

# the trouble with midnight

(a book about the past)

to the memory of my father

and for H, and always

*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."

Beyond that, it is a book about what I know.

the trouble with midnight  
part one:  
correlationism and its discontents

## wind chill

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.

## 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."

‡

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.

‡

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 which 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 too  
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.

‡

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 Roslyn 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.

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?

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

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 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.

‡

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.

‡

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 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."

## unchained melody

"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."

## **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

## clockwork puddle

"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.

## phase split

“Since somewhere around 1968 or 1970 – but even more so after 1980 and into the 21<sup>st</sup> 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.)

## 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 coninglatin' 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.

"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."

‡

"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 collar.

'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."

‡

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?"

## 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.

"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.

‡

(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)

## 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  
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

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.

‡

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

‡

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

‡

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

‡

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

‡

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

‡

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.

Nothing is more calm than the unknown. We imagine 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

‡

The Lake Where It Is Easy To Swim is somewhere outside Salt Lake City -- as are many things.  
Your assignment for today is to compile a list of all the things you can think of that lie  
somewhere outside Salt Lake City (it will take you less time than you think) As for me  
I have completed my assignment and am handing it in: The one thing I can think of  
that lies outside Salt Lake City is  
The Lake Where It Is Easy to Swim.  
where  
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."*

*"meet – from Old English mētan: to find, find out, fall in with..."*

However certain things have changed since the time between 450 and 1100 AD  
when Old English expressed the needs, whims and desires, the acquiescences and commands,  
of those who spoke it and furthermore:

When, at what instance or juncture, does one meet (*find, find out, fall in with*) someone? Is it to receive a “friend request” on a social media platform accompanied by the words “*you look rad*” tantamount to a *mētan* incident? Indeed in this instance a person had found him, had *found out* what he had so teasingly chosen to expose, and before a month had passed had elected to *fall in with* him even though it was not until the next year that their bodies would appear in the same space. And yet, “the woman who fell in love” (who was also in a coincident guise the woman who cleaned her bathroom, the woman who had herself waxed, the woman who had a history, the woman who had troubles at her job, the woman who had a future), was the woman on the basis of whom he formed certain opinions which, prior to their physical encounter, he expressed as per the following:

“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 Ἡρκεπαῖος, *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."

In the long annals of love songs, probably not quite up there with the likes of  
Amy Winehouse's *Fuck Me Pumps*.

And so a man who was not still youthful by most definitions wrote this amorous twaddle for a  
woman whom he, at the time, wished to *find, to find out, to fall in with*. And, for a while but  
not for  
for too long,  
the story continued, since it needed to occupy the predetermined sector of space, time, energy  
and feeling that had been allocated for it – and no more.  
In the end life is about nothing but space, time, energy and feeling  
running out      What's funny is that all of these things are infinite at least by some cockeyed  
definition but somehow nevertheless they dissipate      Yet after they do stories remain or rather  
episodes that are not even anecdotes since by and large they fail either to amuse to teach to  
reassure to terrify to enlighten or to inspire (things that stories should do).  
To tell them only makes space, time, energy and feeling dissipate further

## 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."

Three words better for the middle of a love song  
than for the beginning or the end.

## 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 20<sup>th</sup> 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 exists 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.

## adding basalt to infamy

Same guy is still playing the game. Playing it for all he's worth.

*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.

This character should' oughta' listened to The Guy Who Used To Be George but is now the bloviating Everyman par excellence: Poetry is no way to win a woman's heart.

the trouble with midnight  
part two:  
parmenides at the dog park

## 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.*"

‡

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.

‡

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 *f*2.8  
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 Ips 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.

Then tonight I will shut my door,  
put the microphone under my pillow,  
press record

And tomorrow  
until the sun goes down, I will  
listen

listen

listen

‡

Kirk Douglas, *The Architect*, was taking another tour of the construction site, accompanied once again by Kim Novak who by that time had already fallen from her tower (and are we not all "*d'entre les morts*," between two deaths?) and was doing her best to yet again be Kim Novak

in the affluent exile of the presumed suburb. Kirk, *The Architect*, was glad that The Writer (think *Stalker*), Ernie Kovacs [in a rare screen appearance before he wrapped himself around a telephone pole on Little Santa Monica Boulevard after his wife had played up to another man at a cocktail party] – Ernie, *The Writer*, had given him the opportunity to express himself this time by building something new.

Kirk wanted very much for Ernie to like the house he was building for him, for Ernie, who was, at this point in the process on the fence. He could not really make up his mind





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.

‡

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.

‡

Survival  
Survival of  
Survival of the

‡

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.

‡

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

‡

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

‡

*"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 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 as 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 as 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 the avenue and buy ten dollars worth of whiting  
then up the 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  
rubs 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, your anus, a little pressure, moving some my tongue  
enters 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 the soft heaving  
of my lips with my tongue inside you I cannot breathe "don't stop"  
I am inside the taste; 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 take it in 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 with 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 our 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 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 until it became  
almost but not quite intolerable for you to hear your scream then  
to move my cum-sticky 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 had thought 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  
of characters from some Coen Bros. film the most recreational story  
in these parts

must be of hooking the fish  
that is 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 movie

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 cum 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?

the trouble with midnight  
part three:  
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.



‡

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 tribidism 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

‡

"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

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.

‡

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 unwitnessed. 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**

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  
*Vaśtva*, 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