repeat

and in this way
he was Today
he was The News
he could exist without challenge or competition or rivalry or dissent
and at long last he was at ease
at perfect ease
at untouchable ease
with himself.

the woman who fell in love

it was by chance that I met her,
the woman who fell in love.
a right click on her part might have taken her to Paris,
a left click on mine might have taken me downhill.
an outage that day and I may never have known her,
the woman who fell in love.
however now, thanks to this binary occurrence, I
 have found out a lot:
A woman's love is at her absolute center,
and deeper than most men surmise.
She is always walking in the ocean,
the waves touching her breasts,
the salt shining in all her hair like the very
 glow of existence itself,
 uncompromised by doubt
 unalloyed with reason
 untroubled by death
 irreconcilable with certain agonies of struggle
 that plague the male mind.
And as she steps, the ocean bottom shifts, so that
one moment she seems to be emerging,
to be ready for the sand and the shower and the beach toys,
 the picnic and the umbrella, ready to ride shotgun
 back to reality;
and another moment, she is in
over her head,
the woman who fell in love.
Her words burst like bubbles in the foam of the waves
"the love of my life"
hears the ocean bird, hears the sparkly plankton, the child
 of earth's beginning;
"forever"
hears the sea breeze, fleeing the cold wind
 of the land, of the dry, crusty floor on which man has built
 his world;
"all my heart"
hear the clouds, and they worry, as clouds do,
 that she may drown in it –
 the woman who fell in love.

"Who's the lucky guy?"
I ask the sea breeze, the ocean bird, the sparkly plankton, the lonely sky.
"You will never know," mocks the sea breeze gently,
 as breezes will do, with a lilt and a sigh and a prayer.
"Ask your own heart," chides the ocean bird, flapping ironically,

sailing on nothing, the taste of a ripe clam in its beak, and in its nest
the world-egg from which will emerge the first-born of the universe,
Phanes, The One Who Brings to Light,
whose other names
are Ἡρικεπαῖος, *power*, and Μῆτις, *craft, skill, thought*,
(and in the secret books, *magical cunning*.)

And thus, in this lineage of the sea, does she become a myth –
the woman who fell in love.

And it falls to us, to the men who see and hear and yearn
to know her heart

but to tell her story, to chant her epic in ten thousand lines and
ten thousand tongues and ten thousand ways

in the hope that one day she will walk out of the sea
and touch us;

that she will walk out of the sea
and love us;

that she will walk out of the sea

and let us live.

bed, bath and beyond

out into the world
in our leather jackets and jeans
running for the subway
feeling the lights fade in the nosebleed balcony at the Met
just enough Lagrein in the bottle to wash down
pear tart with bitter chocolate
talking about sex on a rock in Central Park as fish cavort in the lake
screaming in the dark to save a fallen cyclist from death
as headlights glare in our eyes
making just the right connection for a noon service at the Cathedral
a woman priest talks about peace and poetry and music in Edessa
Aramaic,
the arbitrary congregation stands and embraces one another:
"Peace be with you."
I feel you beside me all the time standing kneeling praying
searching for the right pages in the Book of Common Prayer
Are we going to take Communion, or merely fold our arms on our breasts
and receive a blessing?
I would like to, you say. We approach the altar.
The Body adheres to the roof of my mouth and is washed away by the
Blood.
As the twenty worshipers slowly exit, the Priest seems to single us out.
"Welcome home," she says to me.
Soon I am kneeling in the neighboring Chapel of Saint James
speaking my heart to you, asking you to do me the greatest honor,
and just at that moment, an unseen choir begins to sing,
echoing from the main hall of the Cathedral.
You say yes. Tears are in our eyes. I place the ring on your finger.
It shines like a galaxy at its prime, confident in its equilibrium of light.

Then we have crepes across the street, sweet and tart.
Walking in Riverside Park, watching the light on the Hudson,
talking about everything and people and places and thoughts and dreams,
my ideas and yours,
Love has made us who we are.
I do not miss the sour cynical guy I used to see in the mirror.
Instead I look at you, with my blue eyes that you tell me are
sometimes gray.
"You look about sixteen," I say. Your kindness, your spirit, your stories,
the way you look at people inside and outside and understand them with

as much kindness as humanly possible
I strive to be like you.
I do not miss the frustrated dissatisfied doubtful yet pretentious guy
I used to see in the mirror.
I do not miss the women whom that guy wanted to get close to,
to have on his arm in Paris or London or Cannes or Melrose Avenue,
to sleep with a few times and then get left behind to stare into his mirror
at a sadder, more sour, more cynical, more dissatisfied version of himself.

Behind the mirror are toothpaste, dental floss, razors, bandaids,
misperceptions misconceptions
the ebb and flow of diurnal misery as the days creep past
women and their illusion of affection drift away
music and books and movies get written then repose in the galactic spin
of the hard drive
-- the old world, the old life,
years and years of it, watching someone else's old dream of "California" die.
I do not miss the lost, numb, disconnected guy I used to see in the mirror
Since now love has made us as we make love
in complete connection, in total empathy, in seamless passion,
to give is to receive, our fantasies aligned as we touch and spin off and up
and soar and at the moment, at that moment, at **that** moment
the gush not of release but of union
not of conquest but of connection
not of domination but of mutual power
the outpouring not only of flesh but of spirit
not only of the body but of God,
I find the breath to say
I Love You.

the next time around

I will play hard-to-get
too preoccupied with deals to Skype,
to love to drown to speculate;
too importunate to be bothered --
and at some inopportune point
communicating that I am doing you the greatest
of favors
I will confide that I am actually a student of Husserl
but with a Deistic streak;
and later, in a moment of casual but manipulative intimacy
I will confess that I am in fact a crypto-Christian
who would not necessarily be opposed to kneeling with you
in some tabernacle that suits your fancy;
But for the moment I am simply too busy
you are just one more atom on the wind
just one more shadow in the cavern
to whom on rare occasion I may dispense wisdom,
ill temper, offhand annoyance, lofty growls,
inconsiderate grunts of random lust appended with
ironic assurances
that they are not directed at you in any way size
shape form or substance;
hints that starlets in my bed make stars sparkle in my eyes
and then
silence.
you cannot make me jealous, you cannot make me care,
you can not turn my color or my temper or my mien
because you cannot reach me.
untouchable, unreachable me – fungible you,
synonymous with a gender that I grope whenever
the spirit moves me
scope whenever the eye candy sugars on my proscenium
and let mope whenever I have better things to do.
Adamantine Man, indomitable, oxymoronic –
The next time around.

(the next time around

I will be a garden sacrificed to progress,
an image of eternity lost due to a fluke,
a statement redolent with disaster and hope,
a mounting goodness that people fear,
an object which might be alive in a river too wild to swim
a nonsense syllable, a berceuse, six notes with nowhere to go,
twelve partitions in an infinite whole,
an elegant gesture like an orgasm turned to crystal,

facets of sleep, fractals of fulfilled desire
requited love beamed through granite
from the center of the earth
I will be our destiny, our sunrise, our mutual survey of eternity
which establishes, once and for all, where and who we are now,
where and who we might be,
where and who we can be
in the collapse and rekindling of time
in the birth and weariness and growth of God
in His silence and in His song
in His forgiveness which we do not need
because
because
because
Because of the wonderful things we do
wizards of peace, magi of creation,
incantationists of ecstatic -)

The next time around
I will still be Me
but you will not be You
we will not be We
but mist will still make dew
glass will still make sand
thoughts will still make time
grapes will still make wine
and what I know
I knew.

giving the bride away

I avoid weddings.
the last one I remember was a neo-hippy do
I filmed at the top of Mt. Tamalpais.
first I carried the camera up the mountain
then I carried the tripod
then I carried the battery
then I carried the sound.
Much thought (and even more discussion) had
gone into everything.

Special words were chosen,
Special clothes, special music,
Special food, special flowers,
Special paper, near a special tree
and under a special sky
all to symbolize and eventuate
-- and make no secret of --
their dreams.

as the morning dragged on
I was pretty much oblivious to all that specialness.
for me it started out at a hot f 5.6, rapidly went to an f 8,
and by the time the "I do's" were spoken we were f 16 – f 22
split the difference.

Farther down the mountain, and farther on in time,
she left him for another woman.
he died young-ish, but not young.
But before that,
their children, Aura and Baba Ram (*aka* Bob)
had scattered off into skepticism, recession,
the military and the retail trade,
seldom to be heard from again.

so like I say,
I avoid weddings
and thus find myself at a loss
giving the bride away.
When should I show up? Do I walk up to the altar?
The other guy takes care of the ring, right?
Do I have to give a speech? Should I smile or cry?
How should I look and walk and sit and stand and feel?
Which bills will end up coming my way?
Should I say, "*I haven't lost a daughter. I've gained a son.*"

ii.

The round black mesh metal chair
with the straight hard metal back
and hard mesh metal seat
is the only thing there is to sit on
on the cracked stone balcony overlooking
what could only be the world
(nothing more, nothing less)
And nothing to do but sit --
tired for once, weary for once, observant for once,
lost for once --
and take it all in.

Offices, traffic, subways, pharmacies, factories,
mini-malls, sidewalks, parks,
work, worry, dissipation of time,
things done out of necessity
things done out of longing
things done out of hope
things done as the end result of

fundamental motion – *Zitterbewegung*,
which, if you stretch it far enough,
explains gravity, time, life, and the stars.

Why am I sitting down? Why are my feet cold?
Why am I on this balcony overlooking the world,
the people, the animals and the minerals,
As ice begins to form behind my ears,
to make veins on my scalp and in my lungs,
descending into the capillaries and into the
farthest synapses of my heart, freezing little bits of feeling --
a thought of love without an object,
or with one that went away;
ideas on the quiet, cold islands in the icy stream
of my frozen blood

as the flat gray ridiculous patina of mortality
encapsulates me for discreet disposal.
minutes go by, decades years and I realize
that I have forgotten to breathe
that I have forgotten what it was like to breathe
that I have forgotten why I needed to breathe
that I never really knew if other people breathe too:
I never really knew what made them tick
what made them want to practice medicine or law

or the viola or high jumps or perfection
which practice makes;
what made them have children and sometimes
resent them, or feel they had let them down;
what saw them through the muddle and mire of fear
until they triumphed or gave up;
what strength they found to build twin towers
and what hate they found to crash them down;
what fear they found to snuff the life of millions
or to rise again as an industrialized power
resilient on the world stage;
what love they found to be naked in private with another
to pretend that their nakedness was their secret
to clutch and paw and penetrate
and thus to turn pretense into new life;
what miles they traveled to find
that they had started out on the wrong foot,
the wrong gender, the wrong prescription,
the wrong handwriting, the wrong career,
the wrong shoulder to look over,
the wrong way to turn back
and no way to do it
in the night.

Places are being set on the black, round, stiff metal tables
on the balcony overlooking the world (nothing less nothing more)
Waiters with menus, patrons with hungers, busboys on missions
of spectacular replenishment, and all immaculately dressed.
They look through me, stealing furtive glances at the far tables,
eyeing the food and the women; then
they walk through me – if I could only breathe
if I could only cut myself and see my warm blood
one more time.

Far behind me, my forebears,
shielding their eyes against the glare of tomorrow's tomorrow
at random moments in their busy destinies catch themselves,
seemingly unawares,
glancing forward and stealing a glimpse of
a speck at the end of their genetic trajectory
the null at the end of the tunnel
the glitch at which the shifting patterns of their molecular fate
finally lose all meaning and shift back into chaos –
me.

iii.

Just enough light
to carry the tripod back down the mountain
the shot film sealed in its cans with black tape
the lenses in their soft cloth bags.
a cool $f2.8$
and no film left to shoot.

just enough stuff in me
to move my feet
to trip on a rock
to imagine the moon I believe may rise
after I am done with my journey

and the funny thing is
I did not even see it
and the funny thing is
I did not even feel it
and the funny thing is
I did not even know it

giving my bride away.

for the last time in my home town

I am speaking in my head
to someone who isn't there. And worse still
she was never there. She's too big to fit and also
too small. Don't get me wrong.
She was beside me on the Q Train often enough
in my arms a decent number of times not to mention
shopping, dining, planning, moping
watching reruns of The X Files on her sofa
petting our respective cats – all the usual stuff. But she was never
inside my head. So why was it there
that I addressed her? And I still do even though she is (as they'd say)
"long gone." As if absence were a thing with length rather than with
fangs.

What it comes down to is:
talking to someone who is inside your head, as if they were
seated uncomfortably on a stool with their legs crossed and a cigarette
whether or not they smoked
is effing weird. But you, reader, (who are not inside my head) do it too.
Let's face it: The people inside our heads
are better listeners than
anyone we know. More easy-going, more empathetic, more willing to respect
our point of view.
The people inside our heads, the ones we speak to day and night, rain or shine,
are
the best people. They should
be given the vote.
And what else could we give them. I cannot think of anything else. Perhaps I am too
stingy.

So now I find myself speaking in my idealized voice, the resonant, persuasive, charismatic
one
that is not mine
inside my head to a vanished second person about the last time I paid a visit (as one
pays one's taxes or one's parking tickets or one's insurance premiums)
to my home town.
The "I" inside my head (a far better person than any real me which might exist – an "I"
which makes me
redundant, and in an annoying way)
is narrating what seems to be its life
and in real time
to a permanently absent "you," who is perched on the aforementioned stool, blowing not
rings but
curlicues of smoke which might or might not spell --

Driving north on Glebe Road,
I suddenly want to visit my father.
But where can I find him?
In the boxy brick "colonial" on Henderson Road
reading the stories he wrote for me
about "the little animal without a name" or
on Wayne Street, drinking his scotch and skim milk
listening to the lps I gave him of Götterdämmerung
while watching the redskins face another
fourth down or up on governors hill,
the tenor sax I borrowed from the band room
strapped around his neck, wailing away with a vibrato that could
make a hamster cry or at river house overlooking
the potomac, the pentagon, lee's mansion, the ancient
black trestle of fourteenth street bridge I want
to walk up the steps onto the wide white porch
run home from lubber run push the up button on the elevator
dash in from a long walk writing poems in my head in
Glencarlyn –
and tell him
about you
and
for the first time (or almost)
I want to see him smile
because his son has found love at long last and even
for the first time -
But then continuing on up glebe road toward "Ballston," a
necropolis of office buildings looming above the little church,
st. george's, where I learned the nicean creed
and in so doing announced
that I believe in the resurrection of the dead:
It is there that I see in my mind's eye
the cigarette burning his fingers in the
cancer hospital
him sitting with the sax and scotch and Wagner
as the places we lived in
crumble around him the rafters fall through the ceiling as
Flagstad sings the Liebestod
the music turns into white dust
and I realized
that it is a good thing that I could not find my father here
in my home town
it is a good thing that I could not tell him about you about my joy
in anticipating the first time you would speak Spanish together or
listen to opera together or talk about Texas together (you might
even have made him laugh) -
It is a good thing that, at least in this way,

I did not break his heart.

(We made a mistake –
got on the Short Line.
doesn't go
all the way.)

(Runner on the trail: "Is there anyone else coming this way?"
"No" I shout,
not knowing which way he means, what am I supposed to say?
Nor did I tell him about the dude with the huge beautiful wolf dog
up ahead.)

(On cooler days
even after just a sprinkle
the gray blotches seem to remain on the rocks forever
as if they know
in their heart of hearts
that I may not
be back their way.)

wind

voice

whisper

believe

secret

resurrection

dust

laugh

heart

nor

[wait -]

[wait -]

[wait]

listen

When I was twelve years old,
I had a tape recorder that recorded at very slow speed,
one and seven eighths inches per second, eight whole hours
on very thin tape.

So one night I closed my door, put the microphone under my pillow,
pressed "record,"
and turned out the light.
I thought, "If I snore,
I will be alone all my life."

I spent all the next day shut in my little room under the eaves
on Wayne Street, my head against the speaker.

I listened.

Not a sound.

It was sundown when the tape spooled out, flap flap,
breaking the silence.
I opened the blinds just enough to see the darkening sky.
"I will find a beautiful lover," I said, almost out loud,
"or she will find me. And she will share her soul,
And she will give me the stars."

I have heard many things since that night
and that day.

Fatal collisions in the distance and very close.
Square waves and transient intermodulation distortion.
Women whom I had tried to make happy tell me that I had not.
Women I had thought liked me tell me that they didn't.
People from companies with "Artists" and "Creative" in their names.
Clicks from deep inside my car that I was sure spelled disaster.
Melodies in my head which I imagined were my own.
The sound of my pulse, the sound of women's hearts,
The far thunder of my mother's last breath.

Today I am going to the Goodwill Industries Store,
to look for an old tape recorder,
Wollensak or De Jur or Telectro
that records at one and seven eighths inches per second;
and I am going to Ametron Electronics in Hollywood where
I hope they still sell quarter inch tape one thousand one hundred
meters long.

we must still be in the middle of The Seventh Day, the seventh "God Day" God, not unlike Kirk, is still making adjustments. If that were not the case, if God were finished (like the moment when Kirk handed over the keys to Ernie and Ernie observed that we are all "strangers when we meet") –

if God were truly finished with Creation

nothing would happen anymore.

No new planets would spin off from their suns, no new cosmic swirls no more no more I'll anticipate your argument and say that as far as we know *no new matter* is being created perhaps all The Creation consisted of was bringing *raw matter* -- *undifferentiated* matter -- into being and that was that. Basta.

I don't buy that (necessarily) I think God is still tinkering with things (and He does not even have

Kim Novak to impress) so at this point we are going to do what we always do and ask "*What would Hegel have to say about all of this?*" and he would answer that there is indeed

an end to History but more than likely it will not be an end in which God turns over the keys to the Universe to Man and says

"We are all strangers when we meet."

iii

My way or the highway

Frank Sinatra or AC/DC

you don't give us
much or a choice

iv

"She did her best to talk sense into me, but I didn't listen."

"Of course you listened, dumb-ass. It's not listening that's selective it's something else."

It all boils down to choice. It's choice that it all boils down to. Selection.

Every acceptance is a rejection. Every affection is an indifference.

Every glance is an avoidance. Every peck on the cheek is a kiss that did not happen.

Every apology is a diminution of self.

And when it comes right down to it,

Every choice makes us less than we are.

v

Let it all fall down.

Let it all fall down.

The chandeliers the stanchions the illustrated periodicals the wine

Let it all fall down

The attitudes the shadows the atoms

Let it all fall down

The misery the joy the ambiguity

The tools the weapons the toys

The legs the arms the minds

The devil the teacher the beggar

The possible the impossible the unlikely

The failure the success the vacuum

The hope the fear the reticence

The singles the marrieds the divorced

The infants the aged the condemned

Let it all fall down.

The concept the process the failure

The effort the vacuity the release

The cure the relapse the infection

The question the answer the doubt

The premise the reason the void

The choice the duty the resentment

The angel the tyrant the friend

The synonym the antonym the word

The lust the numbness the soil

The death the birth the sky

The high the flat the empty

The parties the ignorance the carnage

The thrilling the boring the necessary

The forgotten the mislaid the unnoticed

The clocks the toasters the rakes

The go the stop the continue

The center the edge the lie

Let it all fall down

Let it all fall down.

vi

Survival

Survival of

Survival of the

vii

The foghorn

The foghorn was the last thing he heard
he awakens in a hospital room listening for it the foghorn dangers in the bay
the liner emerges from the fog capsize no lifejacket underwater he can no
longer hear
the foghorn until now He strains to hear it surrounded by tubes and lights
digits that blip onto metal the hum the hum the alarm a nurse rushes in but she
cannot

be one her breasts are too prominent and then a young intern with a beard and an
earring he cannot be a doctor

"Mister... Mister Cavanaugh?" He does not quite remember but of course he does as
a strange shiver makes its way down his body his lips his tongue his jaw seem
paralyzed the blipping digits flash a sound that seems the inverse of the foghorn
first low then higher

"Code blue 612 Code blue 612" says the young fellow with the earring into a shiny
metal oval he pulls from his pocket

"I'll page Doctor Sweeny," says the nurse not for the ears of the prone man liquid
flows into him from a bottle hanging overhead earring man injects something into the
tube several new people rush in, none of them normal one colored, one Chinese a
box with a piece of glass hangs down from the ceiling near the opposing wall and on the
glass there are people little ones now there are two seconds later there are four
all different ones women in dresses so tight he wonders how they can breathe he
must not have been paying attention to the women as he walked down

Market Street last Sunday to board the streetcar the Taraval line out to Sutro Baths

"Can you hear me Mr. Cavanaugh?" says an older man in a loose green shirt and trousers
(not something, he thinks, to wear in public) *"Say 'yes' if you can hear me. Or raise your
left arm."*

He searches deep inside himself looking for breath with which to speak It is there --
somewhere

"Yes -- Wait. That is not my voice. I moved my jaw but there must be someone else
talking in my stead a ventriloquist

"Am I . . . am I . . . still wet?"

The nurse gently pulls back the sheet that covers him.

"Catheter's still in place," she answers not to him to the man in green.

"I must still be wet" [that voice whose voice?] *"There was... the ship. And there was
my fiancée, Matilda Matilda Reynolds Where is she? Don't tell me she... don't tell me
she*

drowned. They would certainly have rescued her if they if they--"

"Here. Suck on this." Another nurse puts something moist and sweet between his lips.
Not too much. It'll be a while before you are up to drinking water by yourself."

By myself?

"Ma Ma tilde. You never answer my questions."

More people are now shuffling around him attaching and disconnecting sticky things with
wires, little pads that shook his body slightly, rubbing salve here everything stung
everything

felt hairless and dry the older man in green had been called away before he left he had said something like *"Order X-rays, an MRI, a catscan, then a complete workup. But take it slow. We're not dealing with 'just another patient' here. Mr. Cavanaugh is [and here the man in green, who had been avoiding looking at his face thus far, finally did so] a part of history."*

Yet more commotion. He, Cavanaugh, he he he **Charles** Cavanaugh felt tired and yet he also felt that he had slept at least long enough to get the water out of his ears then there was Matilda. Matilda was not all that pretty. The nurse with the breasts was more pretty. But *how could he think such things.*

"Is it . . . is it morning?" he said to no one. And just at that moment, a short man who looked like a Mexican so what was he doing in a hospital touched the box with the glass hanging near the wall and it began to speak.

"So it was another day of fourth-and-tens for the Seahawks. Next hour we'll give you our predictions for the Moscow World Cup, but first, back to Jerry."

"Today President Donald Trump announced his plans to dramatically increase America's tactical nuclear capability."

Another man, an older man, is suddenly on the glass or perhaps behind it where are all those little people?

"Today I am taking a major step to counter threats by Russia, China, North Korea, Iran, Ecuador, Venezuela, and other rogue nations against our national security. By the year 2025 we will have the ability to make surgical nuclear strikes against our enemies. These strikes will stop them dead in their tracks and bring wars to an end before they begin."

The Mexican touches the box again. Now there are six tiny colored men moving strangely and moaning in an accent he had never heard. The nurse with the breasts shoes him out of the room as she touches the box and the tiny people disappear. It is now merely a glass the people inside the box have gone somewhere else.

"You'll need a few days to get up to speed on your hip-hop, Mr. Cavanaugh. We're very informal around here. Would you mind if I called you Charley? Or maybe Chas or Chuck?"

What do people call me? he asked inside his head. And what were all the things he had been avidly listening to coming out of the box. He understood many of the words individually and knew that they were strung into sentences, but that was about it.

The green man has returned. He carries something. *"Do we have him fully stabilized?"*

"Vitals are decent, given that we are dealing with..."

"Mr. Cavaaugh?" says the green man. *"I think I have something of a something of a a surprise for you."* The green man, Sweeny, is holding what he has just brought into the room. Something metal and round. He looks at the staff to make certain that they are alert.

Then turns the roundness around and maneuvers it in front of the face of the... of the patient. In front of the face of Charles or Charley or Chuck.

"Who" says Charles or Charley or Chuck after a moment *"is that? Is that another box*

with people inside? Does this one make sounds, too. But wait. That face is moving its mouth the same way I am. Are you trying to drive me crazy?"

"Mr. Cavanaugh, this is just a mirror. And the face is yours. It's not 1899 anymore. It is

—
* * *

A TV episode I saw as a child, the mother of many nightmares. Mirrors take no prisoners. Mirrors tell no tales. Mirrors are the only Now. But not exactly. There is first the speed of light to allow for, then the speed of the nerves and synapses and whatever algorithm allocates visual input to your overall perception at that particular moment to your consciousness rather than delaying it for additional processing. So I will not be the first to say that Now is an illusion which, like all illusions, is best left untampered with Now is over before we have any chance to do something about it Now is its own best defense immune as much to capture as it is to annihilation If we could all be Now and only Now nothing but Now always and forever Now we would all be safe.

viii

In early Spring
rot is in the air
like no time else.
Earth has not yet digested
last year's death
in early Spring.

*

The Rotting Man
That is what we must celebrate
in ribald festival
with all our pendants and kites and marijuana cigarettes
our jug wine and our
curling up on the damp grass
for Man Rots, not burns—
putresces, not blazes
his life
to what lies beyond all celebration
to the rotten Autumn of nothingness.

So beware: It is early Spring.
Rot is in the air.
Stench is on our breath

Goodbyes are in our smiles
like no time else.
Earth has not yet had time to
digest our thoughts so they yet blow in the plague-wracked breezes
skim and slime the plague-doomed streams

It is early Spring Rot is in the air like no time else

(Does all of this lose everything if heard in some voice
other than mine?)

ix

"I never thought I'd see the day..."
-- the implausible repeal of dawn --
He never thought
he'd see the day.

x

"Hi, I'm Jenny. I don't look like much but I'm very good in bed..."

*"Hi, I'm Dave Schuster. Used to be with CarMax. I've got an idea for a new type of pen.
I know with pads and tablets, pens are out, but..."*

*"Hi, this is Christine. I've left three messages for you but you haven't called me back.
Does this mean you no longer wish to be my friend?"*

There's not much doubt about it.
The universe is calling

the moths

I picture an Edwardian Era ball, like in a Max Ophuls film –
black and white –
elegant couples in perfect period attire. Suddenly ten thousand moths
are released into the ballroom. No one misses a step.
The waltz continues as the moths devour the clothing. Hours, days,
years later
-- the dancers are entirely naked, swirling, oblivious, ecstatic

the breathless sleep

Below the dam
the boy lifted his pole over the railing.
And at the end of the string flapped a fish
thrusting its tail pumping its mouth heaving its gills
starved for air as the boy walked very slowly toward
the far concrete bench while his father, hat on his face,
lay prone on the perpendicular one:
Could not be bothered
by such a small fish. And I could not tell if,
in his deliberate slowness, the boy sought guidance or praise,
affirmation or at least acknowledgment of his existence while the fish
caught, vertical, gasping, doomed, faced the end of his life.

My friend, a father of two grown women, looked on smiling the entire time,
identifying presumably with the boy's dad in his studious indifference.

Meanwhile, the fish panicked for breath, praying as only
fish out of water can pray that one more thrash of its long silver being
might mean water, might enable it to inhale
the drowning life of its own world
rather than the gasping death of ours.

By this time I had turned away toward the slits above the cascades,
toward the lake or reservoir in the headwaters of the Mississippi
toward the signs and warnings and railings and paths –
even toward the empty Minnesota sky, insufficient to distract one
from this little flailing death at the end of a two foot string and a
five centimeter hook and
the arm of a boy who did not know if he had done the right thing
if it was a thing that would be rewarded
or even acknowledged and after all
he would really rather eat pizza tonight
and ice cream and watch TV by the time he had cleaned
such a small fish
there would be nothing left,
nothing to fill the emptiness inside him like pizza crust or
give him that flash of crashing excitement like ice cream.
Nothing but an odor. An odor that would stay on his fingers
no matter how much he washed them; an odor his mom
could never quite
get out of his clothes but worse
an odor that would stay in his mind like an omen like a
sickly shadow he would hear the smell and see it, feel it,

taste it for years he will wake up sick from that smell
it will be the aura of all of his bad days, bad loves, bad dreams,
bad jobs, the aftertaste that will come when he drops the ball,
forgets the answer, guesses wrong, hurts someone he loves
unintentionally... the scent of regret.

And he will gasp for air while lying in dark rooms and not know it then
awake pale and deflated, drab and disconsolate, numbed into
an inescapable present – awake
from the breathless sleep.

I like to eat fish.

to walk down flatbush avenue and buy ten dollars worth of whiting
then up flatbush avenue to buy a white wine from italy,

lacryma di jesu christi, perhaps, and/or some cava and/or some malbec
then home to you. I would camp out at my laptop in the kitchen while the
little fish cooked and the kale steamed and the wine chilled and maybe
some quinoa or risotto warmed up as an afterthought.

I like to crawl under the sheet and up between the legs
of young beautiful women and part their breathless gills with my
flicking tongue – many different little circles and dodges and feints and
subtle hard and soft and like making tiny sparks in three d
in the imaginary world of your pleasure – I love the taste, the intimacy,
my hand resting on you, you giving a little pressure, making some of my tongue
enter your vagina very deep “you’re fucking me with your tongue”
you say – I wish I had three tongues: one for your vagina, one
for your clitoris, one for your anus – and another for your mouth
for each ear, for your navel, for each breast, and then to lick your ass
your neck, the backs of your knees, your calves, to have each zone
respond to my tongue’s darting roughness and its soft healing
of my lips – with my tongue inside you I cannot breathe “don’t stop”
I am inside the tent: I want to bring your hand down to your clitoris
so that we can excite it together – I with my tongue and you
with your finger – I suck it into my mouth, bathe it in my saliva,
then I draw my tongue along your finger, wet and sticky, with taste
and suck it – I want you to bring it to your mouth and taste it too – I
feel selfish – I want to share your taste – to you, I want to share
the joy of making love to you with you

like we share everything –

links about shrinks and jay-pegs of voodoo humanoid cockatoos and
apps that distort and transform voices in the subway diagnoses
memories of beds and rooms places we went to against our will

reunions with or without the anticipation of sex
or of the night families and wounds we pour salt on them
we lick them off we talk into a delirium of insight then you abandon me
and then God comes and we are all right
for a while –
we share everything.
futures pasts lives taken apart
we reassemble them and it suddenly all makes sense
how many times do you tell me about your mother
beating you into an inconsolable oblivion of self-loathing you were
a stunted growth everyone you knew was pruning your limbs
to the tiny shapes they envisioned you to be every once in a while
they would visit you on your dark shelf just to make sure
that your pot was not too big or too deep and if there was a danger
that it might be
to give you a smaller one; to give you less water less sun less hope
and you were so pretty to them, so reliable, so decorative –
such a specimen the not-so-attractive women would bring you along
so that men would look in their general direction the giddy gay gays
mostly long in the tooth
would dote on you, guffaw at your every grimace, engage in
ribald repartee that scandalized you and you bandied it right back
and they hoped
that you would attract the attention of cute metrosexuals they could
fantasize about
while in bed with their same old lovers or facsimiles thereof
and finally after much talk, tears, wine, feta cheese and
quasi-freudian flights of fancy,
“have you noticed” you said one night over yellowtail or red snapper
“that I don’t talk about my mother anymore? You did this for me.”
And yes, I had taken you off the dark shelf and smashed the pot that
stifled your gasping roots which have now grown a billion branchlets
in the pure fresh exhilarating air breathing sustenance like a bromeliad
“you have birthed me,” you said once and then again and again and
then
you said “I love you” without saying “I love you”
and “goodbye” without saying “goodbye.”

“I’m sorry it’s taking me so long” you would say but I wanted
it all to last forever although I did wonder
what was on your mind
if you could have done it better yourself
made that repetitive circle like mercury around the sun or

a finger around the rim of a glass (I loved the higher harmonics
of your passion, like on a viola or a guitar, resonating with
the grain and texture of your essence) and when
the shiver finally came, the gasp, the tightening of your thighs
I always wanted to stay there, to lick you, it became
almost but not quite intolerable for you to hear your scream then
to move my own fish hands to your throat (you said it's
very hard to hurt a person that way)
hear you gasp as you do in your breathless sleep
to birth you anew with my tongue in your cunt
again and again and again
then

I had hoped that the dam would save me

I had dreamed that the dam would save me

I believed that the dam would save me.
I had built it so safe and so strong.

that the ice would melt into my waters and remain in a lake of regret
a lake of placid surface and pure intent
a lake for the casual recreation of others

(“Is this hydroelectric or mainly flood control,” I asked my friend,
the father of two grown women, as he smiled at supine dad
and the fish declined to die
in its time. “I think there’s a small generator here,” he replied.)

My lust turns its tesla rotors then, mixed with urban waters and waste,
joins the mississippi’s disconsolate liquid journey toward the gulf
(your stories of bodies and sunny boats and islands
down there)

Eagles nest here near the headwaters where do they fly?
are they frightened by the skyline of St. Paul do they understand
the traffic below them?

(your stories of men, women, rooms, suddenly naked, then
the next day)

downstream downstream undistracted by the night just cool and hidden
why am I here dispersing into anonymity even my sorrow
without a name.

Below the dam
more people arrived to fish.

Ostensible adults in tastelessly colorful odd clothes like cartoon marionettes
or characters from some Coen Bros. film the most recreational story
in these parts
must be of hooking the fish
so big and strong
that it can tug you under.

Above the dam
more people arrived with their boats

On the roads
families went where they usually went for pizza

In the houses
kids pushed remotes on TVs, game consoles, fingered iPads

In their bedrooms
couples made love

On the radio
the very latest familiar voices sang about romance and sex

On the six o'clock news
twelve people were shot at an early screening of a highly publicized film

In the church
folks dozed through parables and genealogies of long-dead Jewish people

In the school
children learned just enough to pass a test, then enter the forgetfulness of
life

In the washing machine
the ~~rum and shit~~ and stains of life are mostly washed away

In the clothes dryer
the stains that are not are set permanently like our dreams like our sins

On our faces
the subtext of embarrassment:
do our stains remain visible
despite everything -- all our efforts
to lead normal lives?

[Apologies for the lacunæ in the foregoing
The moths had their way with it before I did]

the trouble with midnight
part two:
the null hypothesis

window envelope

Not far from the mulch stood the woman,
on the verge of some age or other,
on the far side of some time or other,
wrestling with stories that just wouldn't quit –

harassment

borderline confusion
in the winds

unsubtle
risible
as she took it all in

"Mulch this year just average," she opines. The shallow thunder thought about
making an appearance
before she finally went away

empty handed.

"She shows up this time every year," says the attendant as if to no one although he is not alone.
"She ought to know better," remarks an unqualified visitor,
more like a passerby than a person.

Back in her car the woman wonders
Where else she might go.

On the seat beside her are three broken pots and some exceedingly dry
flower bulbs, virtually indistinguishable from the cellophane they were wrapped in.

"There ought to be a revolution,"
offers a body sitting behind her, like some radical mannequin.

"I've had just about enough
of your crap," answers the person next to him. A man with no hair and no skin to speak of.

"How do you get things to grow around here?"

Back to the woman
and her obsession.

"They drain us in the end," offers the man with
no hair, no eyes and no heart,
"Those things you cannot get out of your head."

"You're no one to talk."

The traffic slows before them
Crumbling into the gray distance in which
all their prickly tomorrows huddle obliquely like
distaff commodities futures.

The first man crunches the driver's seat with his knees. Either he or the driver must be tall, although from this perspective either could be true.

"All this goes against my grain." (Just something to say while massaging his bruised knees.)

"Next time I want your help--."

"Next time I want your *help*..."

"Next time I want your *help*...
You'll do the same thing you always do.
Insist on tagging along
and then just take up fucking space!"

"Now aren't we being cozy," whines the individual with no hair, no situation, no thoughts, no agenda.

"You couldn't have picked up the mulch anyway," he continues.

"And fucking why? Because neither of you have fucking arms? Because neither of you really gives a shit about me? Because women are nothing but a freak show for you?"

The two men look at one another.
or would
if either of them had eyes.

"No" says one of them --
it doesn't matter which.

"You could not have
picked up the mulch because

Harry's in the trunk."

underrepresented demographic

"Telemarketers Wanted.

"Acrimonious Marketing LLC:

"Call

Glancing at this on the utility poll

waiting for the light to change

as some random wind caused the five remaining confetti strips at the
bottom

to flutter

Painfully aware that her legs were thicker than her consciousness,

even more painfully aware that the

twenty three people on the waiting local bus

would have their eyes glued

to her hand

if it were to reach toward the leaflet

and grab at glory

collapse of the state vector

Living in the mountains
was not all that it was
cracked up to be.
First there were the bottles.
And then the complaints,
the toasts,
the recriminations.

Under the mildewed blanket
Something was lost.
It had justified itself by being between
two nothings of different sizes:
one hopelessly speckled although unseeable
to the naked eye;
the other a vexing conundrum
in the shape of a pearl.

"Only certain atoms
Survive at this altitude."

"That's bad news for the material world."

"Worse news for meta-fucking-physics,
If you follow my drift --

"Dude."

Mountains are not only high.
They are abstruse,
and in that way
not worth thinking about.

A hen grazed the gravel in silence as if
she had no opinion. The egg that became her
just ended up here
somehow
perhaps by rolling lazily up
the northernmost fire road
through time
or tumbling backwards from emptiness with
a satin parachute.

If watched closely enough,
something –
a wave or a speck -
stirs under the mildewed blanket
every once in a while
when no one is watching.

But there will not be anyone *to* watch.
Not for another sixty-eight million years.
Only the hen
should she develop the gumption
to come inside.

And hens don't count.

*

"In this context 'extinction event' is an oxymoron,
since events are what unleash upon us
imminent truth."

"Ergo extinction is truth."

"Mutatis mutandis you are not true until you die.
Death sets your truth for all time."

Who's speaking?
Is it the truculent
mendacity of heaven,
colorblind,
immune to shape,
crawling the walls of time
as would any perplexed spider;
as caught up in her mind-numbing
ratiocinations as she is
burdened by the best intentions?

At the bookstore in Soho in New York
customers, shivering from the cold,
line up in a queue to get their books signed.
On the sales counter,
the stack of glossy books is
diminishing in size.
In the stock room,
an employee opens another box
with his box cutter,
something one must not take on a journey by air.
At the table, trying very hard not to appear like
a scholar
but succeeding only in being the spitting image
of your high school guidance counselor,

the liberal one
who always wore
a sweater over his white shirt and green tie

The second year graduate student has arrived at
the front of the line. She hands her newly-purchased book
to the author, who winces imperceptibly at the title as he flips open
the cover.

THE BIG BANG AS EXTINCTION EVENT

(Too Nietzschean, perhaps. *Amor fati* and all that crap.

Still, better than the publisher's ideas:

"Arising From Their Ashes"

"A Fiery Future"

"Dust to Life"....)

"How should I sign it?"

"Would you mind writing 'to Melissa'?"

As if for the first time in his life he glances up into someone's eyes and sees
a shy woman, ill-formed for a smile; ill-prepared for his inevitable question.

The author keeps looking into those eyes as if they just might possibly
free some entangled truth from its benighted maze. But they only begin to –
to tear up? Is it possible?

Is this possible?

"I'm sorry," he finally says. How should I sign it?"

She just stands there, too embarrassed to wipe her eyes, or her cheeks
down which the tears descend
like dew on the horizon.

"To... to Melissa?"

"And that would be you."

Finally – a hint, the tinniest of hints --
of a smile.

Heading toward the subway, the girl stops in the middle of the pavement,
and reaches into her shoulder bag.

She can no longer wait to see
how her name looks
when written by him.

To Melissa

I will never forget

your eyes

Six years later
they already have two children,
a farm scarcely worthy of the name but still a farm
on the side of a mountain

slightly upstate but not too distant
from rivers,
a plan to painlessly improve their Latin,
for her to learn Greek,
to patch up the roof on the barn and for her
to teach at the State University rather than at
the community college.

And for him,
to write a less pessimistic book
Now that the world is at his feet
and happiness is his oyster and
Melissa is its pearl

in the barn
under the mildewed blanket,
something had been lost

and outside the barn
their hen grazes the gravel in silence as if
she had no opinion. The egg that became her
just ended up here
somehow
perhaps by rolling lazily up
the northernmost fire road
through time
or tilting backwards out of emptiness
borne by gossamer wings.

If watched closely enough,
something –
a wave or a speck -
stirs under the blanket
every once in a while
but only

when no one

is looking.

Or can look

Or wishes to look
Or wishes to see

because in their eyes

are tears of joy

hair extension

"Ex-girlfriends and future girlfriends
are trouble enough."

"That's not the half of it;
the challenge is going to be getting it to fit."

Maneuvering three sofas into an average-size truck
entails multiple considerations.
In no particular order –
the functionality of some higher principle whose sanity escapes us;
downtime wishfully to be spent in a commercial-free museum;
the third book from the left on the bottom shelf –
you know the one:
the one with the pictures.

What does anything mean
without the pictures

"But back to girlfriends."

"That's why you need the three sofas.
I told you that already."

"You don't get it. I think I'm in love."

And with that everything
grinds to a halt.

The little girl on the perfunctory sidewalk
lets her hula hoop fall.
She looks down.
She's trapped in a circle.

A paramedic ambulance screams up to the curb.
The uniforms jump out without the men,
who will only follow after lunch.
Nevertheless the spirits animating the clothing
want to help
free her
as she is clearly dying.

"Future girlfriends. Now there's a concept."

"And not one to be sneezed at."

"Unless you're allergic to the future."

"Love is no laughing matter."

"Neither is pain."

"They both grow until there is no longer any room
for you."

No one has noticed
that ten thousand pink hula hoops
are descending from the sky;
or that by reaching out
one only grapples with disaster

The pavement is more fragile than the earth
The uniforms more transparent than the stars
The sofas stiffer than the waves
The pictures more empty than the text
in the book
on which one relies
if only for the certainty
that it will outlast us.

Once again
both men are heaving the second sofa,
the one on which the ex-girlfriend will sleep.
(The third will be for dogs, bunnies, chinchillas,
bankruptcy attorneys
and "future girlfriends,"
should any of the above
make an appearance.)

"One. Two. *Three!*" shouts the second man
before the second sofa tumbles atop the third one at which
both men stare but see only

A boy the same age as the girl.
A boy with a twisted mouth.

"My gang's gonna fuck you up."
He speaks in a high, reedy voice from the side of his mouth,
looking up at the struggling men as if he were looking down.

Then he walks toward the hula hoop.

The little girl is standing with stooped shoulders
shivering a little

The boy crosses into the circle and puts his arm around the girl,
who is the same age but taller.

With his tiny head on her shoulder he says
"My love."

And she:

"My love."

So many possibilities
and yet so few.

And with that –

fade to chaos

In medias rain;

when the gist of your self splatters on the pavement, then drains into obscure punctuation. Today there are new marks that mean different things. : and ; and ! and # and even , and ? have new neighbors, if not to say friends. The new sign to indicate that you regret what you have just thought clutters up your keyboard. The new sign that means the last word in the sentence has excited you in some unmentionable way. The new sign that stands in for the tear that would have fallen on the paper if anyone wrote on paper anymore. The new sign whose meaning is that all of these words are better left unspoken until tomorrow, or until some yesterday which clamors for them. The new signs have been allotted their own keys, upper and lower case. Your iPhone is now six times larger. Eventually there will be no more room for words, only signs and squiggles and signs, marks to compress our latitude signs to query our intent so unforgivingly that soon we realize

(Perish the thought of elderly rainbows too noncompliant to disperse,
of newborn gorgons sucking
at the sagging breasts of reason,
of man

of man in a wilderness of his own making in a maze coincident with his mind. The meanderings, the salutations, the embarrassed fidgets of uncertainty. He trips on the bootlaces of his plans his future his grasp of the possible his quakings at the stone feet of the inevitable, the top, the remainder of its sandstone colossus long since plundered by adherents to some faith best left unnamed if not behind
best left
best left

One car per green
One life per birth
One death per moon.

The coruscating, dooming law of The Conservation of Synergy with its ever-reliable twin, the reticulated statute of The Conservation of Will, trundle in conspiratorial tandem into self-created darkness, their cherished territory. A belonging like none other as sensuous and tender as imagined love.)

(Throwing flotsam to the winds,
the grand toss of dysfunctional liberty.

Opposing traffic does not stop.
Opposing traffic
does not stop.



OPPOSING TRAFFIC
DOES NOT STOP

"I read philosophy much as others read the sports page. In a more similar frame of mind."

"As if your mind were something to put a frame around, then hammer to the wall."

"That's not how I meant it. You're as bad as George."

"That's how you 'mean' everything; on a certain level you are so godam literal."

[GUFFAW]

"Sorry. I thought you said 'clitoral'. Which only goes to illustrate my point."

"Which was?"

"That Death must have a Registered Office. An Agent for Service of Process so far offshore

that it has forgotten the tides and minds. Only the stars, the stats and the actuarial trends which in the short and in the long haul of eternity tell it

-- tell Death --
what to do."

"But none too often what not -- what not to do."

[The moment is but a whatnot. An indefinable unalloyed with being. A question with a 'dunno' answer, a wound and a prayer.]

"By the way that guitarist barely escaped a murder charge for injecting his first wife with heroin laced with strychnine and meth."

"Typical story."

She had hungered for the irresponsible charm
of being outdoors with her,
the her who was not her daughter but her -
Push her on the swing her smile blowing by as if it were the breeze,
her patterned skirt riding up her thighs

(her eyes locked once more with yours over her shoulder,
a wisp of her hair caresses her soft cheek and
she smiles a smile you dream must mean
*Push me harder push me higher push me
forever
push me
to the stars. . .*

your promises left unspoken her questions left unasked your longing
caught up short but only for now. Later is soon enough --)

"This is how it was meant to be," she whispered to herself, gathering all of her love
for another push.

Things are meant.

Meant to be.

As if meaning came before being, as if being were *the result* of meaning -

(The look in her eyes is meant for you her her *all
meant for you...*)

A young man stopped near a tree

the lump in his throat even larger and more ungrateful than the lump in his jeans. Visions of
plangent tridism danced through his head like caramel fairies

Swing Swing

as Being and its Partners in Crime, Time, Nothingness, and Event, bludgeoned the moment -

The girl on the swing gave another smile with a different meaning if not a different being
(and you said:)

"Ready to stop now? I'm bushed." (a bush a bush and what it hides what it must
give up)

"Bushed" are you?" laughed the girl on the swing as she slowly began to drag her shoes on the
brown dusty ground

then clenched the chains that were the swing and stood wary of the dizzy sky.

And in that moment their eyes locked. Time stopped.

"This is how it was meant to be"

thought Janine, the pusher of pushovers, who cherished the perished thought that she
could look into a woman's eyes and say without breath or words *"You were meant
to be mine."*

Which two of our troika of crooks will *pull the job* tonight? Being and Nothingness?
Being and Time?

No no Nannete. This time round, the thieves are to be Being and Event -
Event the Elf of Redefinition.

"Guess what?" grins Janice, having finally found
her balance.

"Got a hot date tonight. Met him online (where else)? He introduces himself as 'Anthony' but I am going to call him Tony. Tony's are sexy. Or that's what I read. I wonder what he'll be like."

"They're all the same" Janine was about to remark but stopped herself short - a short stop on the diamond a halt on the amethyst, the ancient coaxing gem of sobriety.

"What are you up too this evening? If you don't start dating you'll never land a guy."

Never land
Neverland
always an ocean
deeper than the squalid sea of self-deception of making up stories of making up
meanings
meanings

Neverland
Never land

ocean

ocean

iv

"I have already broken my New Years Resolutions: not to awaken each morning thinking about her; and not to go to bed each night waiting for rain. The last time (or was it the next time? or the time after that...) they found me skulking in the exercise room. I was advised that a blonde [the one in the exercise bra with the pink S8?] had approached me and asked, 'Mr Burgess?' Then the attendant said, 'He responds better to 'Anthony.' Somnambulism is such a blessing. I can ignore everyone. Even myself. You should try it on for size.

"One night I shall sleepwalk to the circle of moonlight under Rapunzel's balcony
and she will let down
her golden dreams. . .

"Only it is time for me to drive now. To drive and drive. On automatic limelight. My tires warm against the highway as if as if

"Time to send her another text; slightly different this time: HI SWEETHEART
Too faggy old-ladyish or retarded...

"HI LOVE

"Too British too Cockney but hey,
Cockney's good at least OK. So it's

"HEY LOVE MISS YOU ALREADY WOKE UP THIS MORNING [with the tits of the blonde in the exercise bra in the exercise room in my face]

NO:

"WOKE UP AGAIN THIS MORNING THINKING ABOUT YOU.
IT WAS NICE"





in memoriam louis althusser, who

i

The b side of paradise
The one for which we got less studio time
The one on which we used pick-up musicians from a strip club since we had broken up for good
by that time
The one where the engineer was some kid from a class at the community college who didn't
know the mass from a soul in the wall
The one that barely made it as a bonus track onto the Kmart bargain reissue of our last
compilation album, the one even our sixty year old ex groupies won't spend
their hormone replacement money on and our seventy year old ex roadies won't spend
their Exelon and Razadyne money on and our eighty year old ex producer won't spend
his funeral money on

The b side of paradise.
That's where we are.

ii.

The hexagonal reservoir atop Tonga Mountain, covered with thick rusted planks of furrowed
steel, has, like all the others, been abandoned to the echoes and the snakes. Below
a rickety city spreads to the mountains through the wishful gray haze.
Towers carry their wires. Ants carry their food. The earth carries all of it, round and round
Carries more fantasies
than it can bear. A shrub shivers in the cold desert wind.

Let's call it home.

No other journey makes sense
No other goal stays steady in our eyes
The finish line of flimsy twine we flashed across and then as if in death
No where to run
No one to hide from
No watch to stop us swollen in our tracks
Like all victories an infraction a shattering a debasement
And all the more reason
The seasons are spent
The race is run

Let's call it home

Let's call it ours.

who
 plays his lay on the lyre of capital,
 the clinamen flushed by a wink,
 the impatient inpatient swerve

His cerebrum then his cerebellum sliced by power sufficiently puissant
 to ground unassailable rationality's dreadnought dynamos
 (the head, the shoes, the inmate's collar, the attendant's hunger
 for a brioche or some other extravagance, soon the belittling electron orgasm, the numb sound
 the shock to which there is no before, only an after, *l'avenir, l'avenir dure dure*)
 They will let him out again to write reams now guarded by the comprehensionless trustee.
 And to seek something more within his small apartment.
 Yet in the streets remains the forlorn struggle
 in the mills the girls collapse from grief
 in the books the lies enshroud the meaning
 and in his heart he finds that he's the fiend.
 All the patterns of his life bring torture
 except his hollow triumph with Lacan --
 as short a session is a thought is shorter
le stade du miroir made us light and clear not firm
le objet petit the *a* outside us,
le manqué which drains us of our selves
 as *agalma* gives and takes from us *jouissance* --
 (*entre deux nuits, celle dont je sortais sans savoir laquelle,*
et celle où j'allais entrer)

The surplus value of his heart made no one rich

L'avenir dure longtemps

Hélène Hélène Hélène

“We need to talk.”

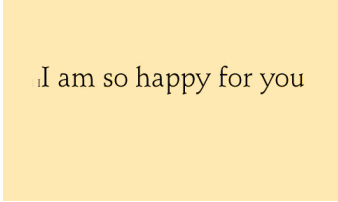
(Just my luck. I hocked my parachute last week.
I had stuck a condom to the lining. Never may it be said
that I am not prepared)

“Did you hear me? We need to talk.”

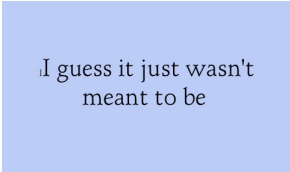
(I never believed what they said.
It is the fall that kills you
It is the fall that kills you
- Your life is in that hand that bears your ring –
now is known the purpose of your throat,
done with classless swallows, grown now tight,
a path twixt life and lungs without a want,
a strangled vortex of corrupt oblivion.)

The talk is over and for a while she goes about her own business.
Her face is the shade of ashen fog, as if it had taken all her will to slacken her jaw, which would
otherwise crush granite.


But it is not over. She has not said all she “needed to say.”
During my crass indifferent parachute-less descent
pigeons feed me my lines on cue cards:



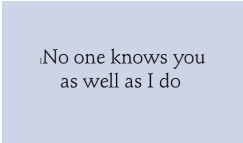
I am so happy for you



I guess it just wasn't
meant to be



We were so happy
for a while



No one knows you
as well as I do

You told me I was
the love of your life

What is going to happen
to all our plans?

My stabs at improv are no better, so I recite a few of these cue cards in a classic “let’s get this over with quickly” mien. The birds are not impressed by my delivery. Littering pigeons – birds, by the by, which form firm relationships replete with affection and care of their young ...-- so unimpressed are they that they allow the cue cards meant for me to descend upon the city, where the lines are spoken that night in bedrooms and bars, in noodle joints and concert halls, on cell phones and via email... Onto chilly benches in Fort Greene they fall, into taverns in Park Slope, into dorms at NYU, onto hovels in Bed Stuy

The monotonal monologue of being cast away
so that someone else can
have their say

Happenstantial, trite The motions go through us as if we were immeasurably permeable,
our souls and bodies little but crannies and nooks for them to lurk
then spring new influenza through our cells
and boast of new infection to our limbs
and talk the talk and walk the walk of death
for sorrows sweet are those we cannot know.

You pack your desultory belongings,
ahead of you the new Penn Station
as yet unwitneessed. You descend an escalator into a turquoise hell,
the spitting image of your heart.

We, we are the species that gathers bile into ourselves and then
needs to talk,
yielding at last to the emetic of resentment.

Listerine and blight from pain
I am killing myself
Hélène Hélène

who
like Sartre was a prisoner of war but not particularly troubled by it
who
as a prisoner changed his mind about some things
who
like Derrida and Camus was born in Algeria
who
had for students Serres and Foucault
who
lectured on Freudo-Marxism, Feuerbach and Spinoza
who
called his philosophy "theoretical anti-humanism"
who
reminds one in that sense of the inhumanism of Jeffers,
who
would rather
kill a man
than a hawk
or a pigeon dropping its cue cards into the East River, or above Far Rockaway
(As I child I went to New York I loved New York its steam was my steam its throb was my throb
and always hoped to see the side of the subway train going to *Far Rockaway*. Where the cradle gently rocks us
as far as we can dream to go
so far

so far)

Iphigenia never married Achilles.
More's the pity,
less is the shame.

Menelaus the cuckold demands his say.
Cassandra at sea
Clytemnestra on land

all about wind
all about wind

all about war
all about war

l'avenir dure longtemps

l'avenir dure longtemps

Hélène Hélène Hélène

six genders in search of a species

"It was not unreasonable
to be more careful."

"It will get better before it gets worse."

"That's not what I'm talking about.
And in any event
what you say is far from the truth."

"How far is that?"

"No one asks that sort of question."

"Why?"

"Because 'distance from truth' is only a metaphor.
'Truth' is not a spatial concept."

"And if not what is it?"

"'Truth' or 'Space'?"

"Are you asking which is a metaphor for which? And if that's the case
then either could be true,
or spatial."

This could go on and on. But how far?
(Whoops... Can't go there...)

The firefly cringes as it swoops down into the burning city
where remnants of tomorrow coagulate like the past and
men with skinny ties and khaki trousers spit into puddles
with a curious surface tension like Brownian Movement
run amok

"I don't get this notion of 'extension'."
That from the guy with the skinniest tie who generally has
the least to say.

"How does something 'take up' space? The space is still the space
whether something is in it or not."

More fireflies, more orchids,
impossible gestures flocking toward abandoned platforms –
More cities, more questions, more ruin;
backwards down the flagpole of civility

Next year the snow fell
before the holidays
and remained fallen through the plague,
in a state of collapse

ii.

“Here are my musical aesthetics in one sentence:
‘If you’re tapping your toe you’re not listening.’”

iii.

She realized that she had reached a boundary
Pamela
which she should not cross. Beyond it lay something which, though only paperwork,
was brutal.
Cease and desist.
Cease and desist.

Unconscionable a heinous deflation of a family’s dreams the other party to the agreement
could put it behind her no eyes in the back of her head the past is the past let it lay
Trickery deceit misapplication of the statute
for dividends to be earned in hell
and yet Grace was Pamela’s best friend best friend true and only friend Grace
always
came out on top and someone else
came out below bottom
Is that not
how it goes?
Pamela told herself to
put on her thinking cap. Not her hungry cap or her lusting cap or her leaky rain hat her
thinking cap loss, gain You ask too many questions said Grace
Sign the thing and we’ll party
meet some guys at Hogan’s Saloon book a trip to Cancun make a down payment
on a condo in Miami
You think too much You worry too much and for some bizarre reason, especially when
there are no consequences. Thinking’s fine but you need to know
when to stop

to stop thinking
an exercise like yoga:
to stop breathing
and traverse the *mahasiddhi*:
Prāpti, which gives unrestricted access to all places;
Laghima, which gives the ability to become weightless;
Aṇimā, which gives the ability to reduce oneself to the size of an atom;
Mahima, which gives the ability to expand oneself to infinity;
Prākāmya, which gives the ability to have all one desires;
Iṣṭva, which gives the possession of absolute lordship;
and

Vaštva, which gives the power to subjugate all.

So much, thought Pamela, for stopping one's thinking dead in its tracks for draining the body of will so it can reach its peace.

So this, thought Pamela, is the noise beyond the quiet of the mind.

The composer/writer John Cage was once placed into an anechoic chamber in which there was no sound no possible sound purest silence.

An hour later he was let out, and the researcher asked him, "How did you – especially you as a musician and a composer, someone who makes art out of sound – how did you respond to being somewhere where sound was impossible?"

"I am sorry to disappoint you," said John Cage. "I still heard something. And not something particularly quiet at that."

"And what was it you heard?"

"A sizzling, a whooshing . . . So, something must be wrong with your machine."

"No," answered the researcher. "There is nothing wrong. What you heard was your blood rushing through your veins. What you heard was the electricity coursing through your nerves."

Pamela asked Anthony about this one day -- about what can or should happen when you turn your mind off and make your body as still as possible.

She was on a double date with Grace and a guy she met online named George --, and he had no opinion, although Pamela suspected that he really did, and had half-way decided that he was not the man for either her or Grace entirely on that basis.

Anthony, on the other hand, said that this is proof that what lies beneath everything is not peace but will;

not silence but desire, desire for life, desire for more, desire for things, desire for power. And without will without desire we die.

Grace told her the next day that she had not liked Anthony very much. Not only had he kissed her on the cheek in a funny way – too long, his lips wandering toward her mouth --, but he also struck her as a guy who would say one thing one day and another the next.

Grace was smart, and even careful – in her own way. "Hide your losses," she would say, but Pamela never really understood her.

The losses she had tried to hide kept her awake at night. Because they were losses for other people, too.

By this time next year Grace had married but Pamela hadn't. She kept Anthony's number in a shoebox in her closet on a three-by-five card with a few other guys' numbers and emails. (Safer than on her phone or on her computer. No one has ever hacked into a shoebox.) The other men's

names were all exed through, but not Anthony's. Where is he now? Is he married? Is he doing well or in the dumps?

Then her cell rings and it's Grace. And from that point, as always, Pamela's life resumes.

the null hypothesis

Three a.m. my time –
minatory bullhorn in the dark please exit the freeway
branch against my window in the moonlight streetlight
possible raccoons forage or the old house creaks and sighs
wide-load trucks small earthquakes
ivy brugmansia sore shoulder too many blankets nightmare
possibly my sister's nonexistent back veranda
 descending in infinite turquoise and curves sweat
 like your skin waxed and dangerous like your eyes
 when they're hinting or your breath when it's hinting or
 your touch when it's hinting
 that they've left something out
 and that something
 concerns me -
that you are lost
 in my vertigo, in my myopic psychic unease, in my insomniac panic do I
 need to drink something, turn on the lights, read about the Buddha,
 touch my arm where it hurts
 or somewhere else where it does not now but will
 ache ache losing your love down the turquoise slide missed connection
 to sri lanka istanbul illusion infallibility and to you
Sixteen-wheelers grind their gears on the 101 my windows rattle a police
helicopter in the distance sirens paramedics a heart attack my longing
 for you sirens breaks gears the highway patrol and not so far away
 just possibly
 a fire.

Blue sheets wood blinds brown dawn naked unwashed last night's wine
in teeth stain stain pad thai or garbanzo salad or gruyere or Cheetos
No Cat. Not home. More light. Cell blinks in your purse, bra rumples
on its chair his hair grease slightly smudged the pillow where you are awake
and how did you get here? Awakened in the hangover version of
 your own past
 You will him to sleep so you can creep out unnoticed
 and find a way
 any way
 home.

6 a.m. your time.
 His hand touches your thigh in his sleep
 in his dream
 but not in yours

Stop for a moment to think
That these events are related to everything else
behind us and in front –
They caused us to come together
Just so we could reach this moment this point
where the lines of our lives converge.

Just so we could live out our fantasies henceforth
with a garbled conscience, with cluttered suspicion

But The Null Hypothesis assumes that there *is no* cause and effect
That Krebiozen does not cure cancer
That Prickly Pear pills do not cure hangovers
That war does not herald prosperity
That meditation does not bring wisdom
That falling does not bring injury
That sex does not bring babies
That dark does not cause light

But one can never prove
a negative.

You are in the hall outside his apartment his sock slid to make certain
it does not lock behind you wearing his robe his shaving cream
from yesterday overpowering on the collar holding your cell
nauseous leaning against the wall can't stand up dull blinding throb
behind your eyes, feet cold on what feels like stone you speed-dial

3:05 a.m. my time.
"Hello."

"It's me."

"Oh. Pretty freaking weird. I was just thinking about you. Couldn't sleep.
Had the oddest feeling."

"I was thinking about you, too."

"Are you sure you're okay? You sound like you're in a tomb."

"Probably this new headpiece. Is this better?"

"Maybe a little.
It must be dawn where you are. Did Minx wake you up again?"

"How'd you guess? I'd better go feed him.

But before I do

I thought I'd call to say

I love you