

HELENS: AUTOBIOGRAPHY AT THE CROSSROADS OF PHILOSOPHY AND
LITERATURE

by

DAVID JEREMY HART

(Under the Direction of O. Bradley Bassler)

ABSTRACT

This study considers the close relationship between philosophy and autobiographical forms of writing. Beginning with a comparison of two autobiographical works, Descartes's *Discourse on Method* and Stanley Cavell's *A Pitch of Philosophy*—the first publication of the prototype “modern” philosopher and the recent “post-modern” philosophy of the maverick Cavell—I consider the motivations for the autobiographical turn, distinguishing the Cavellian from the Cartesian. Attempting to bridge the gap between the two philosophers, I write my own philosophical autobiography in which philosophy turns out to be a sort of self-reflexive meditation on what it means to write autobiography, i.e. a meditation on the very activity in which it is engaged. Modern philosophy, I suggest, proves to be inseparable from notions of boundary, or rather *standing at* the boundary. Accordingly, its expression is intrinsically interdisciplinary, bringing together literary criticism, history of philosophy, fiction, and psychological portraiture, among others. My own study moves between these various modes, and in so doing, it constitutes a Baconian portrait of thinking as a process in which the most disparate subjects are juxtaposed without their collapsing into one another.

INDEX WORDS: Autobiography, Philosophy of Literature, Descartes, Bacon, Modernity

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my wife, Monica Smith, who walks in beauty.

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Thanks to my family for their unflagging support and to my committee members for a wonderful and genuine educational experience. And special thanks to Brad Bassler for his courage, strength, and belief.

*I have kept hidden in the instep arch
Of an old cedar at the waterside
A broken drinking goblet like the Grail
Under a spell so the wrong ones can't find it,
So can't get saved, as Saint Mark says they mustn't.
(I stole the goblet from the children's playhouse.)
Here are your waters and your watering place.
Drink and be whole again beyond confusion.*

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	v
FORWARD.....	1
CHAPTER	
1 PROLOGOS	21
<i>A Remembrance</i>	21
<i>A Forgetting</i>	35
<i>A Riddle</i>	51
<i>A Communiqué</i>	65
<i>A Love Letter</i>	79
2 KATALOGOS	85
<i>The Birth of Philosophy</i>	85
<i>The Birth of a Town</i>	93
<i>The Birth of Helen</i>	97
3 ANALOGOS.....	167
<i>“In the Days of Variety”</i>	167
<i>The Conjuror</i>	171
<i>Three Burlesques</i>	174
<i>A Dark Saying</i>	177
<i>“The Vaudeville Philosopher”</i>	186

<i>The Body</i>	188
<i>Short Film</i>	192
<i>Detecting the Man in the Macintosh</i>	218
4 EPILOGOS	245
REFERENCES	264

FORWARD

For Stanley Cavell, Descartes is a sort of bogeyman. Along with Derrida, he represents one face of the Janus-head of skepticism, which, through the withdrawal of the subject from the everyday world, threatens to suffocate what Cavell calls the “ordinary voice” of autobiography. “Everyone recruited into our present academic and cultural wars seems to have an answer to the question of philosophy,” Cavell writes in the opening sentence of *A Pitch of Philosophy*; “some say that philosophy is literature, some say it is science, some say it is ideology, some say it doesn’t matter which of these, if any, it is. For me it matters”¹ Clearly, Descartes matters for those who say that philosophy is science. Indeed, he is their patron saint, for as the prototypical rationalist, Descartes’s mathematicizing of philosophy is often taken to inaugurate the philosophical development leading to modern science. The playful deconstructions of Derrida, on the other hand, tend to push philosophy in the opposite direction toward literature. But as Cavell notes, “there is no uncontested place from which to adjudicate such an issue,” the issue of what philosophy is.² For what are we to do: give scientific reasons for thinking philosophy a science, aesthetic ones for thinking philosophy a type of literature? The issue is aborted in the very identification of criteria according to which it is supposed to be judged.

What we are left with, Cavell might say, are choices. And choices are not made in a vacuum but instead in the context of a life. The question of philosophy is one that is settled (or

¹Cavell, Stanley. *A Pitch of Philosophy: Autobiographical Exercises*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1994. viii.

² Cavell vii.

unsettled) not in respect to some criterion whose authority exists independently of the events of our lives, but by each of us in relation to those very events. Or rather: by those aspects of a life that *matter*. This qualification is decisive, for philosophy, regardless of whether it tends to align itself with Descartes or Derrida, has claimed to speak not just for the individual human but for humanity itself.

Since there is no uncontested place from which to adjudicate such an issue, I take it on, in my opening chapter, autobiographically, following two guiding intuitions: first, that there is an internal connection between philosophy and autobiography, that each is a dimension of the other; second, that there are events of a life that turn its dedication toward philosophy. The second of these intuitions is expressed in the question: What is an education for philosophy? If what distinguishes the philosopher is not that he or she knows anything that others do not know, then the education in question is one grounding the conviction, in words of Emerson, that ‘the deeper the scholar dives into his privatest, secretest presentiment, to his wonder he finds that this is the most acceptable, most public, and universally true.’ Put otherwise, it is an education that prepares the recognition that we live lives simultaneously of absolute separateness and endless commonness, of banality and sublimity.³

The arrogance of the philosopher, Cavell tells us, is that he or she presumes in some way to speak for others even while dwelling on the most private of joys and sorrows—to speak for others *to the extent* that he or she gets to the bottom of these secret sentiments. Certainly, such an intuition, with its boast of surprising affinities, is mysterious. Perhaps it is an intuition possessed only by Cavell.

In response to a letter from a University of Georgia professor of philosophy, Cavell sent the following reply:

In answer to your (collective) wonder whether Derrida ever responded to my limited discussions of him. To my knowledge he never responded in print. But you say you would appreciate any information. There is a little. Derrida’s and my paths crossed several times. The most extended was our attending a month-long so-called workshop in Jerusalem in the eighties in which the last days were given

³Cavell vii.

over to a public conference in which a large number of papers were presented. Derrida read a paper on negative theology and I, just discovering melodramas to go with Hollywood comedy, read what became the chapter on Gaslight in my book *Contesting Tears*. It is the piece in which, digressing to refer in outline to his early confrontation with Foucault, I ended the digression by saying of [Derrida's] work in relation to my own: "Too near to ignore; too far to go." At the end of my presentation, the first person down the aisle to greet me was J.D., with outstretched hand, saying: "I love the reading. But what can I say? Too near to ignore; too far to go."⁴

Apparently Derrida, one face of skepticism, felt his own work to be very close to Cavell's, or at least he felt that way in Jerusalem. But what is curious to me is the way in which Descartes, the other face of the Janus-head, also might have shared this feeling of proximity to Cavell, perhaps even to a greater degree.

The first chapter of *A Pitch of Philosophy* begins with what seems to be a sort of joke concerning philosophy's arrogance: "The arrogance of philosophy is not one of its best kept secrets. It forever toys with worlds, and when its discoveries humble human pride, like Kant's in proving the necessary limitation of human knowledge, or Nietzsche's in interpreting our resentments, it finds itself exorbitantly superb."⁵ Implicitly or explicitly, philosophers have thought (and continue to think) themselves omniscient and masterful. But tongue firmly in cheek, Cavell also writes that philosophy perhaps is most arrogant, most immoderate, when it seeks to undercut that pride by showing definitively its own limitations, as if it were competent even to mark out its own boundaries, as well as the boundaries of every other sort of inquiry.

Surely Cavell would include Descartes amongst those children of pride, with his arguments for God, his *Le Monde*, and the much belabored quest for certainty. But having read Cavell's opening sentence, who could ignore the beginning of Descartes's *Discourse on Method*:

⁴ Email to Brad Bassler.

⁵ Cavell 3.

“Good sense is the most evenly distributed commodity in the world, for each of us considers himself to be so well endowed therewith that even those who are the most difficult to please in all other matters are not wont to desire more of it than they have.”⁶ “Good sense,” Descartes goes on to say, is the power to distinguish the true from the false, so in effect he jokes to his philosophical readers that ‘each of us thinks he is completely capable of knowing the truth—if you don’t believe it, just ask us.’ Such a witticism turns on the presumption that one knows exactly the extent of his or her own power in respect to judgement, and for that matter, the powers of everyone else. To make oneself the judge of such a matter, even if the intent is to chart out the limits of one’s own ability, is to presume a vast power indeed. Descartes’s next line—the punch-line—is variously translated: sometimes as “it is not likely that *anyone* is mistaken about this fact,” which destroys the joke, and sometimes as “it is not likely that *everyone* is mistaken about this fact,” which conserves it.

Good jokes, even when they are philosophical, are always stolen. Indeed this is not the first time we come across this particular one in the philosophical literature, for it is well known that Descartes is echoing a passage from Montaigne’s essay “Of Presumption”:

All in all, to return to myself, the only thing that makes me think something of myself is the thing in which no man ever thought himself deficient: my recommendation is vulgar, common, popular, for who ever thought he lacked sense? That would be a proposition implying its own contradiction. It is a disease that is never where it is perceived; it is indeed tenacious and strong, but it is pierced and dispersed by the first glance from the patient’s eye, like a dense fog by a glance from the sun. To accuse oneself would be to excuse oneself in that subject, and to condemn oneself would be to absolve oneself. There never was a porter or a silly woman who did not think they had enough sense to take care of themselves. We readily acknowledge in others an advantage in courage, bodily strength, in experience, in agility, in beauty; but an advantage in judgement we

⁶ Descartes, Rene. *Discourse on the Method for Conducting One’s Reason Well and Seeking Truth in the Sciences*. Trans. Donald Cress. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1998. 1.

yield to no one So this is a kind of exercise for which I must hope for very little commendation and praise, and a kind of composition offering little renown⁷.

Despite his apparent opposition to Descartes, Cavell begins his discussion of philosophical arrogance in a way that recalls the opening of the *Discourse*, and Descartes's introductory joke itself is borrowed from Montaigne's "Of Presumption," whose subject matter—the presumption, the arrogance of philosophy—is explicitly recalled by Cavell in his opening pages. Perhaps Descartes is nearer to Cavell than one might think, certainly too near to ignore.

How near are the two when Cavell examines the academic answers to the question of philosophy, denying that philosophy is science or art or ideology? Doesn't the *Discourse* proceed in precisely the same way? Descartes detailed his own education, bemoaning the fact, as he saw it, that there was nothing in academic philosophy beyond dispute, "and thus nothing that is not doubtful." Since the sciences had derived their principles from philosophy, they were just as doubtful as their foundation. Philosophy, in so far as it was Science, could not offer the "clear and steady knowledge of everything that is useful in life" that Descartes so desired. Moreover, this knowledge was not to be identified with rhetoric or poetry, given that these seemed "gifts of the mind," which only could be received, not learned. And when Descartes distinguished such knowledge from both the textbook moral works, which did not instruct sufficiently as to how the virtues could be *known*, and also contemporary theology, whose revealed truths, though addressed to the most ignorant as much as the wise, were beyond understanding, was he not struggling toward the denial that philosophy is ideology? The very

⁷ Descartes, Rene. *Discourse on the Method for Conducting One's Reason Well and Seeking Truth in the Sciences*. Trans. Donald Cress. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1998. 1.

act of criticizing his schooling, a course of study “celebrated” throughout Europe, seemed to approach this denial.⁸

When Cavell goes on to distinguish philosophy from two more closely related activities—from psychoanalysis, on the one hand, and from ancient philosophy’s “sense of itself as guiding the soul, or self, from self-imprisonment toward the light or instinct of freedom,”⁹ on the other—he draws into very close quarters with Descartes indeed. Given his guiding intuition concerning the relation of philosophy and autobiography, these activities seem to Cavell to bookend philosophy without really capturing it, since for ancient philosophy with its “Socratic ambition,” “speaking for oneself is, let us say, too personal,” while for psychoanalysis, “what we are likely to call autobiography is, in a sense, wrongly personal, about the wrong person, serving to avoid hearing (roughly paraphrasing Lacan) who it is who is dictating our history.”¹⁰

Similarly, Descartes admits that “the gracefulness of fables awakens the mind” and that the “memorable deeds recounted in histories uplift it, and, if read with discretion, aid in forming one’s judgement.” But nevertheless histories, even “if they neither alter nor augment the significance of things, in order to render them more worthy of being read, at least almost always omit the basest and least illustrious details, and thus the remainder does not appear as it really is . . .” In contrast, fables suffer from the opposite problem, “mak[ing] one imagine many events to be possible which really are impossible.”¹¹

Ancient philosophy, Cavell claims, holds itself aloof from the autobiographical, thinking these matters too personal. In so doing, I suggest that it approximates what Descartes is calling “history,” the ancient stories of memorable and heroic deeds. Both ancient philosophy, as

⁸ Descartes 3.

⁹ Cavell 4.

considered by Cavell, and ancient “history,” as described by Descartes, omit those mundane details of a life that make it recognizable as one possible for *us*. Who among us could imitate the heroism of a Socrates or the placidity of a Marcus Aurelius? Like Descartes’s historical heroes, the actors within these philosophic tales are inimitable because they have been purged of commonness, of banality. From the depths of the work-a-day world, we may look on their elevated lives with admiration, but such lives don’t seem possible for us and the world we inhabit. Indeed, they seem mere types of lives, not actual lives. Their actors seem to be emptied of human reality to the extent that they are elevated in dignity.

Descartes’s “fables,” in contrast, make us imagine certain actions to be possible when they are really impossible. There’s no reason to take him to mean that fables represent *logical* impossibilities. No, the point here does not concern logic, but practice. Whereas history presents us with elevated but ultimately inimitable models, the fable includes the sort of material omitted by histories—the basest and least illustrious details of the world—but it fails to deliver a life that is sufficiently general, making one imagine that its events are significant to his or her own life when in fact they are not. Unlike the historical life, which has been emptied of the particularity of real lives, the dreams of the fabulist are so peculiar that they cannot be taken as examples for one’s own conduct. Likewise, Cavell complains that psychoanalysis is certainly concerned with autobiography, but with those details or associations that are specific to the analysand. For psychoanalysis, the *representative* autobiography that Cavell has in mind is the wrong sort.

¹⁰ Cavell 4-5.

¹¹ Descartes 4.

Both Descartes and Cavell are concerned with a sort of life (and a sort of writing) that can serve as an example. The fable is inimitable because too idiosyncratic, the history because too elevated. The analysis of one patient is immaterial to that of another, while ancient philosophy fails to address the vulgar particulars of an actual life. This way of taking Descartes clarifies his explanation of the purpose of the *Discourse*.

I would be very happy to show in this discourse the paths I have followed and to present my life as if in a picture, so that each person may judge it. . . . Thus my purpose here is not to teach the method that everyone ought to follow in order to conduct his reason correctly, but merely to show how I have tried to conduct mine. Those who take it upon themselves to give precepts ought to regard themselves as more competent than those to whom they give them; and if they are found wanting in the least they are blameworthy. *But putting forward this essay as merely a history—or, if you prefer, a fable—in which, among the examples one can imitate one also finds perhaps others which one is right in not following, I hope that the essay will be useful to some, while harmful to none, and that my openness will be to everyone’s liking.*¹²

The *Discourse* shares with history the presentation of a life that is of general significance, but like a fable, it will include details only significant to Descartes, which is to say, actions that one is right not to follow. In this blending, Descartes is attempting to overcome both the problems of those ancient histories, which do not present lives so much as types of lives, and also the problems associated with fables, which are so peculiar as to be of limited general significance.

Cavell, who calls the psychoanalytic stance the “clinical” and the ancient philosophical stance the “critical,” attempts something very similar:

Not to shun the autobiographical means running the risk of turning philosophically critical discourse into clinical discourse. But that has hardly been news for philosophy since its taking on of modern skepticism, since Descartes wondered whether his doubts about his existence might not class him with madmen, and Hume confessed that his thoughts were a malady for which there is no cure. *If the following autobiographical experiments are philosophically*

¹² Descartes 2-3 (my emphasis).

*pertinent, they must confront the critical with the clinical, which means distrust both as they stand, I mean distrust their opposition.*¹³

That this opposition is questionable was foreseen by Descartes, who noted that the heroes of history tended toward the “knights of our novels,” that the dream world of fables nonetheless “awakened the mind,”¹⁴ and whose *Discourse* was somehow both fable and history.

After the work of distinguishing what he means by philosophy from the academic disciplines—a sort of *via negativa*—Cavell goes on to elaborate a “somewhat more positive view of philosophy,” which “is given in considering its relation to its audience.

Science can be said to have no audience, for no one can fully understand it who cannot engage in it; art can be said to have in each instance to create or re-create its audience. Philosophy is essentially uncertain whom in a given moment it seeks to interest. Even when it cannot want exclusiveness, it cannot tolerate common opinion. Nietzsche’s *Thus Spake Zarathustra* is subtitled *A Book for Everyone and No One*; this is comparable to Emerson’s having said, with, to casual readers, casualness, that he speaks out of an ‘insight [that] throws us against all and sundry, against ourselves as much as others.’ Philosophy’s essential uncertainty of its audience is what may appear as its esotericism—not its capacity to keep secrets (which I believe it precisely repudiates in its differences with religion) but its power to divide one from himself or herself, or one from others, in the name of healing or bringing peace, so that it oscillates between seeming urgent and seeming frivolous, obscure and obvious, seductive and repellent.¹⁵

In so far as Cavell’s autobiographical exercises constitute “experiments,” they are meant to address this question: “Can it be seen that each of us is everyone and no one?”¹⁶ Unlike the scientist, who writes for other scientists, engaged in the same activity in which he or she is engaged and sharing the same assumptions, the philosopher possesses an audience, a readership who initially approach his work as outsiders or strangers, but who may come to feel that the content of that life is somehow akin to their own lives in respect to its banality and idiosyncrasy.

¹³ Cavell 8 (my emphasis).

¹⁴ Descartes 4.

But unlike the artist, whose work seems to rest in that very idiosyncrasy, Cavell's philosopher purports to live a life that is also somehow exemplary. The philosopher is not simply rendering the peculiar experience of this particular person with all of its strangeness, but rather a type of life, a more general way of existing in the world which, though general, is somehow alien to the sort of life the reader leads. Complete success for such a philosopher would be the recognition by the reader that he or she is as unique and strange as Stanley Cavell, that the life Cavell leads is an instance of a more general way of life that nonetheless appears novel and surprising, and that the reader can imitate this life should he or she choose.

The parallels between this sentiment and the previously cited passage from the *Discourse* are clear.¹⁷ Descartes wishes his own essay not to be harmful, and guarding against that possibility, he suggests that it could be taken as merely a history of a certain way of life, not one that demands any sort of imitation on the part of the reader, but rather one that in certain respects is inimitable because too removed from the particulars of the reader's life. Nevertheless, he also hopes that everyone will thank him for his openness and liberality, which is to say, for the fabulous nature of his work. The peculiarities that he has laid bare strengthen our connection to him, for his life is seen to be just as strange and "common" as ours. One might say that his honesty in such matters absolves us for the banality of our own experiences, for he too is a stranger in the world. Yet for those who do not wish to rest in either its fabulous or historical character, for those who distrust the opposition between the two, the *Discourse* holds open the possibility of imitation so that there are examples one might choose to imitate and others that one

¹⁵ Cavell 5.

¹⁶ Cavell 9.

¹⁷ See above, pp. 7-8.

might not. In this way the *Discourse*, an autobiography that was published anonymously, purports to be a work for everyone and no one.

The comparison of the two philosophers could be continued at length, taking into account the various metaphors that each uses to shed light on philosophical activity. Certainly, the “path” is one of the most important. Descartes’s is a discourse on *method*, from the Greek *meta hodos*, so that it is quite literally a discourse on a path.¹⁸ He tells us that he “would be very happy to show in this discourse the paths that I have followed and to present my life as if in a picture”¹⁹ Remembering Cavell’s fascination with the movies, one might say that Descartes is giving us a moving picture of his life since he details the various changes in his thinking from scholastic days, to life abroad, to the stove-heated room and beyond. The path and the moving picture merge into one another, for in one sense we might follow Descartes down the various byways of thought even while, like movie-goers, we merely look on at what unfolds. Things quickly become more entangled when Descartes claims to have “found” himself on paths which have led to the formulation of a “method” by means of which he might perfect his mind to an unknown degree. For Descartes is examining various paths, one sort that he simply finds himself on and another that he himself seems to forge, the latter being made possible by the former.

Cavell, on the other hand, segues into the autobiography proper of his first chapter by raising the question of why the issue of autobiography is posed for him here and now in Jerusalem. He considers the answer to this question to be a clue as to which features of his life are the ones that matter for his project. “Jerusalem,” he tells us, “is a place of stories . . . each

¹⁸ Or perhaps, a discourse on traversing a path.

¹⁹ Descartes 2.

one here has a story, to begin with, the story of his or her path here, as if to make credible to oneself the sheer fact that one is here.”²⁰ And so the reader imagines a city: not a Rome with its Appian way, but a city with myriad pathways converging on it, paths that also seem to be stories. “Each one has a story,” he tell us, but is this to say that each one has a story unique to him or her? Certainly, Cavell was not the first to have been called to deliver the Jerusalem-Harvard lectures at Hebrew University.

There is something strange about this city, for Jerusalem must be arrived at. Since each citizen has a story of the journey, there are no native inhabitants, only strangers. Apparently it is difficult to believe that one has arrived, as if the journey there were somehow unconscious, as if one had to discover or “find” himself in Jerusalem. And so in a certain respect the stories, which are also paths, seem to act as proofs meant to convince the wayfarers of the fact of the city and their being in it. But what sort of “proof” is a story? Surely, we can tell stories about real people arriving in fabulous cities, or fictitious people arriving in real cities. Perhaps Jerusalem exists but the wayfarer is deluded in thinking himself there, perhaps the exhausted traveler sees something shimmering in the desert. If Jerusalem is a city of stories and ways, it is also one of surprises and doubts.

Surprisingly, Cavell claims at the beginning of his book that there is a sense in which he is *not* in Jerusalem, for “here [in Jerusalem] it is known that you do not get to a life until you get to its pain as well as to its joys. And because here you know that the worst is known, and for that reason you know that one’s specific pain, small or large, still pain, need not go unsaid and unaccompanied.”²¹ The goal of *A Pitch* is to share this unknown, solitary pain, which would

²⁰Cavell 12.

²¹ Cavell 12.

constitute nothing less than the arrival in Jerusalem. Indeed, the city itself is the destination of Cavell's philosophy. To emphasize these points, he appropriately tells a story, which I dare not paraphrase.

The story is this. In the days before returning home at the end of my first and longest stay in Jerusalem, on and off for the first six months of 1986, the Jerusalem premiere of *Shoah* was announced at the Cinematheque. I decided against trying to get in, feeling already numb with what there was to think about, telling myself that I did not have to take this particular punishment in Jerusalem, that it could wait, and so on. A colleague I was to meet for lunch the following day phoned to say that he had forgotten when he proposed the luncheon date that it conflicted with the premiere of *Shoah*, that in view of my plans to leave I might be willing, not to miss our chance, instead of at the University to meet him at the Cinematheque in the late morning, a couple of hours before the early afternoon opening of the very long film. When we met there were almost no people around, but after an hour or so the place began filling up and all at once, so it seemed there were people standing in small groups talking in all the spaces between the tables through the restaurant. In a pause in our conversation I attended more carefully to the crowd; I realized that this event had produced the most beautifully dressed and elegantly spoken gathering of its size that I had seen in my months in Jerusalem, where a surface of studied casualness of dress and of manner otherwise, in my experience, prevailed. Moved by the timeless defiance I read in this preparation to witness yet another witnessing of the Holocaust, I turned to say something about it to my companion, who, however, spoke first: 'I had decided this morning that I would not after all subject myself to this event. If you've seen the real thing in technicolor, why look at a black and white representation?' So this is how it can be, I thought, to be told the common, incomprehensible fact that the person before one, also having an omelette with toast and a cup of coffee, had been in a concentration camp—including the small opening of defensive doubt that that was in fact what had been said. 'But,' he continued, 'my wife wants to go with me—this was not part of her past—and we managed to get an extra ticket for you.' Thus I learned in Jerusalem not to count very hard on plans to postpone anything.²²

In his remarks introducing this story, Cavell says of Jerusalem that "no place more sternly warns that in seeking for the representativeness of your life you have to watch at the same time for your limitedness, commemorating what is beyond you." "One is neither to claim uniqueness for oneself nor deny it to others," he writes, before adding parenthetically, "perhaps this is

something Emmanuel Levinas means in attributing infiniteness to the other, interpreting a passage in Descartes's Third Meditation that, on my interpretation, concerns the fate of the other in finiteness."²³ Again there seems to be a sort of grievance between Cavell and Descartes, as if Descartes somehow were opposed to the destination of philosophy, perhaps even associated with a very different sort of city of domination and inhumanity.

But at least in Jerusalem, one is not to claim uniqueness for himself, and so I would like to point out a way in which the Descartes of the *Discourse* seems again to draw very close to Cavell. First, I want to recall a famous passage from Isaiah that cannot have been too remote from Cavell's mind. Isaiah tells us that God is building new heavens and a new earth and that this work coincides with the building of a city on a mountain, Jerusalem. In this city, "the cry of distress" will be done away with and the sound of weeping will no longer be heard. Jerusalem will be a place of restoration, where pain will be assuaged, and this restoration in a sense will be surprising and accomplished before one is even aware of it. "Before they call," Isaiah says, speaking for God, "I will answer, while they are yet speaking I will hear." But most interesting to me is the way in which this restoration will be effected, for in Jerusalem, the people "shall build houses and inhabit them They shall not build and another inhabit" ²⁴ Here, in the city of God, each will live in a house of his or her own making.

Certainly this prophetic passage suggests Cavell's preceding remarks on Jerusalem. However, it also links them to the goal of the *Discourse*, although arriving at this connection will require a few paragraphs. After leaving the academy and traveling throughout Europe, Descartes tells us that "I made up my mind one day also to study myself and to spend all the powers of my

²² Cavell 12-13.

²³ Cavell 12.

mind in choosing the ways which I ought to follow. For me this procedure was much more successful, it seems, than if I had never left either my country or my books.”²⁵ And thus he segues into the famous thoughts of the stove-heated room. One of the interesting things about the conclusions drawn there is that they are all analogical. The mind, to reference the most enduring analogy, is like a house within a city. But of course there are different sorts of cities.

The ancient ones, which have grown from mere villages to great metropolises, include streets that seem so crooked and uneven that “one will say that it is chance more than the will of some men using their reason that has arranged them thus.” Although such cities are splendid and populous, they are “quite commonly poorly laid out.” To this sort of city is contrasted “those well-ordered towns than an engineer lays out on a vacant plain as it suits his fancy.”²⁶ One cannot help but think of the geometer, who manipulates his figures on the vacant plane of space. But if this sort of city is well-ordered, that order does not come from various *men* using their reason. Instead, it is identical to the “fancy” of the individual engineer; such an order is compulsory, like the proofs of geometry that compel assent. Moreover, the vacant plain is not the world in which people actually live, but a veritable ghost-town in comparison to the bustling streets, however crooked, of the ancient metropolis.

A sort of compromise is reached by having officials “responsible for seeing that private buildings serve as an ornament for the public.” In this third sort of city, the chaotic variety of the ancient city is brought under a sort unifying purpose. The officials attempt to gentrify the city, working to ensure that the private dwellings adhere to a more or less consistent style and, at least in terms of their exteriors, minimizing the motley appearance of the metropolis. But Descartes

²⁴ *Isaiah* 65:17-25. Cf. *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*. Ed. Bruce Metzger and Roland Murphy. New York: Oxford UP, 1991.

tells us that if we consider this project, we “will know that it is difficult to produce a finely executed product by laboring only on the works of others.”²⁷

There is a fourth sort of city. But certainly it is strange one, for in a sense, it is not a city at all. The villages that have evolved into bustling centers are cities of men, whereas the one laid out on the flat plain might be said to be a city of *a* man. The “official” city strikes a compromise between the two. But what of “the state of the true religion, whose ordinances were fixed by God alone”?²⁸ Is this a city, a city of God? Certainly the possibility of this fourth option recalls the Jerusalem of Cavell. Descartes himself rejects the first three cities, refusing either to live in the city as he finds it, to remodel it according to his “fancy,” or to work on the houses of others. Instead, he resolves to work only on his own house, vowing to bring it crashing to the ground and thereafter to build it anew from its very foundations according to his own plan and materials. Isaiah tells us that in Jerusalem, the people “shall build houses and inhabit them They shall not build and another inhabit”

Having dwelt on the affinities between Descartes and Cavell, I want to identify a way in which the two are decidedly dissimilar, a way that potentially is of great interest. Cavell tells us that his own turn toward the autobiographical was occasioned by a sense of alienation. As a Jew, Cavell was born into a tradition of exile, but given that he felt himself estranged from that very tradition, one might say that he was doubly an exile. Perhaps even more important was his sense of being alienated from his parents, who professed, in their different ways, to find their own son a mystery. Indeed, the fact that Cavell was enigmatic to his parents, whom one might

²⁵ Descartes 6.

²⁶ Descartes 7.

²⁷ Descartes 7.

²⁸ Descartes 7.

expect to understand him the best, rendered them mysterious to him as well. His autobiography represents an attempt to come to grips with the various sources of his alienation.

Descartes's autobiography also seems to be driven by a sense of alienation, but one with a different source. I have found it very difficult in practice to properly acknowledge the force of the following passage, which locates the impetus behind his resolution to raise his own house in order to build anew.

It is true that one does not see people pulling down the houses of the city simply to rebuild them in some other way and to make the streets more attractive; but one does see that several people do tear down their own houses in order to rebuild them, and that even in some cases they are forced to do so when their houses are in danger of collapsing and the foundations are not very steadfast. Taking this example to heart²⁹

The difficulty of “taking this example to heart” bears repeating, for the house is an image of the mind. Having denied that he intends to destroy the houses of others—the sciences, the order of the schools, or the state itself—in order to rebuild them according to his own “fancy,” Descartes is driven to the suspicion of his own house. Indeed, the philosopher implies that he suspects its foundations are not very steadfast and therefore are in danger of collapse. But this is to say that he fears the collapse of his own mind, that he may be on the verge of a breakdown.

Like Cavell in the Jerusalem movie theater, one feels the opening of defensive doubt. Have I heard Descartes correctly? Can he really be saying that he fears for his own sanity? Perhaps it is simply a matter of building a more “attractive” house. Perhaps the foundations of the new one will be more solid than the previous, but this doesn't mean that the old one was in danger of falling. But I wonder.

²⁹ Descartes 8.

Elaborating on his opening remarks, Descartes writes: “For as to reason or good sense, given that it alone makes us men and distinguishes us from animals, I prefer to believe that it exists whole and entire in each one of us.” This seems to support the notion that Descartes’s decision to tear down his house does not stem from the suspicion of its foundations or at least its most subterranean one. For what belief could be more foundational than the belief that one possesses good sense or an adequate power to distinguish the true from the false? Nevertheless, he immediately qualifies this remark, “In this belief I am following the *standard opinion* held by philosophers who say that there are differences of degree only among accidents, but not among forms or natures of individuals of the same species.”³⁰ This is the same philosopher who in the next chapter tells us that “I could not do better than to try once and for all to get all of the beliefs that I had accepted from birth out of mind And I firmly believed that by this means I would succeed in conducting my life much better than were I to build only on old foundations or to lean only on the principles of which I permitted myself to be persuaded in my youth without ever having examined whether they were true or not.”³¹

I suspect that we heard Descartes all too clearly the first time. This is how it can be to be told the common, incomprehensible fact that our philosopher, regardless of the reasons, suspected his own sanity. Despite what he might “prefer” to believe, Descartes emerges as a sort of problem or mystery to himself. Montaigne wrote that “it is commonly said that the fairest division of her favors Nature has given us is that of sense, for there is no one who is not content with the share of it that she has allotted to him.” With a touch of mystery, he adds, “Is that not

³⁰ Descartes 2.

³¹ Descartes 8.

reasonable?”³² It seems to me that the reasonableness of this adage in respect to his own case is *precisely* the question for Descartes. If there is a problem to be solved in the *Discourse*, the problem is the stability of his own mind.

But we know how to solve problems. Descartes himself tells us how to solve them. One must divide difficulties into as many parts as possible and as is required to solve them best. Thereafter, one is free to reorganize these fragments into the most composite edifices.³³ So the first thing to do is to break the problem down. But what if that problem is one’s own mind?

Descartes’s is a dangerous way. He likens himself to “a man who walks alone and in the shadows” and later to “travelers . . . finding themselves lost in a forest.”³⁴ Although his decision to tear down his house suggested a sort of necessary, self-induced fall, what he fears most ironically, having fallen off from the common path, is “falling”³⁵ or “remaining lost”³⁶ all of his life. In his metaphor of the mountain and the conventional road that winds upward toward some unknown city, he cautions against trying a more direct route by “climbing over rocks and descending to the bottom of precipices,” precisely, one suspects, because of the danger of falling.

We will have to return to the issue of mental illness, but for now it suffices to pay attention to this language of roads and mountains, of forests and falling. This is not the first time we have heard it, although the source is not philosophical, but poetic. Dante began his *Inferno* saying:

Midway on our life’s journey, I found myself
In dark woods, the right road lost. To tell
About those woods is hard—so tangled

³² Montaigne 499.

³³ Descartes 11.

³⁴ Descartes 14.

³⁵ Descartes 10.

³⁶ Descartes 9.

And savage that thinking of it now, I feel
 The old fear stirring: death is hardly more bitter.
 And yet, to treat the good I found there as well

I'll tell what I saw, though how I came to enter
 I cannot well say, being so full of sleep
 Whatever moment it was I began to blunder

Off the true path.³⁷

Dante tries to ascend a hill, but finds the way blocked. And then a shape appears to him, the shade of Virgil, and Dante chooses to follow along a different path, winding deep into the ground. On the shores of a great river, he sees Charon the awful ferryman:

. . . Then, the earth of that grim shore

Began to shake: so violently, I shudder
 And sweat recalling it now. A wind burst up
 From the tear-soaked ground to erupt red light and batter

My senses—and so I fell, as though seized by sleep.³⁸

And with that, he descends into hell.

Having had his joke, Montaigne cited Persius, “No man tries to descend into himself,” but then continued, “as for me I roll about in myself.” Descartes’s own mind was a problem for him, and his way of dealing with this problem was a controlled breakdown. Some of the sources of his anxiety were his alone, and his uniqueness, as Cavell would say, must be respected. But Descartes’s way—a way of falling—is one that may be imitated.

My own method is experimental. I distrust the opposition of psychoanalysis and philosophy, of fable and history, of science and art. But more than this—I distrust the opposition of Stanley Cavell and René Descartes.

³⁷ Dante. *The Inferno*. Trans. Robert Pinsky. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1994. 3.

³⁸ Dante 25.

CHAPTER 1

PROLOGOS

A Remembrance

When R. Meir died there were no more makers of parables. When Ben Azzai died there were no more diligent students. When Ben Zoma died there were no more expounders. When R. Joshua died goodness departed from the world. When Rabban Simeon b. Bamaliel died the locust came and troubles grew many. When R. Eleazar b. Azariah died wealth departed from the Sages. When R. Akiba died the glory of the Law ceased. When R. Hanina b. Dosa died the men of good deeds ceased. When R. Jose Katnutha died there were no more saintly ones. When Rabban Jonathon b. Zakkai died the splendour of wisdom ceased. When Rabban Gamaliel the Elder died, the glory of the Law ceased and purity and abstinence died. When R. Ishmael b. Piabi died the splendour of the priesthood ceased. When Rabbi died, humility and the shunning of sin ceased.

The endlessly repeatable lesson I draw from this Mishnah text is that, with the death of every teacher, his culture, liberated from his teaching, lowers itself by that death deeper into its grave.

Philip Rieff

It is indifferent to me
Where I make a beginning;
For there I come back again.

Parmenides

Margaret Dickie is dead. She died of lung cancer on January 11, 1999 at the age of 63, a few weeks after classes ended. I don't remember where I was when I heard the news: I could have been in my living room celebrating my 24th birthday, which happened to fall on the same day, the phone ringing in the background; or reading her comments on my seminar paper in the graduate student lounge, hidden within the English department. Actually, nothing even that dramatic.

The truth is that my phone never rang. Indeed, sleepwalking through the Christmas break, I tried my best to forget my teachers and heard the news only after the fact and by way of whatever channels graduate students use to communicate. The fact that I was surprised, which itself would have surprised anyone who actually knew Dr. Dickie and her situation, proves that we were not close. Hearing the news I paused, but only for a moment or two.

As for the second fantasy, my seminar paper included two different grades and two sets of comments, apparently in different hands: one not particularly flattering set written in ink and the other, more generous, in pencil. And although I imagine that the erasable words, those kind thoughts set down without presumption of permanency, belonged to her, the truth is that I don't know which comments were hers. I only know that the difference between them was the difference between "excellent" and merely "good." And luckily, the latter, erasable hand had won.

On the heels of disappointing midterm papers, Margaret Dickie had declared that she expected every student in her twentieth-century American poetry course to earn an "A." This was not meant to edify. For while she was speaking, she moved from student to student, looking each one full in the face, and arrived at mine precisely at the moment she added, "but some of you will need more help than others."

I imagined that this was no more an expression of hope than the Ten Commandments: if I knew what was good for me, I'd shape up—and quickly. Dr. Dickie had that kind of effect on students. This fragile, little woman, habitually clad in denim skirts and nurses' shoes, simple cross around her neck, having lately arrived, it seemed, from organizing a philanthropic pot luck at the First Methodist—this woman put the fear of God in students. Detecting a cavalier, unscholarly attitude, Dr. Dickie reduced one of my classmates, a booming-voiced student of

Viking height and mendicant beard, to tears. The old lady with the old lady's perm towered over him.

Actually, she wasn't so old. At 63, she was younger than my mother is now. A picture taken only a few years before she died shows a Brown educated, second-wave feminist whose closely cropped hair and oversized spectacles communicated nothing if not professionalism and competency. And if that cross was sincere, it was an ambiguous, Episcopalian sincerity, unable to compare, no doubt, with the absolute seriousness with which Dr. Dickie approached her academic discipline.

This focus had carried her always up the academic ranks, from junior scholar to one of forty Americans chosen by the Fulbright Commission to commemorate its fellowship. She had been the department head at the University of Illinois and the first female chair of that department before joining the University of Georgia as the Helen Lanier Professor of English. At the time of her appointment, she was one of the first women to hold an endowed chair at UGA, and the only woman in the English department with the status of full professor. Although I never heard her speak at a professional meeting, I imagine an ambitious conference speaker at the microphone, noticing her raised hand in objection, anticipating, along with everyone else, the authority of her unaided voice. Such a voice, both measured and measuring, must have been cool, even, and utterly clear.

Our class usually began with technical problems. Dr. Dickie arrived not only with books and notes, but also with a portable amplifier so that her voice, which by this point she could raise no louder than a whisper, could be heard by students sitting no more than six or seven yards away. We waited, teeth on edge, for the inevitable burst of feedback that accompanied the attempt to assemble a working microphone. As a rule, this burst would not come by expectation,

but only when we had begun to relax and slacken our shoulders. Always surprised, we jerked hands to ears and grinned at one another. To someone passing our open door we must have seemed a throng of monkeys, each of which heard no evil. A group of grinning things, aggressively arranged in a semi-circle around Dr. Dickie who, in those moments, looked less like a gray-eyed goddess of war and more like a frightened little girl.

The bulk of the three-hour seminar was given over to student presentations on the various works that we read: T. S. Eliot on tradition, the poems of Elizabeth Bishop and Robert Lowell. We were apprentices to a trade, the trade of literary criticism, and we learned by doing. Each student was given a poem to recite and explicate to the rest of the class, and we presented our critical findings in the manner of conference presentations. My sense is that much was expected of the rest of the students and that each performance earned them a ranking of better or worse on the towering chain of scholarship overseen by my unmoved teacher. This had made the Viking's failure all the more dramatic as he had been, or at least I had imagined him to be, my opposite, the first link in the chain. My classmates spoke anxiously and, the truth be known, somewhat giddily about his failure. And I was first among them. Having enrolled that semester in a Milton seminar, I was filled with a dark, boyish ambition: if one so favored could fall, might I not rise?

Such competition was meant, I suppose, to preview and facilitate entry into professional life. For Dr. Dickie knew, and made clear to us, that graduate students must not only attend, but present papers at the MLA convention; that we must not only consult professional journals, but also publish workmanlike, if not quite significant articles in those very journals. She knew that failure to enroll in a course taught by the venerable literary critic Hugh Kenner would "identify us as second-rate scholars." "You can't need much sleep," Dr. Dickie would remind us, "if you want to distinguish yourself as literary scholar."

But less was expected of me. I had taken Kenner's Yeats course as an undergraduate, but had avoided his graduate seminar on *Ulysses*. By my calculations, that made me neither first nor second rate, or at least my bottom shelf status had been hinted at, if not revealed outright. It was my first semester as a graduate student, and for the most part, I was able to muddle through with mystification and oblique, knowing references to the Hegelian dialectic. Most of the time Dr. Dickie met these attempts with crinkled eyes and mouth slightly open, a posture that I have come to know fairly well, having taught both English and philosophy classes in which the muddling, though at a lower-level than that of graduate students, has been impressive. My one shining moment came when asked to recite Wallace Stevens's "Poems of our Climate," with its talk of an imperfect paradise. After I finished, Dr. Dickie sized me up for a moment and then said, "You read that poem as if you knew what it meant." And knowing what these poems meant was the highest achievement: to translate them, to make them cohere as a structure of concepts, to birth fully-formed interpretations, like Zeus, from our graduate student heads.

Last year, I found myself an attendee at the MLA conference. Not that I was presenting, as Dr. Dickie had advised: I accompanied my wife, who was interviewing for several academic positions. I had met my wife on the first day of a Shakespeare class during one of those marginal classroom activities, incidental to the serious work of the course. Because she happened to be sitting next to me on the first day, we introduced each other to the other members of the class, perhaps in more detail than usual: "she is the daughter of a farmer and schoolteacher, and as a child, the idea and workings of the post office had held her spellbound, . . . and oh, by the way, her name is 'Monica'." I joke with her now—perhaps it's wrong to write "with" since she doesn't find this particularly funny—that instead of "one who advises," her name is more accurately translated as "one who corrects or reminds."

About a week into our class, I saw her sitting in the hall and, without thinking, reached down to touch her pale, dimpled knee as I passed. She raised her head from the books in her lap, revealing for the first time the ring of gold around her piercingly blue eyes, and gave me the most wonderful smile. Before graduate school, I had very few girlfriends. Nevertheless, in an apartment too small for us, three cats, and a German shepherd, we promptly began to live in sin. Thankfully, I did a lot of things without thinking over the course of those winter months. I'm wondering whether it would be wise to include proposing to Monica on that list.

The MLA convention occurs during the dead of winter, and this time Ph.D.'s en masse, both well-respected and itinerant, from private and state universities, took over the Marriott in Washington, D.C. Indeed, the Viking poet, now clean shaven, was among them, auditioning for a new job. My wife worked through an exhausting schedule of interviews: a dizzying array of military men who studied Ovid; systematically unkempt and be-sandaled intelligentsia; theorists with architect glasses who, slightly tipsy, quoted John MacDowell's *Mind and World* over cheap wine and large plates of unidentified sizzling fare. Monica came back exhausted from each performance.

Worrying about her south Georgia accent, which to me is barely perceptible, she said, "They take one look at me, ring on the finger, white woman from the South, and they think they know exactly who I am. They think they know . . . They think I look like 'church'." During the course of our engagement, she had confided to me the childhood story of her family's house burning to the ground and the claims adjustor, who looked up from his paperwork with a scoff: "There's no way that a farmer and a schoolteacher had that many books." As we walked to the hotel elevator, we passed a young professional who never has been, nor ever will be, suspected. Obviously going places, he speed-walked out of the barely opened doors and with a dramatically

weary sigh, tossed a remark over his shoulder to some friends: “Well, you caught me between Cornell and William and Mary, so I guess everything’s . . . alright.”

When my wife was finishing her dissertation earlier in the year, I had tried to help by doing some of the grunt work. One of the poets that figured in her argument was a woman named Ellen Johnston, a factory worker who died in a poorhouse. Remarkably self-educated—as much as one can be while working at the power-loom for most of the day—Johnston wrote many poems both in standard English as well as Scottish dialect, concerning everything from the day-to-day conditions of British working-class life to religious and political topics, such as the ecstatic reception by the English lower classes of Giuseppe Garibaldi, the Italian liberator. Since only a few copies of her autobiography are extant and hardly any anthology includes her work, Monica preserved many of Johnston’s poems in an appendix to her dissertation, several of which I typed.

One of these poems, “To James Dorward, Power-Loom Foreman, Chapelshade Works,” was addressed to her employer and included the poet’s hopes and well wishes for his family. I typed one verse, which speaks of Dorward’s sons, in the following way:

And may William, George, and Thomas, all grow up useful men,
Ah! gie them lots of learning—make them master o’ an art,
That on the tower of science still hauds the master part.

While looking over her final draft, my wife noticed that there should have been four lines in this stanza. And the part I overlooked was important, for the poem should have read:

And may William, George, and Thomas, all grow up useful men,
Ah! gie them lots of learning—make them masters o’ the pen;
The man that’s master o’ the pen is master o’ an art,
That on the tower of science still hauds the master part.³⁹

³⁹Johnston, Ellen. “Lines to Mr. James Dorward, Power-Loom Foreman, Chapelshade Works, Dundee .” *Autobiography, Poems and Songs of Ellen Johnston, The ‘Factory Girl.’* Glasgow: William Love, 1867. 86-88.

A telling omission. One wonders what I had in mind as the “master art” that rules over the sciences: some sort of foundational logic or metamathematics, no doubt. But a poet, a lowly laborer whom textbooks barely remember, corrected me. Although the “Factory Girl” probably could not have been familiar with this text even if she had known of its existence, Johnston reminded me of Plato’s *Phaedrus*, a myth-laden work devoted to the connection between reading and writing, *eros*, and the soul. Like the myth of Theuth,⁴⁰ Johnston identifies the perfection of writing as the most useful of academic pursuits. But one wonders what to make of that last line: does the art of writing occupy the first rung on that scientific tower or does this art hold the master discipline in check from outside? For Plato *eros*, and maybe even philosophy itself, seems to be something between knowledge and ignorance, and likewise Johnston implies that the art of writing is neither science nor totally removed from science, but something between the sobriety of calculation and the frivolity of games.

Having attended one supremely boring panel devoted to *eros*, I spent most of my time at the MLA meeting “studying” Descartes in our hotel room. With its strange talk of winter fires, the mad “vapours of melancholia,” and those afflicted who maintain “they are dressed in purple when they are naked,”⁴¹ the writing of Descartes proved to be more titillating than the academic panel on erotica. The framing parts of his work, in particular, held some curious interest for me. Instead of responsibly studying the intricate physics of bodies, I poured over the prefatory

⁴⁰ “[Socrates:] What feature makes writing good, and what inept? . . . I can tell you what I’ve heard the ancients said, though they alone know the truth . . . Among the ancient gods of Naucratis in Egypt there was one to whom the bird called the ibis is sacred. The name of that divinity was Theuth, and it was he who first discovered number and calculation, geometry and astronomy, as well as the games of draughts and dice, and, above all else, writing” (274B-274D, Plato. *Phaedrus*. Trans. Nehemas, P. and Woodruff, P. Hackett: Indianapolis, 1995.)

⁴¹ Descartes, Rene. “Meditations on First Philosophy.” *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*. Trans. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugold Murdoch. Vol. 2. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1984. 13 (my emphasis).

material to his *Principles of Philosophy*, devouring his dedication to princess Elizabeth, the daughter of the “Winter King” of Bohemia.

For, in the first place, *your desire of self-instruction is manifest*, from the circumstance that neither the amusements of the court, nor the accustomed mode of educating ladies, which ordinarily condemns them to ignorance, have been sufficient to prevent you from studying with much care all that is best in the arts and sciences Of the vigour of your intellect I have a still stronger proof, and one peculiar to myself, in that *I have never yet met any one who understood so generally and so well as yourself all that is contained in my writings*. But what most of all enhances my admiration is, that *so accurate and varied an acquaintance with the whole circle of the sciences is not found in some aged doctor who has employed many years in contemplation, but in a Princess still young, and whose countenance and years would more fitly represent one of the Graces than a Muse or the sage Minerva*. In conclusion, . . . though fortune has attacked you with continued injustice, it has failed either to irritate or crush you. And this constrains me to such veneration that I not only think this work due to you, since it treats of philosophy which is the study of wisdom, but likewise I have no greater wish to hear myself called a Philosopher than to be called the most devoted admirer of your Most Serene Highness.⁴²

It seemed to me that this prologue, which almost reads like a love letter,⁴³ actually identified Elizabeth as the incarnation of wisdom. For its author, to be called “a Philosopher” and to be called “the most devoted admirer” of the princess were one and the same. And so I took it to be a description of what Descartes’s philosophy pursued: a *desire* for self-instruction, a heightened ability to *read*, and “most of all,” the *physical* beauty of a Grace. That these attributes were the goal of philosophy and not its precondition, or that the third was related to philosophy at all, proved difficult to take to heart. Certainly the scientific minded would dismiss the dedication as marginal or merely rhetorical, perhaps even as ironic.⁴⁴

⁴² Descartes, Rene. *The Principles of Philosophy*. Trans. Valentine Miller and Reese Miller. Boston: Kluwer Boston, Inc., 1984. xiv-xvi.

⁴³ So far, scholars have uncovered only one love interest in Descartes’s life: Helene Jans, with whom he conceived Francine. The child was considered “legitimate” because Descartes acknowledged himself her father at the baptism, but Francine was born to Helene and Descartes out of wedlock. Cf. Watson, Richard. *Cogito, Ergo Sum: The Life of René Descartes*. Boston: David R. Godine, 2002. 171-189.

⁴⁴ Descartes himself insists on the philosophical status of the dedication (xiv), and one wonders what Stanley Cavell

Queen Christina of Sweden “invited” Descartes to join her as tutor and sent a warship to fetch him. Though he lived long enough to publish the work that Elizabeth had implored him to write, *The Passions of the Soul*, Descartes could not survive the Scandinavian winter. “The thoughts of men freeze as the water,” the philosopher said of his final season.⁴⁵ Five winters previous to the MLA convention, I composed my final paper for Dr. Dickie, and it was a tour de force—seriously. Having chosen what I imagined to be the most cryptic poem of the most cryptic poet we had read, John Ashbery’s “Farm Implements and Rutabagas in a Landscape,” I proceeded to illuminate how the poem actually constituted an allegory so strict that every image corresponded to some theological concept or another. It was as if Ashbery were a transmogrification of Edmund Spenser, rewriting the *Faerie Queen* in light of recent post-Hegelian developments in neo-Platonic metaphysics. The inessential, material covering of the poem fell away as I laid bare the unified structure that was its meaning. I flattered myself that by the end, no part of that poem lay hidden; in fact, I damn near succeeded in getting rid of the poem altogether.

would make of it. After giving an example of a certain type of reading, what he takes to be *philosophical* reading, Cavell considers a similar case: “I am reminded, and will be reminded again, of an astounding confession of John Stuart Mill’s in the third chapter of his *On the Subjection of Women*, a moment that reveals the essential autobiographicality of that text as a whole. Mill is asking, in effect, where his evidence lies for his conviction that women are the equal of men in intellectual originality, given their fewer numbers in the historical lists of intellectuals. Having answered that women are not in general trained to put their ideas in institutionally correct forms, that in other words their lack of numbers in certain institutions is not determined by their lack of ideas but by the constructions of those institutions, he goes on: ‘Who can tell how many of the most original thoughts put forth by male writers, belong to a woman by suggestion, to themselves only by verifying and working out? If I may judge by my own case, a very large proportion indeed.’ It is a vision of a very large proportion of high Western culture as plagiarized, speaking with voices other than those it owns. (This is not the same as the indictment that the culture has not listened to women; it is the indictment that it very conveniently has.) It is an autograph sign of that culture that when Mill, in the dedication of *On Liberty*, names Harriett Taylor as ‘the inspirer, and in part the author, of all that is best in my writings,’ he is not—any time I have heard the book mentioned—taken seriously. What can one confess?” (16-17).

⁴⁵ Incidentally, *hodos* means not only a road, way, or channel, but also the motion along these paths, such as journeying, or even the flowing of water.

And so I eagerly awaited Dr. Dickie's comments, but, if memory serves, we didn't receive them until after the semester. Indeed, Dr. Dickie herself had been a missing person during our final meetings, as a junior colleague of hers had suddenly and with no explanation assumed responsibility for the class. At the time, that did not strike me as odd. In fact, I must admit that her replacement seemed a holiday. My wife and I ran into him and his young daughter only a few months ago in an Athens supermarket. His stylish, urban dress coupled with a British accent stood out incongruously against the backdrop of chicken cut up for frying and the moneyed, but decidedly middle-class Atlanta students buying beer and salsa for weekend festivities. The professor's pixie-sized daughter, with her albino blonde hair and blue eyes, stood by her father's side, ignoring our witty banter and references to avant-garde criticism. In one hand, she brandished a chocolate covered doughnut with sprinkles, while the other clutched a deli sample of roast beef to her chest. Alternating vigorous bites of the two, she smiled up at my wife. The substitute professor, with a little, uncomfortable laugh, added his gloss: "She's the world's daintiest barbarian."

My hair wasn't quite that blond when I was a child, and my eyes were smaller, cloudier. When I was a boy, son of a chiropractor and a civil servant, I went through a rather unhealthy phase during which I refused to eat. It seems to me that this is unremarkable: I also refused to wear buttons—only snaps and velcro—and I've talked with other men who labored under similar sacred prohibitions, denouncing all shoes except cowboy boots, for instance. But apparently this was a little more serious, at least according to my mother, Myra Diane. She would close her blue-gray eyes and say, "You were very different from your sister. You didn't want anything, never asked for anything; I had to take toys and put them in your hands." Smiling and shaking her salt and pepper curls, she would add, "You just wanted to be left alone." My uncle, in

between cigarettes, remembers it differently: “You beat anything I ever saw as a kid. You could do anything, this chubby little blonde-haired kid. And then you just stopped.” What I remember is my mother, the smile having faded from her face, saying, “I used to beg you to eat something.” From time to time, I inexplicably would find candy bars hidden underneath my desk at school, as well as around the house, although only the former, I think, were meant for me.

Once my elementary school teacher had sent us home with a riddle—what order and class does the spider belong to? I was overcome with excitement when I discovered the answer in our ancient Compton Encyclopedia set. Thinking back now, I can remember no comparable joy, except perhaps when I realized that men do not have babies. Indeed, I seemed to possess some aversion to the prospect of being copied. Virtually all of my childhood photographs resemble nothing so much as a toad sporting a Prince Valiant haircut, sullen cheeks bulging with anger.

This aversion to replication, however, did not extend to things other than myself. Indeed, on my grandmother’s nineteenth-century typewriter, I copied out a good chunk of Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* word for word, thinking that I was making something, that I was writing. Although my teacher had made me vaguely aware of the concept of plagiarism, the alteration of one word or phrase seemed enough to protect me from its ignominy. Predictably, coloring between the lines was an award-winning strength of mine. The only original drawing I can remember producing, besides one of ducks that my mother made me redo on the grounds of unrealized potential, was of a dark-haired child the color of the shadowy, burnt orange sun that set behind him on the horizon. Holes in his home-spun clothes, he sat on a split-rail fence, head in hand and alone, except for the black-eyed Susans pushing up through the fence. There were tears running down his face. He was well received.

My mother's family was headed by my willful, twice divorced Grandmother Beavers, offspring of the rather curious, almost scatological union of the Shead and Head families. Money was a constant challenge and of three children, only my mother's brother had been fortunate enough to attend college, completing his bachelor's degree at the University of Georgia and his law degree in Atlanta. My mother speaks glowingly about her brother's academic achievement. Despite her own lack of education, my mother had been a substitute teacher for my elementary class and always sent me to school armed with pencils sharpened to a point and correct answers, including the answer to my teacher's riddle. Standing in front of the class, I read from a sheet of paper clutched tightly to my breast: "The spider belongs to the order Araneae and the class Arachnid, along with the scorpion, the mite and tick."

Not too long ago, my mother and father came to UGA. With some difficulty, we found a restaurant that served food my mother could eat: her doctor, who, according to some absolutely idiosyncratic measure, chastises her for being "overweight," had prescribed a special diet since she has the liver of an alcoholic: cirrhosis, despite her teetotaling past. Speaking of my dissertation-to-be, she told me that she couldn't dream of writing a book. After dinner I proudly showed them the sizable lecture hall in which I taught, strutting to the front of the amphitheater. My mother asked me to sit behind the teacher's desk and suddenly burst into tears.

Margaret Dickie looked larger sitting behind the desk in her office than she did in front of our class. I'm not sure now whether I came to her office of my own volition or whether this meeting was required. Approaching the end of my first semester, I had been casting about for an area of study, largely based on the classes that I happened to be taking at the time. In fact, the choice of *these* classes hadn't been mine. Or at most, it had been partly mine. The actual, binding decision was made by the graduate coordinator; I only submitted "preferences." And my

preferences weren't particularly firm: now a Blakean, now a Shakespearian—casting about for a name—I was at a loss. Dr. Dickie and I chatted pleasantly but rather distantly about my areas of interest, my other classes, and the final paper, its due date creeping ever closer on the calendar. All three made me intensely anxious, as did the professional woman flanked by her cases of scholarly array.

She wrote down several books and articles of interest for my reading during the Christmas break, and I suppose that if I had kept this paper, instead of promptly misplacing it, I could have compared these handwritten comments after the semester with the two sets on my final paper: the distant refutation written in ink and the pencilled comments, full of kindness and supportive hopes. I didn't put it together at the time but she must have been grading almost until her death. Reviewing now my “excellent” but torturous allegorical reading of “Farm Instruments,” with its secret structure, its reduction to concepts, I can hardly read the faint marks in pencil. But they dwarf everything that came before: “You have put an end to the charge that Ashberry's poem is meaningless and incoherent, but have you now made the poem too meaningful?”

During our meeting, I declared my suddenly deeply held professional ambition. As if stating some axiomatic necessity, I blurted out, “I think I want to be a Miltonist!” Margaret Dickie leaned toward me from behind her desk as if seeing me for the first time. She said nothing.

Small gestures are the hardest to pin down. Little movements, muscular, where rigor is mysteriously loosened, those easily overlooked, around the borders of the eyes and mouth, the joints of the hand: these are foundational. A slow upturn of the lips, cracks around gray eyes, a wrinkled, marked hand that only begins to reach out, almost imperceptibly. There is something

mysterious in the human body, something compassionate, sad, and warm. But I took no notice of these contours. And I didn't know Dr. Dickie. Not really.

A Forgetting

Japan invades. Far Eastern vines
Run from the clay banks they are

Supposed to keep from eroding,
Up telephone poles,
Which rear, half out of leafage,
As though they would shriek,
Like things smothered by their own
Green, mindless, unkillable ghosts.
In Georgia, the legend says
That you must close your windows

At night to keep it out of the house.
The glass is tinged with green, even so,

As the tendrils crawl over the fields.
The night the kudzu has
Your pasture, you sleep like the dead.
Silence has grown Oriental
And you cannot step upon the ground:
Your leg plunges somewhere
It should not, it never should be,
Disappears, and waits to be struck

Anywhere between sole and kneecap:
For when the kudzu comes,

The snakes do, and weave themselves
Among its lengthening vines,
Their spade heads resting on leaves,
Growing also, in earthly power
And the huge circumstance of concealment.

. . . . In your closed house, with the vine

Tapping at your window like lightning,
You remember what tactics to use

James Dickey

Before working on this dissertation, I never had read any criticism devoted to Thomas Wolfe, “the great haystack of a southern country boy,” as Kurt Vonnegut writes, “who came to New York City with a great haystack of an unpublished novel.”⁴⁶ In certain respects, though, he seems to have been lurking underneath my work, as unsettling as a needle. I’ve spent more time with Wolfe than any other writer. I first read him as a boy, sneaking *Look Homeward, Angel* at random from my grandmother’s shelves when I was supposed to be working up an appetite by cleaning the windows. And I remember spending all day in UGA’s immense library, deserted during the interim between spring and summer semesters. Having failed to complete my graduate school applications on time, I sat in the covering stacks, leafing through *Of Time and the River* on a whim and at my own leisurely pace. I can remember no other book, at any point in my life, moving me to tears.

I loved Thomas Wolfe. And I said as much when I finally completed those applications, pledging (unwisely, one suspects) to make his work my focus of study. He was beautiful, a shining youth even at age 38, when tubercles completely covered the right side of his brain. Just like that, the young man fell into a coma and never woke up.

Thomas Wolfe is dead. And that big work which he was prepared to write, which was to have gone to six long volumes and covered in the course of

⁴⁶ Vonnegut is actually parroting the stereotypical view of Wolfe in order to highlight the success of Arlyn and Matthew Bruccoli in putting this scholarly myth to rest. The original version of Wolfe’s *Look Homeward, Angel* was entitled *O Lost: A Story of the Buried Life*, the most recent edition of which was edited by the Bruccolis. Vonnegut’s blurb on the back cover is worth quoting in full: “There was once this great haystack of a southern country boy who came to New York City with a great haystack of an unpublished novel. Hopeless! But then a brilliant, superbly educated Yankee editor applied the pitchfork and tweezers of his perfect taste to such disorder, making the country boy seem a genius, and *Look Homeward, Angel* a romantic, poetic masterpiece. This bit of literary history, supposedly so widely believed because it was entertaining in its own right, is now revealed by Arlyn and Matthew J. Bruccoli to be a shameless slander of the author, and of the original manuscript as well, which is reproduced in toto. The southern country boy really was a genius, and a thoroughly professional writer besides, and his manuscript, probably somewhat frumpish in appearance, to be sure, was already a beautifully organized masterpiece before the two of them ever headed north across the Mason-Dixon Line.”

its narrative the years between 1781 and 1933, with a cast of characters whose numbers would have run into the hundreds, will never be finished. The title which he had chosen for it, *Of Time and the River*, had already been allowed to appear on the second volume. There its application is not altogether clear; how appropriate it would have been to the work as a whole we can only conjecture. No work of such a magnitude has been projected by another of his generation in America; Wolfe's imagination, it appears, could conceive on no smaller scale. He was, he confesses, devoted to chance; he had no constant control over his faculties; but his fecundity was nothing less than prodigious. He had, moreover, a tenacity which must, but for his dying, have carried him through to the end. Dying, he left behind him a mass of manuscript; how much of it can be published there is no knowing. Wolfe was the most wasteful of writers.⁴⁷

So begins John Peale Bishop's essay "The Sorrows of Thomas Wolfe." I'm still struggling to distinguish whether the predominant tone here is grief, pity, or indignation: grief over the loss of such an intensely inspired artist and the uniquely lyrical novels of which he was capable; pity for the man, whose alienated and fractured mind gave out so soon; or a sort of righteous indignation at the artistic failings that Bishop associates with Wolfe's mental defects. As to whether justice or mercy has won, Bishop seems as inscrutable as the godhead.

That Thomas Wolfe is indeed dead, on the other hand, seems to be a rather uncontroversial point on which Bishop's early paragraphs are curiously fixated. Having noted this fact no less than three times in his opening passage, Bishop rivals the narrator of Dickens's *A Christmas Carol* for repetition, whose opening insistence on the fact of Marley's death prompted novelist John Irving to grouse, "I think we get the idea."⁴⁸ Bishop himself was first and foremost a poet, although, according to the judgement of the critics, a minor one: his poetry will be forgotten if it hasn't been already. But perhaps his criticism will be remembered, given

⁴⁷ Bishop, John Peale. *The Kenyon Critics: Studies in Modern Literature from the Kenyon Review*. Ed. John Crowe Ransom. Cleveland: World Pub. Co., 1951. 3.

⁴⁸ Irving, John. Introduction. *A Christmas Carol and Other Stories*. By Charles Dickens. New York: Modern Library, 1995. Of course it turns out that Scrooge's former partner Marley, in the inimitable words of Dickens, was only dead "to begin with." Indeed, the narrator himself remarks on the curiousness of his insistence, but adds by way of explanation, "this must be distinctly understood, or nothing wonderful can come of the story I am going to

his connection to the so-called “New Critics”: Allan Tate, Robert Penn Warren, and John Crowe Ransom. Indeed, the inaugural issue of Ransom’s influential journal *The Kenyon Review* begins with this essay by Bishop, the aspiring poet and sometime critic. And here the two vocations mingle in his blunt first sentence, which echoes the opening line from one of Bishop’s poems, appearing six years earlier in the *Now With His Love* volume. Only the names have been changed. “Bernard Peyton is dead” instead of Thomas Wolfe, but although Wolfe was middle-aged, not 17, he joins Peyton and the other soldiers of the Great War by association as one of Bishop’s “Young Men Dead.”⁴⁹ John Irving might say, “I think we get the idea.”

But I’m not sure that *I* do. I’m not sure I understand the change in tonality that seems to accompany the three different references to Wolfe’s demise. What seemed a colorless, rather uninformative statement of brute fact—“Thomas Wolfe is dead”—comes to suggest an unseasonable and violent demise. Miltonists might remember here the beginning of their namesake’s great lamentation: “For Lycidas is dead, dead ere his prime, Young Lycidas, and hath not left his peer.”⁵⁰ Wolfe, who like Lycidas was “in the way of being [a] poet,”⁵¹ brandished a talent without equal and an ambition of a scale undreamt by his American peers. “But for” his sudden death, the irrepressible Wolfe apparently would have fulfilled his great potential, his tenacity “carr[ying] him through to the end.” Nevertheless, Bishop’s Wolfe was somehow “wasteful” in dying, as if he were being blamed either for having produced too much unpublishable, scattered prose or, stranger still, for having exited too early so that his potential

relate.”

⁴⁹ *Collected Poems of John Peale Bishop*. Ed. Allan Tate. New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1975. 16-17. Allan Tate begins his preface saying: “A critical edition of the poems of a man so recently dead as John Peale Bishop is not possible at the present time; nor would it, I think, be desirable” (vii).

⁵⁰ Milton, John. “Lycidas.” *Milton’s Poetical Works*. London: MacMillan and Co., 1922. 538-542. lines 8-9.

⁵¹ Bishop 9.

and his rude manuscripts were left unrealized, unpolished, and incomplete. By the end of Bishop's passage, it seems that Wolfe were somehow responsible for his own death.

And indeed the company in which Bishop places him strengthens this feeling. The title of his essay, "The Sorrows of Thomas Wolfe," suggests the early Romanticism of Goethe's "The Sorrows of Young Werther." Bishop, in fact, considers Wolfe's novels to be a late flowering of the movement on this side of the Atlantic. And more to the point, young Werther is a suicide. Similarly, Wolfe's "position as an artist," Bishop tells us, "is very like that of Hart Crane,"⁵² whose poetry also represented the "culmination of the romantic spirit in America"⁵³ and who also possessed or perhaps was possessed by "what we must call genius."⁵⁴ For Bishop, these two, born only a year apart, seem almost mythical twins of American literature. Twins who die unseasonably and, it seems, at their own hands, for "Crane's [will] was strong enough to lead him deliberately to death by drowning." Continuing the theme, Wolfe's fictional stand-in, Eugene Gant, is said to have "the craving of a Faust to know all experience, to be able to record all the races and all the social classes which may be said to exist in America."⁵⁵ Although Goethe's Faust was not an actual suicide, he was a near one, raising to his lips that goblet of poison only to be overcome by the force of the pealing church bells and the childhood memories that they evoked. Else he would have followed through on his pledge: "I pour the brown stream in the cup. I have prepared it, now I choose it and take the final drink with all my will, a solemn festal pledge to Easter morning!"⁵⁶

⁵² Bishop 5.

⁵³ Bishop 8.

⁵⁴ Bishop 6.

⁵⁵ Bishop 8.

⁵⁶ Goethe, Johann von. *Goethe's Faust: Part One*. Trans. C. F. MacIntyre. New York: New Directions Publishing Corporation, 1949. 19.

Who bears the guilt for Thomas Wolfe? It's difficult to get hold of the idea. According to Bishop, Thomas Wolfe never did, and this was his great failure: "It can be said of Wolfe, as Allen Tate has said of Hart Crane, that he was playing a game in which any move was possible, because none was compulsory. There is no idea which would serve as discipline to the event."⁵⁷ These cryptic remarks by both Bishop and myself demand some explanation. By way of anticipation, let us say that their explanation involves a meditation on guilt, sacrifice, and the nature of "event" and "idea."

But let's be irresponsible and put off this theoretical work for a moment. There's still time to play with words and names and bodies. Wolfe's name suggests the Greek *lukos* and its derivative *lycos*, the first meaning "wolf" and the second signifying a certain type of spider, apparently of wolfish character. Surely there is something of these in the name "Lycidas." Indeed, the so-called "pilot of the Galilean lake" apparently juxtaposes the noble Lycidas with clerics themselves no better than wolves.⁵⁸

He shook his mitred locks and bespake:
 'How well could I have spared for thee, young swain,
 Enow of such as for their bellies' sake
 Creep, and intrude, and climb into the fold!
 Of other care they little reckoning make,
 Than how to scramble at the shearer's feast,
 And shove away the worthily bidden guest;
 Blind mouths!
 The hungry sheep look up, and are not fed,
 But swollen with wind, and the rank mist they draw,

⁵⁷ Bishop 7.

⁵⁸ In his 1936 edition of *The Complete Poems of John Milton*, editor Thomas Newton, the Bishop of Bristol, attaches this note to "Lycidas": "In this monody the author bewails a learned friend, Mr. Edward King, who was unfortunately drowned in his passage from Chester on the Irish sea, 1637, and by occasion foretells the ruin of our corrupted clergy, then in their height" (New York: Union Library Association, 1936. 591). Though I am no authority, I'm unsure that those "blind mouths," who "scarce themselves know how to hold a sheep-hook," are necessarily identified as the clergy. The speaker suggests that he would have traded them for Lycidas, who is no cleric, but rather a young poet. One wonders whether and how the jobs of the poet and the cleric might be distinct in this poem.

Rot inwardly, and foul contagion spread:
 Besides what the grim wolf with privy paw
 Daily devours apace, and nothing said.
 But that two-handed engine at the door
 Stands ready to smite once, and smite no more.⁵⁹

Milton's speaker, having learned that his friend has drowned, excuses himself toward the end of the poem from pondering reasons and questions of art in order "to interpose a little ease."⁶⁰ For the space of thirty or so lines, culminating in the eponymous command "Look homeward angel," the speaker desires only to look on the corpse of his friend, to anoint with flowers of a thousand hues that body uncovered from the bottom of the sea.

The unsanitary, physical details of Wolfe's own death—the tumors having spread over the entire right side of his brain—go unmentioned by Bishop. Perhaps this death was fitting, for the word "wolf" at one time meant a cancerous mass, a riotous, undirected growth. Of course, the word also signifies, in the understated words of the OED, "a somewhat large" canine animal, as well as the ravenous hunger associated with this animal. That Thomas Wolfe was "somewhat large" is also an understatement. Although reports vary as to his stature, the measurements taken by his undertaker suggest a height of at least 6 feet 6 inches and a weight upwards of 250 pounds. In life he was a man of prodigious appetite, astonishing a San Francisco cook by devouring a dozen eggs, a loaf of bread, and two quarts of milk for breakfast.⁶¹ Such an appetite corresponded to a prodigious physical energy. His editor Maxwell Perkins likened him to Percy

⁵⁹ Milton 540-541. This talk of a "two-handed engine" at the door "ready to smite" has constituted a great mystery for Miltonists. There is no danger for one outside their fold to offer a suggestion: perhaps it refers to the type of siege engine described by Procopius, the Roman historian. Apparently, the Goths called this device "war-wolf" (Cf. Grose, Francis. *Military Antiquities from the Conquest to the Present Time*. Vol. II. London, 1786. 302.). Milton certainly was familiar with Procopius (Cf. Hanford, James Holly. "The Chronology of Milton's Private Studies. *PMLA*. 36.2 (1921): 262.) and this sort of flinging device itself seems to have had two arms (Cf. Hacker, Barton. "Greek Catapults and Catapult Technology." *Technology and Culture*. 9.1 (1968): 38.). In such a wolfish section of the poem, this reference would not be unaccountable.

⁶⁰ Milton 541.

Shelley, but it's difficult to imagine delicate featured Shelley using the top of a refrigerator as a table, writing furiously for hours on end, pausing only to down the beer or quart of milk hidden within its belly. Rumor has it that when he was not in a relationship, and even sometimes when he was, Wolfe's sexual appetite was promiscuous and indiscriminate.⁶² Often he wrote while fondling himself, as if this somehow stirred his creativity.⁶³ One of my favorite stories involves Wolfe maniacally striding the early morning city streets, his booming shout echoing down the byways, "I wrote 10,000 words today."⁶⁴ Through the closed windows of apartments, the insomniac could be heard in the deserted streets repeating this sentiment to no one in particular—to himself maybe—repeating it over and over and over again.

Such excess, regardless of its facticity, cannot go unjudged. Bishop tells us that in the case of Wolfe, "the faults of the artist are all of them traceable to the failures of the man." And indeed he seems to countenance no difference between the two, for "at the center of Wolfe's writing is a single character,"⁶⁵ Eugene Gant, who has no existence apart from the author and

⁶¹ McElderry, Bruce R. *Thomas Wolfe*. New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1964. 126-127.

⁶² Cf. Donald, David Herbert. *Look Homeward: A Life of Thomas Wolfe*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1987. 364-366. The online *Oxford English Dictionary* lists certain slang usages that might be relevant: a *wolf* signifies "a sexually aggressive male; a would-be seducer of women," but in American colloquial usage, it also suggests "a male homosexual seducer or one who adopts an active role with a partner." In Plato's *Phaedrus*, Socrates responds to a written speech on the subject of *eros* by an orator named "Lysias." During that response, the lover of boys, the *erastes*, is likened by Socrates to a wolf: "These are points you should bear in mind, my boy. You should know that the friendship of a lover arises without any good will at all. No, like food, its purpose is to sate hunger. 'Do wolves love lambs?' That's how lovers befriend a boy!" (241d). Cf. Plato. *Phaedrus*. Trans. Alexander Nehemas and Paul Woodruff. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1995. 22. This passage itself may be a reference to the battle between Hector and Achilles in the *Iliad*, in which Achilles responds to Hector's wish for the victor to return the corpse of his defeated foe to his comrades: "You unforgivable, you . . . don't talk to me of pacts. There are no binding oaths between men and lions—wolves and lambs can enjoy no meeting of the minds—they are all bent on hating each other to the death" (22.307-312). Cf. Homer. *The Iliad*. Trans. Robert Fagles. New York: Penguin Group, 1990. 550.

⁶³ Donald 237.

⁶⁴ Although I remember reading this story in a biography of Thomas Wolfe several years ago, I have been unable to verify it currently. I must admit that it's possible I invented the detail.

⁶⁵ Bishop 8.

“is, beyond all doubt, Thomas Wolfe.”⁶⁶ Wolfe’s aim “was to set down America as far as it can belong to the experience of one man” and had come “early on what was for him the one available truth about this continent—that it was contained in himself. There was no America which could not be made out . . . in the memory of an American.”⁶⁷ For Bishop, Wolfe’s hero was himself; the America in which this hero moved, Wolfe’s own memory. And therein lies his great flaw.

Bishop writes that Wolfe’s memory was “the source of what is most authentic in his talents,” for “he could . . . displace the present so completely by the past that its sights and sounds all but destroyed the surrounding circumstance.” The radical intensity and inclusivity of this faculty, which approximated total recall, was Wolfe’s inheritance from his mother. From his father, he received the gift of “vigorous utterance,” the ability to charge his words with an unmatched intensity. But this inheritance, so vital to his novels, ultimately turns against itself, consuming the very work that it made possible. Like his mother, Wolfe was incapable of “suppress[ing] any detail, no matter how irrelevant; indeed, it was impossible for him to feel that any detail was irrelevant to his purpose.”⁶⁸ His unwillingness to privilege certain details at the expense of others; to sacrifice certain events that do not advance the narrative toward an end; indeed, the lack of any purpose in respect to which his passages could be subordinated: these flaws effectively render Wolfe’s novels incoherent, sprawling webs in which any point could be taken to be the center. And though Wolfe’s language “could sputter into fiery intensity,” as his father’s before him, “more often than not [it] runs off into a homespun rhetoric. It sounds strong,

⁶⁶ Bishop 10.

⁶⁷ Bishop 3.

⁶⁸ Bishop 4.

but it has very little connection with any outer reality and is meaningless, except in so far as it serves to convey his rage and frustration.”⁶⁹

The implication drawn by Bishop is devastating: “Wolfe no more than Crane was able to give any other coherence to his work than that which comes from the personal quality of his writing”⁷⁰; “it must be set down in words to which he constantly seems to be attaching more meaning than they can properly own. It was as though he were aware that his novel would have no meaning that could not be found in the words. The meaning of a novel should be in its structure. But in Wolfe’s novel, as far as it has gone, it is impossible to discover any structure at all.”⁷¹ The touted fecundity of Wolfe comes to nothing more than an untended garden allowed to riot and lost finally to its own weeds. His undirected outbursts of emotion, his sufferings, his joys, fail to achieve anything other than a private significance and therefore turn against Wolfe as surely as his own body.

I think now I begin to get the idea. For here “idea” means precisely that sacrifice, that purposeful amnesia of which Wolfe, according to Bishop, was incapable. Those details and bursts of affect that would be shaped and subordinated to some authorial purpose constitute the “event” that is to receive “discipline.” The events of Wolfe’s life, his feelings and emotions: some of these had to be sacrificed if the work was to have a purpose; some details had to be excluded as superfluous or beside the point if the work itself was to have a point. In the absence of some rule separating the significant and insignificant, the work possessed no meaning, for the limitation and the meaning were one and the same. Without a purpose, no measure could be taken of how well the parts of the work furthered this end, and therefore the relative success or

⁶⁹ Bishop 4-

⁷⁰ Bishop 6.

failure of the novels in relation to others could not be measured. Sacrifice, exclusion, and meaning stand inseparably together: they are the “idea.”

One wants to know why: if Bishop is right, why couldn't Wolfe perform such a sacrifice? Again and again, Bishop produces passages such as the following: “The force of Wolfe's talents is indubitable; yet he did not find for that novel, nor do I believe he ever could have found, a structure of form which would have been capable of giving shape and meaning to his emotional experience. He was not without intelligence; but he could not trust his intelligence, since for him to do so would have been to succumb to conscience. And it was conscience, with its convictions of guilt, that he was continually trying to elude.”⁷² Notice that, in one sense, this description itself seems rather meaningless. To say that his work was without structure is just to say that Wolfe had not performed the sacrifice discussed above. Suppose, with Bishop, that he refused to do so because he sought to avoid feelings of guilt. These feelings require some normative law that has been breached. But this law could not be erected without exclusion, without the sacrifice of certain details as insignificant, as out of bounds in respect to the purpose of the work. If Wolfe refuses to sacrifice because he seeks to avoid the feelings of guilt that would be made possible by the erection of some purposeful law, then he does so to avoid sacrifice. Bishop seems to claim nothing more than that Wolfe refused to sacrifice because he sought to avoid sacrifice.

I am reminded here of Heidegger's book on the supreme principle of sufficient reason—*nihil sine ratione*, nothing is without reason—and his reference to a letter written by Leibniz, the first to formulate the principle strictly. In a letter to his friend Paccius on January 28, 1695,

⁷¹ Bishop 5.

⁷² Bishop 5.

Leibniz wrote: “With every mystic there are a few places that are extraordinarily clever, full of difficult metaphors and virtually inclining to Godlessness, just as I have seen in the German—otherwise beautiful—poems of a certain man who is called Johannes Angelus Silesius.” Silesius, whose given name was Johann Scheffler,⁷³ wrote his first collection *The Cherubinic Wanderer: Sensual Description of the Four Final Things* in 1657, and this volume, Heidegger explains, included a poem entitled “Without Why.” The first lines read:

The rose is without why: it blooms because it blooms,
It pays not attention to itself, asks not whether it is seen.⁷⁴

Certainly Bishop’s Wolfe was like that rose.

So what sense does it make to say that “the secret end of all [Wolfe’s] writing was expiation”?⁷⁵ After all, one cannot atone for some guilt without recognizing some guilt for which one needs forgiveness, and Wolfe is peculiar insofar as he refuses to engage in the sort of sacrifice that would render this guilt possible. Since his work is lawless, he cannot have chosen this law unwisely, excluding what ought not have been excluded, nor can he be accused of having broken a law or having followed it imperfectly. One must say either that Wolfe is innocent or that “innocence” and “guilt” do not apply to him. Having written this, however, I believe I detect the beginnings of a secret, melancholy conclusion in Bishop’s essay: Wolfe is guilty precisely inasmuch as he has refused to engage in the type of sacrifice that underlies the possibility of guilt and innocence. The crime of his work, which may incline to Godlessness, and the crime of the rose are one and the same: the impossibility of judging them.⁷⁶

⁷³ The name *Scheffler* looks to be related to the verb *scheffeln*, which means “to amass” and the noun *Schafer*, which means “shepherd.”

⁷⁴ Heidegger, Martin. *The Principle of Reason*. Trans. Reginald Lilly. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1991.

⁷⁵ Bishop 5.

⁷⁶ The Athenian in Plato’s *Laws* provides a germane, ancient gloss concerning the death of suicides and the funeral rites owed to them. After considering three typical sorts of homicide—those murders caused by lust, especially for

In the critical anthology entitled *The Kenyon Critics: Studies in Modern Literature from the Kenyon Review*, Bishop's essay is placed first among those standout works collected from the first ten years of the *Kenyon Review* by its founder John Crowe Ransom. Ransom had studied philosophy before turning fugitive as a poet, or as fugitive as a Rhodes scholar can turn. The well having dried, he hedged his bets and turned to criticism with much approbation. His success in the "Southern Ivy Leagues" of Vanderbilt University, which helped to legitimize the position of poet and critic within English departments, catapulted him to prominence at Kenyon College in Ohio, where he became professor of poetry in 1937 and founded the influential *Kenyon Review*. The first issue of this journal appeared in January 1939, which makes Ransom's appearance at Kenyon contemporaneous with the death of Wolfe. Bishop's article began on page one of that volume, the inaugural essay of Ransom's organon.

Although the *Kenyon Critics* was described by Ransom in his introduction as a "critical anthology" and therefore "an extreme miscellany," his faith in the significance of the volume is beyond doubt: "These pieces are sponsored from one little corner of the American scene, yet they compose a body of work which seems excellent and trustworthy, possessing a kind of functional integrity, perhaps bearing a national importance." For he considered literary criticism to be perhaps "one of the saving gifts of our age" and to make "some headway against the bad tendencies of the time, including its foul humors and reckless human strategies." The critics Ransom collected were all thought to be "good" of course, which means they were "[some] of

wealth and power; those springing from rivalry or jealousy; and those that originate in the fear of disgrace—he considers a fourth sort, which he considers rather unaccountable: "*self-slaughter*." In such cases, the next of kin should consult the official canonists as to which purifications should be performed, but in respect to the burials of these suicides, the Athenian is insistent: "But the graves of such as perish thus must, in the first place, be solitary; and they must have no companions whatsoever in the tomb. Further they must be buried ignominiously in waste and nameless spots on the boundaries of the twelve districts, and the tomb shall be marked by neither headstone nor name" (9.870a-d, 9.873c-d). Cf. Plato. "Laws." *Plato: The Collected Dialogues*. Trans. A. E. Taylor. Ed. Edith

the most responsible agents of our very best humanity,” a gathering of wisemen⁷⁷ each of which was “healthy in his feelings and habitually right in his judgements.” The rightness of their judgements in large part consists of being “professionally sensitive to what is latent in the work, [and] therefore likely to be difficult,” without “content[ing] themselves with what is manifest and for everybody to see.”⁷⁸

Ransom seems almost medieval with his talk of “healthy feelings” and “foul humors.” One senses that the instrument wielded by these critics against the individual and national sickness is the ability to ascertain a concealed structure to the artistic work and to show how this latent and abstract skeleton gives the artwork a type of “functional integrity.” Indeed, a sort of secret coherence seems to be attributed by Ransom to the “extreme miscellany” of his own anthology, and it consists in this: that these medicine-men, as a rule, are *themselves* sensitive to the secret coherence, the “functional integrity” of whatever work they are diagnosing.

Ransom apparently thought that such criticism restored the works to health and in so doing—here the critic dreams heroically—contributed to the health of the body politic, which would seem to be threatened by uninterpreted works. In Ransom’s canon and *polis*, it seems, there was no room for sick men with their sick books. Or rather, there was room only for the work that would respond to interpretation. Such a canon represents a hospital and not a hospice: only those who may recover are to be admitted, not the walking dead. And to be sure, “Thomas Wolfe is dead,” as the essay of John Peale Bishop so often insists.

Hamilton and Huntington Cairns. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1989. 1429-1432.

⁷⁷ No female critics appeared in this anthology.

⁷⁸ Ransom, John Crowe. Introduction. *The Kenyon Critics: Studies in Modern Literature from the Kenyon Review*. Ed. John Crowe Ransom. Cleveland: World Pub. Co., 1951. viii.

Mourning the death of Lycidas the shining youth, Milton, that great canonical poet,⁷⁹

wrote,

Alas! What boots it with uncessant care
To tend the homely, slighted, shepherd's trade,
And strictly meditate the thankless Muse?
Were it not better done, as others use,
To sport with Amaryllis in the shade,
Or with the tangles of Naera's hair?
Fame is the spur that the clear spirit doth raise
(That last infirmity of noble mind)
To scorn delights and live laborious days;
But the fair guerdon when we hope to find,
And think to burst out into sudden blaze,
Comes the blind Fury with abhorred shears,
And slits the thin-spun life. 'But not the praise,'
Phoebus replied, and touched my trembling ears.⁸⁰

As of the writing of Bishop's essay, the praise of Thomas Wolfe was very much intact.

According to Bishop, his reputation in fact had not even been divided amongst the academics and the people: "It is impossible to say what Wolfe's position in American letters would have been had he lived to bring his work to completion. At the moment he stands very high in the estimation both of the critics and of the common reader." This last point, the popularity of Wolfe, would not seem to endear him to the Kenyon critics, for as Ransom says in his introduction,

⁷⁹ According to Stanley Fish, however, this particular poem seems to have been more a threat to that canonicity than an anchor. Notice some recurring themes and names here: "much of *Lycidas* criticism is an extended answer to those who, in the tradition of Dr. Johnson, see the poem as an 'irreverent combination' of 'trifling fictions' and 'sacred truths,' or as a lament marred by intrusive and unassimilated digressions, or, more sympathetically, as an 'accumulation of magnificent fragments,' or simply (and rather notoriously) as a production more 'willful and illegal in form' than any other of its time. This last judgement—it is John Crowe Ransom's in his famous essay 'A Poem Nearly Anonymous'—indicates the extent to which the poem has been brought before the bar. The indictment has included, among others, the following charges: the tenses are inconsistent and frustrate any attempt to trace a psychological progression; there are frequent unsettling changes in style and diction; the structure is uncertain, hesitating between monologue, dialogue, and something that is not quite either; the speaker assumes a bewildering succession of poses . . . Together and individually, these characterizations constitute a challenge to the poem's unity, and it is as an assertion of unity that the case for the defense is always presented." Cf. *How Milton Works*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2001. 256-257.

Indeed, the greater our faith in [literature's] authority, the more hidden is likely to be its rule of life and way of salvation. That which is manifest in it was manifest before literature took it up, so that upon reflection it goes back into the common disrepute. It is the critic who must teach us to find the thing truly authoritative but hidden; the critic trying and judging the literary work which has one content that is visible and another content which is not so visible.⁸¹

Insofar as his work was common, Wolfe was disreputable and trifling. One can imagine an enterprising academic dismissing the “popular” writings of Wolfe, if indeed this distinction is even possible in Wolfe’s case, with a snort, “Such work does not warrant the serious attention of the Academy: it will be forgotten as it should have been already.”

The refutation of an academic Wolfe, whose work would respond to the interpretive techniques of the trained critics, revealing a latent structure, a hidden but uncoverable purpose according to which his work is organized, awaited John Peale Bishop. Everything I’ve said on the subject leads to this moment: the secret functional integrity of Bishop’s own essay is the sacrifice of Thomas Wolfe himself. The prodigious, homespun Wolfe, the tattered innocent who wrote as if a man “possessed,” came north to the ivy leagues and then to the literary salons of New York, an audacious dying god from the hills of North Carolina. And because his prose was undisciplined, obscenely rampant, because he was unwilling to sacrifice anything other than sacrifice, Wolfe was guilty. Because he wrote novels as if they were poems, because their vegetable emotional intensity was not disciplined by the “idea,” Wolfe was guilty. Wolfe was guilty because his work threatened the very foundation of “guilt” and “innocence.” Such a man cannot control himself: he is *indiscrete*, a vessel . . . a rose.

. . . . You have won, and wait for frost,
When, at the merest touch
Of cold, the kudzu turns

⁸⁰ Milton 539.

⁸¹ Ransom ix.

Black, withers inward and dies,
 Leaving a mass of brown strings
 Like the wires of a gigantic switchboard.
 You open your windows,

With the lightning restored to the sky
 And no leaves rising to bury

You alive inside your frail house,
 And you think, in the opened cold,
 Of the surface of things and its terrors,
 And of the mistaken, mortal
 Arrogance of the snakes
 As the vines, growing insanelly, sent
 Great powers into their bodies
 And the freedom to strike without warning:

From them, though they killed
 Your cattle, such energy also flowed

To you from the knee-high meadow
 (It was as though you had
 A green sword twined among
 The veins of your growing right arm—
 Such strength as you would not believe
 If you stood alone in a proper
 Shaved field among your safe cows—):
 Came in through your closed
 Leafy windows and almighty sleep
 And prospered, til rooted out.

James Dickey

A Riddle

Those who experience do not participate in the world. For the experience is “in them” and not between them and the world.

The world does not participate in experience. It allows itself to be experienced, but it is not concerned, for it contributes nothing, and nothing happens to it

This essential twofoldness cannot be overcome by invoking a “world of ideas” as a third element that might transcend the opposition To be sure, some men who in the world of things make do experiencing and using have constructed for themselves an idea annex or superstructure in which they find

refuge and reassurance in the face of intimations of nothingness. At the threshold they take off the clothes of the ugly weekday, shroud themselves in clean garments, and feel restored as they contemplate primal being or what ought to be—something in which their life has no share. It may also make them feel good to proclaim it.

But the It-humanity that some imagine, postulate, and advertise has nothing in common with the bodily humanity to which a human can truly say You. The noblest fiction is a fetish, the most sublime fictitious sentiment is a vice. The ideas are just as little enthroned above our heads as they reside inside them; they walk among us and step up to us.

Martin Buber

When my wife and I arrived in Texas, the wind was blowing so hard that it was difficult to stand. Having traveled I-40 through Oklahoma, we exited the interstate and pulled over on an access road. Our German shepherd, who had been whining for the past twenty minutes, jumped out of our truck, but was so confused by the wind that he leapt in again just as quickly. Later on, I discovered that this place was called Groom, Texas, named for immigrant Englishman turned High Plains rancher Colonel B. B. Groom, but at the time I thought it might be “Britten, USA,” for those were the words painted on the side of a roadside water tower. It seemed that we had actually caught the red and white tower in the act of falling over, for it perched precariously on two legs, the other two lifted a couple of feet into the air. Nothing seemed to be holding the tower in place, except perhaps for the badly kinked center pipe that ran from the receptacle into the dust below.

There seems to be some mystery surrounding this “Leaning Tower of Texas,” which has been poised in its fall for many years now. Observing the few, straggling trees in the area, all of them bent over from the force of the Panhandle winds, one wonders whether the tower itself had barely escaped some tornado. Other explanations, however, have favored human error, suggesting that one of the metal legs was unknowingly constructed shorter than the others.

Several yards away stand the tall, metal ruins of the Tower Restaurant sign, a ragged cross of a sign with the proud word “Restaurant” alone surviving intact above the arms. The building itself had burned to the ground. Perched atop these ruins, a miniature “Britten” water tower tips over, and the replica seems a good one but for the star that crowns the original, full-sized tower. This star, made from holiday lights, puts an end to the mystery, for one can hardly imagine a run-of-the-mill water tower having been decorated so before some quirk of fate sent it reeling. No, the riddle of the “Leaning Tower of Texas” with its ornamental star is too easily solved: it was constructed to lure the tourist cars traveling along the newly built interstate, which bypassed the city of Groom and replaced old Route 66, the “mother road” of America, as the preferred method of westward travel. When I-40 opened for business, the “mother road,” stretching from Chicago to L.A., faded into memory.

Once this stretch of Texas was known to anxious travelers as the “Jericho Gap,” one of the last parts of Route 66 to be paved. For motorists driving west out of the Ozarks, the Gap marked the end of the most dangerous shoals, with names like the “Devil’s Elbow,” and the approach to the calm waters of southern California. A type of cottage industry developed amongst “Jericho” townsfolk taking advantage of the rudimentary highway. Sudden showers turned the infamous Gap into a quagmire of black mud, and literally hundreds of motorists were stranded at a time. Those with heavy trucks earned an extra dollar disgorging mired motorists, while those with houses hosted them over night. Observing gathering clouds—and oftentimes even in clear weather—tourists would pull over to ask nervously, “When do we hit the ‘Gap,’” only to be told, “You’re in it now!”⁸²

⁸² Cf. Wallis, Michael. *Route 66: The Mother Road*. New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1990

The Gap, however, no longer need be braved, and my wife and I passed around most of Groom, traveling along the interstate toward Amarillo. Coming from the hills of north Georgia, the Texas land east of Amarillo seems utterly flat, as flat as a chessboard. There should be a sign of warning—let no one enter here who does not know Euclid—for here on the plains, Euclid is king. Like their south Georgia brethren, the panhandle farmers employ gigantic irrigation systems, great arms that revolve around a fixed point and shower the crops with water. But unlike Georgia, any seeds that do not fall within the circumference of this circle do not grow, and so the boundary between the cultivated cotton and prairie stubble is utterly clear. To natives of the area these mechanisms must seem to be an obvious, self-evident part of the landscape. But I'm a stranger here. Indeed, it might surprise those born in the deep south that cotton is king in Texas, not the Dixieland states, for Texas exports more of it than anyone else. Driving this stretch with little rest, I wondered whether I was still in the South at all and fought daydreams in which these irrigation machines seemed gigantic protractors marking off circle after circle; great instruments of demonstration drawing inferences in the dirt.

Nothing is hidden in this land, except perhaps beneath the gold patches of the wild black-eyed Susan. Once in a while, the flat plain is obscured in the distance by a dark clump of misshapen trees, foliage not wild, of course, but planted with the purpose of shading the encircled prairie house from both the sun and the day-dreaming eyes of motorists. Here in the domain of light, where there is no cover, where every move must situate itself within the arid logic of the plain, the homesteader had planted a humble wall of foliage within which he may be shielded from sight. There is something both absurd and noble about these tiny retreats with their disfigured arbors, irruptions in the very midst of Euclid's plain.

Almost immediately after arriving in Texas, having barely unloaded the truck, I left my wife to fly back to Athens. Since we needed the money, I had committed earlier in the year to teach a class on logic and critical thinking during the summer semester. This commitment was accompanied by a stunning lack of critical thinking, for my wife had been on the job market, and I should have known that we would be moving during this part of the summer if she accepted a tenure-track position in British Literature, which she did. Since I had arranged no place to live in Athens, I was lucky that my friend Jonathan, a graduate student of philosophy, was good enough to allow me to stay at his house while I was in town. Monica made me promise to write, but I never did.

I spent most of my days in Athens thinking about this dissertation and, not unrelatedly, most of my nights drinking whisky and talking with Jonathan until the small hours of the morning. This ironically was one of the few things Jonathan could drink, for his stomach was an hourglass. He had been diagnosed as gluten-intolerant and was following a gluten-free diet, which, needless to say, is challenging, triply so alongside his vegetarianism and attempt to keep a kosher house. In consequence, the refrigerator and pantry were mostly empty, and so whisky represented an important nutritional supplement for both of us. After what seemed a slightly exasperating phone call from his mother, who had phoned to ask whether he had gone to the doctor, Jonathan joked about going into one of the large grocery stores to buy provisions for the next month and coming out with a little tin of smoked salmon and a jar of pickles. Like a couple of undergraduates, we stayed up and drank and smoked and sang Leonard Cohen songs loudly; Jonathan accompanied himself on guitar and I warbled along. We watched foreign movies and laughed at everything, at each other, at the philosophy department, at the cockroach crawling

lazily up my arm. I fell asleep listening to Jonathan improvise, playing whatever happened to come to him.

My friend had traveled all over the world. Having immigrated from South Africa with his family as a boy, he had driven across the United States, had spent time on a kibbutz in Israel only to backpack through Turkey with a couple of Canadians, and had recently returned from teaching English in China. Recalling this latest trip, Jonathan told me funny, uncouth stories about braving the public restrooms, singing pop songs to his students, and contracting salmonella. Indeed, the doctors in that provincial hospital didn't quite know what to do with him, clutching his English-Chinese dictionary and repeating the phrase, "I have diarrhea." One of them ushered my friend around the hospital so that he could say it for everyone.

Jonathan shared these indignities with delight because that's the kind of man he is. Curly headed and clad in disheveled thrift-store clothes, youngest son of two, short and frail of stature, even though he is the giant of his family: he seems to be everyone's little brother, shining and full of possibility. Playing Scrabble with some friends, they came across an old scorecard. Jonathan had won, of course, because he does everything well. Indeed, he had worked as a manual laborer that summer and lectured me on the finer points of extracting nails from old wood, insisting philosophically that there was a *techne* to this activity. All he wanted to know at present was whether he or his own brother had won the game recorded on the scorecard. Remembering that I used to be good at everything, I suggested that we play chess, but warned him that I consistently had been the Paulding County chess champion for my age group. And, as I explained, "they weren't just *giving* that one away."

One night we wandered around the neighborhood, arguing about the first three of Descartes's *Meditations* only to discover, again and again, that we were saying the same thing in

two different ways. “It’s amazing,” I said, commenting on our game, “how much better these Meditations are when we do them together.” At some point, almost dizzy with the moves of the ontological argument, we abruptly stopped, looked around at unfamiliar porches, and realized we were lost. Jonathan spoke of the “ornamental” sections of Descartes: “Sometimes I’m not sure how the argument is moving or if this is an argument the way we normally understand it, but these passages are really beautiful, that part from the second Meditation about being caught in a deep whirlpool. You can either stand on the bottom or breathe the air but not both.” Without realizing the misquotation,⁸³ I thought of Descartes’s prisoner, who “is enjoying an imaginary freedom while asleep; as he begins to suspect that he is asleep, he dreads being woken up, and goes along with the pleasant illusion as long as he can.” This is a “kind of laziness”⁸⁴: a dreamy irresponsibility.

Several nights Jonathan and I exchanged dreams. Jonathan’s were full of precarious bicycles and infested stomachs, golden-haired, messianic kings and ghost-town utopias. He ended every retelling with “Now, what do you think that means?” In my own most memorable dream, dredged up from childhood, monsters guarded the doorway separating my bedroom from my mother and father’s. Instead of confronting them straightaway, I remembered an alternate route to my parents’ bedroom and reasoned that since the monsters didn’t know the house as well I did, I could outwit them without ever seeing their faces. Having bypassed them with this gambit, I arrived safely and with ease in my parents’ room with a sort of arrogance, and wanting to warn my father, or perhaps to hear him praise me, I shook his left shoulder. He was sleeping

⁸³ The passage actually reads: “So serious are the doubts into which I have been thrown as a result of yesterday’s meditation that I can neither put them out of my mind nor see any way of resolving them. It feels as if I have fallen unexpectedly into a deep whirlpool which tumbles me around so that I can neither stand on the bottom nor swim up to the top” (16).

⁸⁴ Descartes 15.

on his stomach, and his head was turned away in the gloom of the pillows. When his face snapped without warning toward mine, it was horrible.

Somehow this dream was easier to share than the one I had dreamt earlier in the year. In this more mature fantasy, I looked on a scene unfolding before me: a horned thing with a head approximating a bull and the body of a man sat in the dirt; lolling its wet, furry face back and forth, the thing had great, liquid eyes and its tongue protruded from the froth of its mouth; it saw me for the first time with widening eyes and let out a strange, inarticulate bellow. What sticks with me is the feeling that the thing had been surprised at having been seen, that it was afraid of me. And I wonder what I must have looked like to him.

My favorite author, J. L. Borges, was taught metaphysics as a child by his “free-thinking” father by means of a chessboard. When his father was away, Borges would sneak a book of steel engravings from his library, always returning to the same page. His face inches away from the engraving, which represented the walled exterior of Daedalus’s labyrinth, Borges fantasized that if he just looked closely enough, he could see through the slit windows to the monster at the heart of the maze. One afternoon when Jonathan was away, I looked over his bookshelves, full of metaphysical works, and found a collection of Borges’s stories tucked away in a corner. The Argentinian had been a diverse talent, penning movie reviews, philosophical short stories, enigmatic, religious poetry, and non-fiction essays on time, gnosticism, and nightmares. Attending a lecture given by Borges not long before his death, a professor from our philosophy department had attempted to press the man of letters on the subject of metaphysical themes within his works. Borges, having been blind for some time, stared blankly at the teeming audience and denied that there were any such themes in his work. Although I have never read any confirmation of this, I suspect that blind man was a master at chess.

In his collection *The Aleph*, Borges included a story entitled the “House of Asterion,” a name that I did not recognize. Speaking of his life within the twisting corridors of that house, Asterion said the following:

Of course I do not lack for distractions. Sometimes I run like a charging ram through the halls of stone until I tumble dizzily to the ground; sometimes I crouch in the shadow of wellhead or at a corner in one of the corridors and pretend I am being hunted. There are rooftops from which I can hurl myself until I am bloody. I can pretend anytime I like that I am asleep, and lie with my eyes closed and my breathing heavy. (Sometimes I actually fall asleep; sometimes by the time I open my eyes the color of the day has changed.) But of all the games, the one I like the best is pretending that there is another Asterion. I pretend that he has come to visit me, and I show him around the house. Bowing majestically, I say to him: *Now let us return to our previous intersection* or *Let us go this way, now, into another courtyard* or *I knew that you would like this rain gutter* or *Now you will see a cistern that has filled with sand* or *Now you will see how the cellar forks*. Sometimes I make a mistake and the two of us have a good laugh over it If my ear could hear every sound in the world, I would hear his footsteps. I hope he takes me to a place with fewer galleries and fewer doors. What will my redeemer be like, I wonder. Will he be bull or man? Could he possibly be a bull with the face of a man? Or will he be like me?⁸⁵

The house in which Jonathan and I lived was within walking distance from the middle of the city, but I often rode Jonathan’s bike, very precariously, to campus: unfortunately riding a bike is not as easy as riding a bike. Having studied English at the University of Georgia as both an undergraduate and MA student before switching to the philosophy department to pursue a doctoral degree, I had lived in Athens close to thirteen years. Even so, my sense of the town was less developed, I suspect, than many a freshman. I knew none of its history and few of its roads besides the ones I traveled to go to and from school, and whatever might be happening in the way of a cultural scene was a mystery to me. In one way, Jonathan was worse off in these matters, for he could get lost driving from the north side of town to the south. Indeed, his

⁸⁵ “The House of Asterion.” *Collected Fictions*. Trans. Andrew Hurley. Penguin Group, 1998. 220-222. *Asterion* is the name of the Minotaur in the Theseus myth.

navigational skills recall an anecdote concerning one of Borges's favorite writers G. K.

Chesterton, who apparently, having run some errand, often would become lost in the streets of London. Sometimes his wife would receive a telegram asking, "where am I supposed to be?" When Chesterton received a telegram in reply, it simply answered, "Home."

Approaching the third week of my stay, I took a turn for the worse. Jonathan and a girl who was "sort of, but not really" his girlfriend listened patiently as I bored them with stories about Monica and our pets. When I started them, I thought these stories had a punchline or a point only to realize about halfway through that they did not, ending with some observation about the most expedient order in which to cook Saturday morning breakfast foods or about my wife's cache of maxims: "In for a penny, in for a pound!" and "It doesn't matter--six of one, half-dozen of the other." No longer in Athens, but not yet in Texas; no longer in Athens, but somehow still tied there; exiled from Monica, it seemed to me, just when we were starting a new life: I just kept talking, piling one story on another. Driving to campus in a car I had borrowed from my uncle, I stopped at a local bookstore and bought twenty dollars worth of postcards, one of which featured a smiling, well-dressed businessman, a conspicuously hygienic young WASP, who held a sign reading, "I'm desperate."

Walking through the delicately manicured blossoms of North Campus, with its garden aromas and landscaped quads, I said with a bit of envy, "This must be what the Ivy Leagues are like. Or this is what they should be like, but probably aren't." Jonathan and I were deep in philosophical conversation as we turned past the pillars of pre-Civil War buildings and the well-proportioned president's office, formerly the museum of art, and before that the university's library. "What's Being got to do with anything," I asked. We laughed, but I was serious, "I mean really what is the point of doing what we're doing, it's sort of ridiculous. We're spending

years studying this stuff and it's just a distraction. That's all it is, a distraction. There's your first principle—be distracted.” My friend told me that “once you're in it, though, you can't stop doing it. Anyway, it's good, the activity itself is good.” I wondered whether he would laugh at what I said next, which I had mentioned to no one but my wife, “What if philosophy didn't have anything to do with knowing or the scientific community or any of that stuff, what if it were really about making a certain type of friend? What if it were about making something beautiful?” Jonathan pointed at the marble encircling the top of the president's building. Etched in stone were the names: Plato, Homer, Dante, and Virgil on the face of the building, Milton and Goethe on the sides, and “Shakspeare” in the very center above the door. My friend added, “I never noticed that before.”

“Don't you think it's strange that we don't study more non-Western philosophers, or more women philosophers?” I asked as we returned to the department from a downtown restaurant. “Have there been any women philosophers?” my friend responded, only half in jest. My wife would have made a great logician. A year earlier, reading a test I had given to a former logic and critical thinking course, she worked it with ease once I told her the rules and what the symbols meant. “I would like to take a philosophy course,” Monica once told me, “but I don't think I'd feel comfortable. Well, actually I'd feel unwanted because it just seems like a boy's club . . . I even feel a little strange coming to your office.” She showed me a few poems that she was teaching in one of her classes, several Scottish dialect verses and “Xantippe” by Amy Levy.⁸⁶ I didn't recognize the name.

⁸⁶ Xantippe was Socrates's wife. Cf. Levy, Amy. “Xantippe.” *Victorian Women Poets: An Anthology*. Eds. Angela Leighton and Margaret Reynolds. Oxford: Blackwell, 1995. 591-597. “Upon the threshold, half concealed . . .,” Xantippe observes her husband holding forth to thin-lipped Plato and Alcibiades “the beautiful”:

. . . And thus, with solemn tone, spake Sokrates:
 ‘This fair Aspasia, which our Perikles

Toward the end of the abbreviated semester, Jonathan and I indulged a bit too much in our dietary supplement one night. The whiskey was manufactured by an island distillery off the coast of Scotland, which had started production only in 1995, but which laid claim to an ancient tradition. Indeed, the whiskey illegally distilled on this island, sometimes known as “Scotland in miniature,” had been said to be among the best in the country. With their commemorative bottles, the newcomers saw themselves as returning, lawfully this time, to that glorious youth. Whether their whisky was excellent or merely good I have no idea, but it was certainly potent.

“Kant has an argument,” I mentioned somewhat confusedly, “that wine is good because it makes you witty and improves dinner conversation. But I am its refutation.” Jonathan, on the other hand, spoke with evangelical emotion, saying “I really believe that the universal is the only thing that exists” and then quietly, but more to the point, “I wish I didn’t have to eat.” Sinking into exasperation, he spoke about the ridiculousness of academic philosophy, of colloquia, departmental politics and fame. My friend returned again and again to a philosopher of mathematics who had been invited to speak to one of Jonathan’s classes. “Published by Harvard Press,” he snorted, “how many times did we hear that. And then he shows up to talk to the class and he just sits there eating doughnuts out of a box, he couldn’t have cared less, stuffing his fat face, and these crumbs falling out of his mouth. He had no respect for us whatsoever, he didn’t care. Stuffing himself, and I ask him a question and he doesn’t understand what I’m asking, he

Hath brought from realms afar, and set on high
 In our Athenian city, hath a mind,
 I doubt not, of a strength beyond her race;
 And makes employ of it, beyond the way
 Of women nobly gifted : woman’s frail—
 Her body rarely stands the test of soul;
 She grows intoxicate with knowledge; throws
 The laws of custom, order, ‘neath her feet,
 Feasting at life’s great banquet with wide throat’ . . .

just brushes it off. And this is who I'm suppose to emulate. He's going to tell us the truth.

What does he know about the truth, what does he know about me?" My friend suddenly seemed both very strange and intimately familiar to me.

When I finally completed my last day of class, I suggested to Jonathan and his brother Charles, himself a graduate student of philosophy, that we go downtown and celebrate. Their friend, who had been an award-winning student of classics, was passing through on his way back to Boulder to pursue a doctorate in mathematics, and he joined us. Sitting inside a dark downtown bar, I just wanted to talk, but someone started telling jokes. They were alternately metaphysical and scatological. Sometimes they were both at once. To a professor of neo-Platonism, who asked "Why can't the One touch itself," an acquaintance of Jonathan's had broken the silence and replied, "Because it'll go blind?"

Someone distracted us with the subject of riddles, and we, or they, spent the rest of the night solving them. The mathematician told us one concerning dominos and a chessboard: there are sixty-four squares on a chessboard and they can be covered completely by thirty-two dominos; it seems that if we take away two squares, the square in the bottom left-hand corner and the one in the upper right-hand corner, and if we take away one domino, we should still be able to cover the remaining sixty-two squares with thirty-one dominos; is this possible?

Charles and Jonathan drifted off into their own worlds, working systematically through the problems with bowed heads. Half-heartedly, I thought about possible solutions but soon lost interest, and so when the mathematician walked outside, leaving the brothers hard at work, I followed him. "Do you want a hint," the mathematician finally asked. "What are the properties of the squares on a chessboard? Are they all the same?" His hint expanded into an explanation, "A domino always must cover one white square and one black, and since there are now an

unequal number of white and black squares, the thirty-first domino cannot be used.” “It would have to be cut in half,” Charles added, having joined us. Looking both pleased with himself, for having given the explanation and slightly displeased with me for having needed it, the mathematician smiled at Charles, “You don’t look satisfied. What do you think of the explanation?” And observing the smirk on Charles’s face, he added, “I know what you mean. It seems like it shouldn’t have to appeal to qualities of the board. That’s surface, isn’t it. I mean shouldn’t there be a deeper explanation that’s purely mathematical.” In respect to this point, the mathematician and the metaphysician were in complete accord.

Having finally joined us, Jonathan on the other hand refused any hints or explanation whatsoever, wanting no answer, it seemed, that did not come from inside him. “When I was in high school,” he told us, “I took a number theory course and the teacher gave us a riddle. A friend of mine practically told me the answer when I walked into class the next day. I still haven’t forgiven her.” And he laughed. Being dumbfounded by the idea of a high school that offered number theory in addition to “Math,” I couldn’t change the subject before Jonathan offered another riddle. The puzzles and jokes, one of which seemed inexplicably to involve both baby seals and Chuck Norris, continued long into the night and were still going strong when I fell asleep.

The next day, Jonathan gave me a lift to the U-Haul building to pick up the truck that I would drive back to Texas. We said our goodbyes, and I turned to walk inside. Jonathan called to me. There was slight catch in his voice: “I’m really glad you stayed with me. You’re one of the few people I can talk to.” He looked away, embarrassed at what he had said. When I turned back toward the window from inside the building, he was gone. On the way home, I drove until I had trouble seeing the road. I drove straight through the Ozarks and Groom, Texas without

stopping. The roadside distractions never once occurred to me. When I pulled into the driveway of our rented house, Monica was waiting, and she did not look like I remembered. And for the first time, I felt married. I told her later, “Something is happening to me. I’m in the middle of it.”

A Communiqué

I deeply regret having lent to a certain lady, irrecoverably, the first book that Quain published. I have said it was a detective story—The God of the Labyrinth; what a brilliant idea the publisher had, bringing it out in late November, 1933. In early December, the pleasant yet arduous convolutions of The Siamese Twin Mystery gave London and New York a good deal of gumshoe work to do—in my view, the failure of our friend’s work can be laid to that ruinous coincidence. (Though there is also the question—I wish to be totally honest—of its somewhat careless plotting and the hollow, frigid stiltedness of certain descriptions of the sea.) Seven years later, I cannot for the life of me recall the details of the plot, but this is the general scheme of it, impoverished (or purified) by my forgetfulness: There is an incomprehensible murder in the early pages of the book, a slow discussion in the middle, and a solution of the crime toward the end. Once the mystery has been cleared up, there is a long retrospective paragraph that contains the following sentence: Everyone believed that the chessplayers had met accidentally. That phrase allows one to infer that the solution is in fact in error, and so, uneasy, the reader looks back over the pertinent chapters and discovers another solution, which is the correct one. The reader of this remarkable book, then, is more perspicacious than the detective.

J. L. Borges

Brad Bassler and I got into a shouting match one night during class. I don’t know how common this is in academia, but it is certainly unique in my own experience. He was not then my major professor. Nor was he even a member of my advisory committee. I had asked Bassler to be a member of that group the previous year before I had taken any classes with him, but he had politely declined. The first time I saw him outside class, he and his wife, whose course on the emergence of modernity I was taking, were walking through a chain bookstore. I remember

having been embarrassed for him to have seen me there, for I had been planted in the self-help aisle for a good hour.

But now that I think about it again, that's not exactly true. I first saw Bassler on campus, not in Peabody Hall, which houses the philosophy department, but coming out of the English building. Wearing my new camel's hair coat, which my mother-in-law had given me, a graduate student trying hard to look the part of the professional, I brushed past his backpack. He was walking out as I was coming in. Observing his shorts and baseball cap, I thought he was a student.

In spring 2003, I enrolled in Bassler's seminar on philosophical categories, my first course with him, in which we read Leibniz, Kant and Peirce. Those shorts and cap proved to be no accident, but the latter, despite its omnipresence, could not contain the curls that emerged from underneath. At the time, although this is no longer the case, he seemed to be supporting an addiction to cheap colas of relatively obscure brand names, always both diet and caffeine free. I wondered at least once during every class, "Where does he buy those?" Nevertheless, there was something vaguely Teutonic about Bassler that I can't quite put my finger on, something more than the surname, which seems to mean "one who plays the bass."⁸⁷ I'm not talking about the bearded cartoon, pounding a table while screaming, "Was ist Geist?! Geist ist" No, certainly not that, but it's as if a German professor were the host of some urbane, Renaissance salon, if that can be imagined. Such an atmosphere, whose description amazes even me, clashed with his otherwise aggressively American casualness. Indeed—and here I'm being very serious—I think now that Brad Bassler is first and foremost an *American* philosopher. A certain sense of incongruity might be driving this very intuition.

For the first half of the class, Bassler would lecture on some topic of interest, often very beautifully and seemingly off the top of his head. Pausing only intermittently to take a sip and collect his thoughts, he spoke in long movements: indeed the unit of Bassler's speech doesn't seem to be the bar or the phrase so much as the passage. After the cohesion of the first half of class, the second half seemed to be a cacophonous free-for-all. I had never seen, nor have I since, so many students in a UGA philosophy class.

There were students from the mathematics department, drawn I suppose by Bassler's work on parafinite numbers. Indeed, he completed a doctorate in mathematics before being hired at UGA. Several students from the social sciences also had enrolled in the class, and perhaps they knew of the other Ph.D. Bassler had earned in Chicago's Committee on Social Thought. Neither of his advanced degrees is in philosophy, but that seemed to be no deterrent. For in addition to mathematicians and social scientists, there were students of comparative literature, creative writers, and people who seemed to have no academic affiliation at all alongside the usual philosophy students—so many that it was often impossible to find a seat at the seminar table. Late arriving students were forced to sit at the outer desks lining the walls of the room. I always sat at one of these desks, but I don't remember ever arriving late.

The various perspectives from which questions were raised during the class bewildered me. I often wondered exactly what we were saying, but the break halfway through each class seemed decisive for Bassler. He was loathe to interfere or direct during the second half of the class and seemed content to practice a curious restraint.

I wrote a term paper that only can be described, even in the most generous terms, as cockamamy. It may have been the type of adolescent, 'fuck you' paper that teachers sometimes

⁸⁷ He denies this etymology, preferring to derive the name from the Swiss *Basel*.

receive, that I have received since. Written from what I imagined to be the Hegelian perspective of my then major professor, sporting what I thought was a postmodern flair, my paper unexpectedly managed to combine the worst of both these worlds. And while I wouldn't have been surprised to have received a low grade, I was surprised to receive no grade of all. In a public library in the Florida panhandle, my summer vacation escape, full of sand and schemes for scholarly publication, abruptly ended as I sat staring at the "I" where my grade should have been. In German education, that would be the lowest grade: *ungenügend*, said of that which is insufficient, which has caused discontent.

If anything, that seemed to whet my appetite because I promptly signed up for the next class offered by Bassler the following fall, a course devoted to the question of philosophical praxis. Though still diverse, this class included far fewer students; indeed, the setting was quite intimate. We all could fit at the seminar table, and this time I sat right beside Bassler at the head of the table, flanking him on his right hand, almost behind him when he leaned toward the rest of the class.

The reading list for the class featured Adorno's *Minima Moralia*, *Fellow Teachers/Of Culture and Its Second Death* by Philip Rieff, and Pierre Bourdieu's *Pascalian Meditations*. I spent all of my time on the first of these works, advancing no further than halfway through *Fellow Teachers*. Despite this hesitancy, this distraction, a section from the preface of Rieff's book concerning the death of teachers so struck me that it remains in my mind even now, partly because of the force of the passage and partly because Bassler stopped class to read it aloud,

savoring the sound and rhythm as if he knew what it really meant. Closing his book, he ended his recitation saying, “That’s beautiful.”⁸⁸

We weren’t given many limitations as to what the final paper needed to address other than the relation between theory and practice. Writing this now strikes me as sort of funny because the question of this relation seems in some way to be the question of limitation itself. I might have begun instead, “Permissible subject matters were unlimited but had to address limitation.” Despite the freedom of this assignment, we were encouraged to come by Dr. Bassler’s office to talk about what we had in mind. I did not look forward to this meeting, but there was no place to hide. Housing me and three other graduate students, my office space formed, according to the peculiar logic of Peabody Hall, a sort of antechamber or waiting room to my professor’s office. I joked with my office-mates that we should scatter some magazines around the room and ask arriving students, “Have you met your deductible yet?” Bassler’s door usually stood open, but even when it wasn’t, there was no mistaking whether he was there: people climbing the stairs in the hall have been startled by his shout of laughter it is so loud. And regardless, even with his door closed my teacher seemingly could hear the furtive sounds of graduate students tiptoeing through the antechamber door.

Our first meeting was so mercifully short that I wonder if it qualifies as a meeting. I knew he was behind the door before I could see him. Bursting into the room with a sort of frightened bravado, I blurted out that I was interested in how Kierkegaard’s *Repetition* and Melville’s *The Confidence-Man* might be related to what we were reading. I exited the office just as quickly and with a flourish, stumbling over feet and words. A certain amount of anxiety accompanies, I suppose, any meeting with a professor, but this much was out of the ordinary, for

⁸⁸ See the epigraph to Chapter One, Part One above. p. 21.

recently Bassler and I, after several relatively contained squabbles, had gotten into a shouting match so heated that subsequent to the event, a fellow student had ushered me back to our office murmuring, “I can’t believe that just happened.” But perhaps my memory is too dramatic: I wonder sometimes whether my teacher remembers it at all.

My final paper had nothing to do with repetition or con-men. The day before it was due, I sat down in the morning and wrote it all down without stopping, without even really thinking about it. In hindsight, this was not the usual procrastination, but just the opposite. Indeed, it would be wrong to say that I had been thinking *about* this topic, more accurate to say that it was the *place* of my thinking during the semester. That sounds a little preening, but the more I think about it, the more I’m convinced that this may be the best description. My reaction to the Rieff passage; my vocal disagreements with Bassler: these were the figure and that topic the ground.

The words came to me and I wrote until I was done. I wrote about Borges and metaphysics and poetry, but mainly I told a story in which these were motifs. It began like this:

When I was a boy, my father fell ill. On Sunday mornings I liked to pile in my parents' bed. We didn't go to church. One of those mornings, my father abruptly stopped in the middle of a sentence. With a thoughtful look on his face, as if he had realized or remembered something extremely important, he said, “You know what?” “What?!” I screamed with delight, pouncing on him (aggressively, I now suspect), my face within inches of his. Dostoevsky spoke of the peculiar feeling that came over him right before he fell into epileptic convulsions, saying that this moment was timeless and breathless, as if the universe or God were poised to open. Of that moment of anticipation, I remember nothing more than my father's eyes opening wide as confusion burst forth from his lips. What followed was a whirl of activity: my mother hurling me away from my father, her own unreal scream, which must have been simultaneous, arriving at my ears only after I tumbled safely off the bed, as thunder or a rifle’s report. My father fell ill with the “divine” disease, the “falling” disease, when I was a boy.⁸⁹

⁸⁹ Cf. “The Falling Sickness: Metaphysics Poetry and Betrayal.” *The International Journal of the Humanities*. 3:7. 7-12.

I told the story of the first epileptic seizure I remember my father having, the story of my embarrassed, distracted adolescence and his deepening religious mania. I told the story of the disintegration of what, in my childish eyes, had been my parent's love. I told the story of psychiatric ward windows and of suicidal leaps of faith, the story of brain tumors and diagnostic ordeals administered by confessors with cameras and readings and scientific labcoats. I told of the loss of my father, if not his death, at the young age of 38. To me, as a boy, he had seemed every bit the youthful, dying god as Thomas Wolfe: such a man could not control himself, he was *indiscrete*, a possessed, guilty vessel. My father had seemed all of these things to me as a boy. But I am no longer a boy.⁹⁰

A couple of years before his death, Thomas Wolfe wrote a novella set in Germany entitled "I Have a Thing to Tell You," which was published in three-part installments by the *New Republic* in 1937. This work went unacknowledged in John Peale Bishop's essay: perhaps he overlooked it. The title of the novella was taken from a conversation between the narrator, who is a novelist, and his friend Franz Hartmann, who worked for an exporting firm. Speaking anxiously of his genealogy and the changes occurring in pre-World War II Germany, Franz says,

This last year these big fools are coming round to Karl and me. They demand to know who I am, where I am from—whether I am porn or not. They say I must be proving to them that I am an Aryan man . . . now I may tell you something. I am completely Cherman, it is true. Only, my poor dear mother . . . was loving my father very much, so much, in fact, that she did not go to the trouble to marry him. So these people come and ask me all these questions and say 'Where is your father?'—and of course I cannot tell. Because, alas, my dear old shap, I am this bastard. Gott!⁹¹

⁹⁰ Incidentally, my father, Ted Hart, was not given a middle name when he was born. Later in life, he gave himself a first name, "Raymond." The etymology of the name *Raymond Ted* bears a curious resemblance to the name of Milton's friend Edward King, whose death seems to have occasioned the writing of *Lycidas*. See above, note 61 p.43.

⁹¹ Wolfe, Thomas. *Short Novels*. New York: Scribner, 1961. 244.

With its emphasis on the father, the genealogy of the Führer was not that of the Rabbis, and so it seems that some turned bastards out of necessity.⁹² Continuing, Franz tells the narrator that “some day you must write this bitter book in which you tell these fools where they belong,” but then, quickly qualifying his remark, “only . . . you must not do it yet. Or if you do, you must not say some things in your next book that will make these people angry with you here Because you have a name here. I don’t mean with these fools, but with the people left who still read books They cannot believe they are reading a translation.”⁹³

Toward the end of the novella, on a train bound for Paris, the narrator good-naturedly offers to take money over the border for a fellow passenger, who could not do so himself because of the German law prohibiting natives from taking more than ten marks out of the country. Later, the narrator learns that this man, along with several others who have entrusted their money to their fellow passengers, was a Jew fleeing the country. Nazi officials discover the man and cart him off, leaving the surprised narrator with ten marks and no way of returning the money lest the other passengers also be discovered.

In the summer of 1936, Wolfe made his last voyage to Germany, a country in which he was wildly popular. He would not have been welcome there after writing this bitter novella. After Wolfe’s death, the final passage of the work, in which the train hurtles over the German border, was transferred by editors to the last page of the posthumously published novel *You Can’t Go Home Again*, where it appears to be a prophecy of the lead character’s death. In the novella, however, this is not case. It is a prophecy of something else entirely:

⁹² The Nazis traced “Jewish-ness” through the father, not the mother. Having a German, gentile father would establish Franz in the eyes of the authorities, but he would have to prove that the man was his father. If the man weren’t married to Franz’s mother, though, presumably he would not be compelled to produce such evidence.

⁹³ Wolfe 246-247.

[Germany] was no foreign land to me. It was the other half of my heart's home. It was the dark lost Helen I had found, it was the dark found Helen lost—and now I knew, as I had never known before, the countless measure of my loss—the countless measure of my gain—the way that now would be forever closed to me—the way of exile and of no return—and another way that I had found. For I knew that I was 'out.' And that I had now found my way.

To that old master, now, to wizard Faust, old father of the ancient and swarm-haunted mind of man, to that old German land with all the measure of its truth, its glory, beauty, magic and its ruin—to that dark land, to that old ancient earth that I had loved so long—I said farewell.

I have a thing to tell you:

Something has spoken to me in the night, burning the tapers of the waning year; something has spoken to me in the night; and told me I shall die, I know not where.⁹⁴

And just like that, Thomas Wolfe was no longer a boy.

After the semester, Bassler wrote that he wanted to meet for lunch. We walked downtown from Peabody Hall. I had arrived early at our offices and played music. Awaiting his arrival while feigning nonchalance, I played a recording of an improvisation by the Brad Mehldau Trio over and over until he arrived. “What’s that you’re listening to?” he asked, walking in the door a little late, to which I replied offhand, “Everything in its Right Place.” Downtown, we talked before eating. The pile of books that I had brought with me—oh, just some things I happened to be reading—stood precariously balanced, as if by some magic, between us. Looking over the pile, I said, “I want to spend the summer reading books about set theory and about Freud and Jung.” “Not about their theories,” I added, “so much as their relationship, the way their theory was in their relationship.” I wonder now what those books were meant to communicate to my teacher.

The weightiest volume, *A Most Dangerous Method* by John Kerr, described the manic, unstable energy of Jung struggling against his mentor, destined perhaps to betray him, this

⁹⁴ Wolfe 277-278.

grandiose betrayal having been foreseen and perhaps even insisted on by the equally mercurial Freud. But who was the stag and who the hounds?⁹⁵ If I had known of Bassler's proficiency as a poet, I probably would have included a book of verse in that wall of books, Yusef Komunyakaa's *Talking Dirty to the Gods*, a volume of James Dickey, or perhaps even Frost's *North of Boston*, with its talk of good fences and good neighbors. When he wasn't looking, I stared intently at Bassler's stony face, thinking that it looked like some rude, natural outcropping, with jutting, horned bone around the forehead, the sockets and the bridge of the nose—a face worn by the elements, not chiseled. His twisted hair clung to that stone as surely as creeping vines. I thought there was something goblin about that face. Wheeling around, he startled me with a thunderclap of laughter.

We sat face to face in his office: two chairs surrounded by a perimeter of books lying indiscriminately on the floor. There was a dry-erase board on the wall on which both of us drew. I think we started meeting regularly, talking through a reading list before I asked him to be my major professor. In fact, a semester passed before I asked and he agreed. Speaking of this awkward moment, I joked with a friend, "It's like you're asking for a date," to which my perceptive friend responded, "It's worse than asking for a date. You're asking for a *relationship*."

We read Heidegger on *The Principle of Reason* and Freud's *Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety*. I interpreted them metaphysically, even Heidegger's rose without reason, but I suspect Bassler did not. We read philosophical stories by Hans Blumenberg in which he wondered

⁹⁵ Kerr claims that the two medical men fought over a female patient, Sabine Spielrein, also communicating by means of her until she broke free from them and became a psychiatrist herself. With an approving Freud in the audience, she delivered an influential paper on the close relation between *thanatos* and *eros*, death and generative instincts, which anticipates certain trends in Freud's later work. Nevertheless, he never mentioned her paper. Spielrein, along with her daughters, was shot by soldiers of the Red Army and buried in a mass grave with at least

whether one should say, “I’m anxious,” in which he understood the beginning of wisdom to be the Lord’s fear, not the fear that takes God as its object. A tempting voice in my head, like some righteous Elihu, young in years and full of arrogant words, answered, “the God that could fear is not the true God.”⁹⁶ My teacher talked about Heidegger’s late turn to poetry, his final insistence that “only a god can save us now” and the almost inexplicable suggestion that the poet Hölderlin could presage that deity. And beneath it all, subterranean, Blumenburg speaking of dangerous genealogies, of war and foxholes at the front in which one could smell, like some pack animal, the anxiety of the other. I think my teacher and I may have sensed something about each other. Indeed, I’m fairly certain that I told him the childhood dream about my father, although looking into his liquid eyes, I clutched the recent dream of the Minotaur tightly to my chest, keeping it secret .

I didn’t know what a proseminar was when I agreed be a part of one. Nevertheless, I was one of the four students who met every Wednesday over the course of five weeks in the sitting room of Dr. Bassler’s home. Two of the others were students of his in UGA’s philosophy department, while one was a former student who had gone north to study religion in Harvard’s divinity school. Olive skinned and elegant, the religion student was the son of an Indian doctor and seemed himself to be rather slight of health, if not of energy. He possessed a most exquisite manner and a diverse knowledge of both mathematics and the teachings of the Buddha, these qualities making him seem almost an aristocrat. Having both arrived early once, he told me while we waited for the others that he was beginning to wonder whether Buddha’s talk of mindfulness simply amounted to “being aware of what you are doing, here in this moment.”

18,000 other Jews.

⁹⁶ Before God comes to Job from out of darkly divine whirlwind, seemingly to correct what has been said in respect

The philosophy students included a Taiwanese national, who I later learned was the grandson of an exiled poet and the heir to a great fortune amassed by his self-made father. Outspokenly radical, dressed for the café, he now studies in Paris and hopes to work with Badiou. I told him one night that he should write the story of his family, and he beamed. The other philosophy student, a shy, dark-bearded young man who had attended a college in north Florida, possessed a gift for being inconspicuous and rarely talked at all during our meetings. Privately though, he spoke with such a candor and sensibility that he seemed a sort of fragile jewel, whose luster was all the more lovely for its being so vulnerable and reserved. He often wondered whether he was meant to study philosophy at all. At the time, I confided to him in my office that I just wanted to make something beautiful. But this is no longer the case: now I want to write something that aches.

We sat around Dr. Bassler, flanked by a miscellaneous wall of books and a small, unobtrusive piano, behind us a door and before us a window overlooking Bassler's backyard teeming with all manner of prospecting animals. There were drinks and snacks and room to stretch out, although I spent most of my time nursing store-bought coffee, hunched over, scribbling notes in my hardbound, baby-blue notebook. That notebook, which contained descriptions of the proseminar as well as my courses and meetings with Bassler, was misplaced during our move to Texas. I'm still waiting for it to turn up, but it might be gone for good. I suspect that something of value always is lost during a move. But something also may be gained. Indeed, this essay depends entirely on memory.

to him, Elihu warns Job, "Do not long for the night, when people are cut off in their place" (36.20). Cf. *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*. Ed. Bruce Metzger and Roland Murphy. New York: Oxford UP, 1991. 665.

Bassler's plan was to speak uninterrupted and extemporaneously for the first half of our meeting. Ideally, he told us, this topic would not be decided in advance, and no notes would be prepared. A lover of jazz, Bassler hoped to improvise as much as possible. These improvisations were filled with stories and anecdotes, references to sickness and fire and music. Or more accurately, to *being* sick, to burning, and to playing music. I knew, as I suppose the others did, that our teacher had been diagnosed with clinical insomnia. Before the others arrived one Wednesday, he spoke candidly with me about my writing, saying, "You know, I think you've been more successful in dealing with certain problems associated with the mathematical approach of academic philosophy and less successful in overcoming the problems of Romanticism." "You've got to trust that there will be hands there to meet you," he added and then, having paused for a moment, "and they will be *human* hands."

The memory of Bassler's father, a mathematician who had died of Parkinson's, hovered around his stories, as did memories of his undergraduate improvisations on the piano. Piling story on story, my teacher spoke of Thomas Mann's *Dr. Faustus*, and of an uncle who watched over a bedridden boy, beside himself from the heat of fever. One of the many books Bassler had recommended to me had been Gaston Bachelard's *Fragments of a Poetics of Fire*, which remained scattered and incomplete at the time of the author's own death, only later being compiled by his daughter. During Bassler's history of a quiet acquaintance who without warning had set the family farm ablaze, I remembered both this book of fragments as well as Dickens's intractable belief in the fact of spontaneous combustion. Indeed, there is something of this belief in the feverish remarks of the pianist Keith Jarrett, who, speaking of his totally improvised Vienna Concert, said that he had "courted the flame for a very long time," but while

“many sparks [had] flown in the past,” this concert spoke “finally, the language of the flame itself.”⁹⁷

Sitting at the head of the table during my dissertation prospectus defense, I made an offhand remark that must have seemed rather curious. I joked about my hillbilly roots, recalling a home-spun genealogy full of lay, charismatic preachers, the spirit descending on them like tongues of flame; a genealogy including practitioners of the uncouth art of “grabbling,” in which one blindly reaches hands underneath the warm, muddy banks of a lake or slow-moving creek to catch hold of the fish that hopefully waits there. I laughed and looked at Bassler, who sat close beside me on the left. Smiling, he said in a low voice, “One must search below the foundations.”

One night during our course on philosophical praxis, Brad Bassler and I screamed at one another. I’m tempted to make up some details about what led to that moment, which explain it as a series of ever more heated disagreements. But that’s not the way I remember it, and I decided half-way through this chapter not to lie or to add what should have happened. We had squabbled on other occasions, usually on those nights when I complained about our method, which, to my mind, was entirely too personal, too subjective, too emotional, not philosophical. In fact the paradigm by which I measured the class belonged to another UGA professor, who had returned one of my first philosophy papers to me with these handwritten words: “next time pick a philosophical topic.” As my wife can attest, I returned to our house hopping mad after many of Bassler’s classes, tearfully testifying both to the necessity of being dispassionate and the reality of abstract ideas. All this frustration ignited during class one night. Without warning we were yelling at one another. Walking away, Bassler turned to confront me, shouting “I don’t think I

⁹⁷ Jarrett, Keith. Liner notes. *Vienna Concert*. ECM, 1991.

should have to apologize to you!” And without thinking, I was bellowing back, “I’m not asking you to apologize!” That was the first time I saw Brad Bassler.

A Love Letter

I am writing this essay in a house that Monica and I rented in Amarillo, and the wind is so forceful that the dog doesn’t want to go outside. Since it was Monica’s first year teaching at a local university, since we did not know what might happen with my own job search, we decided to rent instead of trying to buy a house. I have never owned a house. In fact, I had never rented one by myself besides the apartment that I lived in for the space of a couple of months, between the beginning of my first semester in the English department and moving in with Monica sometime shortly after Halloween. I remember Monica bringing her dog, then only a puppy, by that apartment before we started dating to give me the smell test. Now, eight years later, he’s as much my dog as hers, perhaps even a little more so.

My dog had been advertised as a pure-bred German Shepherd, but he doesn’t walk like one, haunches dragging the ground. And that unstarched left ear suggests confusion more than the so-called majesty of the pure breed. Despite his eighty pounds, eleven years, and white beard, my dog still has the vigor of a puppy. He is at home both on couches and in the fields, but he certainly spends more time on the former. I walk him through the back alleyways of our thoroughly respectable, middle-class Amarillo neighborhood.

Wearing cowboy boots as always, the little old man tells me that he walks six or seven miles a day and that this section of Amarillo is a nice place: “we haven’t had any trouble with the gangs yet.” He always chuckles and waves when I shout my greeting at him—“HI, HOWYA DOING?”—music blaring from my Ipod. But I don’t see him much. I don’t see many people in

the allies behind the houses, only an occasional garbage truck emptying the long rows of small dumpsters. “No need to mess up anybody’s front yard,” if one were to ask: “We’ll just walk around back.” My dog and I have a route we walk every day, so one would think that the neighborhood dogs would get used to us. But they haven’t and their number is legion. The last stretch of our walk resounds like some sort of canine gauntlet: wild, frothy growling on both sides, baying so loud that it drowns out my music, and what appears behind one fence to be a pitfighting Jack Russell terrier. Terrible skirmishes seem to break out behind the tall security fences, terrible in part because hidden, except for the shadows darting furiously under the small opening where the fence meets the ground. My dog strains at his leash, sometimes taking me along with him toward those shadows. Some of the neighborhood animals, however, don’t mind strangers and, especially if their fence is chain link, they come to meet us, a whirlwind of wagging.

Opening our back gate I often have been startled by a child’s voice, apparently the son of my neighbors, the Griegos. Mel Griego seems like a nice guy; we talked for a good hour the first day my wife and I moved in and have barely spoken since, although we do exchange waves from our passing cars. Mel works at the airport as one of those security guards with the baton, but he is thinking of going back to school because his wife is a teacher and “values education.” I think that my wife and I make them nervous. Mel told me that the people in the neighborhood like to play golf, spend time with the family, and work in the yard. But I haven’t played golf in years, my wife and I have different last names and no kids, and our dying lawn is the only one in the neighborhood that could lure fall travelers away from the colors of New England. In the allyways behind the houses, the grass is never cut and dumpsters are left open.

With one exception, Mel's kid never has called me anything other than "man".

Apparently, he does not mean this term to be familiar, but merely descriptive. His voice sounds like a piccolo played by a moderately talented, high-school band member, and he disdains pauses: "Man what are you doing with that dog what are you doing?" This may be the only question he has asked me, but he makes up in frequency what he lacks in variety: "Man what are you doing with that dog what are you doing?" Until very recently, I never could put a body with that voice, so I would respond to no one in particular, "Oh, I'm just taking him for walk." A week ago for the first time, though, I noticed that the voice seemed to be coming from above and I looked and saw a little, brown knee sticking out from the tree branches in the corner of Mel's backyard. When he realized I finally had seen him, he giggled and gave us that little kid wave. We are beginning to discover things in the alleyways.

I am writing this in an office I had no hand in decorating; while I was in Athens, my wife fixed it up as a surprise gift. Even so, it is all the more mine. The colors of this office are burnt orange and gold, velvety brown and patterned black. On the wall hang reproductions of William N. Nicholson's early photographs of lightning, including the first recorded one of 1885. Nicholson was provoked by the habit of the artists of representing lightning as a sharp, angular zigzag and had undertaken to represent the discharge with greater accuracy, submitting his "lightning book" to the Franklin Institute in 1929, almost fifty years later. The small black and white photos frame a larger reproduction of a photograph from John McWilliam's book "Land of Deepest Shade: Photographs of the South." Black water, strewn with leaves, mirrors the exposed roots of towering, waterside trees. The dense southern foliage is close, so close that it seems to lean over the banks toward the sluggish, opaque water, as if it were trying to see itself.

Rembrandt's "The Rabbi"—that bearded face always in the act of emerging from the darkness—sits atop a bookshelf, which faces another on the opposite wall. In fact, the other two shelves also stand across from one another so that the office is framed by books at each corner. On the wall space between two of these shelves hangs a dry-erase board on which my wife had written a homecoming message. In addition to books, my shelves house several small saints, among them a mitred St. Nicholas, whose golden robe, like Dickens's ghost of Christmas present, seems to conceal some terrible or wonderful secret, as well as a small St. Francis, carved out of wood and holding a small bird. A young female saint, whose name I did not know, stands clad in yellow and sky blue, like the golden-bordered iris of my wife's eyes. Clutching a rose to her breast, she seems to be on the verge of offering a gift.

On the wall closest to the door hang two masks that we found in Mexico. The uppermost is a devil with bulging blue eyes and tarnished pink tongue, protruding from his open mouth. He rattles if shaken. The dealer said that mummers used him to ward off evil spirits. Underneath hangs a metal, curly-headed figure with maroon skin and a long black beard. Dark blue and tear shaped, his earrings drip from both lobes. What appears to be a scarlet spotted toad crawls from his mouth, and its face in some way suggests the larger humanoid one. From his own mouth emerge two snakes with human faces, winding up either side of the main figure's beard. This is a rain dance mask.

I also bought a thin, pillar-shaped pen and ink drawing from an artist in a Mexican plaza. Tinted various shades of orange, its color approaches a sort of amber in certain areas and the reddish tint of apples in others. Indistinct figures seem to swirl around one another in a flame, coming here into view as a human face, here a monster, and here only an eye and then receding again into the general swirl. I talked to the artist for a long time and felt like I knew him.

Indeed, I put my arm around his neck, an intimacy that I usually don't feel comfortable initiating. He told me, "It's abstract, I see one thing, you see another." "I see you," I said pointing to a face within the flame, and he smiled.

There are snowglobes in my room. One contains a slightly comic nativity scene in which Joseph and Mary make exaggerated gestures, as if overacting. If these poses are supposed to suggest movement, they fail. The faces of the family are masks of gravity. She strokes a small, feral dog but does not touch the child wailing in the crib, and his eyes look vacant, distracted. Along the base is a stylized Bethlehem with stars and psalms, and on the back, which I never observed until now, three wise men make their way on camels. Another globe holds angels who dance and play instruments. They seem alive within the swirling snow. One holds a lute, another a harp, and the third raises what may be either a horn or a flagon to her lips. In the last globe, which my mother gave me, a tarnished hart lies peacefully on the ground as if in deepest memory, snow swirling around his antlers and coming to rest on his warm back. The resting deer looks toward the pagan fetish propped on my desk: Cerunnos, the horned god of the hunt. He is flanked by a Green Man carving, replicating those fertility figures inexplicably found in Winchester Cathedral and other medieval churches, peering incongruously from the pews. Vegetation tendrils grow out of his open mouth and cover his face. I use these fetishes as paperweights.

On the wall hangs a tapestry recreating a segment of the famous Bayeaux embroidery, which detailed the coming of William the Conqueror to England. A Norman boat, wind full in its sails, floats below the word *navigio*, but the words that accompany this scene in the original—*Hic Willem Dux in magno Navigio Mare*—are missing. In my reproduction, the crew members conquer nothing. They are simply in a boat, certainly not a great one if not outright small. The

gusting wind inflates the sails perilously and the faces of the crew signal worry, not stony confidence. They do not know their destination. On the prow, two conspicuous figures stand face to face, one looking forward, the other behind. They mirror one another except for the smile of the former and the frown of the latter.

One figure, perhaps he his William, stands before all the rest, his hand on a steadying rope, the other on his hip. On this face that looks out over the approaching waters, there is joy.

CHAPTER 2

KATALOGOS

The Birth of Philosophy

It is no exaggeration to state that in the classical culture of Tlön, there is only one discipline, that of psychology. All others are subordinated to it From all this, it would be possible to deduce that there is no science in Tlön, let alone rational thought. The paradox, however, is that sciences exist, in countless number. In philosophy, the same thing happens as happens with the nouns in the northern hemisphere. The fact that any philosophical system is bound in advance to be a dialectical game, a Philosophie des Als Ob, means that systems abound, unbelievable systems, beautifully constructed or else sensational in effect. The metaphysicians of Tlön are not looking for truth, nor even an approximation of it; they are after a kind of amazement. They consider metaphysics a branch of fantastic literature.

J. L. Borges

“Don’t you think you’d be safer on the ground?” Alice went on, not with any idea of making a riddle, but simply in her good-natured anxiety for the queer creature. “That wall is so very narrow.”

“What tremendously easy riddles you ask!” Humpty Dumpty growled out. “Of course I don’t think so! Why, if ever I did fall off—which there’s no chance of—but if I did—” Here he pursed up his lips, and looked so solemn and grand that Alice could hardly help laughing. “If I did fall,” he went on, “the King has promised me—ah, you may turn pale, if you like! You didn’t think I was going to say that, did you? The King has promised me—with his very own mouth—to—to—”

“To send all his horses and all his men,” Alice interrupted, rather unwisely.

“Now I declare that’s too bad!” Humpty Dumpty cried, breaking into a sudden passion. “You’ve been listening at doors—and behind trees—and down chimneys—or you couldn’t have known it!”

“I haven’t indeed!” Alice said very gently. “It’s in a book.”

“Ah, well! They may write such things in a book”

Lewis Carroll

In his *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, Diogenes Laertius writes that Thales, the son of Phoenician parents of no particular prominence, was the first among the Greeks to be given the name of “Sage.”⁹⁸ Some say that he was always a recluse, while others maintain that he turned away from public life to pursue a solitary one. Whether he turned away in disgust or for some other reason is not altogether clear. According to some accounts, he never married, never fathered a child. It is said that when asked the reason for this reluctance, he jokingly cited his great love for children. If he loved them, though, he also seems to have feared the living arrangements that might produce them, for Diogenes tells us that when the philosopher’s mother exhorted him to marry, he said, “‘No, by Jove, it is not yet time.’” And afterwards, when he was past his youth, and she was again pressing him earnestly, he said, ‘It is no longer time.’” One wonders what his mother thought of the well-known anecdote concerning the philosopher: that he gave thanks for three things—having been born Greek and not Barbarian, human not animal, and man not woman.

Despite these prejudices, the philosopher seems in a sense to have been magnanimous in his attitude toward nature. Embracing esoteric studies, he attributed soul to lifeless matter, such that the world itself was a living thing and full of daemons. And these daemons made him rich. In a curious return to the workaday world, Thales desired to show that it was easy to become wealthy and, having predicted a great crop of olives, he bought several presses, monopolizing the means of oil production and making a fortune in the process. The motive behind this desire—whether the reclusive philosopher sought to show the superiority of his own studies or to make

⁹⁸ For Diogenes’s account of Thales’s life, cf. *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*. Vol. I. Trans. R. D. Hicks. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1972. 23-47.

some other point—remains mysterious, as does the compensation, if any, the philosopher promised his daemons in return.

Mystery, itself, seems to have been a subject to which he gravitated. Although some deny that he wrote at all, it is also said that he wrote only two books, one on the equinox and one on the solstice, thinking that everything else was easily understood. Diogenes tells us that these verses belong to him:

Many words do not declare an understanding heart.
 Seek one sole wisdom.
 Choose one sole good.
 For thou wilt check the tongues of chatterers prating without end.

Touting a secret reserved for the elect, the first Sage almost seems to have been waging a private war against his fellow men and their chatter.

When asked, “What is easy,” Thales replied, “to give advice to another,” while to the question, “What is difficult,” he replied, “To know oneself.” But one wonders whether, for Thales, there *was* a world outside of the self or whether he himself was the world that brimmed with living daemons. When the philosopher calculated with such painstaking exactitude that the sun was seven hundred and twenty times as great as the moon, was he not also measuring the discrepancy between human and brute, Greek and Barbarian, and man and woman? Was this not also the difference between Thales and the many? When he affirmed—the first, according to Diogenes, to do so—the immortality of the soul, was he affirming the immortality of all souls or only the soul of the elect man with his esoteric search?

It is surprising, then—almost as surprising as the entrepreneurial venture concerning the olives—that this man would have need of any community whatsoever. But nevertheless, Diogenes includes two letters written by Thales, both of which speak of the philosopher’s

willingness to leave his home and settle with the addressee. Indeed, Thales encouraged Solon, the Athenian lawgiver, to join the “society of [his] friends” in the Athenian colony of Miletus and offers alternately to relocate to any other city that the lawgiver might choose, so great was Thales’s need to see and, even more importantly, to be seen by this most practical of men.

The Law of Release was the first laid down by Solon.⁹⁹ Its effect, Diogenes tells us, “was to ransom persons and property. For men used to borrow money on personal security, and many were forced from poverty to become serfs or day-laborers.” As an example, Solon himself renounced his claim to a debt of seven talents. Some say that Solon was afraid the Athenians would force him to repeal the laws that he had set up for them, and so he left Athens and traveled throughout the Mediterranean. But Diogenes tells a different story in which Solon, the lover of democracy and enemy of tyranny, resolved to flee his home upon realizing the inevitability of Athens falling under the sway of the tyrant Pisistratus. Feigning madness, he once had rushed into the Agora with a garland on his head, where he recited an ecstatic poem urging the Athenians to resist the imperialistic advances of the Megarians toward his birthplace. “Let us fight for Salamis and fair fame,” he shouted, “win the beloved isle, and purge our shame!” In the Agora, his madness was thought wisdom, but his measured words within the Assembly, warning of Pisistratus’s tyrannical designs, were thought mad.

Regardless of its motivation, Solon’s subsequent self-exile is well known: the journey to Egypt and Cyprus island, the site of Aphrodite’s birth and his own eventual demise, and then on to the court of Croesus. This fabulously wealthy king, who apparently was the first barbarian to subjugate the Greeks and to offer dedications at Delphi, paraded the wonders of his kingdom before the wiseman, asking Solon if he had ever seen anything more beautiful. According to

Diogenes, the sage replied, “Yes, cocks and pheasants and peacocks; for they shine in nature’s colors, which are ten thousand times more beautiful.” In Herodotus, of course, the point of emphasis differs. What is at stake for *The Histories* is happiness, not beauty, and so Solon responded, “Call no man happy until he dies.”¹⁰⁰

Thinking Solon, with his insistence on chance and the jealousy of the gods, a madman, Croesus moved against the Persian empire to the east. But although his army was assisted by Thales, who diverted the course of a river so that it might be forded, Croesus of course was captured by the Persians and placed upon a sacrificial pyre. He remembered Solon and his maxims in the midst of the flames, and weeping, he called on a god to save him. The flames were extinguished when a storm suddenly gathered overhead.

Among others, the apothegms “no man is master of his own universe” and “nothing too much” were said to be authored by Solon. Diogenes also includes an anecdote from Dioscurides’s *Memorabilia*: “when [Solon] was weeping for the loss of his son, of whom nothing more is known, and some one said to him, ‘It is all of no avail,’ he replied, ‘That is why I weep, because it is of no avail.’” Apparently, it is also of no avail to seek for the true author of a maxim, for Diogenes tells us that the moderate utterance “nothing too much” was attributed rather indiscriminately to various sages. But one wonders whether either of these apothegms could have been attributed to Thales.

In recounting the life of the first philosopher, Diogenes focuses most of his account on one particular story associated with Thales. There was a tripod, in some versions a bowl or chalice, that was reserved for the wisest of men or at least the wisest of Greeks. Accounts of the

⁹⁹ For Diogenes’s account of Solon’s life, cf. 47-69.

¹⁰⁰ *The Histories*. Trans. Aubrey de Sélincourt. Baltimore: Penguin Books Inc., 1954. 25.

origin and discovery of this vessel vary. In some instances, it is pulled from the sea by fishermen, while other authorities consider it a gift from the Argives or even Croesus himself. But in each variation, it was to be given as a prize for that sage who surpassed all others in wisdom. Several versions have Thales first accepting this prize and then magnanimously sending it to another sage who also passed it on until Thales received it again, whereupon he dedicated it to the god Apollo with this self-aggrandizing inscription, “Thales, the Milesian, son of Examyas [dedicates this] to the Delphinian Apollo after twice winning the prize from all the Greeks.” But not all versions feature him as the alpha and omega, for in at least one, the vessel is passed from Thales to the other sages until it is received by Solon, who, remarking simply that the god was most wise, sent it on to Delphi.

One particularly interesting account attributes a divine origin to the vessel as the handiwork of Hephaestus, whom the Egyptians considered the first philosopher.¹⁰¹ The lame god presented it as a marriage present to Pelops, the son of mad Tantalus, who had quartered and served his own child to the gods as a test, some say, of Zeus’s omniscience. Having discovered the insolent, bloody ruse, the gods sentenced Tantalus to perpetual hunger and thirst in the midst of fruit-laden trees and a lapping lake, which turned to mud in his grasping hands. The limbs of Pelops were sown together, and he later won the hand of Hippodameia, scheming his way to victory over her father in a chariot race with the help of Myrtle, the king’s treacherous charioteer. Having killed his fellow conspirator, who apparently attempted to rape his new bride on the desert island of Helene, Pelops received the wedding gift of Hephaestus.

¹⁰¹ For the mythological details, cf. Graves, Robert. *The Greek Myths*. New York: Penguin Group, 1992. and *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*.

On his marriage day of all others, Pelops should have suspected such a gift, for Hephaestus, the divine cuckold, was unfamiliar with nuptial bliss. Distrusting his wife Aphrodite, he laid a trap for her and warlike Ares, pretending to be called away on business only to return unlooked for, catching the trysting lovers in a bronze net. Strangely enough, he chose to exhibit his disgrace to the rest of the gods, inviting them all to look on the ensnared lovers. Indeed, of all the gods, the smith seems to have made a display of weakness and shame, limping amongst them on his unresponsive, golden-braced legs. It is said that they were shattered when he fell from the summit of Olympus, a fall that lasted an entire day.

Enraged, Zeus had flung his son from the mountain after Hephaestus had reproached the god for his treatment of Hera during a domestic quarrel, a quarrel that saw Zeus fall into a sort of sadistic fit, hanging his rebellious wife by her wrists from Heaven. But Hephaestus always had been weak. Hera herself, the god's own mother, had been so disgusted by his feebleness at birth that she too had dropped him from the height of Olympus.

And so Pelops should have suspected the wedding gift of Hephaestus, the god accepted by neither mother nor father, whose association with weakness and falling is so peculiar. But he did not suspect. Indeed, the golden vessel was inherited by his son and then his grandson Menelaus, the richest of the Achaeans, who prized it along with his wife, Helen. He would lose them both.

At the marriage of Peleus, Eris, the uninvited goddess of strife, cast a golden apple inscribed "For the Fairest" at the feet of Hera, Athena, and Aphrodite, who disputed the proper ownership of the prize. The gods refused to judge the quarrel and appointed the barbarian Paris, who as a lowly cattle-man was little better than a slave, to make the choice. Thinking himself

unworthy of such a decision, he wanted to divide the apple amongst the three, but was denied this compromise.

Hera offered the riches of the ground, Athena heavenly wisdom and victories in battle, but Aphrodite spoke the most pleasing words:

As soon as I saw you, I said to myself: 'Upon my word, there goes the handsomest young man in Phrygia! Why does he waste himself here in the wilderness herding stupid cattle?' Well, why do you, Paris? Why not move into the city and lead a civilized life? What have you to lose by marrying someone like Helen of Sparta, who is as beautiful as I am, and no less passionate?'

Enticed by these promises of beauty and civility, Paris gave her the apple and seized both the wife of unsuspecting Menelaus and also his inheritance, the golden prize for wisdom.

But neither Helen, nor the prize were easily kept. In his account of Thales, Diogenes tells us that fishermen hauled in the golden vessel with their nets, but he also reports a version of how the vessel came to be drowned. Fearing that the golden prize would become a source of strife, Helen herself flung the vessel into the sea. Helen: who was born woman not man, the daughter of a swan that was also a god, the lover of a barbarous Trojan.

Diogenes, teller of philosophical tales and tales of philosophers, seems to have been a master of pregnant juxtapositions. After relating the three-fold thanksgiving of Thales, he tells the following story concerning the first philosopher.

It is said that once, when he was taken out of doors by an old woman in order that he might observe the stars, he fell into a ditch, and his cry for help drew from the old woman the retort, 'How can you expect to know all about the heavens, Thales, when you cannot even see what is just before your feet?'

The Birth of a Town

One hundred years ago, the town of Helen had not been born. In the 1800's, the land that would become Helen was part of the Nacoochee Valley region in extreme northeast Georgia, bordered by the timbered Blue Ridge mountains on the west and north and the granite face of Mount Yonah to the southwest. One of the first white settlers to try the region, Dr. Matthew Stephenson, an assayer and state geologist, reported matter-of-factly that

The valley of Nacoochee . . . is considered by all foreigners to be one of the most charming and lovely valleys in the world. It is in a high state of cultivation, and improved by elegant residences, orchards, vineyards; and many of the choicest works of art in statuary and sculpture are being introduced from Italy to add to its beauty. Its inhabitants are natives of Massachusetts, Indiana, Virginia, Georgia, the Carolinas, and some from beyond the seas. They are pious, intelligent, and hospitable, and have yet to learn the cursed influence of European modern philosophy.¹⁰²

Touting a nameless mountain society somehow both cosmopolitan and parochial, Stephenson described a peaceful community of equals, virtually without need of law and devoted both to respecting the natural environment and to beautifying it.

We must praise the doctor for the adaptability of his rhetoric, for when it came to advertising his Georgia home, Stephenson had a keen sense of audience. Indeed, when strikes began to peter out a couple of decades after gold was discovered in northeast Georgia, Stephenson is said to have stood on the courthouse steps in front of a unruly crowd of disgruntled prospectors, who threatened all sorts of things, desertion of the valley in favor of the new strikes in California being the least among them. In front of this mob, Stephenson stood as tall as some archaic lawgiver, practically commanding the men not to leave the mountains, even while he seemed to give voice to the secret hope of each of his auditors. Some locate the origin

¹⁰² Gedney, Matt. *The Story of Helen and Thereabouts*. Marietta, Georgia: Little Star Press, 1998. 19.

of the drawling “Thar’s gold in them thar hills” in Stephenson’s impassioned insistence that day on the hidden riches of the mountains. “There’s millions in it,” he bellowed with the conviction of an evangelist.

But some men were not overly impressed by societies, regardless of their perfection, or lustrous rocks, regardless of their exchange value. To these, Stephens made promises of a different sort. “From the trending of the mountains the upheaved strata form thousands of waterfalls,” the doctor wrote enthusiastically, “in addition to which the charming landscapes, the magnificent scenery, and the sublime accompaniments of mountain grandeur, elevate the mind and fill the soul with the most exquisite and indescribable emotions, bringing man into close communion with his Creator and Preserver.”¹⁰³ Ever the promoter, Stephenson advertised emotional states unavailable to the ordinary man in his ordinary life, as breathtakingly stunning as the wild mountain scenery. Indeed, he seemed to insinuate that here surrounded by the natural wonder of North Georgia, the traveler would be filled with God, or at least would be treated to the spectacle of those who were.

There were hidden things in North Georgia: within the covering folds of the mountain, a beautiful society; within the earth, fortunes; within the person, divinity. But not everyone bought what Stephenson was selling. A mere thirty years earlier, the novelist William Gilmore Simms had described the valley area as “the wildest region of the then little-settled state of Georgia—doubly wild as forming the debatable land between the savage and the civilized—partaking of the ferocity of the one, and the skill, cunning and cupidity of the other.”¹⁰⁴ The only thing hidden within the mountains, Simms implied, was a lawless arena for the exercise of

¹⁰³ Gedney 25.

¹⁰⁴ *Guy Rivers: A Tale of Georgia*. 1890. <<http://www.gutenberg.org/etext/16303>>.

power. But regardless of the novelist's warning, the rhetoric of the doctor and the like-minded would prove too seductive.

In the early decades of the 1800s, John C. Calhoun, former vice president of the US under both John Quincy Adams and Andrew Jackson, had returned to his family plantation in South Carolina.¹⁰⁵ There he hatched a plan to complete a great East-West railroad line from Charleston to Cincinnati. This scheme was not quite as grand as it seemed, for lines already existed from Charleston to Anderson, South Carolina and from Cincinnati to Knoxville, Tennessee. It was left to Calhoun to simply connect the dots, bridging the extreme southwest corner of North Carolina that lay between Knoxville and Anderson, a distance of only a couple hundred miles.

Originally he proposed to bypass Georgia altogether, but the plan was revised in 1838 after gold was discovered in the northeast corner of the state, less than fifty miles from the North Carolina border. The opportunistic Inferior Court of Rabun County, the Georgia county that bordered both Carolinas, extended permission that same year to the Blue Ridge Railroad Company to build rails through its territory. But this line was never completed. Indeed, when the Confederates, influenced by the political philosophy of Calhoun, fired on Fort Sumter in 1861, the company halted construction and never did make it out of South Carolina despite a hundred years worth of attempts.

In 1854, however, the dark clouds of the war were not yet overhead, and the future seemed promising for the Blue Ridge project. Even after its gold began to dwindle, northeast Georgia planned several lines that were to connect to the East-West railway. One of these

¹⁰⁵ For story of railroad construction, cf. Reynolds, George. *Foxfire 10*. New York: Random House Inc., 1993 and Gedney.

proposed “feeder” lines, the Northeastern, was to extend from Athens, a college town since fifty years before, to the town of Clayton in the north where it would connect with the Blue Ridge rails passing through Rabun County. But when the war shut down all such operations, work on this feeder had not even begun.

The financiers behind the Northeastern, however, did not sleep through the conflict, or rather did not sleep without dreams, for when work resumed on the line in 1871 their plan had become grandiose. The Northeastern would not be a “feeder,” but would extend all the way to Knoxville, as the Blue Ridge group had initially planned. Indeed, the Northeastern braintrust realized that if they could reach Clayton, most of the groundwork for connecting this north Georgia town with Knoxville already had been laid by their predecessors. The Northeastern could assume the work as easily as a cuckoo lays claim to another bird’s nest. Indeed, the railway architects, who apparently took this bird as a model, also planned to use the existing tracks of the Atlanta and Richmond Air Line, which ran from Charlotte southwest to Atlanta.

But both the Richmond-Atlanta line and the Northeastern were bought by the Richmond and Danville System. This system had been an important railway for the Confederates, who used it to evacuate Jefferson Davis from Richmond during the last days of the war, but after the Confederacy’s surrender, the system had been gobbled up by the Southern Railway Security Company, controlled by Northern railroad magnates. These profiteers pushed on to Tallulah Falls, with its spectacular cascade of water, and the bordering Tallulah Gorge, once known as the Grand Canyon of the East. Servicing the great tourist interest in the Tallulah landscape and actually creating other tourist towns in its wake, the railway again seemed a prosperous investment, both in terms of vacationers’ dollars and in respect to the larger design of the East-West line. But when the Richmond and Danville system acquired an East-West line from

Knoxville to Atlanta, it no longer had any need of the Tallulah Falls railway, and it passed from hand to hand, finally being subsumed as part of the Southern Railway System reorganized around the turn of the century by financier J. P. Morgan.

By 1911 businessmen from St. Louis had descended on the area, buying large tracts of land and timber rights a few miles west of the Falls on the headwaters of the Chattahoochee river. The people living in Stephens's valley, which seemed to have lost its cosmopolitanism, were surprised by the arrival of the businessmen and their chauffeured cars—not so much because these men had personal drivers but rather because they had cars. After buying much of the area, the businessmen promptly built a huge sawmill to take advantage of the area's "new gold," the thousands of acres worth of virgin timber. Almost as quickly, they built a resort hotel offering the luxury of flush-toilets on every floor and, later on, a golf course and spring-fed swimming pool.

Meanwhile, the tracks of the Gainesville and Northwestern railroad, running from Gainesville to the Stephenson's valley, were completed, servicing both the mill and the tourists who now began to flock to the area in earnest. Bookended by this railroad from the southwest and the Tallulah Falls line in the east, the emerging town was named "Helen" for the daughter of one of the railway owners.

The Birth of Helen

I. Malcolm's Story: *Call No Man Happy Until He Dies*

Storm: everywhere a driving, icy rain.

A chain of vehicles wound its way through the North Georgia mountains. Excepting the "leader," each was connected by the liquid beam of its headlights to the vehicle in front of it like

a train of freight. Indeed, unbeknownst to the passengers, they had followed the path of the old railway in driving north from Athens to Tallulah Falls. But lost now between the Falls and its destination, the city of Helen, the vanguard vehicle meandered haphazardly down unmarked roads as if searching for something to couple with, its lights illuminating little besides the glossy patches beginning to form on the twisting blacktop.

If any insomniac had been awake at this small hour, sometime between two and three o'clock in the morning, and had managed to see through the contracting pupil of his window, he would have put these lights down as some sort of *ignis fatuus* of the mountains, a distant fire worming through the pre-dawn gloom. And if he had been told that the sources of this illumination were Mercedes vans, and that they contained not only a hot-air balloon with its great furnace, but also a multi-millionaire by the name of *Malcolm Forbes*, the southern mountaineer probably would have returned to bed thinking the hour very late indeed. For Mercedes was a relatively unknown name in these rural parts even in the mid-seventies, and hot-air balloons were amusements for the "summer people." Stranger still would have been the millionaire publisher and his magazine full of great lists ranking the ultra rich, the richer and the richest.

Snug inside the careening lead van, its heater turned on full blast, Malcolm Forbes saw the fairy light of a distant window and wondered whether it was better to be warm and lost in a Mercedes or to be safe inside a frozen house in the middle of nowhere. Regardless of its primitiveness, this country was beautiful—there was no denying that. Or if not beautiful exactly, given the treacherous conditions, then somehow both more and less than. "The center of the earth," he said out loud with a little laugh. "Pardon?" the young driver responded, his fierce attention to the road startled by the voice coming from the seats behind him. But the publisher

didn't answer, thinking instead of the hot-air balloon race, scheduled for later that morning, that he had been sold by the hillbilly Barnum.

The man hadn't taken 'no' for an answer, bursting into Forbes's office a full fifteen minutes before their scheduled meeting. He had flung the door open and strode into the room, ignoring the hand-waving objections of Forbes's secretary, who stood in the doorway sputtering apologies until the millionaire dismissed him. The interloper had no charts, no figures, no timetables, but he did have a purple beret, which sat lopsidedly on his head. Painstakingly cocked to one side, it made it difficult to look the man square in the face, as he proceeded to describe his village hidden within the North Georgia mountains, his role in its recent cosmetic transformation, and the opportunities that such novelty presented to the discerning businessman. His tempo quickening, the man spun tales of eccentric and artistic townsfolk, who had been attracted by the permissive atmosphere; "the last refuge of free spirits," he had called it. But most of all the beret-clad man spoke reverently about his great balloon race. His voice filling the room with its crescendo, the man rose to his feet and slapped his hands together like some enraptured mountain preacher, "it will be the 'race from the center of the world to the edge of the earth!'"

As the man sunk back in his chair, seemingly spent from the force of his proposal, Forbes noticed something strange about the eyes beneath the purple fabric, something glassy and unfocused, something peculiar about his left eyelid. Once it seemed to droop slightly as if independent of the man's will, but that may have been the millionaire's imagination. "It's gonna be something," the man said softly, "something that will surprise the World."

"Surprise the World," the millionaire repeated after a pause, savoring the hyperbole. "That's a good one. Do you think you're a founding father, Pete?" he asked with one eyebrow

cocked, “You stole that from John Adams’s diary.” Thinking that this had sounded a little harsh, Forbes added as if in jest, “You’re an educated man, you know what they say about a thief, don’t you? A man who will steal will also murder . . . he’ll do anything.” Pete took off his cap and placed it in his lap, fingering its velvet texture nervously. His hands never stopped—indeed Pete did not even look up—when he replied, “Is that a threat, Malcolm? I seem to remember something from Aristotle to that effect.” A barely noticeable twitch at the corner of his eye was the only visible sign of the millionaire’s surprise. And then Forbes smiled, wagging an index finger back and forth in correction, “*Pseudo-Aristotle.*”

The two men stared into each other’s eyes. The mountaineer was the first to avert his gaze, looking over to the dark part of the room, where the outline of a door, which had been designed to do so, went unnoticed in the gloom. But the millionaire, following the man’s eyes, was the first to break the silence, “You’ve got a secret, don’t you?” Receiving no reply, Forbes thought to himself that there was something weak in the man, something both weak and hidden. And this was something that Malcolm Forbes could not resist: “Alright. I’ll buy it.”

But no one ever sold the millionaire anything—not really. Whatever Forbes bought he expected to work for him. Yes, he had bought the idea of participating in this race, but he expected to make money off his fun. A couple of years earlier, detractors had thought his purchase of the green and gold balloon for \$25,000 a useless extravagance, a vulgar and expensive diversion. And especially so when the millionaire emblazoned its fabric envelope with the words: “Forbes: Capitalist Tool.” Malcolm knew, however, that extravagance was his business, that his very public diversions were his best advertisements, and that penetrating the common vernacular with his name was worth vastly more than a new entry on the fledgling NASDAQ screen. Perhaps it was worth even more than a spot on his magazine’s list, which

itself was made relevant by these very un-business-like extravagances. As he had told reporters at a preview of his newest frolic—a sneak-peak at the latest in a long line of “Tools”—“you people wouldn’t be here today to write about the editor of Forbes magazine if it weren’t for the balloon.” Earlier in the evening, before the rains had started, he had ridden a Harley Davidson motorcycle on the mountain roads overlooking Tallulah Gorge. Finding a picturesque overlook, the Atlanta reporters had taken shots of him and his conspicuously handsome entourage, clad alike in immaculately pressed, canary yellow pants, brilliant red shirts and biker’s vests. The back of these vests sported the “Capitalist Tool” logo: a winged motorcycle tethered to a soaring balloon.

“Hell’s Angels? More like Elizabeth Arden’s Angels,” one of the photographers whispered to his fellow, making him laugh out loud. When the pictures ran the following week, with the caption—“madcap millionaire enjoys one of the seven wonders of Georgia en route to balloon race”—Forbes would look as he always did: forehead inclined forward, chin slightly tucked so that he peered over his bulky black-rimmed glasses, and a smile that showed only the top row of his teeth.

“Seven Wonders of Georgia,” the millionaire mumbled, coupled this time with a spontaneous, charming laugh, mouth completely open, his head tilted back showing his neck. “What!” the driver practically shouted, as the van fish-tailed slightly. Somewhere west of Lake Burton, which had been created in 1913 when Georgia Power dammed the falls, the road on which they now slalomed was not even on the map, but this was the lesser of worries, for the gusting wind did its best to blow the lead van off of it altogether. “It get’s worse whenever you . . .” the driver began testily and then, remembering whom he had on board, added “slow down.” Instinctively, the millionaire leaned forward like a father and patted the driver’s muscled

shoulder for a reassuring moment, but then suddenly jerked his hand away and moved back to his seat. Summoning his public voice, the one he imagined to be delightfully ironic, he told the young man to relax, saying “you can’t die before I have a chance to fire you.”

When the Helen promoter had pitched the idea of the balloon race to Forbes, he had mentioned the Gorge as a good photo-op, adding seductively that Karl Wallenda had tight-roped across it a couple of years earlier. Indeed, he had noted, it was one of seven natural wonders that the state could boast. But Forbes hadn’t recognized any of these attractions other than Warm Springs, where FDR, battling polio, had come to swim in the waters a decade before he became president. Forbes himself had dreamed not unrealistically of being president and had been elected to the Senate in 1951. After throwing his weight behind the Eisenhower campaign the following year, Forbes had represented the Republicans in the New Jersey gubernatorial race of 1956, but was soundly defeated. Even so, he remained as active in politics as he had in all such suicidal activities.

Two years earlier he had completed an unprecedented cross-country balloon voyage only a year after receiving his ballooning license, a flight that barely averted disaster when his dirigible crashed into high-voltage power lines in Virginia. Undaunted, perhaps even titillated by the near miss, Forbes planned a trans-Atlantic flight for the next year, a crossing that, according to certain employees, “looked like an elaborate suicide try.” Indeed, it was whispered in the Forbes building that the entire project was purposefully flawed so that disaster, either virtual or real, would be guaranteed. When the thirteen balloons accidentally shot into the sky, their anchors too light to keep them earthbound, they jerked Forbes’s gondola off its platform, dragging it along the ground behind them. If not for the quick thinking Frenchman, who heroically had jumped into the gondola and detached it from the balloons, Forbes would have

been killed. For only five of the thirteen balloons survived their ascent, not nearly enough to safely convey the gondola laden with the millionaire and his team of research scientists, their experimental equipment, and the stacks of Forbes's book *Fact and Comment*, which was to be distributed by the would-be Lindbergh on safely arriving in Europe.

The millionaire had crawled out of that gondola the same way he had crawled from the King of Morocco's summer palace four years earlier, when the sovereign's own soldiers had stormed through the doors with machine guns and grenades, mowing down several of the elite that had gathered there for Hassan II's birthday party. Someone had told them that the king was being held by kidnapers, the falsity of which was revealed only when they discovered their sovereign cowering in one of the palace's myriad restrooms. Having jumped through a broken palace window, Forbes had made his way on hands and knees across the adjoining beach to the royal golf course where other partygoers had gathered. Thinking at first that the gunfire and explosions were part of some fireworks display, more than one hundred of the guests were killed. But Forbes, of course, was not among them: he had not been born for such a ridiculous fate.

Not for this had he been named aeronaut of the year; not for this had he purchased the elegant Chateau Balleroy in Normandy, built according to Cartesian architectural principles, and the garish, unprincipled Palais de Mendoub in Morocco, which was to launch an Arabic edition of *Forbes*; and certainly not for this had he parlayed his image as a spendthrift into a fortune so vast that it dwarfed his already rich inheritance. "For this," Malcolm Forbes thought to himself, riding mutely in the back of his Mercedes, "a locally sponsored balloon race in a hillbilly backwater." Pushing the heavy black frames back into place on the bridge of his nose, he looked out into the mountain darkness. Forbes was no longer smiling.

Introducing himself in the forward to his *Fact and Comment*, Malcolm had written, “through sheer ability (spelled i-n-h-e-r-i-t-a-n-c-e) I have become Editor-in-Chief of *Forbes* magazine and President of Forbes, Inc., which at this moment includes a couple of profitable subsidiaries leavened by a couple of unprofitable ones; far-flung we ain’t, in a big, conglomerate sense.”¹⁰⁶ Indeed, the millionaire seems to have dreaded the thought of being “far-flung” in any sense. With unflagging resolve, he had succeeded in bringing all of the corporation’s stock under his own name.

That’s what Malcolm did, he *owned* things. But his methods—these are of particular interest.

At a point in time when the American capitalists were busy trying to hide their wealth from the public, Malcolm had devoted his magazine to revealing their fortunes to the man on the street. And in so doing, he had made his own. He knew the mind of the public: it wanted a spectacle and millionaires who were quite frank about their good *fortune*, in every sense of the word. So he gave the people what they wanted, denying responsibility for his privileged life, playing up the chance factors that had been responsible for his wealth. A passive heir, one who simply retained what had been given him: this wasn’t modesty, but a marketing strategy. And such a strategy assured the people that everything was beyond their control and exactly the way it had to be, that status was outside the realm of initiative or talent, or if not altogether outside, that this particular sort of initiative and talent were themselves the result of chance. If *Forbes* could have found a way to disavow his own part in procuring his blonde wife and wonderbread family, he would have done so.

¹⁰⁶ *Fact and Comment*. New York: Knopf, 1974.

But the genius of this stance was that the millionaire kept nothing hidden, using his assets to purchase a gaudy collection of Faberge, the ostentatious palaces and jets, the manuscript of Lincoln's last address and, of course, the balloons. And the more trifling and superfluous the purchase, the better: for this attracted the media, which in turn showed the public the gifts of fortune, which in turn sparked greater interest in the man and his magazine. Fate made visible, a great body composed of precious things—that was Malcolm Forbes.

At the moment, however, he probably would have traded it all for a better set of tires, as the Mercedes skidded around the treacherous Georgia roads. Reflecting the headlights of the vehicle, the downpour now seemed sparks falling from the mountain anvil of some invisible, gigantic smith. Indeed, these icy flames so captivated him that he fell momentarily into a grim reverie, considering the possibility that he would die out here, hurtling over the edge of an unmarked highway and down the suicidal slopes of the mountain. And what was perhaps even worse, that no one would alert the press.

Mesmerized by the downpour, he never thought to bellow “Watch out!” before the back part of the hydroplaning van began its revolution, as if it were determined to lead the car now that the nose of the vehicle, with its sudden braking, had signaled a lack of resolve. Feeling a sudden pressure in both his chest and his back, the millionaire wondered whether he might be split in half by this pincer force. But he didn't wonder for very long. The spinning Mercedes jerked to a concussion-producing stop, and then his thoughts abandoned him entirely.

“My father and grandfather would approve,” Stephen Forbes told reporters after Malcolm's death; “no one is master of their own universe.” The grammatical mistake spoke volumes, for his father's vast signature collection was being disassembled and sold piece by piece. And not only this, much of the company that he had inherited from Malcolm and that still

bore their family name, likewise was being divvied up amongst venture capitalists, forty percent of it going to the private equity group Elevation Partners. It seems that his late father, so identified with his company and his millionaire's toys, was not one but many and could be distributed accordingly.

Nevertheless, this dissection did not seem to deflate Steve's spirits. Sales of advertisement space in Forbes magazine were lagging as was the credibility of the magazine itself. To the media, he doggedly maintained that the new partners were "not just a source of capital," but "a source of insight"; that the sale was motivated by "ambition," certainly not "weakness."¹⁰⁷ But one gets the feeling that after a failed presidential bid, Steve feared for his shrinking wallet. After the deal it looked to be around three-hundred million dollars fatter, but the details were withheld from the media. If he had inherited his father's love of irony, he might have thrown them a quote: "Call no man happy until he dies."¹⁰⁸

II. The Queen of Heaven and Earth

She's gone on now to her eternal reward. Whether or not she followed the savior's advice—to lay up treasure not on earth but in heaven—is another matter. She had no immediate family, but when her nieces and nephews discovered the sum that she had squirreled away over the course of fifty years, they were amazed. How could she have saved so much money, tens of thousands of dollars, on a salary that rarely crept above minimum wage? She took no vacations, for one thing, nor did she own a car, even when she needed one as the unwed, middle-aged

¹⁰⁷Cf. Carr, David. "Investors, including Bono, Buy a Piece of Forbes." *New York Times*. 2006. <<http://www.nytimes.com/2006/08/07/business/media/07carr.html?ex=1179892800&en=d32d05c62d684cd1&ei=5070>>.

¹⁰⁸ For biographical details, cf. Winans, Christopher. *Malcolm Forbes: the Man who had Everything*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990 and Jones, Arthur. *Malcolm Forbes: Peripatetic Millionaire*. New York: Harper and Row,

manager of a dry-goods store. In fact, it's safe to say that the woman spent no more than a pittance on herself over the years, just enough to buy the cans of snuff, her one vice, and to renew her subscription to *Prevention* magazine with its physician-approved diets, herbal remedies and puritan slogan: "smart ways to live well."

She knew nothing of investments, at least in the usual sense. It's even difficult to imagine her, having lived through the Depression, trusting the remainder of her hard-won salary to a savings account. No, she probably hid her earnings under the mattress or buried them by moonlight in the earth somewhere: perhaps out behind the house near the small creek, home to spidery, water-walking insects, whose trickle formed the back boundary of her half-acre; or perhaps under the tattered myrtle hedges, whose name she bore. These self-sufficient evergreens needed little care, asked nothing of her, unlike the rest of the yard, which demanded and received the tireless attention of her pruning shears, rake and watering can.

The small two-bedroom house sat just over the edge of the city limits in a neighborhood that would cling tenaciously over the years to respectability. One imagines her in her black nurse's shoes walking the two miles to work past the churches and the clubs for men, the lady's hosiery mill, which constituted the city's only industry, and over the railroad tracks that split the withering town in two like a dried-up vein.

When the Northern colonists began arriving in western Georgia in the early part of 19th century, the provincial area had been known as Hixtown, but eventually it would receive the conquistador-inspired moniker Villa Rica, the city of gold, with the state's first mining strike a few years later. For the span of a minute, those churches and clubs must have overflowed, and trains must have rumbled through town on the hour, but they soon dwindled along with the fickle

prospectors when gold was unearthed in the Helen area only a couple of years later, inaugurating the short-lived gold rush of 1829.

The city never really became anything other than Hixtown, and in the latter part of the twentieth century, her dry-goods store, if still respectable, was largely empty. Nevertheless, in her outdated horn-rimmed glasses and mesh hairnet, omnipresent clipboard at the ready, she fussed over the bookkeeping and inventory of David Beber's Star Department Store as if it had been Harrod's. These things demanded her careful attention.

Her family name was "Beavers," but that may have been Anglicized. It certainly is not the case, as one elderly in-law maintained, that the family descended from English royalty. Regardless, in her case the name didn't signify very much, for as a child, she was a virtual orphan. Both parents having died young, she was exchanged amongst a series of households of varying degrees of relation. At some point during this circulation, she developed a fear of "clouds," later clarified as "lightning-storms." At their approach, the little girl took shelter in closets or buried herself under beds, fumbling in the dark with her knitting needles and yarn clutched tightly to her chest.

She never married or had children, but in later years, her nieces and nephews, their own children in tow, unfailingly would make the holiday pilgrimage to her house. She greeted each with a full-bodied hug, especially the children, whose heads she held deeply between her breasts, drawling "I've missed you so much." She liked to tease the blushing older boy in particular, asking, "So how many girlfriends d'ya have now?" Before the presents were pocketed, they all would sit down to a heaping breakfast table, every dish of which she prepared: fried pies, the rustic "streak-o-lean" (a dubious sort of fatback) and eggs, always eggs, prepared in every

conceivable manner, and some that are not. By an unspoken rule, no one was allowed to leave the table until all had been consumed.

This rule held sway despite the protests of the children eager for the comforts of the orange couch that, in another setting, could have been described as “modern” and the black-and-white television, which normally stood in the corner both blank and mute, excepting the daily melodrama of “The Guiding Light.” Operating under the cover of adult conversation, the children would sneak into the living room, little hands grasping anything that wasn’t under lock and key, but primarily her collection of knickknacks acquired at employee discount prices: the porcelain ballerina girls and a strange, bobble-headed German shepherd figurine. If these were not enough to hold their attention, they would flip through photo albums, in which they discovered yellowed press clippings from the local weeklies, bearing witness to the latest successes of their parents and siblings and to their own childish talents. “Don’t bury them in the ground,” she would say, having emerged from the dining room, catching the children at their play, “Don’t bury your gifts or they might be taken away.”

Her homemade presents were always the same, each person receiving a knitted pair of house-shoes. Seemingly fueled by the horror of cold feet, the amount of work that had gone into these often went unremarked, but not perhaps unknown. For surely anyone, if he looked closely at the intricate interweaving of the threads and even more especially if he actually witnessed the subtle manipulation of fingers, needles, and yarn, the loops and counterloops—surely anyone would have been slightly awed by this art, attributing its origin to some archaic fisherman or god. But he would be in error, for something this complex is never invented or made from on high; it emerges from somewhere deep underground.

She often knitted in her bedroom, rocking back and forth beside the iron Singer and the scattered boxes of needle and thread. Sometimes, she favored the kitchen table, but only if there was no jig-saw puzzle in process, which was seldom the case. The more elaborate puzzles were the ones she liked, often ignoring the picture on the box, so that she might be surprised by the image that began to take shape only over the course of weeks. Her favorite, the Last Supper, hung above her bed, glued down to a back of sturdy cardboard, which had been salvaged, no doubt, from the backrooms of Star department store. She loved that puzzle, her only piece of artwork, even when it faded with age and even when pieces began to fall off and be lost. Perhaps she cherished it more than before.

The other bedroom, facing hers across the length of a short hall, was not off-limits, but nevertheless, none of her adult relatives so much as mentioned it in conversation, much less actually entered the room. But children go where adults will not, and they saw the spotless interior, the freshly dusted nightstand next to the unused, but obviously well cared for bed. There were vases displaying the modest flowers picked from the foliage growing around her house, and their relative positions never changed, certainly not the vases that flanked the one picture frame in the room: a dark man with dark eyes, half-smile on his handsome face.

No one ever talked about him. But the adults knew the story of their engagement—how he had courted her so many years ago, how she loved him. And how he had stood up during the middle of breakfast one morning, walked outside, and shot himself in the head. Although they never told the story, they all knew that, buried within his brain, something terrible had begun to grow.

She had no other lovers. And when her own mind started to go years later, she would phone her niece and talk nonsense, thinking she was someone long dead: “I can’t remember how

to . . . I miss you so much,” she said into the receiver, the hopelessly tangled yarn and needles lying useless in her lap.

When she died, her relatives were surprised to find a detailed set of directions regarding her funeral and money enough to pay for it. They were instructed not to bury her in Villa Rica, the city of gold. But none of this was shocking. What they had no answer for was the phone call revealing that they and their children would claim an inheritance.¹⁰⁹

III. The Inmate’s Story

My mother taught me the English language. But as far as Mom’s ability to communicate through writing, she has beautiful handwriting, very good vocabulary, but she never *says* anything! She says, “I love you,” or “I’m sorry I haven’t written. Everything’s fine” or “We miss you . . . Everything will turn out” . . . I don’t resent it, but I don’t know why this is. There’s something in her background that prevents her from opening up. “What’s happening? What’s going on? What’s happening with life?” There’s this logjam of feeling in her that she doesn’t open up and explain.

One of the reasons I believe that I’m such a verbal person—that I feel I can get much more from listening than from reading—is that in my younger years I depended a lot on the radio. I’m a radio freak!

¹⁰⁹ Myrtle Beavers was my mother’s aunt. In an essay entitled “Our Feelings Reach Out Beyond Us,” Montaigne considers our curious concern for the body even after death. After recalling the philosopher Lyco, he writes the following in respect to his own funeral plans: “I shall let custom order this ceremony entirely, and shall leave it to the discretion of the first people into whose charge I fall If I had to become more involved in the matter, I should find it more sprightly to imitate those who undertake, while alive and breathing, to enjoy the arrangement and honor of their obsequies, and who take pleasure in seeing their dead countenance in marble. Happy are those who can delight and gratify their sense by insensibility, and live by their death” (10).

As a kid, I would listen for hours and hours to the Lone Ranger, Big John and Sparky, and all that stuff. I remember once I sent away for a little radio. It had no battery or plug. It was tuned by adjusting the length of the antenna. It had a ground wire with a clip and I would attach the clip to the rail of my bed. I'd go to sleep with that earplug in my ear and wake up in one corner of the bed wrapped up in the tiny little wires. I'd get under the covers and listen as long as I could every night. Never did understand how it worked!

Later on when I was about in the sixth grade, I had a regular radio, and one of my favorites was a program on KGO in San Francisco, a talk show from about ten into the early morning hours. I'd really get into it. It was a call-in show.

And as people would be calling in to speak their minds, I would formulate questions as if they were talking to me. I was very, very into news broadcasts, but I didn't read very much.

I would lie in bed for hours and hours, listening to news broadcasts exclusively. *Meet the Press*, or whatever. My favorite thing on Sunday nights was to hunt the radio bands for talk shows, call-in programs, documentary-like things. They're still my favorites. I'd listen to talk shows all day rather than listen to music.

People might think I was terribly serious-minded. But I genuinely derived pleasure from listening to people talk at that age. It gave me comfort. Often it didn't matter much what they were talking about. And I realized, even then, that a lot of the affection I had for programs of that type came not because of their content, but because it was people talking! And I was eavesdropping on their conversations.

I never discussed any of this with my parents. . . .

I felt that way when I popped out of jail in Glenwood Springs. I had that feeling that things were just *happening*! Everything was just going my way. The stars were right! How can

I explain it? My karma was good! I mean, *nothing* went wrong. If something did go wrong, the next thing that happened was so good it compensated. It was even better.

People say it was such a sly escape. Well, it wasn't. Yet my karma was *so* right that it compensated for all my errors. I mean, I just walked out the front door of the jailer's quarters. I didn't hide behind a trash can, like they said. I just walked down the street. I didn't walk toward Main Street. I walked (in) the other direction and up the dark streets toward this large apartment complex by the railroad tracks. There were several cars parked there.

I checked out several of them, crunching along in the frozen snow. Couldn't find any cars with keys in them. I don't know how to hot-wire a car, right? So I kept looking in all these cars, opening the doors and checking around for keys under mats and so on. I got out of the damn jail at seven-thirty and at eleven I was *still* looking for a car!

I must have tramped up and down every side street, honest to God now . . . I walked every side street and neighborhood in Glenwood Springs. No lie. In fact, I walked up and down some of them twice.

I walked from the jail to the high school and past. Up by where the used-car lots are. Over across to the east side of town and down to the river again. And back up and around and down. And I couldn't find a car. And it started to snow, very, very hard.

Dig this! I found a car with keys in it. It was an old jalopy. This was maybe about nine o'clock. I was looking for a car with snow tires. I was no dummy. I said, 'Let me look some more.' I looked some more and said, 'Well, I'd better take that car.' As I was walking back to get it, somebody came hurrying out of the building, hopped in the car, and drove away.

It was one of those nights. You see, if I *had* taken that car, it would have been reported almost immediately.

Finally, around eleven p.m., I found this little M-G. It had a front-wheel drive with studded snow tires on the front. I hopped in and revved it up. It went like ‘bud-d-d-d-d . . . buh-buh-buh-buh-buh.’ There was no second gear. The gear shift was chattering away. I got it in first; there’s no reverse. The heater didn’t work and windows immediately steamed up. But I was goin’ for it.

It was parked on a residential street by the river. I cleaned off the windows as best as I could. Got everything set—and drove right down the wide street by the police station! Stopped at the stoplight. Made a right turn. Drove over the bridge spanning the Colorado River. It was low on gas, so I stopped and filled up just over the bridge. Self-serve. Paid my money and got moving.

The snow was falling heavily. But I go this thing up to first and then on into third. Vroom! Vroom! Vroom! The thing wouldn’t get out of third. It took me about twenty minutes to get into fourth. And then there’s an incline, you know. There were cars all over the place—semis, cars, buses—sideways and slipping. People puttin’ the chains on.

I just put this damn thing into third and floored it. I’m zooming around, weaving here and there, like a slalom course. I closed my eyes because there were state patrolmen all over the place, helpin’ people. Flares and everything! I didn’t even slow down. Vroom!

I knew that if I stopped in this little fucker on the hill, I wouldn’t get anywhere because I couldn’t get it in second. It’s a four-lane highway most of the way to Vail. Couldn’t see the road. After a while, I couldn’t drive it in fourth. I could only go in first. The snow was deeper than the hood of the car, right? Finally, it just goes ‘phhheeeew.’ It wouldn’t move.

I had tennis shoes on, from the jail. I couldn’t push the car off the side of wherever I was. Couldn’t tell where the highway was! I was scared to death a highway patrolman would

come along. A couple of cars passed me in the middle of nowhere. I was, for a while at least, more scared of dying of exposure than anything else.

I was about twenty-five miles from Vail and at least that far from Glenwood Springs. In a blizzard—a bona fide blizzard!

This guy comes along in a Mazda. I waved at him and he slowed down. Helped me shove my car—get that, *my* car!—off the highway. “Best to leave the car because my wife’s having a baby in Denver. I gotta get to Denver,” I told him.

He said he was from Ogden—in the army, returning from some base in Kentucky. He said, “Hop in. I’d enjoy the company.” We had trouble getting moving because his tires were almost slick. Just then a huge snowplow came along, hooked a chain to us, and got us moving. We followed him pretty close, the rest of the way to Vail.

When we did get to Vail, we found out the pass was closed. Since we didn’t have chains, they wouldn’t let us try, so we came back down.

There was a Vail cop right off the freeway as we came back down the mountain. As he pulled over, I rolled down the window and asked him where we could hang out for a while. It was probably about two a.m. He directed us to the Holiday Inn, where they had a nice big fire going. But it was clear the pass was going to be closed for quite a while. Nothing was getting any better.

I got back out and tried to hustle a couple of rides, to no avail. Finally a Trailways bus was scheduled to leave. I said, “Sorry, Buddy, I gotta get moving.”

When I got to Denver, I was *still* feeling those good vibrations. I shared a cab with three other guys to the airport. I was feeling *so* good, I paid for it!

I walked in the airport and directly to the row of counters, looking for the first flight to Chicago. I had planned to go to a big city. Lots and lots and lots of traffic. No way to trace me. It was New Year's Eve. I knew they didn't have much of a chance to trace me.

TWA had an 8:55 flight. I plopped down my money and didn't even slow down because there was less than five minutes to make it. I had a Bell Telephone plastic carrying bag with an extra shirt, some underwear, and miscellaneous items in it.

I just kept movin'. Settled in on the plane. Slowly buckled up and said, "I need a scotch and soda, fast! It felt just right—the whole time, just perfect. You see, there was nothing clever about the escape. Nothing clever about the engineering. In fact, it was sloppily done.

In Ann Arbor, it was just *boom, boom, boom!* I was just cool. I was talking to people in bars. Oh, I felt good! I felt the drive, the power. I had what it took.

I lost that. I felt it slip away like in the old movies where you see the ghost lift out of the body lying on the ground. It slipped away from me a few days later in the bus station in Atlanta. It just evaporated. I could feel it go.

I was waiting for the bus in the Omni (Auditorium), watching a convention on the main floor there. There were all these people going to a Hawks game. And I was watching these people—these people who had *real* lives, backgrounds, histories, girlfriends, husbands and families. Who were smiling and laughing and talking with each other. Who seemed to have *so* much of what I wanted!

All of a sudden I felt smaller and smaller and smaller. More insecure. And more *alone!* Watching groups of couples talking with one another, strolling toward the gate. Bit by bit, I felt something drain out of me. And by the time I got off the bus in Tallahassee, things just did not

feel right. From the time I first set foot on Tennessee Street, I kept saying to myself, “I gotta leave here.”

[During a series of interviews given at the Florida State Prison in 1980, one of which is reproduced above, Ted Bundy described his childhood and his escape from a Colorado jail three years earlier. After this escape from Glenwood Springs, he had murdered two sleeping coeds in the Chi Omega sorority house at Florida State University, driven perhaps by his “karma.” He was sentenced to death, but while awaiting execution, he wrote a letter to two reporters, trying to interest them in his story, a tactic which led to these interviews from Death Row. The letter began, “It’s too cold to sleep, it may even be too cold to write.”]¹¹⁰

IV. Pete’s Story: *No Man is Master of his own Universe*

He gave up on sleep an hour ago, leaving his wife alone in their bed. In the hours before the single most important dawn of his life, Pete Hodkinson sat at his small kitchen table in pajamas, his robe belted tightly. The ironing board stood upright in the spartan family room off the kitchen, clothes hanging neatly pressed since the morning before—the Sears-bought trousers, the silk scarf borrowed from his wife that would serve as an ascot, and the longish tan jacket with pocket insignia. Which meant nothing: no family coat-of-arms, no corporate symbol, nothing but a vacuous, generic “distinction.” He had sewn it into the jacket himself, had pressed all of the clothes. Pete liked to do everything himself.

¹¹⁰ Recalling Descartes’s final winter in Scandinavia, where “the thoughts of men freeze as the water,” I believe I’ve located a curious intermediary between the inmate and the philosopher. In “The Haunted Mind,” a piece that hovers between essay and fable, Hawthorne examined the curious early morning hours in which one straddles waking and sleeping. During these hours, “it is too cold even for thoughts to venture abroad,” and thus one is left alone with them, secret thoughts that can no longer be ignored: for “in the depths of the heart, there is a tomb and a dungeon, though the lights, the music, and revelry above may cause us to forget their existence, and the buried ones, or prisoners whom they hide.” Cf. *Selected Tales and Sketches*. New York: Penguin Group, 1987. 106. Also see

On the table before him lay artist renderings, and he leafed through them absentmindedly. Six years before in 1969, Pete had no idea what he wanted the town to look like. He knew only that he wanted it to live. And so he had done all the right things—had laughed at the jokes told by the wheels at the Mountain Air Restaurant, had played and lost at golf, had joined the Episcopal church. But Pete could never have drawn these sketches, although he wished to God he could have. When his friend, the artist John Kollock, brought the portfolio to him, having converted the Helen eyesores with his colors to an Alpine, Bavarian village, Pete had snatched them up greedily, talking of “our” vision for the town, instead of the artist’s. Over time, during the innumerable business lunches where Pete had pitched the idea to the local elite, “our” vision had become, almost imperceptibly, “my” vision.

One of the loose sketches fell out of the book and glided to the kitchen floor. Perhaps Kollock’s earliest sketch, the original flat roof of Brown’s Standard Station, Grocery, and Picnic Supplies had been hidden by a gabled, sloping roof of red tile. Underneath its peak, a stylized arrow pointed to panes of glass and their surrounding shutters. The artist’s ink caption read “false window.” Another, indicating an “artificial flower box,” pointed to the rainbow bouquet that covered the bottom half of the window. Where the original station had been painted the cheapest shade of white paint, overlaid with years of grease and the black exhaust of malfunctioning trucks, the artist substituted colors with exotic adjectives attached to them, “Hawaiian” ivory and “Olympic” olive. A pencilled outline suggested the horned skull of some beast over the only functioning windows.

But the stiff-necked mechanic had not incorporated this detail when the cosmetic construction had actually begun on his building. Indeed, the stuffed head had been replaced by

the corporate logo of the gasoline that Brown sold. And despite repeated steak dinners with Pete, he never warmed to the suggestion concerning “Alpine” trashcans, retaining instead the industrial barrel that had always used. Old tires still lay in stacks beside the Olympic olive grease pit.

Even now this was enough to make Pete grind his teeth, as he returned the sketch to its proper place. These small deviations from the model infuriated him, for Pete knew that the little things mattered the most. They were what made the town unique, and uniqueness made Helen something more than the legion of generic refueling stops along the interstate. The little things would lift him out of his position at Orbit Manufacturing Company, hocking women’s foundational garments. The Alpine phone booths, which, according to the phone company’s conservative estimation, were “probably the only ones of their kind in the country”; the theater built to house a continually running production of “The Sound of Music;” the prototype trolley car, which Pete had dubbed “The Spirit of Helen” and envisioned to be the vanguard of the “Helen Transit Authority’s” great system of tourist transportation: these details *were* the town. And the town—well, he knew what Helen was.

Looking up from the sketches, Pete snorted at this last little “fuck you” to the state capital and its Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority, which in 1968 had funded the twenty-one mile basic system of its railway with a loan from the federal government. The transformation of Helen had been accomplished with no federal money whatsoever, relying solely on the native, interior resources of the town. But even if the makeover could have qualified for such external support, Pete would have been against it.

With zealous enthusiasm, he had pledged to abolish any knickknack from the shelves of his own store if he discovered that it was also sold in Atlanta. It had been *his* plan, Pete thought,

from the very beginning to abolish competition between the stores of the town by ensuring that each one peddled goods unique to it. From the very beginning he had fought to forbid chain corporations a toehold in town unless they agreed to forfeit all marks of their corporate allegiance, all indications that they were one of many such businesses throughout the state or country. And it heartened the man that McDonald's and its millions served had been denied an exemption from the required Bavarian facades.

If Pete had his way, there would be no exceptions to what his wife liked to call his "first principle": namely, that *everything* within Helen would be exceptional. Smiling at the prospect, Pete thought the town would be as distinctive as he himself. For Pete knew what he had inside of him.

Indeed, it put him in mind of the well-fingered press clipping that he carried in his billfold. When reporters first made the drive north from Atlanta to cover a groundbreaking, Pete had bought a velvety purple beret for the occasion and an expensive bottle of champagne, although, in truth, it should be called neither "champagne" nor "expensive," given that Pete had purchased it from the fledgling local vineyard, *The Three Sisters*. Holding his pose for a good second or two, so that the cameras could capture its spontaneity, Pete had made sure that his right hand gripping the bottle did not cover the label, while he twisted the cork out with his left. He had thrown his head back with eyes closed, suggesting the beginnings of a belly laugh, while lifting his left arm so that the insignia on his jacket could be seen clearly. All these things mattered.

When the *Atlanta Constitution* ran, it included only this photograph, not the one that captured the following moment in which Hodkinson had jumped back, holding the wildly overflowing bottle at arms length, ringing his right arm with a look of surprise on his face.

Buried somewhere in the inner pages of the paper, the caption under the photograph read, “Local Promoter Pete Hodgkinson [sic] declares Helen the ‘Last Refuge of Free Spirits.’”

The only other recognizable face in that photograph had been John Kollock, one of those “free spirits” to whom Pete had referred. But anyone indulging Pete would not have seen the artist in that clipping unless it had been turned over, for the entire left side of the photograph had been folded to accommodate the dimensions of Pete’s wallet. And indeed with his patterned wool sweater and Nikon hanging from his neck, his full beard and rimless frames, the artist seemed a beatnik expatriate, more at home in the East Village than the mountain hamlet of Helen. He had started growing that beard the day he returned home from the war and the Allied propaganda units. Wandering Helen’s dilapidated, largely vacant downtown with his camera, Kollock had thought of the bombed out European buildings, and in his imagination, he decorated them in the manner of the grim fables he had loved as a child.

Fingering the sketches below him, Pete was not entirely at ease with this fairy-tale likeness, not so much because it was whimsical, but because it was a likeness. But the race—that was another matter entirely. It was entirely unprecedented. He had thought of the idea while ballooning over the Gorge area, a trip that he made often and alone. But one balloon does not make a race, and so having read the national papers with their talk of the flamboyant millionaire and his new hobby, Pete finally had seen his opportunity. Forbes’s participation, he had thought, would secure that of others, and this strategy would be validated in the morning when a hundred balloonists from around the country would fill the sky. Pete himself would be among them in his “Spirit of Helen,” red and white like the Swiss flag and bearing his insignia on the bag. Closing the artist’s portfolio, he fancied that he would be the first to glimpse the Atlantic.

“*Now* is the only thing that matters,” Pete thought, and having tightened his already tight belt, the man flipped up the collar of his robe and walked outside. The fixed stars shone brightly in the clear mountain sky, brighter than usual, or so it seemed to him as he craned his neck. Against this heavenly backdrop, he could see it all unfolding: the shouting townspeople, the flashing cameras of the Atlanta reporters, even himself as he straddled the gondola dramatically with his jacket and purple beret, pulling the cord of the furnace as he gazed upwards into the expanding bag. “When they publish this photo,” Pete assured himself, “the millionaire’s own balloon will be visible, but safely buried somewhere in the background. And then, who knows?”

In preparation for his meeting, Hodkinson had read the man’s book, if indeed it could be called one, given that it was simply a collection of the short editorials that Forbes had written for his magazine. A privilege, Pete suspected, that had been given him by the man’s indulgent father and one that Forbes’s lackeys were powerless to revoke. Sometimes they were barely ten lines long, little maxims concerning God knows what. Indeed, one had read:

Balloons
usually
leak—
or
bust.

Printed just like that, as if it were some precious fragment preserved from the masters.

Looking away from the stars in disgust, Pete retorted, as if to some imaginary opponent, that even Forbes had pronounced himself a charlatan. Yes, the torn page was there in his wallet, and Pete unfolded it even though his memory needed no help.

Writing these editorials is the most fun and least work part of managing
the magazine.
(One sentence in and already it’s doggerel.)
It wasn’t always thus, though . . .

As time went on, the struggle to write editorials became much less of a struggle. I guess it was a combination of things, beginning with a realization that what I wrote didn't necessarily have worldwide reverberations. As a matter of fact, with rare exception it was hard to detect so much as a tremor even from our subscribers. Too, I began having more and more opinions about more and more, and unconsciously I had discovered the commentator's secret weapon—that so long as you can wield words, it isn't necessarily necessary to know what you're talking about.

(Necessarily necessary?! As opposed to what?)

Thus, following Dad's death twenty years ago, writing all of 'Fact and comment' wasn't difficult. With an interest in almost anything interesting, accompanied by a stupendous lack of knowledge about many of the subjects, I enjoy pontificating about everything under the sun and beyond.

It is really quite an extraordinary privilege—and one which I have enjoyed abusing these many years—to be able to write what I will and have it untouched by the wiser men and abler editors who abound at *Forbes* magazine.

(He's right, here. "Abuse" is the only word for it.)

That's the most appealing advantage of being a sole proprietor of a periodical. When occasionally we've been urged to go public with Forbes, Inc. stock, or been tempted to undertake expansion that was beyond our in-house resources, I have firmly, unequivocally, said nay.

(Jesus!)

"In my lifetime we'll never grow so big we can't afford to stay private" is the Napoleonic way this sole *Forbes* shareholder phrases it. I usually manage to rustle up a few ostensibly sensible reasons—but the real one is here, in this book: the fun of being able to have and express opinions uninhibited by facts or the Boss.

I'm it, and heartily recommend the job.¹¹¹

With wrinkling brow, Pete crumpled the paper and made to throw it to the ground, but stopped as if held by some magic. He smoothed the torn sheet, refolded it, and placed it back within his wallet.

Resuming the placid attitude of the stargazer, Pete forced these trifles from his mind. "Now is all that matters," he reminded himself. Tomorrow, they would see. Everyone will see: the city people, the prattling townsfolk, both the educated ones who had warned of diminishing water quality and wildlife and the hillbillies, some of whom still made references to the phases of

¹¹¹ Introduction. *Fact and Comment*. New York: Knopf, 1974.

the moon. “The new moon’s full of water,” one had said at the town meeting in preparation for the race, “everyone knows that, and if she lies on her back everything’ll be fine, but if she stands on her tip and spills her water, then it’ll be a wet month.” “Well, she’s standing on her tip,” Pete thought, looking over at the moon, “and the sky couldn’t be clearer.” “Just words,” he said to himself, thinking of all the doubters, “the race, this town—these are facts.”

As he looked up at the chalice of the moon, its light seemed to shimmer. Indeed, its borders began to blur, and just for an instant he thought he saw . . . Pete rubbed his temples savagely, but to no avail, for he already felt something peculiar in his left leg, something colder than the mountain weather. And then suddenly the man turned, almost tripping over his moccasins, and walked quickly back inside the house, one hand covering his face.¹¹²

V. The Queen of Wisdom

The students were used to her jokes during the intermission of the three hour course. Huddled together in the freezing classroom, they looked forward to these diversions while interminably slogging through their ancient Greek textbook, appropriately entitled *Athenaze*—“toward Athens”—with its Persian wars, the high-brow poetry of Euripides, and the low-brow parables of the New Testament. Everyone thought she was witty, especially the many young men in the room, who considered themselves unquestionable judges in the matter, but even the no-nonsense professor, who, after an hour-and-a-half of the optative mood, was ready for a break.

Quoting some forgotten German philologist, he quipped that there were two great “abominations” in Western Literature, Plato’s *Timaeus* and the *Apocalypse* of John, and strode

out of the classroom, leaving the students to puzzle over his meaning. When he was safely out of earshot, she turned to her classmates in mock exasperation, drawing out the syllables, “Well, obbbbvviously,” and then sliding into the Greek locution they had come to love, “*On the one hand Plato, but on the other John.*”

It wouldn’t have mattered much if the professor had heard her. Admiring her facility for the language, indeed for *logoi* in general, he spoke proudly of the young woman to his associates in the lounge, touting her as a paradigm for her classmates, virtually his representative amongst the students. Physically, if this had mattered, they could not have been more different. Everything about her was slender, her face, her nose, but also her rather androgynous body, hidden away underneath baggy jeans and hipster t-shirts. Her hair, cut in a cheek-length bob, fit her head as snugly as a helmet, showing off a pale freckled complexion and grey-blue eyes. But this was an accident, for nothing could have been further from her way than to “show off,” least of all herself. Quite the opposite: she thought more than she spoke, and knew even more than she thought. Reasoned translations, when called upon by the instructor, and witticisms, when needed by the class, were her habits.

“The moon will turn to blood!” a scoffing classmate joked during the break. “There’s actually an impact crater on the moon called the ‘Timaeus,’” added another, and then in a display of newly acquired Latin pedantry, “it’s in the *Mare Frigoris*—that is, ‘the sea of cold’—lying to the north of the *Mare Imbrium*—that is, ‘the sea of rain.’” They continued in this vein, with shows of wit and learning, but the general hubbub grew suddenly silent at her revelation. “When I was girl I had a ‘rapture dress,’” she said, and after a moment’s silence, “I didn’t think I could be taken unless I was wearing it.”

¹¹² For a fairly brief description of the Helen, Georgia makeover, cf. Gedney.

She kept the dress underneath her bed, hidden away so nobody could see. It was her best dress, a creamy white muslin covered with pink and lavender flowers and covering her body from midcalf to Adam's apple in the manner of the German "plain people." Each night she kneeled beside her bed to look at it before praying her one prayer. And sometimes, fearing that she might sleep through the trumpet blast, she slept in the dress, changing from her pajamas after Daddy stuck his slim, bearded face in the door to say 'goodnight,' and then stowing it away before he knocked in the morning. Behind her locked door, she ran the iron tirelessly through its wrinkles every Sunday morning before services and in the evening on Wednesdays.

Many a mid-week afternoon, she sat at the rain-streaked window of the empty house, absent-mindedly brushing her long, unbraided hair and awaiting the return of her father's minivan with its summoning horn and curious bumper sticker, "in the event of rapture, this vehicle will become unmanned."

"The framer of this universe was good and free of jealousy," the preacher would bellow, raising the Word high in his right hand, "and so he wanted everything to be as much like himself as possible." The truth of this was self-evident to her, even as a twelve-year old. But as to whether she would be among those elect taken bodily into the middle of the air—this was not so certain. And so she knelt beside her bed, looking at the dress . . . believing in it. She slipped it on, buttoning the small white buttons up her neck, and looked at herself in the mirror. Her hair hung long and straight, as did the flowered dress, not a curve or curl to be seen. Before falling asleep, she prayed her one prayer: "Don't leave me behind, *please* don't leave me behind."

Her father knocked that morning, as he had done a thousand times before, but the gasp from behind the door told him that this was unlike any other day. "Honey, is everything OK in there?" he asked the closed door, but received no reply. Fumbling for his key, he opened it to

find her standing in the middle of the room, looking down at her dress soaked through where her thighs came together. She looked up at him, her mouth open, but said not a word. Without thinking, he rushed into the room and snatched her up bodily into his arms.

The two lunar seas of shower and cold were formed when molten lava pooled in the recessions left by gigantic meteors. In the boundary area between them lie two craters, one bowl-shaped crater named “Bliss,” the other, with its perfectly circular rim, “Plato.” The latter has long possessed a reputation amongst astronomers for “transient lunar phenomena,” strange and irreproducible appearances that include brilliant flames, unaccountable darkenings, and the sudden coloration of deepest crimson. The emotional impact of these phenomena has been recorded throughout history, but their meaning, if any, is subject to interpretation.

VI. The Inmate’s Story

(Steven Michaud, an interviewer): Your recollections of the Leach case don’t conform to reality.

(Ted Bundy¹¹³): Sure they do.

SM: No, they don’t. (Inmate looks wary.) So Hugh and I have come up with another approach to this.

TB: What’s that?

SM: Well, no one knows the story better than you. Remember writing us? “I may not have *all* the facts, but I have the ones which count!”

TB: I do. I did.

¹¹³ Bundy is hereafter designated *TB*, Michaud *SM*.

SM: You haven't shared them, though. What you can do, however, is to analyze the whole thing for us.

TB: Huh?

SM: You're the expert You know the cases. You know the investigations. You're the suspect. Who else is in a better position to pull this all together?

TB: I've told you everything I know.

SM: You've told us *some* of what you know. What you *could* tell us, though, is what sort of person you think might have committed the crimes. Assuming it was a single person, he must have a personality and motives that you could infer from the evidence—and from your own background in psychology. (The inmate had an undergraduate degree in psychology from the University of Washington.)

TB (sounding interested): You mean, for me to tell you what this guy . . . or guys . . . is like?

SM: Yeah, but not like some shrink. We want the person who knows absolutely the most about this story to tell about it. We're after an explanation here.

TB: I'm not copping to anything but theft!

SM: We realize that. What we need to know is who *he* is and what he's like. Not (you), suspect, talking to me in the first person.

TB (after a thoughtful pause): I think your idea may have some merit. I'll have to think about it.

(By the next day, Bundy had made up his mind. With minimal explanation, he took the tape recorder and cradled it in his arms, closed his eyes, and delivered an abstract soliloquy on stress and its effect on "this personality." Afterwards, he continued.)

TB: That's a broad overview. The real critical point of analysis here is why would a person with this kind of background, subjected to this kind of environmental stress, or this kind of environment in toto, seek out as targets for his dissatisfaction, frustration . . . call it psychopathology. I hate to use labels that are psychological or psychiatric because there are no stereotypes, and when you start to use those labels, you stop looking at the facts. (After a digression concerning violent, pornographic literature, the inmate finally takes up the issue of the murderer's specific victims.) The individual does not particularly see himself as the actor where the violence is directed toward women. But he *is* fascinated by this kind of literature that depicts this kind of action.

It is perhaps not so inexplicable when you understand the position of women in the United States as they are marketed and used to sell things. Seen as objects of perfection, et cetera. Now, this is on a different level than this individual would deal with women every day, and not in the context of the sexual condition, because that is over here someplace, like collecting stamps. He doesn't retain the taste of glue, so to speak, all day long. But in a broader, more abstract way, it begins to preoccupy him.

He has no hatred for women; there is nothing in his background that would indicate he has been abused by any females. The only explanation would be that there is some kind of weakness that gives rise to this individual's interest in the kind of sexual activity involving violence that would gradually begin to absorb some of his fantasy.

(Bundy described that part of him that was fascinated by sexual violence as "the entity," or the "disordered self." It was "the entity" that fantasized schemes, at first purely as an exercise in imagination, for isolating victims. He "posited" that "the entity" led this "personality" to experiment with disabling automobile distributor caps or letting air out of tires. Then the girl or

woman would be alone and in need of help, grateful for the appearance of a friendly stranger. Apparently the inmate went so far as to attempt these approaches but discovered “that instantly one or more others always showed up to help her.” At this stage, he said, the hunting was all mental, a game. Then he started to describe an actual attack and stopped. For some reason, he wanted to skip over this stage in the development of “this personality.” Instead, he went on to explain voyeurism, describing the “tension” between the normal personality and “the entity” as a sort of “malignancy” or as “hole in the dam.” Afterwards, the interviewer returned to the subject of the attacks themselves.)

SM: Can you describe the mood as it would come over this person? Is it predominantly like anger?

TB: No.

SM: Lust?

TB: No. It’s going to be difficult to describe. I don’t know how you describe the taste of a, uh . . . how do you describe what quiche tastes like? Or what the juice of bouillabaisse is like or why it tastes the way it does? Some people tastes clams and some people taste the, uh, mullet and mussels and whatever else is in there. And so it’s difficult for me to sit here and perceive what the mood would be like. It wouldn’t be anger necessarily. It would *definitely*, at a given point, I think, well . . . let me regroup here. I said that initially the spark that was there that ignited the subliminal juices was not born of anger or hostility toward women or anything of that particular nature.

It somehow evolved basically along . . . was stimulated, you know, by cultural kinds of mechanisms, but a point was reached where this entity—this condition, as it were—began to try to justify itself, to create rationalizations for what it was doing, perhaps to satisfy the rational,

normal part of the individual. One element that came into play there was anger, hostility—what have you. It would be hard to describe it, but I don't think that . . . it was not an overriding emotion or feeling that was present when he would go looking or hunting, or however you describe it.

Let's say it was more of a (long pause) . . . on most occasions it was a high degree of anticipation, of excitement, of arousal. It was like an *adventuristic* kind of thing. Perhaps people who go out deer hunting or fly fishing have the same feeling when they get up in the morning, you know? But it was that *kind* of thing—if you're following.

SM: Uh huh.

TB: However, with increasing regularity, what was once just a high state of arousal, of anticipation, became an almost frenzied desire to be, uh . . . to receive the kind of gratification that was being sought. And it was just an escalation of the desire to fulfill.

SM: Was this vengefulness . . . because the most important prerequisite was . . .

TB: We're talking about images . . . and it's a terrible thing to say. Sure we're talking about images. We're talking about anonymous, abstracted, living and breathing people . . . but the person, uh, they were not known. They were just, uh, uh, symbols. To a point they were symbols, uh, but once a certain point in the encounter had been crossed, they ceased being individuals and became, well, uh (sighs), you could say *problems*—that's not the word either. Threats. Now, once a certain point in the encounter passed, they ceased to have any symbolic value at all. And they ceased also to have . . . at that point, once they'd, once they became flesh and blood and once they ceased being an image or a dehumanized symbol, uh, that's when the rational self—the normal self—would surface and, and, react with fear and horror, and so on. But,

recognizing the state of affairs, would sort of conspire with this other part of himself to conceal the act.

The survival took precedence over the remorse . . . with increasing effectiveness. When, in fact, it would almost seem this individual, recognizing the emotional trauma . . . the guilt and remorse he had . . . on it *and* on the normal individual, began to condition mentally, condition out guilt; using a variety of mechanisms. Saying it was justifiable, it was, uh, acceptable, it was necessary, and on and on.

SM: Necessary?

TB: Attempt . . . using really false mechanisms to condition out guilt.

SM: Would the violence generally be very quick or prolonged?

TB: He received no pleasure from harming or causing pain to the person he attacked. He received absolutely no gratification from causing pain and did everything possible, within reason—considering the unreasonableness of the situation—not to torture these individuals, at least physically.

The fantasy that accompanies and generates . . . the anticipation that precedes the crime is always more stimulating than the immediate aftermath of the crime itself. . . .

TB: I'll bet you never forget these conversations.

SM: No, I won't. I was thinking about this model, this creation. But there are things I do not understand, right? Your opinion is that violence is a subtheme, or a sub-subtheme, of what you call "depersonalization." And I don't understand possession.

TB: Uh huh.

SM: We also said that in this instance the victims would be images and symbols. But images of *what*?

TB: Of *women*! I mean, of the idealized woman. What else can I say?

SM: A stereotype?

TB: No, they wouldn't be stereotypes, necessarily. But they would be the reasonable facsimile to women—as a class. A class not of women per se but a class that has almost been created through the mythology of women and how they are used as objects. Of course, that's just one explanation.

SM: Would there be a standard of beauty or attractiveness?

TB: Well, I suppose, standards. Everyone has his standards. . . .

(Hugh Aynesworth,¹¹⁴ an interviewer): Where were we? Oh yes, we were discussing justifications.

TB: How would a person who was considered *partially* sane and had subscribed to society's norm—uh, rules, ethics, and morals, at least on the surface and probably deeper than that—I mean, how in the world could he live with the knowledge he has, somewhere inside his brain? That he *kills*! How do you deal with that? How do you cope with it? How do you square it with how other things are? With the way he is *supposed* to behave? With the way the rest of the people behave?

And you have got to come up with *some* justification. The guy isn't going to say, "Well, I'm a weak, sick human being." I mean, that's not justification for a person who doesn't want to perceive himself to be sick, a weak human being and one who has a maladaptive behavior. He's got to come up with *something* that is a little bit, uh, uh, less incriminating than that.

HA: But the more intelligent a person is, doesn't that make it harder to justify?

TB: No, it would be easier!

HA: Why?

TB: Because it would be easier to construct a more elaborate, uh

HA: More imaginative?

TB: More imaginative, more elaborate, more free, uh, justification.

HA: But how long does this justification last, when he examines his behavior later on and talks about it later, does this hold up?

TB: Certainly not, but (laughs) . . . that's not the point. We're talking now about . . . we're *both* looking at a person from the top of the mountain—in the clear, cold light of the morning. . . .

HA: In dealing with this kind of thing, he's trying to perfect it by himself. These justifications must have been examined in great detail. And at some point, (they) must have been recognized for what they were . . . or he would probably have not moved ahead to try to correct it. Is that probable?

TB: Well, yeah—examining it in great detail. Let me see if I can come up with an analogy. It's like trying to examine what's in the medicine cabinet by, in great detail, examining what's in the mirror. Uh, he wasn't seeing through, perhaps, the morass of justifications and obfuscations that he'd created and indulged in—and what he was closely examining was the reflection in the mirror, not what was behind it. Not what was really going on. Uh, does that help at all?

And so, with that principal shortcoming in mind, he was . . . well, on the one hand he *thought* he'd looked at the problem and dealt with it. He had. But he was just sort of a . . . I hate

¹¹⁴ Aynesworth is hereafter designated as *HA*.

to use the phrase “time bomb” because it’s so frequently used, but he was just ticking away.

Where he was just a *problem* looking for an opportunity, not looking *for* it, but, I mean . . .

Let’s start over.

[Taken from interviews on March 26 and 27, April 2, and June 24, 1980.]

VII. The Masque

The dancers spun around the maypole. Clutching long streamers in their right hands, they revolved clockwise only to stop, switch the streamers to their off-hands with a shout, and repeat their circuit counterclockwise, at which time the process began all over again. In front of them, a group of dancers had jogged out clapping in time, their lower legs bobbing down and up, forming exaggerated right angles at the knee. With left arms akimbo at their sides, the group of men, clad in forest green lederhosen of the drop front style, raised their right arms so that the women in their bustiered cotton blouses and flowing skirts could use them as axes for their pirouettes. Already deep into their morning cups, the crowd clapped sporadically and off the beat.

Everyone, it seemed, was there, regardless of class or station. The entire town had turned out for the feast that would inaugurate the great race. Doctors and lawyers raised their glasses to Brown, the town mechanic, wishing him good health. In response, Brown himself rose to deliver a speech that he had prepared for the occasion, the theme of which was taken up and expanded extemporaneously by a local nurse. The town spinsters, surrounded by circles of rapt children, told their ghostly tales, and the elderly men chattered away like chickens. John Kollock was there, of course, nodding in agreement while discussing twentieth-century art with a group of eager housewives. And even Jimmy Wilkins, taking a break from his usual talk of inventories

and quotas, found himself in deep conversation with a mountaineer concerning the pros and cons of planting before Good Friday. Intimate groups formed and broke and formed again, not as if there were no longer differences among the townsfolk, but as if these variations were a source of delight.

Pete looked on the scene in silence. Everything was as a dream, a wonderful, idle dream of food and drink and folly and sincerity. So entranced was Pete that he started at the hand placed on his shoulder, clinching his body defensively. But upon recognizing the artist's bearded face peering down at him, the man relaxed back into his chair and patted Kollock's hand familiarly. "It's all happening, just as you said," the artist whispered, making a sweeping gesture with his offhand toward the festivities. Pete smiled and shook his head slowly: "Forbes isn't here." "He will be," the artist responded reassuringly, "it shouldn't be long." "But he's not here now," Pete bit back without thinking. Feeling his friend straighten, his hand withdrawn, he added apologetically, "Patience is a virtue," and smiled almost sadly as he looked up at the artist. "It won't be long now," Kollock said, accepting the man's gesture, "Look at those reporters, they can't even take notes they're having such a good time." The artist nodded toward an uproarious group of well-dressed men, who seemed to be spilling as much as they drank. "When they write this thing . . ." Kollock began, pausing midsentence, and then continued optimistically, "well, this town's going places." "So are you," he added with a wink.

Without warning, the reeling line of dancers parted curtainlike to reveal a slender, winged figure in boyish robe and boots, rainbow ribbons streaming from her helmet of braided blonde hair. She walked forward toward the crowd without fear, scanning the faces with her penetrating grey eyes:

Demeter, most bounteous lady, thy rich leas

Of wheat, rye, barley, vetches, oats and peas;
 Thy turfy mountains where live nibbling sheep,
 And flat meads thatched with stover them to keep;
 Thy banks with pioned and twilled brims,
 Which spongy April at thy hest betrimms
 To make cold nymphs chaste crowns; and thy broomgroves
 Whose shadow the dismissed bachelor loves,
 Being lass-lorn; thy pole clipped vineyard,
 And thy sea-marge, sterile and rocky-hard,
 Where thou thyself dost air—the queen o’ th’ sky,
 Whose watery arch and messenger am I,
 Bids thee leave these, and with her sovereign grace,
 Here on this grass-plot, in this very place,
 To come and sport. Her peacocks fly amain.
 Approach rich Demeter, her to entertain.¹¹⁵

“God, that’s over the top,” thought Pete, although he had to admit that his niece was doing an impressive job pronouncing the Elizabethan verse. She perhaps was not ideally suited to the role of Iris, the rainbow messenger of the gods, who seems to have promoted peace between all warring parties. Certainly, the young girl could not be described as peaceful, for she had pursued the top honors at her high school and the attendant university scholarship with the dogged fury usually reserved for guerilla warfare. Her cause being just—as, indeed, were all her causes, having mastered the art of disputation—she had won the day and now pronounced her clarion lines as confidently as a teen-aged valedictorian.

From behind the revelers, a smoky, alto voice answered the summons,

Hail, many-colored messenger, that ne’er
 Dost disobey the wife of Zeus;
 Who, with thy saffron wings, upon my flowers
 Diffusest honey-drops, refreshing shower,
 And with each end of thy blue bow dost crown
 My bosky acres and my unshrubbed down,
 Rich scarf to my proud earth. Why hast thy queen

¹¹⁵ With some variation, these indented lines and those that follow are taken from Prospero’s masque in the *Tempest* (4.1.60-4.1.109). Cf. Shakespeare, William. *The Tempest*. Ed. Virginia Mason Vaughan and Aldan T. Vaughan. Bristol: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd., 1999.

Summoned me hither to this short-grassed green?

A dark, middle-aged woman, her incongruous black curls billowing from under a crown of wheat, spoke these soft words as she wove her way through the feasting. Despite its modest cut, the linen robe could not quite conceal the outline of a perfect body, soft belly and breasts. She added a few words with a crooked smile, words which seemed to indicate some vague fear of the goddess of love, but neither Pete, nor many of the revelers were listening to the details of the speech. Admiring her every step, they simply thought that John Kollock was a lucky man indeed. And perhaps not only John Kollock, if the rumors were true.

But these thoughts, which merged with fancy, were interrupted by the voice coming from above. Two towering, wooden replicas of hot-air balloons had been constructed for the occasion and flanked the grassy dancing area, their round envelopes painted to represent the sun and moon. Within the latticed bucket hanging from the moon stood a remarkably tall woman, a bone-white crown encircling her dyed hair. When she had married Jimmy Wilkins so many years ago, she had made him the richest man in the town, for her own family had been among the first and most prodigious land owners in the valley. Looking down on the green lawn, she extended her arms toward the dark woman in greeting,

How does my bounteous sister? Go with me
To bless this town that they may prosperous be,
And honored in their issue.

Turning toward the crowd, she addressed them directly for the first time, raising the index and middle fingers of her right hand, as if she were some bishop surveying his flock

Honor, riches, festival blessing,
Long-continuance and increasing,
Hourly joys be still upon you,
Hera sings her blessings on you.

And now, their masque almost done, the other women turned to the crowd, and in unison the three began to chant, slowly and softly at first,

Each Dance is a prayer.
Each Song a sacrifice.¹¹⁶

Their pace quickened as the three women repeated the lines, and Pete began to feel something stirring in his left calf: a bitter cold began to creep ever so slowly up his leg. “Is the wind shifting?” he murmured uncomfortably in Kollock’s general direction. Receiving no reply, Pete bowed his head, clutching the lids of his eyes hermetically and gritting his molars.

Each Dance is a prayer
Each Song a sacrifice.

As the chant crescendoed, each of the three women seemed to be emphasizing different words within the lines. And Pete could feel it now in his thigh, a cold breeze. Something wispy seemed to be hanging before his eyes, and he ground his balled fists into their sockets. “Sounds like thunder,” Kollock said, remarking on the rumble in the distance.

Each Dance is a prayer
Each Song is a sacrifice.
Each Dance is a prayer
Each Song is a sacrifice.
Each Dance is a prayer
Each Song is a sacrifice.

Having reached a frenetic intensity, the chanting stopped as suddenly as it had begun, and the crowd erupted in delight as the dancers closed in and resumed their figures, hiding the women within the surging motion of the dance.

¹¹⁶ With some variation, these lines are taken from a masque that was performed at the wedding of Princess Elizabeth, daughter of England’s James I, and Frederick V, the Elector Palatine of the Rhine, in 1613. It is possible that the *Tempest* also was performed for the couple, but there is no doubt that they saw this masque, which symbolically celebrated, as Francis Yates explains, the union of Great Britain and Germany. The text of the masque was dedicated to Francis Bacon—“you that spared no time nor travail in the setting forth, ordering and furnishing of the masque”—and Yates speculates that he “devised the whole of this entertainment.” Cf. *The Rosicrucian*

A voice grandly called out, “Which one is the fairest Pete,” confusing the Elizabethan with the Classical. “Dost thou favor grey Athena, crowned Hera, or the Cyprian fair? Cast thy apple down.” Picking up on the suggestion, a chorus of voices echoed, “Which is it Pete? Which is it?” The shouts grew louder and more incoherent until they merged into a general rumble. Above the thunder, one inebriated voice could be heard screeching nonsense: “Settle thy studies, Faustus! Settle thy studies!”¹¹⁷

Time to run away now—but he couldn’t. Rubbing his face, Pete’s fingers caught the beret on the way down and pulled it over his eyes. If anything, the shouting intensified as the people observed this gesture, perhaps misinterpreting it as some sort of joke.

“*Mein dame und . . .dames . . . and . . .und herrs*, whatever the Your attention, please!” Jimmy Wilkens yelled. And the crowd grew disarmingly silent, except for the hidden drunkard and his screeching command. The dancers stopped their gyrations and turned as one toward the high table in unison. Now free, the long ribbons slipped from their hands and fluttered in the breeze.

It was crawling up Pete’s flank and side now, worming through his ribcage. His left eyelid had begun to wink slowly and obscenely. But no one seemed to notice, for the crowd’s attention was focused on Jimmy Wilkins, who toasted the race and the town, while simultaneously implying that neither could have prospered without his backing. The reporters, finally having remembered why they were here, were all scribbling away, recording the man’s speech in their shorthand. And so no one seemed to notice, except, that is, for John Kollock,

Enlightenment. New York: Routledge, 1972. 2-6.

¹¹⁷ “Settle thy studies” is the first line spoken by Marlowe’s Faustus, who considers three areas of study: Logic, whose end is to dispute well; Medicine, whose end is the perfection of body; and Law, which decides inheritance and competing claims to property. He rejects them all, as well as Divinity. Cf. Marlowe, Christopher. *Doctor Faustus*. Ed. David Scott Kastan. London: W. W. Norton and Company, 2005. 7-9.

who stared at his friend with a worried look on his face. “What is it?” the artist mouthed. But his question was left hanging as Wilkins bellowed, “And now I present Pete Hodkinson, the genius of Helen.”

Everyone turned toward Pete with raised glasses full of local champagne, many of them yelling “Speech! Speech!” And some of them chuckled when Pete wobbled unsteadily to his feet, thinking that the man was having a very good time, indeed. When Pete remained silent in front of them, this misunderstanding spread, as people winked and nodded and nudged their neighbors. Sensing a chance for more merriment, someone in the crowd again shouted, “Which one’s the fairest,” and the question was taken up by the group as a whole.

When it reached Pete’s head, he could no longer hear anything: not the shouts, not his friend, not his boss. The scene played out in front of him as if a silent-movie—the revelers throwing their heads back with closed eyes, their mouths open wide showing their canines, and others whose lips were forming elongated ovals, as their eyes bulged from their sockets. The town appeared to be surging below him in a hideous slow-motion. Involuntarily, Pete turned toward the fake moon and the three women who stood underneath it: a helmeted girl, a voluptuous woman, and a crowned matron. One after another, each of the three looked him full in the face without blinking. And then, at the same moment, the women turned their back on him in disgust.

VIII. The Queen of Love

She watched him from offstage as he strode confidently, wearing the black-rimmed glasses of a renaissance scholar and enunciating his Latin: *bene disserere est finis logices* and

*stipendium peccati mors est.*¹¹⁸ But she had to wait for the translations, and even then she didn't know precisely what to make of "the end of logic" and "the reward of sin." The wig and paint made him seem an old man indeed, too old she thought to be receiving only now the laurels of a doctor. But what did she know of such things. The education provided her by the film studio had been adequate, but it didn't seem so when she looked at him, the exquisite expression of his face when he murmured for the camera, "Settle thy studies, Faustus, and begin to sound the depth of that thou wilt profess." Speaking, she thought, as if he knew what these words really meant.

Her one task was to be desired—that and to wait in the wings with a flute of champagne at the ready, so that the great actor might refresh himself during takes. To be sure, she was many things to this movie: the Queen of Love, the Virgin Huntress, and of course the face that launched a thousand ships. But it was difficult to get her mind around: was she really supposed to be Helen or only a diabolical phantasm, and what was her motivation, if indeed she had one at all?

She didn't know, but what did it matter, since she had no lines anyway. They had filmed her far in advance, for her ghostly image, by a trick of editing, would be superimposed on the flesh and blood scenes that now played out in front of her. And so she spent hours in front of the make-up artists, who painted the voluptuous curves of her body with silver and hung fake tendrils from her hair so that the red curls might better frame her perfectly symmetrical features. All of this for a minute's worth of screen-time.

After their marriage, Richard had said in his grandiose way that "she was like a mirage of beauty of the eyes, irresistible as the pull of gravity. She makes me not want to look at another woman . . . I dream of her." In private he had insisted on calling her by her middle name,

¹¹⁸ Marlowe 7.

Rosemond, explaining somewhat impatiently that she was “the rose of the world.” For its part, the press had insisted on an overpowering sexual attraction between them so as to explain why she in particular would pursue the predictable office affair past the making of “Cleopatra,” leaving her then husband for her co-star, whose reputation for philandering and drunkenness was impressive even amongst English players.

Only he wasn’t English at all, but instead the lowly son of Welsh miners, and had never attended Oxford like his privileged peers. Indeed, until he was adopted by his schoolmaster, the man who helped him lose or, at least, hide his provincial accent, his family name wasn’t even “Burton.” A weak man, he had confessed to her his hemophilia and “tendency” toward epilepsy.

None of this had mattered to the woman when he showed up at her husband’s party, swaggering and drunkenly striding the hardwood floors with his 5’7 frame. He had treated the crowd as one more audience to be tamed, suggesting that she “stick her tongue down his throat” to show everyone that she belonged to him. Holding her champagne with two hands, she had wavered only a minute and then, as if in the grip of some magic, had walked past her husband and across the length of the ballroom where he was waiting. Yes, the stories of the press were all true. But they were incomplete.

For to her, the man’s voice was the very sound of talent and culture and learning. He was what the first scene of their movie showed him to be: a laurel crowned doctor, lifted high on shoulders and carried triumphantly from the gates of the university. But more than this, his power seemed to come from some hidden place, deep inside of him. He *summoned* it as lord and master. And to watch him do so! . . . she had been tempted to join the scholars with their shouts of “Faustus! Faustus! Faustus!” But she had resisted, for her place, after all, was in the wings.

A few years earlier, he had received much the same from the crowds that had spilled out of New York theaters, demanding seven curtain calls after his stunning portrayal of Hamlet. He had called her out to the stage to share his victory, indeed attributing it to her. And at his suggestion, they would share the Broadway stage again later in the year, reciting Shakespeare and the love poems of Barrett Browning. But when she stumbled over the lines in her first reading, having to begin the poem again to the muffled laughter of the crowd, it confirmed everything that she knew to be true: that she was simply an idol; that a graduate of Paramount Studios University would never have what he had; that she was beautiful and worshiped and nothing more.

It had always been this way. At her birth, the doctors took her father aside and explained to him in their conjurer's language that the baby, while perfect in every other way, was not altogether normal, that there had been some sort of natural mutation. She had been born with two sets of eyelashes on each lid, making her dark brown eyes seem winged. As her father breathed a sigh of relief, the learned men joked that she had been born for the movies. This had made them all laugh.

And it had been this way when she prowled the screen as Maggie the Cat, a drawling role for which she won an Oscar. Standing two stories tall in that creamy blouse and skirt, which seemed golden in the light; bursting out of the white slip as she adjusted the seams of her stockings and the garters that held them—was there ever anything so desirable, so soft? Half of America must have shared Big Daddy's confusion. Indeed, what the hell was Paul Newman's problem, diddling about on that chaise, preferring his liquor bottles to the goddess that stood before him.

But it would not always be this way—no, that was a mistake. When she played opposite her husband in “Whose Afraid of Virginia Woolf,” things were different. She said, “I couldn’t imagine dominating, Richard,” but, with his encouragement, she had. Indeed, she had *summoned* something. Playing Martha, the daughter of a college president, to his George, her academic husband, she cackled and crowed without mercy:

Georgie-boy had lots of big ambitions in spite of something funny in his past, which Georgie-boy here turned into a novel. His first attempt and his last. Hey, I rhymed! I rhymed! But Daddy took a look at Georgie’s novel. And he was very shocked by what he read. Oh, yes, he was. A novel all about a naughty boy-child. [Laughs.] A naughty-boy child who killed his mother and his father dead! And Daddy said, “Look here. I will not let you publish such a thing.” And Daddy said, “Look here, kid. You don’t think for a second I’m gonna let you publish this crap, do you? Not on your life, and not while you’re teaching here. You publish that and you’re out on your ass.” Just imagine, a book all about a boy who murders his mother and kills his father and pretends it’s an accident. And you wanna know the clincher? You wanna know what big, brave Georgie said to Daddy? Georgie said, “But, Daddy—I mean, but, sir, this isn’t a novel at all. No, sir, this is no novel at all. This is the *truth*. This really happened to me. It *happened!*”¹¹⁹

Burton had tried to strangle her at the end of that scene. Before, he had muttered, “You have ugly talents Martha.”

With her tangled witch’s hair and the thirty pounds gained for the movie, she had dominated him. And he had dominated her. By the end of the movie, the scholar had killed off their child, the son that only existed in their imagination. But she and Richard—there on the screen where such things can be done, where wars can be fought and murders wrought—they had birthed something wonderful together, something mutual. And it was vicious. And wonderful.

¹¹⁹ *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf*. DVD. Prod. Ernest Lehman. Dir. Mike Nichols. Perf. Elizabeth Taylor, Richard Burton, George Segal, and Sandy Dennis. Warner Brothers, 1966. The film was based on Edward Albee’s play. Throughout the beginning of the twentieth century, Albee was a staunch opponent of unionization amongst vaudeville performers and movie actors.

And it could not be maintained. She waited in the wings to be painted a demoniac shade of green for the last scene of *Faust*. With terrible laughter, she would pull her husband down into the depths of hell: the scholar's just reward and the end of the film's terrible logic. And she wondered whether this was just another conjurer's image or whether she was really supposed to be a devil or perhaps even *the* devil. She didn't know, and what did it matter? Her one line in the movie was a cackle.

In regard to a certain question, though, she was utterly clear, much more so than Faustus himself, who had asked Mephistopheles, "what good will my soul do thy lord?"¹²⁰ As she walked across the length of the stage for the last scene, she knew that it was all a question of motivation—and that her scholar, Richard Burton, was neither beautiful nor worshiped, but something much more.¹²¹

IX. The Inmate's Story

TB: I think we've established that this kind of individual—as a consequence of just indulging himself in the literature of the day—would have accumulated a great deal of information about crime and its detection. Take, as examples, notorious defendants like Albert DeSalvo or the Hillside Strangler individual. And you can see, based on what you can read about the investigations of those crimes, you can see that hysteria and public tension was drawn to this series of crimes because they were so unique and sensational.

¹²⁰ Marlowe 21.

¹²¹ Later in her life, the press linked Elizabeth Taylor to Malcolm Forbes romantically. But there is good reason—if rumors concerning Forbes's private life can be considered "good reason"—to think that they were only friends. Cf. Winans and Jones. For biographical details of Elizabeth Taylor, cf. Taraborelli, J. Randy. *Elizabeth*. New York: Warner Books, 2006.

And they occurred in a relatively short period of time. And, of course, in every instance, shortly after the alleged commission of the murders, another thing happened that insured such public hysteria and consequent police activity: the discovery of the bodies.

Without a body, a crime is sometimes cleared through speculation, but the public's horror is not fixed on it. And so it'd be easy for this person to study that kind of reaction, public or bureaucratic, police reaction. And to make certain alterations in his *modus operandi*. This would tend to decentralize attention and to avoid the cooperation of several investigative agencies.

To provide varying M.O.s and spread them around, as it were, so as not to arouse the same type of unified reaction.

But another terribly critical factor is this: We look through this person's eyes and study the situation, and it may be that he felt that one of the things that seemed to arouse—one of the principal things in arousing the public and the police—was the discovering of the body. And if you *had* no body, then essentially you didn't . . . you're eliminating a moving force behind the police investigation.

And you're reducing publicity, you're slowing suspicion, limiting the possibility of witnesses coming forward—and keeping somewhat in control of the situation, as it were. . . .

HA: Is there *any kind* of feeling of remorse there that . . . maybe even though these people were nothing to *him*, they have families and loved ones and it might be of some value to let the people know where the bodies are—if it didn't bother him or hurt him. What do you think he'd think about that?

TB: I would imagine that in the event that this person—or person like this—were able to, uh, *conquer*, or eliminate from his mind and his behavior the need to act out in this fashion, then he would have to be so situated that he could do so without *scarring* himself.

If, all of a sudden, in some way he was able to rediscover or rebuild those inhibitions, uh, that prevent most of us—that prevent most people from committing murder, uh, *overnight*, and the guilt that we would associate with the breaking of those kinds of taboos and inhibitions, then, *if* the cure would be as bad as the disease, he would be creating a situation where he would be living in a nightmare.

So, if he were to put himself back together, he'd have to do so in sort of a *prospective* fashion, rather than a retrospective fashion—and then how he felt about killing would apply only from Day One on forward. And he would have to cut off the past and let it float away. . . . I mean if the goal for putting himself together again was to live and minimize or *eliminate* his threat to others—toward innocent people—and to lead a healthy, productive life, it would be contradictory for him to go about confessing crimes because he, uh, perceived the need on the part of those who knew the victim to know, in fact, that the victim *was* the victim. Does that make sense?

HA: Maybe to a psychopath. It gets a bit convoluted, doesn't it? Well let's move on. Suppose this person was caught. Would his main thrust be toward survival?

TB: Suppose the person *wasn't* caught. I mean, caught or not, I suppose the individual The goal is survival. Everyone I know of, their primary goal is to survive. Sometimes in different ways.

HA: Would this person ever really want to change?

TB: Well, we, we . . . uh, described this individual and found that his behavior, which was becoming more and more frequent, was also *concomitantly*, –I love that word, *concomitantly*—occupying more and more of his mental and intellectual energies. So he’s facing a greater, uh, more frequent *challenge* of this darker side of himself to his normal life.

It was actually draining off—it couldn’t keep the distinct . . . —the one was demanding so much that it was going to interfere with his, uh, surface, validity, his normal appearance.

So clearly, he would have to make a *choice*. Now, assuming that he was capable of making the choice, he would have to weigh the future consequences of continuing along this course of action, and, of course, the conduct of murdering in such senseless and incomprehensible fashion, or return to a normal life. . . .

So, understanding—if he was capable of understanding—the dimensions of the problem that seemed to grip him and the consequences in concealing that kind of behavior, and if he was capable of making an intelligent decision, he would probably find a way to extinguish the motives as well as the behavior. Looking behind the behavior of killing as well as the art of killing itself—and all points in between.

It would be a real choice. If he failed to do that, I mean, there’s no in-between. There’s no middle ground. If only he could realize this. If he couldn’t, then, of course he wouldn’t . . . uh, wouldn’t do anything about it. But if he’s capable of making a choice, he’d probably try to understand the problem—what his independent variables were and how to eliminate them, how to deal with them in some fashion. Eliminate—not just repress or suppress—but *eliminate* the need, the underpinnings of his, uh, criminal behavior.

HA: Well, you’ve been convicted in the Chi Omega case. You pled innocent but were convicted. Could we examine the evidence in that case in relation to the man you’ve just

described? Could we look at this case and see what's valid and what isn't? I think we have to get into that.

TB: Well . . . that case doesn't fit (laughs). There you *are*! We've done a lot in one sentence. See how easy it is to take care of that in the book!

HA: Yeah, but . . .

TB: We've created a model that doesn't fit the real-life situation. . . .

HA: Do you think this was definitely an aberrant situation?

TB: It could be . . . an aberration, caused by a great deal of pent-up frustration . . . of rage or whatever. It's, it's . . . it varied at points.

HA: Frustration. Rage. The pressures of the moment. Sometimes sorority girls can be quite snobbish. When people aren't too gregarious or sure of themselves, sometimes people get hurt . . . or extremely angry. Could this man have been insulted, put down, or ridiculed by one or more of the girls in that sorority house?

TB: Could be. Uh (long pause)

HA: This crime almost seems like somebody was getting even for something—the extreme rage. Do you understand what I mean? How *much* variance would there be? You've said that in most cases, he liked to take the victims home, and, if possible, keep them as long as possible . . .

TB: What I said was . . . that in those situations where he couldn't do it, he didn't do it. We've used our knowledge of the facts and circumstances surrounding the cases in the northwest—some of them—to try to come up with an answer to that. And we really don't know for *sure*. We just don't know.

HA: But it was the *desired* thing! And whenever it could happen, it probably did. When all this was going on in the man's life was there any struggle to try and *not* do this? Was there any attempt, say, to have a girl friend that this person would go to, to try to keep himself somewhat level? Would he have a normal sex life with one or more ladies?

TB: Oh, surely. Again, I mean . . . we can see that this kind of person, *because* one of the primary reasons he did this . . . uh, committed the murders . . . was a search for a release of stress or feelings of low esteem or anger, hostility, resentment, whatever. It was channeled for some reason toward women. Young women—and in a particular way.

That does not mean that what he was suffering from was, in fact, a sexual problem or that he hated women. Uh (long pause), so we could expect that he had normal sexual relationships with, with a woman or with women—which would not be interfered with in any way with the other conduct. He wouldn't let it interfere. . . .

HA: Okay, let's veer off. Let's talk about something you're familiar with elsewhere, the Caryn Campbell case. Most people think the evidence there was very, very slim. There were no real eyewitnesses. Let's talk about how . . . What do you think happened in the Campbell case? How would a man like this . . . Would he approach her as she was going up to her room and talk to her . . . represent that you were a police officer and ask her where she was going what? What? What? How would you do that?

[Bundy considers several methods, rejecting them all.]

HA: Where does that leave us? With the old arm in a sling routine? Or a broken leg?

TB: It leaves us probably with as many imaginative approaches as you can think of to get somebody's attention, in, uh, gaining their assistance. The guy, whoever, could have feigned a

heart attack or something . . . feigning illness. Asked for her assistance to get him to a hospital, or *anything*. . . .

HA: You told me your story was more important than the Boston Strangler's. Unless you give us something to explain the numbers—and thus, the relative importance—I cannot see your logic. He killed, how many? Thirteen? What makes you so important? A guy who stole credit cards and cars and says he didn't kill anybody.

If you sincerely want this book to be of some value, we've got to know what kind of league we're playing in here. I know, generally, what you've done, but maybe I only know a third of it. We're not going to quote you; I realize that legally you have appeals that may last several more years, but

TB (ignoring again the intentional use of the pronoun "you"): People who read this book will get some insight into how a particular kind of mentality that contributed to a multiple—may be responsible for a multiple-murder situation. They'll see how he got to *think* that way . . . and what makes . . . what factors in our society facilitate this kind of behavior.

And what it is about the human mind that makes this kind of behavior . . . to, to . . . carry it out—and if there's anything that can be done to reduce the possibility of a person who'd been predispositioned to this kind of behavior, uh, of actually engaging in it

Now, as far as facts, figures, body counts—that's *absolutely* the furthest thing from my mind. I realize, uh, the interest you've attached to it.

HA: And the interest of the reader.

TB: And the reader, oh sure. I agree, but what can I say? . . . I'm not going to *strain* this fiction to the limit, saying, "Well, the person like the one we're talking about is probably

responsible for X number.” I mean, how can a “personality type” be responsible for murder?

That’s impossible. I mean, it’s just illustrative of a class of people.

HA: Then from another direction . . . this type of person . . . there’s a possibility, I presume, that he has killed others that, so far, have not been discovered.

TB: Probably. That’s a distinct possibility—because of the movability, the freedom people have, the hitchhiking and, so, uh . . . I just hate to . . .

You can go as high as you want. The higher the number the better. The more *horrified* people will be. The more they will read and the more interested they’ll be in finding out what makes a person like this tick. And the more they pay attention. If you’re truly interested in pointing out the facets in society that are concerned with this, then *you* . . . you make it up

HA: I just looked at my notes here and wanted to ask you: Did you or did you not go back to Pennsylvania a few years ago to try to find your father?

TB: I didn’t.

HA: Haven’t you ever wondered if he’s alive?

TB: I’ve had that. *Sure* I’ve wondered, but it’s not something that lingers on and I think about very much. I’m happy to be alive. My mother has never made the attempt to tell me. If she had wanted to, she would have. Since she didn’t, I figured she didn’t want to and there was good reason for it. It didn’t bother me one way or the other. So it was never a source of any kind of problem.

HA: Aren’t you curious?

TB: I couldn’t say there’s no curiosity, but on the other hand, there’s a lot more, there are a lot more things that are more worthy of my curiosity. I mean, he didn’t raise me. And I guess my particular view of the world is that, uh, we’re probably 95 percent the way we are because of

the way we were raised and where we were raised. That whatever genetic material we're carrying along with us, well, you know It's just hard to tell. Maybe it would be interesting to know if there was cancer in the family. Or about a rare blood disease. I mean, the way I am and the way I view society didn't emanate from my natural father. It's just not reflected in me in any way—so I'm not looking for anything.

I mean, I certainly wouldn't be looking for him to show him [sic] what kind of person *I* was going to become, because I'm not going to *be* that kind of person. No way. He contributed nothing, substantially, to my, uh, development. So it's never been a problem to me.

HA: As I recall, you told Steven that your mother at one time had volunteered information.

[After a long digression on the initial horror of jail and his adaptation to incarceration, the inmate continues.]

TB: It's no longer that horrible, unknown, threatening place. But anyway, getting back to the other thing, that was the occasion I mentioned to Steve . . . that maybe Mom was going to talk to me about it—and I don't know for sure.

HA: Your uncle, the college music professor . . . We have discovered that you were very close to him. It seems to me this man represented a sort of culture, sort of a style, a classy man. You were sort of reaching out to him in some way.

TB: Yeah, I mean there was . . . I found something inherently attractive and compelling—I don't know what the other word would be, but certainly attractive—about my uncle. His demeanor, his intellect, his culture, and so forth. But, while he is probably our *closest* relative—I mean, one of the closest—I had really never spent a lot of time with Uncle Jack. We'd go out to

their place on the Olympic Peninsula from time to time. I'd spend a couple of weeks out there in the summertime. But, uh, I greatly admired my Uncle Jack and Aunt Eleanor.

HA: Have you heard from them lately?

TB: They stopped by on the way back from seeing my aunt. When I was in the Leon County jail, they stopped by. But I never . . . (clears throat) They were always sort of a different (clears throat) . . . well, they lived in a different society than my parents did.

HA: They lived in a society you wished your parents were in, right?

TB: Well, yeah, I wished *I* was in, sure.

HA: And you couldn't quite attain it. You couldn't quite push your way in. You weren't quite *there*.

TB: Well, I was a *kid*! I couldn't pick up and leave home and . . .

HA: Sure.

TB: . . . and go off and find that kind of world. I mean, it wasn't feasible. It was impossible. But, uh, certainly I envied my cousin John and the advantages that, uh, *he* had . . . growing up in that kind of family.

[From June 24, 1980 interview. Bundy eventually confessed to the murders of thirty women throughout Utah and the Pacific Northwest. The remains of some of his victims were discovered hidden amidst the overgrown tangles of Taylor Mountain.]¹²²

X. Pete and Malcolm's Story: Tactics at the Edge of the Earth

These metaphysics of magicians
And necromantic books are heavenly;

¹²² Cf. Michaud, Stephen G. and Aynesworth, Hugh. *Ted Bundy: Conversations with a Killer*. Irving, Texas: Authorlink Press, 2000. Also see Ann Rule's biography, *The Stranger Beside Me*. New York: Norton, 2000.

Lines, circles, scenes, letters and characters—
 Ay, these are those that Faustus most desires.
 O, what a world of profit and delight,
 Of power, of honor, of omnipotence,
 Is promised to the studious artisan!
 All things that move between the quiet poles
 Shall be at my command. Emperors and kings
 Are but obeyed in their several provinces,
 Nor can they raise the wind or rend the clouds;
 But his dominion that exceeds in this
 Stretcheth as far as doth the mind of man.
 A sound magician is a mighty god.
 Here, Faustus, try thy brains to gain a deity.

Christopher Marlowe

This baroque idea glimmers behind *Biathanatos*. The idea of a god who creates the universe in order to create his own gallows.

J. L. Borges

At the launch point

“I don’t think you should go up,” said the artist as thunder rumbled in the distance. Clutching the beret to his chest, Pete studied the puddles on the ground for a moment and then turned to his friend with a smile, “Look, we’re not going to stay down here.” “But are you sure you’re alright,” the artist continued, grasping the man’s arms with both hands. Pete stepped back and gently extricated himself from Kollock’s grip. “You see this,” he said, pointing toward the insignia on his jacket, as if this constituted some sort of an answer, and he fixed the purple beret back on his head.

But the artist leaned in like a worried mother, reasoning with a reckless child, “Pete, you know it’s not too late to forget about this.” “To forget is divine,” retorted the genius of Helen, walking backwards. He bowed deeply, his right hand sweeping the mud in front of him, and

then turned his back to walk towards the balloon. Almost as an afterthought, a parting shot, he said over his shoulder, “See you at the edge of the earth.”

The other balloonists were milling about their crafts, talking in hushed tones amongst themselves and periodically pointing upwards to the heavens. Pete caught snippets of their conversations as he walked past them, the repeated phrases “in this weather” and “suicide” standing out from their conversation. One man in coveralls shook his head vigorously, staunchly denying something that his companions had said. He paused, jaws working, and gave Pete an accusatory look as the man passed.

Having arrived unscathed in canary yellow pants and biker’s jacket, Malcolm Forbes stood under a giant umbrella by his Capitalist Tool, its uninflated bag trailing flacidly behind. The stacks of *Fact and Comment* formed a wall around the man and his entourage. “Five more minutes and we’re out of here,” Forbes’s young publicist muttered, “Drive to Atlanta tonight, we’ve got the party tomorrow, we’ve got the press conference for the book after that.”

The millionaire watched the little mountaineer walking toward his balloon, his hands suddenly jerking up to his beret to keep it from blowing away in the wind. “Some of the reporters are saying that he had a . . . a fit or something, a spell, earlier this morning,” the publicist added with a snort. Forbes suddenly wheeled toward him and grasped him tightly around the elbow: “Is that a fact? A ‘spell’?!” “You ever had a ‘fit,’ John?” he continued and laughed hard, a savage laugh, moving his right hand up to the scruff of the man’s neck and giving his head a hard push. The millionaire’s entourage chuckled uneasily.

The bag of the balloon stood upright, “The Spirit of Helen” emblazoned across it with Pete’s insignia underneath. And the man himself straddled the edge of the gondola, dramatically gazing up past the burner into the envelope. Satisfied, he jumped down from the bucket and

addressed the balloonists milling about. “You’re all wondering whether its safe,” he shouted, stating the obvious. Nevertheless, he paused for a moment to let these words sink in and then continued, “It isn’t . . . It’s far from safe.” Emboldened by his beginning, the man puffed out his chest and shouted louder than before, “You’re wondering whether it’s folly,” and then, in Forbes’s direction, “whether it’s weak. Friends, if it’s folly, it’s the most serious kind.” “Ridiculous or not,” Pete mumbled to himself, “I’m going up in it.”

The balloonists were not moved. But Forbes, on the other hand—that was another matter entirely. He walked past his own crew, past his sighing entourage, past the grumbling crowd to Pete’s gondola and extended his hand. The mountaineer having grasped it, he clambered up the side of the bucket. The two men smiled for the cameras, which had begun to flash, and suddenly things seemed much brighter to the other contestants, who sprang into action like some mechanism, hurrying the preparations for their own ascent. “I’m doing you a favor,” Forbes whispered to Pete through his teeth as the two men shook hands for the reporters. The millionaire, however, expected to profit from his favors.

In the Air

They floated high above the ground in the rain, the genius and the millionaire. Pete had his back to his passenger, looking over the side of the gondola, while Forbes stared at the promoter’s shoulders slumped over the edge of the basket. Without speaking, hardly without blinking, the millionaire watched the man for several minutes before something sparked in his eyes.

“You a hawk or dove, Pete?” the millionaire began mysteriously. Pete registered his incomprehension without looking up or turning or, indeed, speaking at all. “With mighty wings

outspreed,” Forbes continued undaunted and gazed above at the flame that made them fly. At this, the mountaineer began to turn around slowly. “Get’s boring doesn’t it, brooding on the vast abyss,” the millionaire said, seemingly without meaning, “I mean once you’ve seen it there really isn’t much to it after that, ‘Oh look, there’s a clump of trees—marvelous!—there’s a blue lake—how wonderful!—and the people, well, we know what they look like.”

Something was dawning on Pete’s face, which until now had registered only confusion. He had turned all the way around to face his passenger, but the millionaire himself was looking down on the landscape below so that Pete stared not into his dark eyes, but rather at the logo on the back of his jacket: a winged motorcycle, suspended from the Capitalist Tool airship.

“You’re a dove, that’s what I think, brooding on . . . *squatting* over the abyss—yeah, that’s better— a dove who, squatting over the abyss, ‘madst it pregnant.’ What sort of word is ‘madst’ anyway? You know it’s pronounced *mădst*, short ‘a.’” Forbes spoke these words over the edge of the gondola, as if to the trees far below. “Only madmen,” the millionaire added with disdain, “only madmen *make* things.” And like a naughty boy he spit over the side.

When Pete didn’t answer, he continued with raised voice, “You’re a dove and all doves have it inside of them. You know what I’m speaking of? Inside you? *You* don’t know what the hell I’m talking about.” And then in his best shit-eating, moonlight and magnolias drawl, the millionaire added, “Are you a dove, Peter?”

The mountaineer’s face had gone ashen, and his gaze burned into the ridiculous logo on the back of the Forbes’s jacket. Finally he erupted: “You ever seen a cormorant, Malcolm? No? It’s a filthy bird, a disgusting, wallowing in its own shit, sucking itself sort of bird. You know what I mean. You know what the hell *I’m* talking about. They befoul good things, they perch on a tree and the tree is ruined. They cannot control themselves, they foam from the

mouth—you ever seen that?—they shit themselves, they come all over themselves for no reason.

Have you ever seen that?! Well, if you've ever seen a cormorant, you know what filth is. And if you haven't, you're looking at one right now."¹²³

“Look at me when I’m talking to you!” Pete screamed and moved threateningly toward the man, his hands stretching out like claws. But the bigger man wheeled on him, and they ended up gripping each other by the collar of their jackets, neither capable of letting go. Pete’s furious eyes bugged out of his head, while Malcolm’s had gone to slits, his nostrils flaring as he exhaled great bursts of air through them. They stood in the gondola shaking each other convulsively, and the mountaineer’s beret tumbled off his head and over the edge.

His mouth open in an inarticulate cry, Pete let go of the other man and tore himself away, his left arm reaching out spasmodically as he scrambled toward the brink of the basket. But the wind had caught it and blew the purple velvet far away. The little man stood fixed in place, his arm outstretched like a child reaching for a lost balloon. Suddenly free from the promoter’s weight, Forbes sank forward to his knees, his breath coming in gasps. He hung his head and coughed like a spent old man.

When the millionaire raised his head, having regained his breath from the coughing fit, the other man still had not changed position. “I don’t know why . . . You . . .” Forbes sputtered. The genius stood motionless, his left arm frozen in extension, until all at once he slumped to the floor of the gondola. “Why did you do that?” the millionaire asked, having regained a semblance of composure. At first, Pete did not reply, but when the millionaire persisted again

¹²³ Milton describes Satan sitting on the tree of life in the shape of a cormorant. Cf. Milton, John. “Paradise Lost.” *The Complete Poetry of John Milton*. Ed. John T. Shawcross. Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1971. 322. Also see the speaker’s opening invocation, which concerns the creation of the universe by God in the manner of a “dove” (251-252).

with his question, “Why did you . . .,” the man cut him off savagely, spitting out the words: “Because I could.” And Forbes smiled a secret smile.

For the millionaire was shrewd, shrewder perhaps than Pete had suspected. Forbes expected to profit from his words, and he had—it was a question, after all, of who would be master. And so in his teacher’s voice, Forbes ended the lesson with this commentary: “One makes because he hates. And what does he hate? . . .” The answer went without saying.

The mountaineer stood up and his eyes were liquid with hatred. Looking down at the millionaire’s dark hair, his expensive dye-job, the motorcycle jacket and canary yellow pants, he was seized by the urge to throw Forbes over the edge of the gondola.

He wanted to hurt the millionaire; yes, he wanted to hurt him badly. But then he thought of something better, and the heavens opened up.

Over the Gorge

Streaks of lightning split the sky. The “Spirit of Helen” had begun its descent an hour ago and now was drawing closer and closer to the top of the pine forest. Forbes’s spirits had sunk with the balloon, as the situation began to look more and more dire. As Pete painstakingly searched the terrain below them, the dejected millionaire mumbled, “Falling.” “Exactly,” the mountaineer said, but Forbes’s puzzlement over this response was cut short by his companion’s outburst: “There they are! The Falls—I seem them now! Through the trees, there—She’s beautiful!”

Forbes pulled himself together and joined Pete at his overlook. “That’s Tempesta,” Pete said, but the millionaire couldn’t see anything but the dangerous branches of evergreen trees. Gripping Malcolm by his neck, Pete extended his own arm past the man’s chin and over his

shoulder, pointing out the foaming white spray that leapt and glistened below: “There, you see it?” “Yeah, I see *something*,” admitted Forbes, and he forgot their predicament and thrilled inwardly in spite of himself.

“Why we’re in it now, man, we’re in the Gorge!” Pete yelled in the midst of the wild storm. Unaccustomed to what was welling inside him, Forbes babbled manically, “I see something . . . something shimmering!” Afterwards, the millionaire would never be able to describe what he experienced in that moment. It seemed to him that something was welling within his body and that he might be split in two by the force of it. Rocking back and forth, he held his sides, hugging himself.

“Tempesta’s the easiest,” Pete shouted gleefully, “Hurricane’s the largest. And Oceana, she’s hidden away. The Bridal Veil, that one can’t be seen at all—not from up here—not unless you hike from the bottom of the Gorge.” But Forbes’s couldn’t hear any of this, for everything seemed to waver to and fro as if it were a dream: the rolling waves of trees, the flashing streams of silver within the evergreen fissures, and the blazing veins of the sky. It was cracking open. It was opening wide. And the man who had seen everything wept.

Pete spoke into the millionaire’s ear, “I took Kollock up here, and he had never seen anything like it, he was living right in the middle of it and he didn’t know . . . You could have painted these cataracts a thousand times,” I told him, “but you haven’t seen them until you’re up here.” When Malcolm turned his watery face toward the man, Pete was shaking his head and smiling. “I showed him,” the genius repeated softly, “I’m the only one who knows *this* way.” And then he looked both triumphant and very sad.

On the ground

They had mounted the crest, barely scraping past its pine covering, and drifted down into the glistening folds of the valley. Forbes had seen it coming, had grabbed Pete and pointed to the deepest recess: “Lines! Pull the cord!” But it had been too late.

Their gondola hung there, suspended from the power lines with which the envelope was entangled. The first to act, Forbes scrambled over the side of the gondola, straddling it with one leg, attempting to regain his balance so that he could hoist his other leg over. “Wait a minute,” Pete shouted, having collected himself, “we’ve got to make some sort of rope. You can’t jump from here.” “Make a rope out of what?” Forbes screamed back. After a moment’s pause, Pete said, “Give me your clothes,” and the millionaire couldn’t help but laugh: “That only works in the movies.” They both felt the ridiculousness—indeed, the *aggressive* ridiculousness—of the proposition. But that didn’t stop them from testing it. So they stripped off their clothes, and Pete tied his tan jacket to one of the arms of Forbes’s “Capitalist Tool” coat and the other arm to a pant leg and so forth. For a moment, they looked at each other’s wet and shrunken body.

Forbes climbed down the make-shift rope, and miraculously it held. It held, that is, until he had almost reached its bottom, when Pete’s tan jacket ripped apart in his hands. The millionaire fell to the ground on his back, unharmed but with the wind knocked out of him, the remains of the lifeline landing in a heap beside him. Opening his clinched hands, Pete looked down at the scrap of jacket, the black threads sewn into its pocket.

Lying limply on his back, Forbes stared up at the flashing sky in a daze as the life returned to him. Pete’s face, looking down at him from the black, seemed a small, wonderfully bright moon. He felt the wet ground beneath him with his hands, gripped the turf, unearthing the muddy clumps in his hands. He opened his mouth, and the liquid pooled there and in the sockets of his eyes. Awakened as if from the soundest sleep, he looked up in silence as the promoter

examined the remaining shred of his tan jacket, for a moment holding it close to his breast. Pete let the fragment fall from his hand over the edge of the bucket, and the prostrate millionaire imagined that he could make out its insignia fluttering down to him: some sort of horned beast.

“Malcolm!” the genius bellowed from on high, “What is Helen?!” The millionaire saw the promoter smile down at him through the rain. He saw Pete smile as he mounted and stood balanced on the edge of his basket. Malcolm Forbes, the man who had seemed everything, stretched his arms weakly toward the sky and whispered something inarticulate. “It’s what I brought you here to see” the genius screamed and flung himself headlong over the edge.

XI. Helen

She haunts the river, down under the shadow of evergreens, where nobody sees. But her filmy gauze does not cover as well as that. One pale shoulder peeps out, and now the other. And down where no one sees, the moon catches the loose fabric just right for an instant, revealing everything. Red masses hang down disheveled over those shoulders, and they curl and cover her face.

She dances lightly. Up on one toe and down and up, she prances and struts—clinch and release—and then runs so fleetly over stones at the water’s edge. But only for a moment. For one shuddering instant now, under the low hanging branches, she contemplates a cold pool, she who takes men’s eyes. Almost touching her lowering tresses, the water eddies here against the impenetrable rocks. She tucks the curls behind her ears and leans over the dark water: nothing but a pool of stars and her face, reflected off-center.

The town above, only a stone’s throw from the river, has gone quiet. They named the green park at its center for a genius. But festival beer has run dry; festival songs have faded and

with them the dance. They never could have lasted all night. Before dawn, when the garish glockenspiel clocks no longer keep the time—at that moment she is down by the river, she who takes men’s eyes.

Certain *sophoi* claim that her body was spirited away to Egypt, and that we only warred over an image. But the wise need wars more than the rabble, and she knows the reason why. When the clocks fall silent, Helen presides over some private and terrible ritual at the water’s edge, grasping the bundle tightly to her breast like a new-born, gazing lovingly down at it one last time.

And then casts it off.

XII. An Inmate’s Story

I’ve been holding something back. My father was diagnosed with Huntington’s Disease earlier in the year, and this neuro-degenerative disorder is hereditary. The child of a father with HD stands a one in two chance of inheriting the disease, and my father has one daughter and one son. Symptoms range from full-blown insanity to a slight “eccentricity” or emotional volatility. Indeed, the symptoms could be so hidden as to go unnoticed by onlookers, which would explain why no one in my family can recall any relative on my father’s side being especially “peculiar.” But I know that peculiarity is relative and that amongst his mountain kinsmen, there are several lay preachers and at least one composer of hymns. Pick up a rude hymnal, preferably non-denominational, and it very well may include a song with the Heideggerian title “Just a rose will do.”

Sitting on the floor of my small office, my door closed as tightly as a tomb, I look over yellowed pictures of my father’s family, searching for weakness in the faces of the tight-lipped,

subsistence farmers in their church clothes. Grandfathers and fathers greater still: these men do not look at the children standing precariously beside them, dressed in strange adult clothing, but stare grimly at something outside the frame.

I own three tattered pictures of my father. The first one was taken at a studio shortly before he opened his practice. He is dressed in a newly-purchased suit, right hand cradling his jaw and temple, with a gaudy golden ring on his finger. In the second, a photograph from college, he wears a beret and a pencil-thin mustache, and there is something stand-offish about the way he looks directly into the camera. In the last, he stands in the basement of a photography studio. He worked there in its makeshift darkroom, developing pictures for the studio above. Pinups cover the wall behind him. Clad in his plain white shirt, sleeves rolled to the elbow, he holds a trumpet to his lips, blowing what seems to be a furious blast.

The doctors say, of course, that an “at risk” child should undergo testing to determine whether he or she is a carrier of HD. But I don’t think I’ll ever have them done. Indeed, I would like to think that I’m through with doctors altogether, that I perform my own tests.

But only a god knows the truth.

CHAPTER 3

ANALOGOS

“In the Days of Variety”

Every magic trick consists of three parts, or acts. The first part is called “the pledge.” The magician shows you something ordinary. A deck of cards, a bird or a man. He shows you this object. Perhaps he asks you to inspect it, to see that it is indeed real, unaltered, normal. But, of course, it probably isn't.

The second act is called “the turn.” The magician takes the ordinary something and makes it do something extraordinary. Now you're looking for the secret, but you won't find it, because, of course, you're not really looking. You don't really want to know. You want to be . . . fooled.

But you wouldn't clap yet, because making something disappear isn't enough. You have to bring it back. That's why every magic trick has a third act. The hardest part. The part we call . . . “the prestige.”

Opening lines of the movie *The Prestige*

Analepsis (fr. Grk. analepsis, lit. a taking up.)

1. Obs. Med. a) Recovery of strength after sickness. b) A species of epileptic attack.
2. Eastern Ch. The feast of Christ's ascension into heaven.
3. Psychol. A feeling of relief, satiety, or lassitude supervening upon the completion of the sexual act.

Webster's New International Dictionary

The time is the present and the place is one of those many theatres de luxe where a program of varied features is nightly presented. From the cushioned seat of an opera chair in a playhouse resplendent under a myriad of electric lights, about us richly gowned women and immaculately dressed men, we turn our eyes toward a gorgeously appointed stage.

From the wings into the calcium spot steps a young man in a full dress suit. His face is powdered and rouged. His hair is slick and shiny. With him is a dainty miss in gay-colored chiffon party dress, shoes gay colored too with buckles shining. Her face is powdered and rouged; her hair bobbed and marcelled. They sing, they dance and chatter and then, bowing, pass back into the wings.

We look on while acrobats perform seemingly impossible feats. We listen enraptured as someone strums a piano. A husky lass in swimming suit tells of her achievement in swimming a turbulent channel; a mighty king of swat with New York across his shirtfront recounts the story of a home run drive into the bleachers with bases full to win the final game of a world's series; a square-jawed youth shows his massive shoulders and the mighty right fist which smote another square-jawed youth and earned the heavy-weight championship of the world.

Then the feature—a movie of a popular screen star and its final fadeout. Into the street we found our way as once more the organ pealed a jazz march.

We have had our thrills and we called what we had just seen Vaudeville.

But vaudeville was not always vaudeville. Not so long ago we drew our knees under a roughly made round table in another playhouse. Our seat was a hard-bottomed chair, or perhaps it was a bench. We scraped our feet on the sawdusted floor, and signaled a waiter to bring a mug of beer and plate of pretzels—those twisted things with great pieces of salt sprinkled over them, in case you don't remember.

Through a haze of blue smoke, an odor of stale wine or something alcoholic filling our nostrils, we focused on a makeshift stage, across the front of which ran a row of flickering gas jets.

From the wings of that stage stepped an oddly dressed comedian and his partner, one with face glowing under burnt cork, the other in caricature of a son of the Ould Sod. They sang and danced and chattered too. “Slapstick and knockabout” it was called on the program.

Next came a girl in a short skirt—short in that day for it was just inches above the ankles—who sang something sentimental about “My Mother Was A Lady.” Following our song lady came a green-tighted, all silver-spangled young man who walked a slack wire. Others in turn brought laughs and hurrahs and sometimes a catcall or two.

Then came a sketch with all the artists or performers who had done these turns taking part in a hodgepodge of nonsense called, “Come On, McDuff.”

We had our thrills and we called what we had just seen—Variety.

Perhaps the call of the theatregoers for higher things, or at least what they think are higher things behind the curtains, and perhaps the drifting out of the picture of the old-time showman caused a passing of the word variety as applied to a succession of different things, and with it the disappearing for all time of those many places called variety’s showhouses that once flourished.

Perhaps the methods adopted by the [entrepreneurs] who brought stars of various endeavors under one classification, and advertised these acts as a “potpourri of song and dance, interposed with skits and sketches of vaudeville” and heralded as “refined, classic and educating acts,” had something to do with the passing of variety theatres and the variety performers and the coming of the vaudeville theatres with the vaudville artists.

In the days when Variety was Variety, actors and actresses were poorly paid and salaries were uncertain. Their hours were long and tedious. They had few, if any, dressing rooms and had to change their acts once a week and sometimes oftener. To hold one’s place on the program

in the days of what was termed slapstick and knockabout, an actor or actress had to be able to sing a bit, dance a bit, do dialect, be a part of the grand finale which usually closed a show, and also be able to do brass, that is, toot a horn—not to mention strum a piano or fiddle and sometimes beat a drum.

Some places too saw to it that the feminine stars did duty in dispensing drinks from the floors of the theatre while the menfolks shifted scenery and did a turn now and then as stagehands.

Today the men and women of the vaudeville circuits have little to complain of. A booking agent finds their jobs and if their act is “big time” and stands the acid test of critical theatregoers there is a contract for one and perhaps three years. Dressing rooms are brilliantly lighted and mirrored. A call boy does errands, but, greatest of all, salaries are bountiful and certain.¹²⁴

I like the theater [...] especially a good vaudeville show when I am seeking perfect relaxation; for a vaudeville show is different from a play [...] If there is a bad act at a vaudeville show you can rest reasonably secure that the next one may not be so bad; but from a bad play there is no escape.

Woodrow Wilson (c.1914)

“You know, I could've done well in vaudeville.” Suddenly, he let his face go loose [. . .] The face, totally slack, was cretinous and comical. The body drooped, complementing the face. “I'm Dopey Dan,” he sang, “and I'm married to Midnight Mary.” With that, he did an expert scarecrow sort of dance across the deck, whistling all the while. When he finished, he bowed.

Gore Vidal (description of Woodrow Wilson)

¹²⁴ Written by Bert Lowry for a San Francisco monthly *Sunset Magazine* 59, September 1927: 28-30. Cf. *American*

The Conjuror

I've seen this sort of thing before. I once played the Orpheum with Murphy and Company—everyone remembers Murphy. The trick was to get out of a tank of water and back to the door at the rear of the audience. So I get in the tank, and they drop the curtain over it, the veil, and I pop out of the door at the rear, and I shout, “Ladies and Gentlemen, tanks cannot hold me, water cannot drown me!”

Well, everybody in the audience gasped—which was good, of course. But then they got silent as a goddamn morgue, and a few men stood up gaping and the ladies were pointing and one of them—a beautiful woman!—put her hand over her mouth, lace gloves, and she started to cry. Just started weeping, there on the spot. And well, that stirs the gentleman with her, and he starts saying something to the people around him, and his eyes are bugging out, and they're nodding like they agree with something. One woman, covered in furs and a big, floppy hat—she stands up, and she shouts, “How did you do that?! Tell us how you do did that!”

Well, I grinned and shuffled, and I said “Madam, a magician never reveals his tricks.” You know, you always say that, but this was the first time I said it out of fear. I'm telling you that I was scared of those goddamn people. They were beginning to get up and some of them were starting to edge up the aisles toward me. So I threw my arms out in front of me, trying to calm everybody down—‘just a minute, eaaassy now’—and I said “Ladies and Gentlemen, a moment's pause, if you please.” And I was going to say that I would be available after the show to answer questions. Hell, I sort of thought it might be a good way to make a few extra dollars. But they cut me off, and they're yelling, wanting to know how it's done. And a man with a handlebar mustache—and I'll remember this until I die—that man stood up at the back of the

crowd right in front of me and he turns around and looks me dead in the face—that's what I'll remember, the way he looked at me. I don't know whether it was amazement or disgust, but he had no color in his face at all, and he turns to me and says, "What *are* you?"

Well, needless to say this is starting to make me more than a little nervous and I said to the guy, "What do you mean, sir?" but I think I knew what the guy meant and that's what scares me. It's that I knew right then what that man meant. And everybody else did, too, because they all started crying out. "Conjurer!" "Devil!" somebody says, and the others start in and someone starts shrieking in the back. They were wild-eyed, as God's my witness, sweaty and wild-eyed.

So they're working themselves into a frenzy below me and I'm starting to think about where the exits are. You know, they point 'em out at the beginning, but goddamn if I ever thought that *I'd* need one. So I'm looking behind me, and the workers from out front are standing in the doorways because they're wondering what the hell is going on and they're looking at me like I'm some sort of traitor in their midst. And John Mangum was right there with them—everyone here knows John—and he's got this look on his face, like his dog had just turned on him, and I whispered, "what're you doing, John, we've known each other for twenty years."

Yes, indeed, a frenzy is something, gentlemen. I've never seen a full-fledged one, thank God, but they were working up to it, and that was bad enough. In some ways I think that might be worse because you can see it going that way, if you take my meaning. So finally I bellowed as loud and as low as a could, "Everyone be quiet, please! What you've witnessed is a trick. Now, I will tell you how it was done." And that pacified them to an extent, and the shouting started to die down until there was a general sort of hum and I waited until it was totally quiet.

So I said in the calmest voice I could muster—and it was fairly calm, gentlemen, if I do say so myself, nothing like the threat of being taken for a deity to calm a man . . . hah, Frederic you're laughing, but I suspect that you've been in the same situation, no? Well anyway, I said to them: "Ladies and gentlemen, what you think you've seen and what you've seen are two different things. You think that I have somehow disappeared from the tank onstage, dematerialized, as they say, and reappeared here in a moment's time. But what has actually happened is this: I was never in the tank to begin with. The man you saw submerged in the water was an associate of mine. At that moment, having drenched my clothes, I was walking through a tunnel that leads from the stage underneath the floor to a trapdoor here inside this closet."

And some of the people started sighing in relief, and then others, until the whole audience was one long exhalation, and it was murmuring and cooing just like a gigantic babe. Some of the ones who were frothing not two minutes before, they were the ones saying "Of course," and "There, are you satisfied" and men were patting the hands of their wives, and these were the same men who were brandishing canes. Not two minutes before!

Well, I didn't waste any time, so I walked—walked, mind you—at the quickest rate that is humanly possible down the aisle and back to the stage—I was walking so quickly that they probably thought I teleported again, but anyway, I leapt onto the stage and said, "Now, I'd like to thank you all for your patronage this fine Saturday evening and wish you a safe and enjoyable night. If anyone would like to examine the trapdoor, he or she may do so on the way out." And that was it—I walked to the wings and out the door and I didn't stop walking until I was safely in that hansom cab. And I told the man that I'd make it worth his while if he could make the trip in under ten minutes.

We drove by the front of the theater and suddenly the place just erupted. I'm telling you the shout was so loud that the driver—this grizzled old man—he almost jerked the goddamn bit out of the horse's mouth. And he turns and says to me in the cab, "must be quite a show tonight . . . I hear that this one's a real humdinger." And I said, "yes sir, they say he's the real thing alright, or as real as it gets."

Three Burlesques

While searching the shelves of West Texas A & M's library for an unrelated book, I happened upon a volume entitled *Sherlock Holmes in America*, which includes a series a burlesques published in American periodicals during the early years of the twentieth century. Excerpts from three of these, published between 1908 and 1916, are reproduced below:

I. Timelock Foams, the Great Detective: "The Adventures of the Moving Picture House."

. . . . Once in the moving picture house I settled down to enjoy myself.

A funny little blighter, with a small, black mustache and trotters that curl up at the ends, was on the screen, and his extraordinary antics almost made me bally well smile. Of course, it would be bally bad form to laugh, you know, so you may guess how surprised I was when a loud guffaw from Foams broke the silence.

I had never, in all our years of crime detecting, seen Foams smile, much less laugh. While wondering over this, Foams suddenly arose and said, "Come, Potson, let us get out of this." This slope-shouldered blighter was just about to push a fat woman into a lake, but there was no resisting Foams, and I had to leave before the splash.

“Potson,” hissed Foams, when we got outside, “this is Moriarity’s work. He thought he would make me laugh so much that I would be in a weakened condition on leaving the penny-odeon and he would then find me an easy prey. Let us get home at once.”

Maybe Foams was right, but I wish I could have seen that fat woman flop into the lake.¹²⁵

II. The Powdered Processes of the great Girl Detective, Shirley Combs: “No. 1—The Finger Print Failure.”

. . . . As soon as M. Roquette had left the room, Shirley changed from her comfortable Turkish trousers to her modified Bulgarian ecru eponge with the mackerel blue sash and the Nell rose guimpe, and a saucy little late-asparagus Poiret hat with marabout edging and stick-up of hard winter wheat.

“You will have to show a little speed,” she said to me, “if we intend to get to the cubist exhibit at all”

The next day, when the chief of Scotland Yard called up Shirley, I listened in on an extension in the bedroom, but only in time to hear Shirley say: “Ah, I thought so,” and then she hung up the phone.

Shirley Combs at once sent a message to M. Roquette. It was this: “Arrest Tal the Dip. He has the goods.”

“And now,” Shirley said to me when we had settled down to our books and chocolates once more, “I suppose you want to know how I discovered that Tal the Dip was the man. I don’t

¹²⁵ Written by Wex Jones for *The Morning Smile*. Cf. *Sherlock Holmes in America*. ed. Bill Blackbeard. New York: Harry Abrams, Inc., 1981. 113.

know myself: it was womanly intuition, I guess. At any rate, this is what happened: Chu Chu the Locomotive did not disappear; he died. From the report I learned that Tal the Dip was a close associate of Chu Chu. He had skinned the hand of his friend and put the skin upon a glove which he took care to wear when cracking cribs.

“Naturally, as Chu Chu’s finger prints were the only ones found near the job, attention was diverted from our friend Tal the Dip, who snapped Chu Chu’s fingers, as it were, under the noses of the French police. That is all. Simple, is it not?”¹²⁶

III. “A Pragmatic Enigma”: A Chapter from “The Failures of Sherlock Holmes” by A. Conan Watson, M. D.

. . . . The hand of our visitor trembled slightly as the marvelous deductive powers of Holmes unfolded themselves.

“Mummarvellulous!” he stammered.

“Now, what James can you be if you are not Henry?” said Holmes, “and what book have you written that defies the interpretation of the ordinary mind hitherto fed on the classic output of Hall Caine, Laura Jean Libbey and Gertrude Atherton? A search of the six best sellers fails to reveal the answer. Therefore the work is not fiction. I do not recall seeing it on the table of the reading room downstairs, and it is not likely, then, to be statistical. It was not handed me to read in the barber shop while having my hair cut and my chin manicured, from which I deduce that it is not humor. It is likely, then, that it is a volume either of history or philosophy. Now, in this country today people are too busy taking care of the large consignments of history in the making

¹²⁶ Written by “A. Cunning Gail” for the *Los Angeles Sunday Tribune*, April 27, 1913. Cf. *Sherlock Holmes in America*. ed. Bill Blackbeard. New York: Harry Abrams, Inc., 1981. 109-110.

that come every day from Washington in the form of newspaper dispatches to devote any time to history that was made in the past, and it is therefore not at all probable that you would go to the expense of publishing a book dealing with it. What, then, must we conclude? To me it is clear that you are therefore a man named James who has written a book on philosophy which nobody understands but yourself, and even you”–

“Say no more!” cried our visitor, rising and walking excitedly about the room. “You are the most amazingly astonishing bit of stupefying dumbfounderment that I have ever stared at!”

“In short,” continued Holmes, pointing his finger sternly at the other, “you are the man that wrote that airy trifle called ‘Pragmatism’”

Two hours later the streets of Boston were ringing with the cries of newsboys selling copies of the 5 o’clock extra of the Evening Gazoozle, containing a most offensive article, with the following headlines:

DO DETECTIVES DETECT?
A Gazoozle Reporter, Disguised as a Harvard Professor,
Calls on Sherlock Holmes, Esq.,
And Gets Away with Two Suit Cases
Full of the Great Detective’s Personal Effects,
While Dr. Watson’s Hero
Tells What He Does Not Know About
PRAGMATISM.¹²⁷

A Dark Saying

He believed in the company. And so when he met a stranger he thought to himself, “Are you my brother?”

¹²⁷ Written by John Kendrick Bangs for the *Sunday San Francisco Call*, May 31, 1908. In *Sherlock Holmes in America*. ed. Bill Blackbeard. New York: Harry Abrams, Inc., 1981. 101-103.

He believed in the brotherhood. I say he believed in it for there was no irrefutable evidence that it existed, at least not at first. But his mother—God rest her soul—she had taught him well. “Look at me: You don’t want this, this is not for the likes of you. No, you’re for something better.” Sometimes, though, when his mother was alone, or thought she was alone, he would observe her crying softly.

She was a “civil” servant: she cleaned and washed and did their chores, the jobs that they didn’t want to dirty their hands with. She never complained, although if others did she would sometimes allow herself to smile. And so in the hours of privacy permitted her, she urged him, entreated him, to study. “Learn the books, understand them,” she said, “and one day maybe you’ll write your own.” Once he asked her, “Why don’t *you* write a book?” to which she replied “Oh . . . I could never write anything.”

Their town had a modest library and she would take the boy there every week, regardless of her own schedule. And he would wander in the adult section, pulling volumes off the shelf, caressing them with childish hands. Looking over her bi-focals disapprovingly, the prim woman at the desk once chided, “these books are far too advanced for him.” And it was then that he observed flashes of his mother’s temper. “What does it matter,” she snapped at the librarian, “if he only reads two pages?” And that was confirmation of something that the boy already suspected: that some books were more difficult than others and to be guarded against those who could not understand them.

His mother fed him books, ones that he understood and ones he didn’t, and the boy grew. At first his grades for reading comprehension were merely adequate, but soon he discovered that if he said certain words, added them up in a particular way, then his teacher would smile and nod

her head. And if he didn't, she would frown and continue on to the next student, leaving him alone.

The smiling words were those of the teacher but arranged in a certain way so that they seemed to be other words. So it became a game of discerning the former and then thinly disguising them as if they were his own.

Eventually he realized that if he said enough of the smiling words he could say something his teacher truly did not understand and this was no longer frownable, but itself a sort of victory. She would move on to the next student, but with a smile, thinking perhaps that the young man was exceptional, that he said things that did not make sense to her, but made sense nonetheless. And in this way he learned how to be left alone without being rejected.

So in their provincial way, they picked him out as "special." And it heartened his mother to be told of his merit. "You love books, don't you?" she laughed proudly. The boy had friends that didn't love books, who said too many frowning words and not enough smiling ones. These boys and girls were destined to spend their lives making things with their hand or brains or some other body part. Through some secret mechanism the boy found himself in their company less and less.

He grew up reading the books and began to dread the day when he would have to stop. But he met a woman with hair in bun, who told him that the end that loomed before him wasn't really the end, and that there existed a sort of company that did nothing but read and talk about books, and not just any books, but the ones that were off limits to everyone else. "Why should there be a company devoted such things," the boy wondered. "Because," the woman reminded him, "not everyone does it as well. You are a part of the company already, but at a lower level. Those at the top read better than anyone else."

And when he told his mother what he had learned, she smiled and said that she knew of this company and its elite level and that, wonder of wonders, she had hoped that he would be a part of it all along. But that was all she knew about the elite—that they existed—and recognizing that she couldn't help the boy any longer, she sent him to the college library so that he might study their ways. What she did not know, and what the boy discovered, was that there were distinctions even amongst the elite, who were divided into “Apprentices, Journeymen or Fellows, and Masters.” And this comforted the boy because what he had imagined to be the end was not.

So he underwent the ritual (for in a certain sense, they were always the same) and each time at the end he received new books, more serious and appropriate. Indeed, that's how he knew that the ritual was over. But the end was always approaching, and this filled him with fear. For a worry had begun to grow spontaneously inside him, like worms in meat. “When the end comes,” he thought, “my bad words will no longer avail, for there won't be any other levels to justify them. The bad words will become simply ‘bad’ and not ‘misunderstood.’ They will be cause for frowns and demerits. But if I say only the good words, they will think me a parrot and that I really don't understand the books at all.”

One day, seemingly by chance, he discovered a volume that spoke of levels beyond the three, levels that the masses, and even many members of the company itself, were unaware existed. To be sure, the book simply mentioned the heterodox notion as a curiosity and then proceeded as if it were too fanciful to refute, but this was the first explicit mentioning of the secret levels that he had ever read.

So he searched for the man who had written the book. He found the impressive university address and sent the man letters. And when he received no reply, he sent more,

thinking the first to have been lost in the mail. Finally he gave up, embarrassed by such a display of childish zeal. “This man is either dead or beyond me,” he thought.

But one day he received a note addressed to him in tasteful lettering, written in expensive ink and on expensive paper. It was a letter from the man he had been seeking, asking why he had stopped writing. And he asked the boy, who by this point had become a young man, if he would like to meet.

Well, needless to say, the young man almost fell out of his chair and replied at once, saying of course he'd like to meet; if the man would name the time and place, he would certainly see him there. And the man wrote back suggesting that the young man join him for tea.

The young man had never tasted tea—at least not the sort that the café served—so having arrived a full thirty minutes early, he sat fidgeting in his chair, trying not to look nervous. When the man arrived, he was dressed in camel's hair and sweaters and tailored pants. He carried an umbrella although it was not raining outside. Having exchanged a courteous greeting, the young man thought he detected something foreign in the man's accent, but could not place it. He was, the young man imagined, “professorial.”

“I have so many questions I want to ask you,” the young man gushed, but his elder cut him off before he had a chance to ask them: “You're wondering, no doubt, whether the secret levels, more properly termed ‘the brotherhood,’ exist, yes?” And the young man shook his head dumbly, wondering at the discernment of the man. “But you already know the answer to this question, yes?” the professor continued. “Yes,” the young man stammered, “I know, I know that they do.” And then he made bold to ask, “are you one of the brethren?” And the man smiled and nodded, “Would I be here if I weren't?”

The young man could contain himself no longer, “But what do you study? There are no more serious books after the master level, but we show mastery by saying smiling words about increasingly serious books. What do the brothers study and how do they advance?”

“The body . . . he wants to talk to me of the body,” the man said to no one in particular and he paused and sighed dramatically at the folly of the youth, continuing only after an uncomfortable minute or two. “You perform rituals; indeed, that is how you have gotten this far: by knowing how to respond to your masters at each level. Is this not true?” Taking the young man’s silence as confirmation, the professor added, “Is it not possible, then, to study the rituals themselves?”

This was something the young man had never considered, and being unversed in this new science, he asked, “But then you mean to say that you don’t study books at all?” “What is a book?” the professor replied, looking up at the ceiling philosophically. “If you mean to ask whether there are books associated with our study, then I would answer ‘yes, we have our own books, although you won’t find them in *your* library.’ But if, on the other hand, you mean to ask whether our subject matter is some figment of a fevered mind—fleeting, disordered—then I would answer ‘no, we do not study books.’”

The young man did not understand, but blamed the failure on his own insufficient education. The professor, observing that the young man neither smiled nor frowned, continued, “Is order not the most beautiful subject? Is coherence not the most wonderful? And do we not study the most beautiful and wonderful subject? You have your answer.”

Turning conspiratorial, he looked around the café, which was empty now, and leaned in close to the boy’s ear, and he whispered, “You mean to tell me that you have been performing these rituals all along without ever asking what they mean?”

“I didn’t think they meant anything,” the young man blurted out, and he suddenly feared that the professor would see how ignorant he really was.

“They mean everything, my boy. They are the true meaning of these, uh, these *books* of which you speak. Amongst the higher brothers, there are rituals for the mastery of rituals, is this not wonderful? The rituals: they are the secret links, the fraternal bonds that connect the lowest pupil with the invisible masters. Every member of the company has his place in this series. Amongst the lower levels, there are rituals centering on books, but the higher brothers don’t master a certain group of books, they master the rituals themselves, and in so doing, the most exalted brothers have mastered all possible books. These men are *theoretical*, properly speaking. They are men whose eyes have been opened.”

The young man suddenly grew incredulous and objected with raised voice, “you speak as if there were no disagreement amongst the brothers as to what the rituals meant,” and he started to tremble, “but surely this cannot be, people disagree about what the books mean, why should it be any different for the rituals?”

“Does your right hand hate the hand that it shakes? Does the man who plays the role of devil disagree with the man who plays the angel? In a sense one might say that he does, but it is illusory. A brother might think he disagrees with another, but in doing so he affirms that this is his proper level and that he will ascend no higher. At a more exalted level, disputation is revealed for what it is: role-playing. Indeed, the illusion of disagreement would not be possible unless the brothers shared certain foundational assumptions. What you call ‘disagreement,’ *that* is the ritual.”

“But there are no women in the brotherhood,” the young man shrieked, to which the professor responded coolly, “Oh, some of the finest brothers are women . . .” And the young

man's head began to swim so that he could not follow what the professor was saying. But his words were no longer addressed to the young man, if indeed they ever had been, and the professor stared off into the distance, speaking to no one at all.

“One of the highest masters,” he said, “believes that he hates the company and its great order; indeed, he thinks that he produces works that are designed to confound that very order.” And the professor laughed a bitter laugh, choking slightly. “There's always room for this sort, as there is for the one who refuses to make books. But the most exalted master knows that he is nothing other than this order, that he is a role, and therefore he freely plays both the angel and the devil, he opposes and defends, all the while secure in the knowledge that nothing affects him, for he is the company and the company is him. There is a place for the man who says ‘nay,’ just as there is for the man who says ‘aye.’ There is a place for the makers and destroyers of books and there is a place for those who read them. Indeed, for the illuminated, the ritual sequence can be followed in either direction, so that the lowest levels are no less exalted than the highest. For instance, take your mother . . .”

And the young man shouted so loudly that the professor finally looked him in the face, “*My* mother has never been a party to this, she has never been nor will she ever be a member of your . . . your company.”

“*Your* mother is, as I was saying, one of our finest. From the panoramic perspective of the masters, the lower links are just as important as the higher. She, as you say, does not hold a publicly recognized position in our brotherhood, but in a sense, neither do the highest masters. Your mother—just a second, I have her name right here in my book—the late Mrs. MacLung often encouraged you to better yourself, did she not? Took you to the library, helped you with your

schoolwork, yes? Wept, even, because she could not be a part of our number. Poor woman, she did not realize that she was already one of us.”

“But I love books,” the young man murmured with head in hands. “You don’t really love books,” answered the other, “you love the company.”

“I hate this company,” the young man suddenly roared, starting up from his seat. “Hate it, then,” the professor said, “But you are still part of it. Kill yourself. It doesn’t matter, for your name cannot be blotted out from the book: the fraternal bonds are unbreakable. In so far as you ever had status, you will have it still, and you have always had it and always will. Your future, as they say, is secure.”

And the young man sank back into his seat and began to shake his head pathetically. After a moment, he asked, “Why are you telling me this?” The older man paused, as if the answer were self-evident, and then took out his fountain pen and wrote a reply. He pushed the paper toward the young man and it read, “Because a man should know his place.”

The young man looked at the paper and said nothing. He said nothing for the longest time, as the two men, the old and the young, sat in the café for what seemed like hours. Finally the young man, having worked it out, stood up and said, “You’re right. I do love the company . . . And I also hate it.”

The old man’s face came into focus for the first time, the wrinkles, the liver spots on the forehead, and the cold, cold eyes. “*Mind . . . your . . . tongue,*” he hissed.

But the young man walked through the door and disappeared into the night.

“The Vaudeville Philosopher”

A vaudeville philosophy of life is influencing the mental attitude and the actions of many Americans in their everyday activities . . .

There are certain standard subjects that are used almost every night on the vaudeville stages through the country. An audience, composed of many persons mentally fatigued after a day's work, learns a philosophy that embraces such precepts as: marriage is an unfortunate institution to which the majority of us resign ourselves; women are fashion-crazy, spend money heedlessly and believe that their husbands are fools; politics is all bunk, Prohibition should be prohibited; mothers are the finest persons in the world . . . next to grandmothers; fathers are unfortunate persons upon whom fall most of life's woes; marital infidelity is widespread; clandestine affairs of most any sort between at least one married person and another of the opposite sex are comical; and finally “nothing in life really matters. The main thing to do is to get all the money you can and keep your mother-in-law as far off as possible”

It is an easy undertaking to influence the minds of persons seeking relief from mental activity. They are in a state that finds them too mentally lax to resist what sifts into their thoughts while they are being entertained.

The number of self-reliant men “of settled convictions and so forth” in a vaudeville audience is probably as great as the number of Christ's disciples. But persons most desired for exploitation by the managers and actors are those with deficient knowledge and those who are impressed by the character of the source from which suggestions are communicated. They are numerous. Playing in vaudeville theatres upon these fatigued persons who have deficient knowledge and are easily impressed, it is a simple undertaking for an actor to present a joke and

cap it with the authoritative statement, “remember what Kipling said about a woman and a good cigar!” And, these things are done

Survey an audience in a theatre of the variety species, and you will see it almost instinctively act in concert. Vaudeville philosophers never heard the term “concerted volition” that is used by sociologists and psychologists, but they know in other terms they have seldom if ever been called upon to express, that the basis of all sympathetic like-mindedness is found in a predominance of prompt response to stimulus, emotionalism, imaginativeness, suggestibility, and the habit of reasoning from analogy. This explanation is the gist of the theory of concerted volition. And how satisfactorily the vaudeville laboratory furnishes the demonstrable proof?

What can be done to offset the expansion of this vaudeville philosophy? The vaudeville theatre cannot be obliterated like the saloon. It is an important amusement institution to several million Americans. And, like any institution, it evolves. But, will the evolution bring something healthy and valuable?¹²⁸

The scholar is he of all men whom this spectacle most engages. He must settle its value in his mind. What is nature to him? The astronomer discovers that geometry, a pure abstraction of the human mind, is the measure of planetary motion. The chemist finds proportions and intelligible method throughout matter; and science is nothing but the finding of analogy, identity, in the most remote parts. The ambitious soul sits down before each refractory fact; one after another, reduces all strange constitutions, all new powers, to their class and their law, and goes on for ever to animate the last fibre of organization, the outskirts of nature, by insight.

Ralph Waldo Emerson

¹²⁸ Written by Marshall D. Beuick, originally published in the scholarly theatrical journal *The Drama* 16 (1925): 92-93. Cf. *American Vaudeville as seen by its Contemporaries*. ed. Charles W. Stein. New York: Knopf, 1984. 329-332.)

The Body

“He’s missing a tongue, chief.”

The detective didn’t immediately answer, but instead folded his thin hands—the hands of a concert pianist—behind his back and assumed a dreamy, contemplative look. His subordinate scurried around the body, poking here, prodding there. The eyes of the dead man bulged from their sockets, as if they were ready to pop, and his lips were smeared with blood. But this ghastly sight did not interfere with the man’s examination. He nimbly searched the coat and pant pockets, turning up an empty, battered wallet and a dollar’s worth of coins. Lastly, he uncoiled the fists of the corpse, clinched tightly in death struggle, only to discover a crumpled rectangle of paper no bigger than a business card.

The policeman smoothed the card, and opened his mouth to alert the detective, but the latter had returned from his reverie, and nodding his head, as if satisfied with its results, he cut his subordinate off, “I’d say we have our cause of death then.” The younger man closed his lips and contracted his brow, wondering if he had heard his superior correctly, “But . . . uh, sir . . . there’s also the matter of his bowels.”

The detective wrinkled his nose distastefully and, as if aware of the man for the first time, he glared at the policeman out of the corner of his eyes. “Corporal,” he said in a discrete voice, “a man’s bowels are his own business.” “But he’s missing them,” the young man responded, almost simultaneous with the voice that called out from the brush. “Chief!” and here the voice cracked, “Got something over here.”

The younger man jogging ahead of his ambling chief, they left the corpse in the forest clearing and moved toward a spot behind and to the right of him, where the evergreens grew

closely together. “Right there,” a uniformed man said, clasping a handkerchief to his mouth with one hand while pointing out a steaming pile in the undergrowth with the other. The corporal knelt beside it and spoke excitedly over his shoulder to the detective, “that fixes the time of death, this must have happened only . . .”

“Nonsense,” the detective said, speaking over the man as his pianist’s hands flicked invisible particles from the shoulders of his overcoat, “Why the human body is capable of producing steam for days, give me twenty such bodies and their inner contents and I will drive a locomotive.” “No,” he continued as if in soliloquy, “this detail is suggestive, but not so much of the time of death as of the cause of death.”

Having pocketed his handkerchief, the third man chattered excitedly, “Yes, yes, the *cause*.” But the young corporal kneeling by the pile was not convinced, “the cause, sir?” “Samurai,” the detective continued, looking up into the pine canopy as the chattering man stood by his side, hanging on his every word (“Yes, yes, *samurai*”). But the young man did not understand.

“Good God, corporal . . . Samurai! Samurai!” and then, out of habit, the detective threw his delicate hands in the air in exasperation. “The feudal Japanese,” he began pedantically (“Yes, yes, the *Japanese*”), “would disembowel themselves with a sword when disgraced, a practice known as *Harry Carry* or *Sip-a-coop*. In a word, suicide—you are not ignorant of its history, I trust.” “*Suicide*,” the uniformed man mouthed in a sort of ecstasy. Regardless of how often he worked with the detective, the great man’s deductions never ceased to surprise.

Gaping, the corporal looked uncomprehendingly back and forth between the ooze below and the two men standing over him: “But there’s no weapon here, sir, he’d have had to done it with his hands.” “*Touché*,” the detective responded, impressed with his subordinate, “in which

case the wound would have been much more irregular.” “And the tongue,” the young man stammered, now unable to control himself, “the tongue!”

“Yes, yes, the tongue, what of it?”

“He’s missing it.”

“Quite right.”

“Did he rip it out before or after he Harry-Carried?”

“Before,” the detective snorted, thinking that perhaps the young man was not so intelligent after all, “otherwise, the pain of the Sip-a-coop might have caused him to cry out, summoning busy-bodies who would have tended him, against his intention.”

“In the middle of the woods, chief?”

“Touché,” the detective murmured with a smile, his original judgement validated.

Satisfied with his pupil, the detective began to hold forth while taking in every detail of the forest locale with his near-legendary, hawkish attention. He strode purposefully back to the body, the third policeman tripping at his heels, while the young corporal followed behind at a distance.

“Always be willing to reconsider your theory, corporal, let that be a lesson to you. On the basis of new evidence we must be willing to reevaluate. Constantly . . . continuously . . . ever reevaluating. Now, assuming that the man has committed suicide, how could it be the case that he lacks the fleshy protuberance commonly found in human mouths? Since no one else was involved, he must have been responsible for this wound. But this act could not have been voluntary, as you have so rightly pointed out. Therefore, it was severed involuntarily.”

The detective turned so quickly that he was almost bowled over by his trailing subordinate, who, much to the detective's consternation, actually touched the great man to steady himself. Extricating himself rather daintily from the uniformed man, he continued.

"Now, do we know of any condition wherein a man might involuntarily sever his own tongue. Hmmm? Indeed, we do gentlemen, we—or if not all of us, then I at least—know of the condition called *grand mole* epilepsy. Typically, sufferers fall into seizures, and if nothing is placed in their mouths, they will bite off their own tongues. The man suffered a seizure before he committed this act, and when he came to his senses, he committed suicide rather than live a tongueless life."

"Not the first time I've seen it," the detective said in a low voice full of pathos, and then reaching out past the uniformed man, who looked on jealously, he patted his corporal on the upper arm with the tenderness of a father: "I've seen it before. You'll see it again corporal, you'll see it all in this business." Pondering his assistant's bright future, the detective turned away so that the young man might assimilate this warm courtesy in private.

Having accomplished this, the young man said, "Sir, I don't mean to nitpick, but wouldn't he have been too incapacitated to tear out his innards with his bare hands or with any other instrument, if shortly before he had suffered a seizure of the sort you describe? And one would expect to find the tongue on his person somewhere if this were the case?"

Sensing an opportunity to one-up his competition, the uniform sighed dramatically and, catching the detective's eye, rolled his own toward the young man in disbelief.

"I'll take your second question first," the detective responded. "We would expect so, but when you say 'on his person,' you fall into false dilemma. You suggest that either the tongue would be around the body somewhere or else the man did not sever it in the way I propose. But

these are not the only two options, for the tongue may be ‘on his person’ in the sense of being ‘in his person,’ if you follow. I have no doubt that a thorough inventory of the man’s stomach will discover the missing tongue.”

“But sir?” the corporal blurted out, unable to let the issue rest.

“Yes, what is it now?”

“Wouldn’t . . . wouldn’t he be incapable of committing suicide if he had fallen ill?”

“Your grasping now, corporal. Whether he fell ill before disemboweling himself or after is of no concern—the order does not matter in the least. What does matter is that these things have happened.”

Still vaguely unsatisfied, the young man turned over the deadman’s card, which read “Equity NOW!” in bold letters with “Actor’s Equity Association” printed underneath. And summoning his reserves for one more attempt, he spoke very slowly, “Chief, the man left no note, nothing to tell us why he would have done this. Why would a man kill himself in such ritualistic fashion without giving us a reason? Doesn’t that strike you as a bit strange?”

“Not really,” the detective responded, “he was holding his tongue.”

Short Film

Title: Strikers, Communists, Tramps and Detectives

INT. The sitting room of the Mitchell Mountain Ranch in Helen, Georgia. – Near Dawn

Scene 1

The cast and crew of the movie *Feud Girl* have arrived in town to film another mountain feud movie.¹²⁹ Although such on-site filming is relatively novel, the feud sub-genre is almost cliché in 1916. A group of actors, weary and drunken for the most part, are arranged in repose, lounging or sitting on the comfortable sofas and reading chairs of the resort hotel. Hazel Dawn, star of several Broadway sex farces and comic musicals including the wildly popular *Pink Lady*, sits among them, sober as befits a good Mormon. She is alert and erect, reddish-blond curls arranged neatly, and plump cheeks flushing their trademark rosy hue. With mixed results, she is attempting to concentrate on her book, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Valley of Fear*. The group surrounding her, mostly composed of youngish men, are busy preening for Hazel, attempting to be witty. One man is standing in the middle of the actors, having paused to deliver the punchline of his story.

George Majeroni (dramatically): "Not really," the detective responded, "he was holding his tongue."

(The crowd of actors erupt from their seats all at once, as if the sitting room had suffered a spasm. One man, in the act of draining a highball, chokes on his drink. Hazel Dawn, alone, retains her previous posture, although the left corner of her mouth raises either in a smirk or grin. She does not look up from her book.)

¹²⁹ Plot description of *Feud Girl*: "The classic tale of feuding families is the basis for this silent film. A transportation company wants to buy Iron Mountain in Georgia but can't get the pair of warring families who own it to agree on a price. A young surveyor at the firm, Dave Rand (Irving Cummings), offers to go down and negotiate with the two clans, the Haddons and the Bassetts. Rand is actually one of the Bassetts, but he ran away because of the feud. Changing his name is apparently enough to keep anyone from recognizing him, and the Haddon girl, Nell (Hazel Dawn), falls in love with him without even realizing that they were childhood sweethearts. Marlowe (George Majeroni), the company's vice president, tells the head Haddon, Judd (Hardee Kirkland) that if Nell marries a Bassett, it will end the feud. Judd likes the idea, but Nell balks and insists that if she has to, she will marry her cousin Luke (Arthur Morrison) to avoid marriage to a Bassett. Luke and Rand end up battling for Nell's hand and Rand wins. They marry, but when Nell finds out that she's been tricked, she leaves him, childhood sweetheart or no. They are reconciled by the last frame, and a child is on the way to complete their happiness." (Garza, Janiss. "Feud Girl." New York Times Movie Archive. http://movies2.nytimes.com/gst/movies/movie.html?v_id=91222.)

(The crowd divides roughly into two groups: those who think that George is a charming rogue and those that . . . well, those that don't.)

The first group (various shouts): Give us another! Majeroni, Majeroni!

The second group (variously): Honnnestly. Sit down! That's hilarious, simply hilarious, George.

(A group unto himself, one actor, who also happens to be the most inebriated person in the room, looks over at Hazel, rolls his eyes languidly toward George and makes a rather awkward drinking motion with his right hand and arm to indicate that Majeroni is tipsy.)

George (talking over the dying murmurs of the crowd): It's true. It's all true. (He shakes his head, delighted at his story.)

Irving Cummings (trying to ingratiate himself to Hazel): Jesus, George . . .

Hazel (without looking up): Don't blaspheme.

Irving: . . . Hazel doesn't want to hear that stuff.

Lenore (between drags of a cigarette): What about me?

George: What about you?

Irving: Yes, of course . . . you don't want to hear it either.

George: All I'm saying is that's the gist of it. They found him slit like a pig, with his tongue ripped out by the roots.

Hazel (without looking up): Jesus, George.

Irving (making a show of taking control): Wait a minute, wait a minute . . . does anybody here actually *know* this?

George: I just told . . . *I* know it. Bing, did you or did you not tell me that that's the way they found him.

Fred (Bing) Thomson: Well, I said something to that . . . well, he says to me earlier in the day he says, stomach, throat [whistles slowly], so yeah, I said something.

Hardee Kirkland: I don't know what that means.

Lenore (exhaling a gray cloud): Who has the Bing-to-English dictionary?

George: Ignore the groundlings, Bing. Is you or is you not my source?

Bing: That's what I said, and I already said it.

George (sighing): Bing, concentrate . . . just blink twice if the answer is "yes".

Bing: Why's blinking the answer when it's already answered, got it, you gotta problem?

A chorus of laughing actors: Asked and answered Majeroni! move on.

George: Someone roll Bing on his back . . .

(The same drunken actor nudges Hazel and rolls his eyes toward Bing, downing his imaginary drink.)

Irving: Who was the man, anyway? Was he a local?

George: I'm not sure . . . probably. You know how Zukor likes to hire locals to fill up a scene. Says it gives the picture flavor, "verisimilitude."

Irving: Well if he's looking for a "very simple" flavor then he's certainly getting it. These people couldn't act their way out of a . . .

Lenore: If I didn't know any better I'd say you were a snob.

Irving (trying to think of something witty): . . . out of a

George: Zukor hires them *because* they don't know how to act. They're natural, when they sweep a porch it's like they're really sweeping. What'd he say? . . . oh yeah, see these mountain people are unspoiled, untouched by time. Uh . . . the simple truth of the . . .

Irving (still searching): . . . a, uh . . .

George: The simple truth. See everything they do—every gesture—it’s natural. They don’t know the story, but they just do what they’re told and don’t ask any questions. Man says “now what I’m gonna need you to do is to sweep this porch, but sweep it as if you were *really* sweeping it. Yes, that’s right, a little more wrist action, yes, now you’ve done your chores and you’ve done them well, so now you’re gonna nod, yes, that’s perfect, and put the broom back in its place, *like you’re really doing it now*. Perrrrfect. That’s a wrap, who want’s lunch?”

Irving (almost inaudible): . . . a paper sack.

Hazel (having shut her book): You’re saying they don’t know they’re acting.

George: That’s exactly what I’m saying, they’re like children. Bring up a bucket from the well, fantastic, see they don’t know they’re playing . . . well, wait a minute . . . (becoming confused) I mean they know they’re playing but they, uh, they don’t know anything about the picture, they don’t care about how it all fits together.

Hardee: How *does* it fit together? Everything’s out of order—the first thing they do is live happily ever after.

George: Yes, but they don’t care. They’re not bot . . .

Hazel: That’s ridiculous—you’d think these people had no idea what a movie was. Who do you think we’re making these movies for?

George (irritated): They’re not bothered by interruptions, and it’s a good thing that I’m . . .

Irving (changing his tune in response to Hazel): Yeah, I thought they said this place was isolated.

Hardee: It is.

Irving: What do you mean “it is,” it’s got a road, dry-goods, churches and bars, we’re sitting in a resort hotel.

Hardee: Well yeah, but the road’s impassable.

Irving (sensing a chance to redeem himself): But we’re here.

Hardee: Right, but the road’s impassable.

Irving: Listen to me: *we* are here. How’d we get here if the road’s impassable?

Hardee (unwilling now to concede): Well, it’s practically impassable.

Irving: I don’t know what you mean by “practically.”

Hardee (face reddening): You know—for all intents and purposes.

Irving: Oh, for all intents and purposes.

Hardee: Yeah, it’s impassable in that sense.

Irving (cocking an eyebrow at Hazel to emphasize his victory): Oh, in that sense.

A chorus of actors: Be quiet! Honestly!

(The drunk nudges Hazel and starts to roll his eyes only to be cut off by her.)

Hazel (curtly to the drunk): Yes, I know. Thank you. (And then ignoring the two men and their squabble): So who was that man hanging around the set? He certainly wasn’t one of the locals.

(Slightly wounded, the drunk nudges the actor on his other side and rolls his eyes toward Hazel, downing his imaginary drink)

Arthur Morrison (having awakened from one of his “catnaps”): Yeah, he had that raincoat

buttoned up to his Adam’s apple, like he was gonna catch his death in this, what do they call it, “invigorating” mountain weather.

Irving (thinking all of Hazel's questions are addressed to him): I don't know, wasn't he an actor?

George: Noooo, that was no actor. Hat pulled down over his face, no sir . . . whoever heard of an actor afraid to show his face.

Lenore: Do you think he was involved with the murder?

Arthur: Murder?!

Lenore (patting him on the hand): There, there. Go back to sleep.

George: Bing, did you talk to that man?

Bing: Talking's not right because talking's not yelling, so no, I didn't for one minute, there wasn't any talking to it.

Hazel: Well, who was he?

Irving: Yes, who was he?

Bing: Man was in frame, I said "hey . . . out! out!", and yelling wasn't doing, like he's deaf, and I just about . . . well I did it and was just about to do it. Get . . . out . . . of . . . the . . . shot! Just like that, and he did it because he better do it.

George: Well said, Bing.

Arthur (feeling his wits return): He may have been from another production house.

Hazel: Why do you say that?

Arthur (with pseudo-discretion): Well . . . and I don't know if everyone here knows this . . . but our esteemed producer Mr. Zukor has been accused of arson.

Irving: What?!

Arthur: That's right. John Mangum told me that when they tried to open a theater outside of Atlanta, it went up in smoke one night. No one knows how exactly, faulty wiring,

whatever. But the thing just went up in a blaze, and there was talk that Zukor might have been involved.

Irving: I don't believe it.

Lenore: I do.

Irving: He wouldn't do something like that.

George: Oh, babe in the woods—of course he would. Zook makes money, that's what he does, that's all he does. You stand in his way and see what happens.

Arthur: Well, he can't make money without us, and if he doesn't start renegotiating contracts, he's going to find out what it's like to make a movie without actors.

Irving (rolling his eyes): Here we go again . . . there's an anarchist among us.

Arthur: Anarchy, hah! Man, I'm talking about a union, I'm talking about strikes, or at least the threat of strikes. That's the only way we're going to get a fair shake.

George: You think your shake has been unfair?

Arthur: I know it has. How many times have you gotten called into an office—here or vaudeville, it's all the same—how many times has a man with a cigar . . .

Lenore: Remember what Kipling said about a woman and a good cigar.

Arthur: . . . how many times has he called you into his office . . .

Bing (to Lenore): Who's Pickling?

Arthur: . . . and said "oh, by the way, we can't pay you for this week, the box office is down. Next week'll be better."

Lenore (to Bing): Kip-ling.

Arthur: Riiight, depend upon it. We're cattle to them, man, indentured servants, and they do with us as they damn well please.

Irving: Well . . . we don't do it for the money.

Arthur: Speak for yourself, that's exactly why I do it . . . why do *you* do it? Or are you an artiste? See that's what I'm telling you, they fill your head full of all this high-minded shit—you're bringing high culture to the people, you're above all this, *you* don't need to worry your pretty little head about something so vulgar as money.

Hazel: "Famous players in famous plays."

Arthur: Riiiiight . . . Shakespeare, the Passion, Faust: respectable plays, full of high-minded ideas and refined sentiment. Players with clout, and plays with gout.

Hazel: "Feud Girl" must be one of the lost classics.

Arthur: Exactly, see they—and Zukor in particular— they talk a good game, "Oh, yes, the people will enter the theater for the stars, but they will leave ennobled," but that's all it is, I mean, don't you see that "respectability" is just a, uh, . . .

(Arthur and Lenore simultaneously)

Lenore (through her cigarette): A pickle. Arthur: . . . a carrot.

Bing: Kip-ling, not "kickle."

Irving (assuming a slightly more positive stance): So what's your solution?

Arthur (looks at Irving and then at Hazel and smiles): Riiiiight. I told you already, we need to band together, join Equity. *You* don't have any objection to banding together, do you Irv?

George: We've tried already, five years ago . . .

Arthur: Five years ago they weren't making zillions distributing movies all over the country. Five years ago Paramount didn't exist.

Lenore: Well, your man who don't work so well was a union man. George says they found an Equity card on the body. Does that tell you anything?

Arthur (taken aback by her sudden sincerity): What are you saying?

Lenore: I'm saying that if Zook is as ruthless as you seem to think, and if this union can wield the sort of power that you suggest, any one of us is liable to turn up without a tongue. Especially if he talks as much as you.

George: Jesus.

Lenore: I'm serious Arthur, you need to be careful what you say, and where you say it.

Hazel (returning to her book): The walls have ears. And don't blaspheme.

(Bing gets up and exits the scene. The rest of the actors fall silent and eye each other warily, except for Hardee, who has been stewing since his defeat at the hands of Irving.)

(Screen goes black.)

Hardee's voice: The road *is* impassable . . . In certain respects.

Scene 2

[Dark screen] George's voice: What are you reading there?

[Scene begins abruptly]

Hazel: The same book that you're supposed to be reading.

Arthur: That's the one about the Mormons?

(The drunk blubbers something about "avenging Danites.")

Lenore (elbowing Arthur in the ribs): No, that's *A Study in Scarlet*.

George: So we're back at the beginning, who was the chap in the raincoat?

Hardee: What would Sherlock Holmes do in our situation?

Hazel: He'd solve the mystery.

George: Well, not quite the beginning . . . Everything's out of order.

Irving (leaping into action): I'd say that man was a Pinkerton's agent, the Scotland Yard type macintosh, the way . . .

Hardee: The Pinkertons don't wear a uniform. That's the whole point . . .

Irving: As I was saying . . . the way the man was killed.

George: What do you mean the way he was killed, what's that got to do with it?

Hardee: . . . what's the point of a *private* detective agency if they wear uniforms?

Irving (ignoring Hardee): You mean to tell me, learned friends, that you do not know the masonic oath, "if I betray the brothers' secrets, let my throat be slit and my bowels be removed and scattered to the wind?"

Hardee: . . . That doesn't sound right either.

George: Well so what, that's the way the masons dispose of a problem, but you said our man was a Pinkerton.

Irving: Friends . . . [he throws up his thin hands]

Lenore: . . . Irving, honestly . . .

Irving: . . . everybody knows that Pinkertons is run by the masons. Pinkertons, the masons; the masons, Pinkertons—why they're practically one and the same.

George: So you're saying that's why they killed him, because he betrayed some sort of masoni . . . uh, excuse me, crypto-Pinkertonian secret.

Arthur: Jesus, George, listen to the man, the Pinkertons are union busters.

Lenore (sarcastically): yeah George, everybody knows that. They bust unions for chrissakes.

Hazel: Arthur's right, you know . . . or rather you would know if you had done your homework assignment (she winks at George). It's all here in the Sherlock book, the second half's based on the Molly Maguire case.

Irving (eagerly): You mean the case in which James McParlan infiltrated a group of Pennsylvania miners, whose union served as a front for the criminal activity of a clandestine Irish society, the Molly Maguires; the case in which after posing as one of their number, under the name McKenna, he gathered evidence against the higher members of the secret society which led to their arrest and execution?

Hazel (pausing): Uh, yes.

Lenore (looking around): Are there cue cards in here?

Hardee (under his breath): Someone knows his lines.

Lenore (whispering): Someone's in love.

Arthur: The Pinkertons specialize in infiltrating trade unions . . .

Irving (annoyed at Arthur for hogging the spotlight): Anarchists.

Arthur: . . . TRADE Unions, and gathering information for the bigwig moneymen. Now do we know any such wigs,

Mr. Zook for instance, someone who's not afraid to send a message?

Hardee: Hey, speaking of, has anyone here read Allan Pinkerton's book . . .

Irving: That is not what we were speaking of.

Hardee: . . . about the strikers? Huh? Catchy title: *Strikers, Communists, Tramps and Detectives*.

Arthur: Four people Allan Pinkerton will never be confused with.

Lenore: Unlike yourself.

Irving: What are you saying, man, Allan Pinkerton is *the* detective, “crime itself has become more scientific. It is, to many, a matter of study how they can possess themselves of the property of others . . .

George: My god, he’s quoting Pinkerton from memory . . .

Irving: . . . to meet these new challenges a new detective must emerge, a man of considerable intellectual power (eyeing Hazel) . . .

George: . . . he’s an idiot-savant of bad writing.

Lenore (raising her glass sarcastically): To the *new* man.

(The drunk having awakened from his stupor misunderstands the situation and raises his glass, mumbling something about “Newman.”)

Hazel: It is a good book, though.

Irving (slightly disappointed): You’ve read it?

Hazel: Especially the parts concerning the tramps.

Irving: Oh, yes . . .

Hazel: Of course you’d think that Pinkerton *was* one the way he goes on and on about the, uh, . . . “vagabond life.”

Arthur: We’re all tramps here, that’s what Zukor and the rest think of us.

George: Speak for yourself, Arthur.

Arthur: Don’t you go town-to-town, telling your little stories and acting your little parts? Hoping that someone will throw you a dime? You’re a tramp.

Hardee: But I seem to remember Pinkerton saying that the tramps were behind the unions.

Irving: I thought it was the Irish.

George: Same difference.

Hardee: What I'm saying is that Hazel's right. (Hazel looks directly at him and blushes.) It's strange that he waxes on about them because he's the man the businessmen hire to get rid of them. That's his bread and butter—the unions—getting the goods so they end up on the end of a rope.

Irving (not liking that blush): Those people are anarchists, though . . . communists [unsure of his terminology]. Tramps aren't anarchists.

Arthur: Well what are they then, smart-guy, if they're not supporting the order and they aren't against it?

Lenore (exhaling smoke): They're daemons. The tramps.

George (under his breath): Finally, an insider's perspective.

Irving (patronizingly): Well, they may be dangerous, Lenore, but they aren't demons.

Lenore: Not demons, daemons. You know, "Wailing for her daemon-lover?"

Irving: What in heaven's name is she talking about?

George (muttering): Mommy's little helpers.

Arthur: Man, you guys just don't get it, do you? I'm telling you, *WE* are the tramps. But we're gonna get ourselves one of these unions, and then things are gonna be different.

Lenore: Be quiet, Arthur.

Arthur: Or what?! . . . If Zukor himself were here . . .

George (feeling ornery): What would you do?

Arthur: Look I'm just saying that we need a union in order to get what's coming to us. You can't just work these people to the bone and then . . . I'm serious, god dammit it, we're going to form a union and then we'll see what's what. Things are gonna be different . . .

George: You keep saying that . . .

Arthur: . . . I mean they can't keep doing these things . . .

George: . . . but what does it mean?

Arthur: . . .fucking us over like that, and they *won't* do them if we can say, "If you do X, we're going to strike, and then we'll see how good the box-office is."

Hardee: Well, who needs a movie a week, nobody's gonna care.

Arthur: That's where you're wrong, they'll care because we give them something they need, something they can't do for themselves.

Irving: Communist propaganda.

Arthur: Man, I don't even know what communism is. I just know what's right and what's wrong, and this ain't the former.

George (having had enough): Hey Art, you know what happens to those tramps when they fall asleep on the tracks? Or don't you know any real tramps? Huh? Railroad men? . . . They could teach you something because those tramps don't have any place to go, so they squat together under railway trusses, with a little half-ass fire, and they aren't singing or dancing a jig, or any of that shit. They may be drinking but that's because they're miserable. And when they get enough of that cheap liquor in 'em they stumble around and fall asleep on the tracks. Well, those tramps that you love so much, they don't have railway time-tables in their pockets, they don't know when that locomotive's coming until they hear the whistle and see the lights. Only when your drunk on some shit wine, you don't see so good, you don't hear so good. Get the picture? See they can't stop. You couldn't stop a ten-ton locomotive if you wanted to, and by the time that engineer sees a bundle of rags on the tracks, he *can't* stop. Only thing he can do is blow that whistle. But your blessed tramp can't hear so good, so that locomotive cuts through

him like he wasn't even there, doesn't even hardly slow down. And when your tramp wakes up, well . . . he don't work so well anymore, he's going to be looking for his bottom-half, but it doesn't mean a damn thing to that engine. You think a union's going to change that? They will plow through us, and not think twice.

Arthur: Well if they're so goddamn secure, why are they sending raincoats out to keep an eye on us?

George: *You . . . don't . . . know . . . they sent him..*

Arthur: The hell I don't, I know it. What else could he be?

George: He could be anything. I don't know . . . the stiff might not have even worked on this film. You keep talking like you know all the angles, but it's just hearsay. They may . . .

Arthur: Who's they?

George: . . .they may—some rival movie house . . . yes, don't shake your goddam head, you said it yourself. One of the other ones may have gotten tired of Zukor running the show so they find some stiff . . . in fact, you know where you can find a stiff any day of the week? Down under the railway trussle. That's right, one of your brothers will be down there stiff as a fucking board any day of the week if you care to go look.

Hazel (speaking for everyone): What's your point, George?

George: My point is that they can get a dead body easily enough. They dress him up, they disfigure him, plant some stuff, and make it look like he . . .

Arthur: Jeeesus!

George: . . . MAKE IT LOOK like this guy working on the movie got murdered, they call the flies at the press and there's buzzing, there's pictures in the paper—it looks bad for Zukor.

That's the way these people fight it out. And that is just as likely as the damn Pinkerton megabrain with their labcoats and their scientific young men.

Arthur: So fingerprint the corpse for chrissakes, that'll solve the whole thing.

Hardee: Fingerprints can be faked.

Hazel (trying to restore order): So who's the man in the macintosh?

Hardee (to himself, philosophically): Circles and swirls, everything circles.

George: He's the one hired to make this movie look bad . . .

Hazel: Not that we need any help.

George: . . . and I tell you what, five bucks says that there hasn't even been a murder.

It's just advertising, gents.

Hardee (after a moment of silence): So it's like the book, right?

George: What?

Hazel: He hasn't read it, Hardee.

Hardee: The Sherlock book . . . that guy gets killed and they dress him to look like Douglas. Yeah, but there they were faking Douglas's death so that they could throw off his pursuers. Here they're trying to round up pursuers, you see what I mean, they're trying to put people on Zook's trail.

Irving (grandly): What do you think Hazel?

Arthur: Riiight. What does Irving think, Hazel?

A chorus of actors (mocking Irving): Goddess Sophia! Dark Helen!

George: Yeah, what do you think Ms. Hazel, or should I say, Mrs. Grewell.

Hazel (temper suddenly flaring): That is *not* my name.

George: Hazel, have you considered that your married name will be Hazel Grewell.

(The drunk cackles loudly, startling the rest.)

Irving: Cut it out, George.

George: Hazel Grewell: sounds like something monks eat.

Arthur (under his breath): Lucky monks.

The peanut gallery (variously): (Sing-song) Give us a clue-ell Mrs. Grew-ell. Don't be cruel. She receives so many roses that we need to hire a mu-elll.

(Excited by the sudden uproar, the drunk slurs his way lasciviously through an ancient nursery rhyme): Ride a cock-horse, to Banbury Cross, to see a fine lady upon a white horse, with rings on her fingers and bells on her toes, so she will have music wherever she goes.

Chorus of actors: So she will have muuuusic, wherever she goes.

Hazel (having returned to her book): That's funny. Unfortunately, I'm surrounded by Shetland ponies.

(Hardee bursts into laughter. He and Hazel exchange blushes.)

Lenore (stubbing out her cigarette): You people are dumber than a sack of hammers.

George: Seriously, Hazel, have you set a date?

Hazel: Mr. Grewell and I have an understanding. He knows that I won't marry him until I quit the theater, but he also knows that I will never quit the theater until I have done something meaningful. So you draw the conclusion.

Irving (not liking all the blushing): Well, if *Feud Girl's* any indication, he's going to be waiting a while.

Hazel (under her breath): Yes, he will.

Arthur (putting two and two together): Wait a minute . . . riiight.

Hardee (to Arthur): The conclusion is that she won't marry him until she has done something . . .

Arthur (cutting him off): I *know* that!

Lenore (raising her glass to Hardee and Arthur): To the new man.

(The drunk mutters something about having known Newman well.)

Arthur: Surprise, surprise: things are starting to become clearer. Mr. Grewell is not a young man anymore, if I'm not mistaken?

Hazel: You're not, surprisingly.

Arthur: And Mr. Grewell is a very wealthy man, yes? The owner of a mine?

Hazel: He has resources.

Arthur: And you, as America's sweetheart, are surrounded by a bevy of attractive co-stars?

Hazel (laughing charmingly): A, uh, . . . Okay, for the sake of argument.

Arthur: Seems to me that this points in a certain direction, does it not? Hmmm? The man in the macintosh? With all due respect, perhaps Mr. Grewell sees the temptation . . .

Hazel: But Mr. Grewell has seen all of you.

George (pouncing): Wait just a minute, Arthur. What happened to all that talk about the man being a union-buster?

Arthur (laughing not-so-charmingly): But that's exactly what I'm saying.

Irving: So now the theory is, if I have understood its complexities, that the man in the overcoat was not connected to the murder. Even though the man shows up and 'bang' someone's dead.

Hardee: Well, just because something happens *after* something else doesn't mean . . .

(The conversations devolve into a swarm of arguments: Irving against Hardee, Arthur and George, Arthur and Irving, etc. The drunk is yelling something incoherent that approximates: “Come on, MacDouglas! Settle thy studies!”)

Lenore (jumps out of her seat): You’re all out of order! Now ‘shush’ at once! . . .

(Amazingly, the arguments die down, as Lenore stares down each actor individually.

The actors mutter and look at the floor.)

Lenore: Blooming, buzzing confusion, that’s what it is. State of nature, indeed. Hobos!

Irving: Anar . . .

Lenore (cutting him off): Not another word . . . You’re all a bunch of naturals, everything you do is natural. (In the manner of George) Now what I’m gonna need is for you to sit silently, but like you’re *really* doing it now . . .

(Screen goes black.)

Lenore’s voice (low and erotic): Perrrfect.

Scene 3

(Black screen) Hardee’s voice: This is the hardest part.

(Scene begins abruptly.)

Irving: Where did Hazel go?

George: Oh, she probably snuck off to read that dirty book.

Irving: What dirty book?

George: You know, that *Ulysses* book.

Arthur: That’s the one about masturbation.

George: I don’t know that it’s *about* anything.

Lenore (to Arthur): I'm surprised you haven't read it.

Arthur: Hey . . . mock if you must, but it burns off calories. How do you think I keep in shape?

George: Art's watching his girlish figure.

Irving: Zukor's watching everybody's figure. You know what he said to Hazel . . .

Lenore: Irv . . .

Irving: . . . he said that she had put on a few pounds, bad for business, the "Pink Lady" mustn't be too plump.

Lenore: This from a man who considers bacon a food group.

George: That's what they said about that Joyce book—somebody wrote that it was "obese."

Hardee: Substantive?

Arthur: Well, the critics will whip it into shape.

(Hazel reemerges, looking paler than usual. Within the past few months, she secretly has begun to take purgatives.)

Lenore (knowing what Hazel has been doing, catches her eye and mouths): Are you OK?

Hazel nods at her and blushes.)

George: Hazel, we were just talking about that Joyce book you've been sneaking.

Hazel: Sneaking?

George: You know they say that he taunts his admirers, "Who was the man in the macintosh?" You don't know, do you?

Hazel (recovering a bit): What a strange thing to be concerned about . . . of course that man has many strange ideas.

Arthur: Like what?

Hazel: Well . . . about Mormons for one. He thinks we're, uh, well, Irving could probably tell you.

Irving (searching his memory): Uh, well . . . he, uh . . . tends to . . .

Hazel: He calls us 'anarchists.'

Arthur: I thought they were all Irish.

George: That settles it, the Mormons are behind the unions. (Laughing) Hazel Dawn, Labor Agitator.

Irving (suddenly irritated with Hazel): Well, it is a fact that the insignia of the Pinkertons is the all seeing-eye.

Hardee: Ralph Waldo, Union Buster.

Lenore (bursts into laughter): Remember what Kipling said.

(George laughs in the manner of someone who has no idea of what's being said.)

Hazel: Your point, Irving?

Irving: Well, that was also the insignia of Joseph Smith's elite unit.

Hardee (to himself): That doesn't sound right.

Lenore: Leave it to Irving to want to talk about "elite units" . . .

George: Hazel, I've wanted to ask you this . . .

Lenore: . . . or, in his case, "effete units."

Hardee (to Lenore): "when highbrowisms are slipped into programs accompanied by modified jazz, they 'go.'"

George: Is it the case that Mormons believe that a woman must be married in order to get to heaven?

Hazel: Oh, for goodness sake. Shush, George.

George: Well, I just read somewhere . . .

Hardee: Books badly used.

Hazel: I don't know how these things get started. I'm a good Mormon but I'm not worried in the least.

George: But then I also read that the higher secrets are off-limits to women. And even those who know them would be, uh, officially dissuaded from revealing them.

Irving: Officially . . .

George: Dissuaded, like our man was dissuaded in the forest.

Lenore: Now you're saying . . . wait, what are you saying?

George: That they—you know, the priesthood—take an oath not to reveal the higher secrets on pain of . . . [he draws a finger across his throat]. Ring any bells?

Hazel: No.

George: Well, what happened to our man, that's what happens to informers.

Hazel: That's ridiculous.

Irving: But it is the case that a man can achieve godhood and that he will call his wives to him . . .

Hazel: Irving—and this is the last time I'm going to say this—we do not advocate polygamy. Read the manifesto of 1890.

Irving: I'm just saying that it *has* been thought that a man had to call his wives in eternity

lest they be unable to awaken to paradise.

(Hazel says nothing. She looks at Hardee, who rolls his eyes toward Irving, and she smiles.)

Irving: I'm just saying . . . Look does God have a wife, or not? Of course he does, and not just one according to your elders. She's the number one wife, to be sure, but he's got one for every day of creation.

George: Hey, you think those wives ever slip out on him, huh? You know, do they ever take a liking to the other gods—again all according to the elders—or do they ever look at a mortal and say well there's a good looking young man . . .

Arthur: Or young woman.

George: He's a good looking young man, that miner or professor: yeah, he's a swell looking fellow, I think I'm going to have a little thing with him, and oh, the heavenly father doesn't have to know anything about it. Hey, isn't that the old theological argument, if he's omnibenevolent then he's not omniscient and whatever . . . maybe he doesn't know what his wives get up to.

Arthur: Maybe he's not omni-capable.

George: What the heavenly father doesn't know won't hurt him.

Arthur: Actually most marriages break up over money. Infidelity is a symptom and not the cause.

Hazel: Well, you seem to have all the answers.

Hardee (to Hazel): I think there is a god-dess. And that she has many lovers, and the identity of the lovers is always changing, but their number remains the same.

Lenore (raising her glass to Hardee): To Adonis and Osiris.

Hazel (remembering the Pinkerton book): “It is also a noteworthy fact that, while the great body of tramps always holds its own and never suffers diminution to any extent, that the members of the fraternity are never for any given period the same persons.”

Hardee (picking up): “They come and go, appear and disappear; but, once a tramp, they are always the tramp in feelings and sympathy. There is always this nucleus of a brotherhood, and, as it takes but little time to secure standing amongst them, your presence is ever welcomed and your absence never regretted . . .”

Hazel (to Hardee): “for, should you desert your tramp-fellows, there is always an amateur ready to take your place, who will shortly become quite as proficient as yourself.”¹³⁰

Hardee (to Hazel): This is the hardest point.

Irving (jealous anger flaring): Why, there’s nothing to it. You’re not *doing* anything . . .

Hazel (still gazing at Hardee suggestively): Irving doesn’t understand juxtaposition.

George: So, the man . . .

Lenore: In the woods . . .

Arthur: In the macintosh . . .

George: Where’s Sherlock when you need him?

Arthur: Getting his fix.

Lenore: The “white lady.”

Hazel: Rings on her fingers and bells on her toes.

George: A man is dead, we *know* that much.

¹³⁰ Pinkerton, Allan. *Strikers, Communists, Tramps and Detectives*. New York: Arno Press and the New York Times, 1969. 51-52. Earlier, Pinkerton associated the mendicant life with the “disposition of women to create disorder” (21), noting in the following pages that “tramp” women are “physically and mentally the equals of their husbands” (27)

(Silence, broken by a gasp from Hazel)

Arthur: Mystery solved!

George: Who was he, Hazel?

Hazel (laughing to herself): Oh, that's good.

Chorus of actors: Come on, Hazel! Take a bow!

(But Hazel doesn't say anything.)

Arthur (irritated): So we're just supposed to sit here, whacking off.

Lenore (to Arthur): Like you're *really* doing it, now.

(Enter Bing, out of breath, seemingly from out of the wall itself.)

Lenore: Here's our messenger.

(Various groans and sighs: "Where the devil did he pop out of?!" Everyone foresees much babbling.)

Bing: The man in the macintosh is no man at all. He is a woman and has done murder.

The precious heirloom that should have passed from mother to daughter: the man in the woods stole this legacy from his sister, stole it although protected by the law. But his theft has not gone unpunished, for he has been unmanned. And her righteous act will not go unpunished, though her birthright be reclaimed.

(Irving and Art simultaneously)

Irving (disappointed): But that doesn't have anything to do with us.

Arthur (whining): The unions . . .

Lenore (stubbing out her cigarette): Well said, Bing. I'm glad she did it.

George: How could anyone have foreseen that?

Lenore (lifts her glass): To the new man!

(The drunk raises his glass, sloshing his drink, and slurs something about “Woman!”)

Hardee: Everything’s out of order . . . Hazel, did you know?

(Hazel, staring into his eyes, shakes her head and smiles like a cheshire cat.)

George (belligerently): Well, *what* did you . . . what do you know?!

(Screen goes black.)

Hazel’s voice: I know who the man in the macintosh is.

Exit to the song “Everything in its Right Place” and this quote on the screen:

Did it ever occur to the scholar, or average reader of the best literature, how much is due to what has been treasured up from those trappings of men who have, alone and unknown, but possessed of this liberty-seeking, country-loving spirit, turned tramp and thus got very close to nature and her secrets? Think it over, and then exalt the inquisitive, vagabond tramp through all ages and in all countries.

Allan Pinkerton¹³¹

Detecting the Man in the Macintosh

“What are we here for at all? I really think that you might treat us with more frankness.” Holmes laughed. “Watson insists that I am the dramatist in real life,” said he. “Some touch of the artist wells up within me, and calls insistently for a well-staged performance. Surely our profession, Mr. Mac, would be a drab and sordid one if we did not sometimes set the scene so as to glorify our results.”

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle *The Valley of Fear*

Frankness often must be sacrificed in order to set the scene, but sometimes honesty itself can be a dramatic strategy. I am neither a student of Joyce, nor a literary critic *per se*. One might say that I am doubly an outsider when it comes to the vast body of critical scholarship devoted to *Ulysses* and the infamous mystery of the man in the macintosh. Nevertheless, in classical mysteries the most occult relationships are often in “plain view” from the beginning, and so the outsider may enjoy the most privileged position of all.

The Scottish philosopher James Mackintosh¹³² would have approved of these admissions, for one of his most important essays, concerned with an intractable literary mystery of his own time, proceeds in a similar way. The authorship of the *Eikon Basilike* became a critical problem of the first degree almost immediately after the execution of its purported author, Charles I.¹³³ Over the years the venomous struggle between Puritan and Royalist partisans subsided, but the enigma, which more and more came into focus (magnified more and more) as a purely literary puzzle, continued to attract the attention of “ingenious writers” and to amuse “idle readers.” Having introduced his essay with these remarks, Mackintosh turns to the opening question of why his contemporary nineteenth-century audience should be concerned with such a puzzle—the question of its limited “utility.” In response, the philosopher frankly admits that he himself has sought its solution for entertainment, for surely “amusement itself is an advantage” and worthy of pursuit.¹³⁴

But Mackintosh was a subtle writer, especially in his discussion of “idle” literary detectives and the *Eikon*, whose enormous popularity amongst all strata of seventeenth-century, English society was said to be “Idol worship.”¹³⁵ One gets the sense that the exquisitely detailed arguments of his essay, which attempt to refute the king’s claim to authorship on the basis of later remarks Charles II and his entourage, also illustrate a point about discovery, method, and the philosophical mode of Francis Bacon. For the influence of Bacon is clearly felt in

¹³¹ *Strikers, Communists, Tramps and Detectives* 27.

¹³² Professional philosophy seems to have forgotten Mackintosh, even though as a member of the British intellectual community in general and Wordsworth and Coleridge’s circle in particular, he was important enough to warrant commentaries by De Quincey, Macaulay, James Mill, and Hazlitt, among others.

¹³³ Cf. Knachel, Philip A. Introduction. *Eikon Basilike: The Portraiture of His Sacred Majesty in His Solitudes and Sufferings*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell UP, 1966. xi-xxxii.

¹³⁴ “A Refutation of the Claim on behalf of King Charles I to the Authorship of the ΕΙΚΩΝ ΒΑΣΙΛΙΚΗ.” *The Miscellaneous Works of the Right Honorable James Mackintosh*. Philadelphia: Carey and Hart, 1846. 82.

¹³⁵ Cf. the anonymous refutation *Eikon Alethine. The Portraiture of Truths Most Sacred Majesty Truly Suffering*,

Mackintosh's framing remarks and their concern for "particulars" and the "minutest parts" of history, even if such a focus seemingly comes at the expense of more generalized, theoretical claims. No one would care about these generalities, he seems to say, if not for the small, engaging riddles. Our interest in them is like that of an enthralled bystander at the trial of Mary, Queen of Scots, examining the case for and against her. And it is fortunate that we can be so enthralled, so emotionally engaged, instead of treating this detective work as a means to an extra-literary end or as an occasion to wax philosophic on the "deeper" theoretical concerns. Indeed, fortune itself seems to be an issue for Mackintosh in his opening paragraph, for this emotional engagement of the scholar seems almost "wisely ordered" for his or her benefit.¹³⁶ Perhaps the "fortunate" scholar alone is in a position to solve such riddles.

These introductory remarks strike me as felicitous because our own intractable mystery, the man in the macintosh, seems connected to questions of luck and chance, as well as to "literary history" in the Baconian sense. Mackintosh opens an essay on Bacon with a passage from his *Advancement of Learning* in which he identifies literary history as "a just *story* of learning." Such a history, the philosopher claims, does not yet exist, which is unfortunate since it would "make learned men *wise* . . ."¹³⁷ Were it to exist, literary history would be uniquely suited for these enduring riddles, for in a sense the detection of textual relationships would be its subject matter, its "solution" a story about the *experience* of discovery.¹³⁸

Though Not Solely (London, 1649), sigs. A2-A3v. Quoted in Knachel xxi.

¹³⁶ Mackintosh 8.

¹³⁷ *The Advancement of Learning*. Ed. Stephen J. Gould. New York: Modern Library, 2001. 73-74. Passage quoted in Mackintosh. "On the Philosophical Genius of Lord Bacon and Mr. Locke." *The Miscellaneous Works*. 17. All italics are mine.

¹³⁸ Mackintosh's remarks put me in mind of Ralph Waldo Emerson's *The American Scholar*, delivered less than ten years later in 1837: ". . . Every day, men and women, conversing, beholding and beholden. The scholar is he of all men whom this spectacle most engages. He must settle its value in his mind. What is nature to him? . . . The astronomer discovers that geometry, a pure abstraction of the human mind, is the measure of planetary motion. The

My first exposure to the macintosh mystery came while reading Frank Kermode's marvelous work *The Genesis of Secrecy*, in which he describes M'Intosh as a "drab" enigma, itself a rather mysterious description. In Kermode's discussion of the various contexts in which M'Intosh appears, I was struck by one in particular, the unexpected appearance of the man at Paddy Dignam's funeral. "Where the deuce did he pop out of?" Bloom asks; "he wasn't in the chapel, that I'll swear" (*U* 6.826-27).¹³⁹ For entirely unrelated reasons, I happened to be reading *The Valley of Fear* at the same time as Kermode's book and remembered a very similar phrase in that novel, which was published in 1914 during the first years of Joyce's work on *Ulysses*.¹⁴⁰

Holmes and Watson are called to a moated manor house in order to consult on a murder investigation in which a man presumed to be John Douglas is found dead in his office. It turns out that the body discovered in the office with its face blown off is not Douglas's at all, and that he has been hiding in a secret room connected to the office. Having solved the mystery, Holmes calls him forth from his secret hiding place and the other characters are amazed. Inspector

chemist finds proportions and intelligible method throughout matter; and science is nothing but the finding of analogy, identity, in the remotest parts. The ambitious soul . . . goes on forever to animate the last fibre of organization, the outskirts of nature, by insight." *The Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*. Cambridge: Riverside Press, 1883. 86-88.

¹³⁹ *U* designates *Ulysses*. Numbers before and after the period identify chapter number and line number respectively. Joyce, James. *Ulysses: the Corrected Text*. ed. Hans Walter Gabler. New York: Random House, 1986.

¹⁴⁰ As far as I can tell, almost no one has discussed a connection between Conan Doyle and Joyce, much less the specific one made in my essay. William Jenkins claims an almost absolute priority in *The Adventure of the Detected Detective* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1998). Introducing this work, which elaborates more or less convincing allusions to Conan Doyle in *Finnegans Wake*, Jenkins writes that "among all the commentators on Joyce, only Hugh Kenner has made a comparison with the works of Doyle" (1). Since he himself mentions references made in passing by other commentators, Jenkins evidently means that no one has focused on this connection. Kenner's essay, on the other hand, seems to have much bigger fish to fry and confines itself to a very general correspondence between the Holmes-Watson and Dedalus-Bloom relationships. But Jenkins isn't entirely correct, for Samuel Rosenberg's *Naked Is the Best Disguise* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1974), which is both enjoyable to read and almost impossible to summarize, includes a chapter on Joyce and Conan Doyle (80-116). Interestingly, Rosenberg admits that his first reaction to discovering a connection between the two writers was one of "severe intellectual discomfort," presumably because of Conan Doyle's low-brow status, as well as a sort of "loneliness" or self-doubt, given that only Kenner had remarked on the influence of Conan Doyle on Joyce. In any event, Rosenberg is concerned mostly with Conan Doyle's *A Study in Scarlet* in this respect, as well as his own

MacDonald, one of the policemen investigating the case, exclaims: “If you are Mr. John Douglas of Birlstone Manor, then whose death have we been investigating for these two days, and where in the world have you sprung from now? You seemed to come out of the floor like a jack-in-box” (*VF* 211-212).¹⁴¹

Certainly the phrasing here with its mild oath—“where in the world have you sprung from now”—recalls Bloom’s question in *Ulysses*: “where the deuce did he pop out of?” The contexts in which the questions are asked also bear a certain similarity. In each case, someone appears unexpectedly and seemingly from out of nowhere at the location of a dead body.

By itself, of course, this similarity is not particularly persuasive, but it sparked my interest, especially when I considered that M’Intosh’s presence at the funeral increased the number of mourners to thirteen or, as Bloom describes it, “death’s number” (*U* 6.825-26). On a whim, I counted the number of characters associated with John Douglas’s death. A man writing under the pseudonym “Fred Porlock” alerted Holmes and Watson to the impending murder, which, at least initially, was thought to have been orchestrated by Holmes’s arch-nemesis, Professor Moriarity. Along with Holmes and Watson, the murder is investigated by three policemen, White Mason, Inspector MacDonald, and Sergeant Wilson, and they are assisted by the local physician, Dr. Wood. Within the manor house, the housekeeper Mrs. Allen and the butler Ames are the only servants that see the body, and Douglas’s friend Cecil Barker and his wife Mrs. Douglas are the first to discover the murder. These are the only characters concerned with the corpse lying in Douglas’s office, and they number twelve. When John Douglas emerges

experience of discovering relations between Conan Doyle and a host of canonical writers.

¹⁴¹ *VF* designates *The Valley of Fear*. The following numbers indicate page numbers. Conan Doyle, Sir Arthur. *Sherlock Holmes: The Complete Novels and Stories Volume II*. New York: Bantam Books, 1986. 147-290.

from his secret hiding place and reports that in self-defense he had killed the man presumed to have been Douglas, the number of characters associated with the body increases to thirteen.

I mentioned that the gruesome corpse found in Douglas's office had been shot in the face. It turns out that he was shot with a sawed-off shotgun, and the force of the discharge rendered his face unrecognizable, which is why the policemen don't realize that the man is not Douglas. The detectives are struck by the peculiarity of this weapon, especially since its powerful blast is so noisy that it would have alerted everyone in the house. And needless to say, when Douglas, the man they presumed to have been shot, later reappears alive and well, they are duly shocked. Compare this now to the "Circe" chapter in which Bloom shoots M'Intosh with a cannon, (*U* 15.1565) only later to observe the man downstairs taking his coat and hat, "which," as Kermode says, "understandably makes Bloom nervous."¹⁴²

Now all this is well and good, I thought, but it ignores that which is most obvious about the man in the macintosh, namely that he wears a brown raincoat. Strangely enough, an overcoat plays an important role in the Conan Doyle novel. The dead body actually belonged to a man who, with the secret help of Moriarity, had come to England to take revenge on Douglas. He had been seen around town wearing a yellow overcoat, but after he is shot in their struggle, Douglas removes the man's coat and clothes, dresses the body in his own robes, and puts the coat and clothes in a sack, which he submerges in the moat that surrounds the house. The other detectives, having received a description from the locals, fruitlessly scourer the surrounding area for a man wearing a yellow overcoat, but Holmes, suspecting a ruse, discovers the "sopping" bundle in the moat (*VF* 209). Earlier, the moat had been described as being fed by a small

¹⁴² Kermode 51. After shooting the man in the macintosh, Bloom performs a series of miracles during which he takes on the countenance of Sherlock Holmes by contracting his face.

stream, “so that the sheet of water, though turbid, was never ditchlike or unhealthy” (*VF* 165).

And after Holmes asks about this “turbid” water, we are told that it is always this color because “the stream brings down the clay” (*VF* 176). If the bundle containing the yellow overcoat was soaked through by the muddy water of the moat, however, then the contents of the bundle would have been stained. Indeed, wouldn’t the overcoat be brown since it had been sunk to the bottom of such water?

Regardless, this doesn’t mean that the overcoat in question was a raincoat, but there are other details that point in this direction. Drawing our attention to the yellow coat, Holmes says, “The clothes are commonplace [. . .] save only the overcoat, which is full of suggestive touches. Here, as you perceive, is the inner pocket prolonged into the lining in such fashion as to give ample space for the truncated fowling piece. The tailor’s tab is on the neck—‘Neal, Outfitter, Vermissa, U. S. A.’” Vermissa, the detective adds, is a “flourishing little town at the head of one of the best known coal and iron valleys” (*VF* 209).

Charles Macintosh, from whom the macintosh raincoat takes its name, first developed his waterproof fabric in 1822 while researching ways to use the by-products of coal-gas. He discovered that the conversion of coal tar into pitch produced naphtha, an essential oil also called “coal oil,” and that naphtha constituted an excellent solvent for india rubber. Treated with this oil, the flexible rubber could be insinuated between two layers of fabric, rendering the fabric waterproof.¹⁴³ With some improvements, Macintosh’s method continued to be preferred until World War I, when a water resistant material was created that would allow for more ventilation.

¹⁴³ Macintosh, George. *Biographical memoir of the late Charles Macintosh, F.R.S., of Campsie and Dunchattan*. Glasgow : W.G. Blackie, 1847. 82ff. Full text available from *The Making of the Modern World: The Goldsmiths’-Kress Library of Economic Literature*, an online database made available by the University of Georgia Law Library.

Indeed, as late as the turn of the century, almost any raincoat was referred to as a “macintosh.”¹⁴⁴

So the fact that the previously mentioned yellow overcoat was produced in an area known for its coal would make sense if it were a macintosh raincoat, given the importance of coal and its derivatives to the preferred process of waterproofing.

To be sure, the yellow overcoat was described as “short,” while the first macintosh coats were full length, but by the later part of the nineteenth century, short raincoats were in demand by hunters and other sportsmen, as well as bicyclists.¹⁴⁵ A contemporary advertisement from a popular American periodical makes the point plain enough:

Bicyclists, riders and hunting men have heretofore been unable to ride without great discomfort in rainy weather. Messrs. T. W. Stemmler & Co., who are the agents for the only genuine “macintoshes,” are just introducing “macintoshes” built like the short covert coats so popular with riding men. These [. . .] enable a man to take a spin on his wheel, or a gallop on his favorite hunter, on the rainiest day.¹⁴⁶

Certainly Douglas’s would-be assassin, riding his bicycle from the neighboring village to the manor house with a sawed-off shotgun hidden within his coat, would have need of such a garment, lest an English deluge foil his hunt.¹⁴⁷ And while the overcoat technically did not belong to Douglas, it was so connected to the mystery of his identity that Holmes said the following:

¹⁴⁴ Schoeffler, O. E. *Esquire's encyclopedia of 20th century men's fashions*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1973. 150-152.

¹⁴⁵ With an almost kabbalistic vigor, Sherlockians have determined the events of the Douglas mystery to have taken place sometime between 1887 and 1889. Cf. *The Annotated Sherlock Holmes*, vol. 1, ed. William S. Baring-Gould. New York: Clarkson N. Potter, Inc., 1967. 475, 498. If correct, this dating would coincide more or less with the introduction of the short macintosh raincoat in America, which perhaps would warrant the exceptional interest in the yellow overcoat with its uncommon, “suggestive touches.”

¹⁴⁶ *Outing*, an *Illustrated Monthly Magazine of Recreation* (1885-1906); May 1889, 14, 2. Available to participating libraries from *The American Periodical Series Online 1740-1900*.

¹⁴⁷ The color of the overcoat itself may be significant. Charles Macintosh wrote a letter to R. W. Barton discussing the possibility of using his waterproof varnish as a “mordant for topical colours.” The first color he mentions in this connection is yellow, which could be produced by using “patent yellow, (a very common paint).” Cf. Macintosh 82 ff. In turn-of-the-century America, the so-called “oil slicker” seems only to have been available in two colors: black

When I found the suit of clothes in the moat, it at once became apparent to me that the body we found could not have been the body of Mr. John Douglas at all, but must be the bicyclist from Tunbridge Wells. No other conclusion was possible. Therefore I had to determine where Mr. John Douglas himself could be, and the balance of the probability was that with the connivance of his wife and friend he was concealed in the house which had such conveniences for a fugitive, and awaiting quieter times when he could make his final escape. (*VF* 212)

If not decisive, the possible connection between the brown raincoat of M'Intosh and that overcoat associated with the mystery of Douglas seemed provocative at the least and by the end of my research, something more. But perhaps at this point it's best to take Holmes's advice and consider the history of the strange manor house with its secret room, for this history itself is associated with Joyce's *Ulysses*. Having purchased a small tract, Holmes tells his fellow detectives:

Well, I won't read it verbatim, since you feel so strongly upon the subject. But when I tell you that there is some account of the taking of the place by a parliamentary colonel in 1614, of the concealment of Charles for several days in the course of the Civil War, and finally of a visit there by the second George, you will admit that there are various associations of interest connected with this ancient house. (*VF* 204)

It is the fact of Charles's concealment in the house that makes the detective suspect the secret room in which Douglas is hiding. In principle, I suppose that this could have been Charles I or his son Charles II, but it's fairly clear that Holmes is referring to the latter. After his defeat at Worcester, Charles II made his way out of England, pursued doggedly by Cromwell's men. During this amazing flight, the king disguised himself in rags as a commoner, traveled under assumed names, and was given shelter in various homes, often within secret rooms.¹⁴⁸

or a bright shade of yellow. Cf. Schoeffler 150-152.

¹⁴⁸ Cf. Pearson, Hesketh. *Merry Monarch: The Life and Likeness of Charles II*. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1960. 46-74.

Given the connection between Conan Doyle's John Douglas and the concealment of Charles II, it comes as no surprise that Bloom himself is reading about the monarch. After providing a list of volumes lining his bookshelves in the "Ithaca" chapter, Bloom asks the reader to put them in order, and an examination of this list reveals *A Secret History of Charles II* hiding amongst the others (U 17.1367). Bloom's shelf also includes a book by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Stark Munro Letters*, (U 17.1375) a thinly disguised autobiographical work.

For those, like me, who are impressed with numerical coincidences, *The Stark Munro Letters* is said to have been checked out by Bloom from a public library on May 21, Whitsun Eve. This date is provocative, given that Conan Doyle was born the following day on May 22.¹⁴⁹ And the book was checked out in 1904, a year that also saw the first publication of the stories that would form *The Return of Sherlock Holmes*.¹⁵⁰ A decade earlier, Conan Doyle seemingly had killed off his detective and Professor Moriarity in the "The Final Problem," but amidst popular outcry he wrote this series of new stories in which Holmes, like John Douglas, springs forth again, his previous death being explained away.¹⁵¹ Apparently taken with this volume, Bloom hasn't returned the Conan Doyle book on time, and it is overdue by thirteen days, "death's number."

The *Letters* are purported to be the correspondence between Stark Munro, a young doctor and Conan Doyle's stand-in, and "his friend and former fellow-student" Herbert Swainsborough

¹⁴⁹ In respect to the due date, Samuel Rosenberg also sees a connection to Conan Doyle: "Coincidentally, Doyle's story *Cyprian Overbeck Wells*, from which (I believe) Joyce borrowed the 'parody of English authors' idea for his *Oxen of the Sun* chapter in *Ulysses*, takes place on the date June 4 (1886)—the same day the 'borrowed' Doyle book was due at the Dublin Public Library." *Naked is the Best Disguise: the Death and Resurrection of Sherlock Holmes*. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1974. 109.

¹⁵⁰ Published in *The Strand Magazine*.

¹⁵¹ In 1901, Conan Doyle published another Holmes mystery entitled *The Hound of Baskervilles*, but the events of the story are said to occur before the demise of the detective in "The Final Problem." This is also the case for *The Valley of Fear*, which, although it was published in 1914, relates events that supposedly occurred toward the end of

during the years 1881-1884.¹⁵² Munro works in a mining village (a detail that will become significant) and is attempting to write his first novel. Conan Doyle's first Sherlock Holmes novel was written while he was still a doctor and was first published in 1887. It seems no stretch to say that Conan Doyle's fictional counterpart is engaged in writing the novel that would introduce Holmes to the world.

Regardless, in respect to the *Letters* Conan Doyle writes that he received and edited this correspondence, but did not author it. Supposedly, he simply arranged the letters written to the fictional Swainsborough, who provides this introduction in the front matter:

The letters of my friend Mr. Stark Munro appear to me to form so connected a whole, and to give so plain an account of some of the troubles which a young man may be called upon to face right away at the outset of his career, that I have handed them over to the gentleman who is about to edit them. There are two of them, the fifth and the ninth, from which some excisions are necessary; but in the main I hope that they may be reproduced as they stand. I am sure that there is no privilege which my friend would value more highly than the thought that some other young man, harassed by the needs of this world and doubts of the next, should have gotten strength by reading how a brother had passed down the valley of shadow before him.¹⁵³

The "valley of shadow," of course, is the "valley of death." Is it also "the valley of fear"? Yes, for the title of Conan Doyle's later novel is taken from a middle chapter in which a character, having falling in with a criminal society, says the following,

I was a criminal then, part sharer in a murder, lost forever in this world and lost also in the next [. . .] Look down the valley! See the cloud of a hundred chimneys that overshadows it! I tell you that the cloud of murder hangs thicker and lower than that over the heads of the people. It is the Valley of Fear, the Valley of Death. The terror is in the hearts of the people from the dusk to the dawn. Wait, young man, and you will learn for yourself. (*VF* 255-256)

the 19th century. The *Return*, on the other hand, features the reappearance of Holmes after seemingly plunging to his death at the end of "The Final Problem."

¹⁵² The *Stark Munro Letters* was published in 1895, barely two years after the "The Final Problem."

¹⁵³ Conan Doyle, Sir Arthur. *The Stark Munro Letters*. New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1895.

So here is the gist of all this. First, Bloom reads a work by Conan Doyle, checked out the day after the novelist's birthday, in the year suggesting the return of one of his characters from apparent death. Second, the main character of this book, who for all intents and purposes is Conan Doyle, works on his first novel during the years that preceded the publication of Conan Doyle's first Sherlock Holmes novel. Third, the dedication of the volume that Bloom has checked out looks forward to Conan Doyle's *The Valley of Fear* in which the character John Douglas, thought to have been murdered but actually concealed within his manor house, is described in ways that parallel Joyce's M'Intosh. And fourth, another of Bloom's library books, *A Secret History of Charles II*, suggests the very room in which Douglas has been hiding. Either these connections are coincidental in the extreme or Joyce is very much concerned with Conan Doyle as an author, *The Valley of Fear* in particular, and the mystery surrounding the apparent death and re-emergence of John Douglas.

Let us return to Conan Doyle's novel and the M'Intosh episodes in more detail. After the murder is solved by Holmes, Conan Doyle rewards us in the second half of the book by telling the story of the man known as Douglas. I'll get to the particulars of that story in a minute, but there are a couple of things to note right away. First, the man was an American by birth and had lived in that country before coming to England. In America, he had courted and married a beautiful woman, Ettie Shafter, who later died of typhoid in California. After her death, he worked a mining strike in a "lonely ca on" and continued to mourn his lost wife even after he remarried years later in England (*VF* 288). Again the connection between these details and the man in the macintosh cannot be ignored, for in the "Cyclops" section, it is said that M'Intosh

“loves a lady who is dead,”(U 12.1497-98) while in the “Oxen of the Sun” chapter he is described as “walking Mackintosh of lonely canyon” (U 14.1552-53).¹⁵⁴

Of the many strange things said about M’Intosh, one of the strangest is in the “Nausicaa” chapter where he is said to have “corns on his kismet” (U 13.1061-62) Kermode mentions that this proverbial phrase may mean “is famous for being unlucky.”¹⁵⁵ This seems rather inexplicable on the face of it, but again this description seems to parallel Conan Doyle’s depiction of Douglas. After emerging from his hiding place, Douglas describes his desperate flight to Europe: “I guess I’d fight through it all right on my own, my luck was a proverb in the states about ‘76. I never doubted that it would be with me still” (VF 213). In both cases, the characters are said to be famous for their luck. Of course unlike M’Intosh, Douglas suggests that he was famous for his *good* luck. But through no fault of his own, he has become the enemy of the criminal genius Moriarity, and there’s nothing more unlucky than that. Indeed, even after the failed assassination at the manor house, Moriarity’s thugs pursue Douglas to the ends of the earth, finally dispatching him over the rails of an ocean liner off the coast of South Africa. Despite the fact that Douglas knew nothing of Moriarity, he unwittingly crossed the one criminal from whom escape was impossible. That, I submit, is having corns on one’s kismet.

¹⁵⁴ An alternative trajectory: De Quincey begins his long essay on the works of James Mackintosh noting two editorial errors made by the philosopher’s son. The first, an error of the press that he failed to catch, describes Charles VII as the king of Sweden, instead of Denmark. But the more important error, on which De Quincey expounds at length, concerns the identification of a mysterious philosopher, whom Mackintosh describes but never names. Looking to solve the mystery, De Quincey suggests that this eccentric, “singular character” is none other than “*Walking Stewart*” (i.e. John Stewart), who left England and circumnavigated the globe. A stranger in own land, he sought “a soil more kindly, and a climate more hopeful, for metaphysical growths,” although his metaphysics seems to have had a peculiar materialistic bent. Cf. “Glance at the Works of Mackintosh.” *The Collected Writings of Thomas De Quincey*. Vol. 8. London: A. and C. Black, 1897. 127-128. Similar to the man in the mackintosh, who is likened to the comic tramp Dusty Rhodes, Stewart himself was described in an obituary by *London Magazine* as a both a man of the common people and a veritable hobo. Cf. Editorial Note. *Collected Writings*. Vol. 3. 119.

¹⁵⁵ Kermode 50.

Also suggestive is that after returning to the M'Intosh question a final time (*U* 17.2066) Bloom puts out his candle in the "Ithaca" chapter and is reminded of another mystery: "Where was Moses when the candle went out?" (*U* 17.2070). It just so happens that an extinguished candle plays an important role in Conan Doyle's *Valley*. One of the first details alerting Holmes to the greater mystery surrounding John Douglas was the fact that the room in which the corpse was found contained a candle that had been put out shortly after Douglas had entered the room. The candle establishes a time limit for the events that occurred before the man's death in the office, but it also casts doubt on the entire story that Cecil Barker and Mrs. Douglas have told the detectives concerning the discovery and identity of the body. Indeed, it is one of the first details to do so, as Holmes seizes on it during his initial interrogation of Barker.

"There was one small point," remarked Sherlock Holmes. "When you entered the room there was only a candle lighted on the table, was there not?"

"Yes, that was so."

"By its light you saw that some terrible incident had occurred?"

"Exactly."

"You at once rang for help?"

"Yes."

"And it arrived very speedily?"

"Within a minute or so."

"And yet when they arrived they found that the candle was out and that the lamp had been lighted. That seems very remarkable."

Again Barker showed some signs of indecision. "I don't see that it was remarkable, Mr. Holmes," he answered after a pause. "The candle threw a very bad light. My first thought was to get a better one. The lamp was on the table; so I lit it."

"And blew out the candle?"

"Exactly." (*VF* 187)

All of the previous similarities between M'Intosh and Conan Doyle's John Douglas can be seen without delving into the details of the second half of *The Valley of Fear*, but in order to establish the ones that follow, I need to say a few words about the genesis of this section. The man that the English know as John Douglas went by the name "Birdy Edwards" in America. He

was a Pinkerton's agent hired by businessmen to infiltrate the Eminent Order of Freemen in the coal-mining district of Pennsylvania. Behind a cloak of respectability, the inner sanctum of the lodge is actually responsible for various strong-arm tactics in the area, including intimidation, murder, and destruction of property. Birdy assumes the name "John McMurdo" in order to infiltrate the group, formed almost exclusively, it seems, of Irish-Americans. Although he appears to participate in their nefarious activities, McMurdo secretly attempts to forestall those schemes and gathers evidence against the higher members of the brotherhood. His efforts result in the capture, conviction and execution of most of those members. Afterwards he assumes another name, "John Douglas," and flees with his new wife Ettie first to Chicago and then to California, fearing retribution. As mentioned earlier, Ettie dies in California, and Douglas makes a fortune along with his new friend Cecil Barker working in the "lonely ca on" (VF 288). Unable to shake his pursuers, he sails to England and settles down in the manor house with a new wife.

It is well known that Conan Doyle's story is based almost entirely on the events surrounding the Pinkerton's Private Detective Agency and its investigation of a secret society known as the Molly Maguires in the great coal territory of Pennsylvania.¹⁵⁶ Indeed, Conan Doyle had met Allan Pinkerton's son William during a transatlantic crossing in which he related his father's account of the Mollies.¹⁵⁷ The miner unions of Pennsylvania supposedly were

¹⁵⁶ The *Annotated Sherlock Holmes* simply takes this as a fact without need of further justification: "Sir Arthur Conan Doyle never tried to keep it secret that he had based Part II of *The Valley of Fear* on Allan J. Pinkerton's book, *The Molly Maguires and the Detectives*, published in 1877 in New York by G. W. Carleton and Company" (521).

¹⁵⁷ Cf. Broehl, Wayne. *The Molly Maguires*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1964. 153. and Horan, James. *The Pinkertons: The Detective Dynasty that made History*. New York: Bonanza Books, 1967. 499. According to Horan, who quotes the former general manager of Pinkerton's Ralph Dudley, William Pinkerton was incensed by Conan Doyle's novel: "W. A. P. raised the roof when he saw the book. At first he talked of bringing suit against Doyle but then dropped that after he had cooled of. What made him angry was the fact that even if Doyle was

controlled by this secret organization, born in Ireland and carried to America by the immigrants who worked the mines. Although the unions seemed legitimate, they were a front for the criminal Maguires, who carried out violent attacks on the mine owners and others who opposed the unions and their designs.

Allan Pinkerton was hired by businessmen to infiltrate the Maguires and Pinkerton selected James McParlan, who under the name “James McKenna” insinuated himself amongst the group, gathering evidence in the same way that John Douglas (aka McMurdo) does in Conan Doyle’s novel. Douglas’s love interest, Ettie Shafter, is based on a woman named Mary Ann Higgins, whom McParlan courted so that, according to his later testimony, he could keep more intimate tabs on the Mollies. Her brother-in-law, James Kerrigan, was the Tamaqua “bodymaster” and the highest ranking Molly in that area.¹⁵⁸ Amazingly, McParlan’s cloak and dagger work was successful and resulted in the trial and execution of several Mollies. Pinkerton and the few associates who knew of McParlan’s mission and secret identity referred to him by the codename “Mac.”

Now all of this is rather interesting in relation to the man in the macintosh—the secret identities, the confusion regarding names. In Conan Doyle’s novel, the agent Birdy Edwards assumes the name “McMurdo” and later on, “John Douglas.” And in the historical story on which it is based, McParlan assumes the identity of “McKenna” or simply “Mac.” Someone, in Joyce’s novel, is known to the characters as “M’Intosh” or “macintosh,” although this probably isn’t his real name. When M’Intosh in the “Circe” chapter springs up through a trapdoor in the floor—remember the description of John Douglas coming out of the floor like a jack-in-box—he

fictionalizing the story, he didn’t have the courtesy to ask his permission to use a confidential discussion for his work.”

accuses Bloom of being what Bloom had taken *him* to be, namely M’Intosh (*U* 15.1561). Does this not suggest the undercover Pinkerton’s agent (Douglas’s “McMurdo” or “Mac”) suddenly fingering the Mollies, who had taken him to be one of their number?

Consider also the fact that in the same section M’Intosh accuses Bloom of being “Higgins, that notorious fire-raiser,” (*U* 15.1561-62) the very name of the woman that Douglas’s historical model, McParlan, courted in the Maguire case, the woman whose family was implicated in the arsen and dynamiting carried out by the Mollies. It may seem strange for M’Intosh to have accused Bloom of being a woman connected to the Maguires, but in fact the members of the rural secret societies that sprang up in Ireland during the occupation were well known for dressing in women’s clothing. The “Fairesses,” the “Lady Rocks,” the “Lady Clares”: all of these Irish societies had recourse to feminine disguise, as perhaps did the members of “Moll Doyle’s men.”¹⁵⁹ Indeed McParlan, the agent on whom Conan Doyle’s Douglas is based, was dispatched to Ireland before he began his mission in order to research the secret societies of Ireland, and he reported the following:

Some of the people in the provinces of Ulster and Connaught resolved not to starve as long as there was any food stowed away in the public markets or warehouses or any storekeeper who might have a supply of stock on hand. They immediately organized under the name Molly McGuire. The objects were to take from those who had abundance to give to the poor who were then dying by hundredth with hunger. They seldom ever at this time compelled a man who [sic] they might visit to give them money. But of course would not refuse it if offered to them. Their mode of operation was to have their leader dressed up in a suit of womens [sic] clothing to represent the Irish Mother begging for bread for her children under there [sic] disguise.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁸ Broehl 218, 225-226.

¹⁵⁹ Broehl 25.

¹⁶⁰ Broehl 147-148.

M'Intosh is described as being poor and hungry, as drinking Bovril (*U* 14.1547) a viscous meat extract that Kermode suggests is preferred by people of low income.¹⁶¹ In both the real Maguire case and Conan Doyle's retelling of it, the Pinkerton's agent disguised himself as a poor, laboring miner. But more than this, the fact that M'Intosh is drinking Bovril in particular is interesting. This extract was created by John Lawson Johnston to supply the armies of Napoleon III, but later in 1889, the Bovril company was formed and began to market this "war food" to the British people. The trademark name was formed from the word "vril," which was taken from a late nineteenth-century novel entitled *Vril, The Power of the Coming Race*, written by Sir Edward Bulwer-Lytton.¹⁶² In this book, which enjoyed significant popular, if not critical acclaim, a miner discovers a subterranean race that wields an esoteric power known as "vril." Similarly, in Doyle's novel the Pinkerton's agent poses as a miner in order to infiltrate the secret society of these subterranean workers, a society wielding a dangerous underground power and conducting their own private war against the enemies of their brotherhood.

The Maguire story also sheds light on "The Wandering Rocks" passage in which M'Intosh, "eating drybread," is said to have "passed swiftly and unscathed across the viceroy's path" (*U* 10.1271-72). "Why unscathed," Kermode asks, "did he pass very close to the wheels? Is the Lord Lieutenant peculiarly dangerous to such persons?"¹⁶³ The Lord Lieutenant was an Englishman appointed by the crown to "rule" over Ireland. Such occupation by the English,

¹⁶¹ Kermode 50.

¹⁶² The Bovril corporate website includes the following "Did you know?": "the name Bovril comes from an unusual word Johnston found in a book. 'Vril' was 'an electric fluid' which 'cured diseases and established equilibrium of natural powers.' He combined it with the first two letters of the Latin word for beef 'Bos'." Available at <<http://www.unilever.co.uk/ourbrands/foods/bovril.asp>>. Brian Aldiss, who wrote the introduction to Broadview Press's 2002 reprinting of Lytton's novel, identifies the source of the "unusual word" as *The Coming Race*: "Lytton's underground race possesses a mysterious power, 'vril,' a kind of electricity [. . .] Vril provides illumination and can kill or cure. Lytton is remembered by [. . .] Bovril, a well-flavoured meat extract, happily still with us" (*The Times Literary Supplement*, 17, Dec. 5, 2003, London, Times Newspapers Limited). Cf. Introduction.

especially the absentee land-lords who owned the country, was precisely what the Maguire organization was formed to resist. As such, the viceroy would be “peculiarly” dangerous to a Molly, even an assumed one.

In his book about the Maguires, Wayne Broehl notes the following account of the Lord Lieutenant’s struggle with the subterranean Irish societies:

In June 1816, the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, Charles Whitworth, addressed a long memorandum to Viscount Sidmouth (Henry Addington) on “the Nature and Extent of the Disturbances which have Recently Prevalled in Ireland.” The tone is that of frustration, frenzy, and exasperation—and the feeling that the situation was getting completely out of hand. Whitworth noted that his making “severe examples” in some convictions in Tipperary and Waterford had seemed not to have produced “any lasting effect or materially checked the bad spirit.” On the contrary, the Irish were apparently stepping up their attacks. Worse, potential Crown witnesses were being intimidated, so that it became almost impossible to procure satisfactory evidence. “Sufferers from such atrocities, when visited by a magistrate, would depose only generally to the facts . . . and not denying their knowledge of the offenders, would yet steadily refuse to disclose their names . . .” Whitworth dolefully listed a wide range of crimes, including murders, burnings, beatings, threats.¹⁶⁴

In the present case, the Lord Lieutenant’s fears proved to be well-founded as a group of Irishmen attacked a police barracks, burning it to the ground. Certainly, these “notorious fire-raisers” were a force to be reckoned with, as their activities in particular were directed at the English presence in Ireland, a presence embodied by the Lord Lieutenant himself.

I daresay that there is more evidence connecting M’Intosh and Conan Doyle’s John Douglas, but the foregoing is enough for now. I’ve discussed Conan Doyle the author—the content of his *Valley* and the detective story on which it is based—so it might be felicitous to close with a biographical observation concerning his peculiar beliefs. Kermode notes that

The Coming Race. Ontario: Broadview Press, 2002. 11.

¹⁶³ Kermode 50.

¹⁶⁴ Broehl 22.

Bloom recalls the question of the man in the macintosh after being passed by a nobleman during a walk and also when, “meditating the pattern of the day’s events, or lack of it, [he] hears the timber of the table emit a loud, lone crack.”¹⁶⁵ After Conan Doyle was made Sir Arthur in 1902, he came to believe very strongly in spiritualism. Characteristic of such believers was the claim that the dead, in a sense, returned from their graves and communicated with the world of the living, often by “rapping” on or even rearranging the furniture of a room. Indeed, the Fox family of New York had touched off a fury of spiritualist speculation in 1847 with their talk of a spirit who manifested his presence in this manner, and such modes of communication continued to exercise a fascination through the turn of the century.

In the years surrounding the writing of *Ulysses*, between September 1915 and January 1916, Conan Doyle had converted decisively to spiritualism and by the autumn of 1917 was lecturing on what he termed “the new revelation.” But Conan Doyle had been interested in the phenomena described by spiritualists as early as 1887, when he and researcher Frederic Myers, who founded the Society of Psychical Research at Cambridge, exchanged letters on the subject. One of these includes the following remarks:

I am very glad that you can now get some of the phenomena without a paid medium. What you say as to *raps* deeply interests me as raps are such *extremely rare* things, though spoken of by some spiritualists as if so common. Did the raps answer questions? did they spell out a word? These are the questions of great importance in making sure that *raps* are not *creaks* . . . ¹⁶⁶

This is not to suggest that Joyce was somehow familiar with this letter, but that the rather funereal mystery of M’Intosh is evoked by a “loud, lone crack” from Bloom’s desk, that

¹⁶⁵ Kermode 51. “What selfimposed enigma,” Joyce asks, “did Bloom about to rise in order to go so far to conclude lest he should not conclude involuntarily apprehend? The cause of a brief sharp unforeseen heard loud lone crack emitted by the insentient material of a strainveined timber table” (*U* 17.270-272).

¹⁶⁶ As of the writing of this essay, no collected volume of Conan Doyle’s letters exists. The author of this particular letter, included in Nordon biography, seems to have been Conan Doyle, not Myers, but it is impossible to tell for

“spiritualism” was associated with messages from the dead delivered through the noises emitted by household furnishings, such as desks and whatnot, and that Doyle was a very public—perhaps *the* public—face of “spiritualism.”

On this concluding note of occult relations and affinities, I should address one question that probably has worried many from the beginning of my argument, the question of whether Joyce actually read *The Valley of Fear*. In the absence of this demonstration, perhaps these correspondences, which seem so weighty, amount to little more than “spirit-rapping.” And frankly I cannot deny that all of this may be the result of chance, despite the fact that at least one biographer has described Joyce’s reading of Conan Doyle as “pell-mell.”¹⁶⁷ But during the course of writing this essay, I have begun to wonder—perhaps under the spell of Conan Doyle—whether there is not more to chance than meets the eye.¹⁶⁸ Certainly it is strange that John Gordon, to whom my interpretation responds, has said the following:

Finally I have become more convinced than before that the man in the macintosh [. . .] is a “mystery” in precisely the tradition of the genre designated by the word. *Ulysses* was written during the golden age of the English mystery story [. . .] In such works [. . .] the mystery concerns a crucial clue which is not hidden or encrypted but presented frontally as a routine part of the furniture, in order to be taken for granted and thus overlooked. (“You see,” says Holmes to Watson, “but you do not observe.”) Might this not, I have been asking myself recently, be the story of M’Intosh as well?¹⁶⁹

After these thoughts, Gordon concludes his essay with a fictional dialogue between Holmes and Watson concerning M’Intosh.

For his part, Kermode, after describing the question as a “drab enigma,” moves almost immediately to some remarks concerning the occult plots of classic detective novels and those

sure. Cf. Nordon, Pierre. *Conan Doyle: A Biography*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1967. 150.

¹⁶⁷ Ellman, Richard. *James Joyce*. New York: Knopf 1959. Quoted in *Naked is the Best Disguise*. 18.

¹⁶⁸ See above, p. 73.

¹⁶⁹ Gordon, John. “The M’Intosh Mystery: II.” *Twentieth Century Literature: A Scholarly and Critical Journal*.

more recent ones that work against classical conventions. I mentioned earlier that Conan Doyle's *Valley* begins with Holmes having received a letter from someone writing under the name "Fred Porlock," obviously a reference to Coleridge's man from Porlock. But I neglected to say that the letter is actually a cipher and that the contents of the letter refer to certain words within a book, which Porlock assumes is owned by Holmes. Although the letter does not indicate the identity of the book, Holmes, after considering the Bible, "Bradshaw,"¹⁷⁰ and the dictionary, decides that the cipher refers to a standard edition of the almanac, for Porlock could not have been certain in the other cases that the volume owned by Holmes would correspond exactly to the volume from which he constructs the cipher. Unlike Holmes and Porlock, we have access to the authoritative Oxford English dictionary, which I recently consulted, having been struck by Kermode's characterization (and the epigraph of my own paper):

Drab: *n.* a kind of cloth. Whence the colour of this cloth.
adj. Of a dull light-brown or yellowish-brown.¹⁷¹
adj. fig. A dull or lifeless appearance or character.

I've said that my interpretation constitutes a response to Kermode, so I better explain the sense of this. In *The Genesis of Secrecy*, Kermode wrote the following in respect to the business of interpreting a work:

Summer; 38 (2), 1992. 220-221.

¹⁷⁰According to the *Annotated Sherlock Holmes*, "Bradshaw's" "was the guide to British Railways conceived by George Bradshaw, 1801-1853, an engraver of maps and plans of towns" (474).

¹⁷¹ Rosenberg thinks that this yellow and brown business occurs in Conan Doyle's first Sherlock Holmes story, *A Study in Scarlet*. Holmes hands Watson a recently purchased book, *De Jure inter Gentes*, saying, "Charles's head was still firm on his shoulders when this little brown-backed volume was struck off." Rosenberg adduces certain passages associating this book with the "old yellow" one in Robert Browning's *The Ring and the Book*. Wondering how to reconcile the difference in color, Rosenberg suggests that "with that choice of color Conan Doyle admitted, perhaps unconsciously, that he had taken the *brown* book from Robert Browning" (95). Incidentally, one of James Mackintosh's most important essays concerns *De Jure inter Gentes* (or *the Law of Nations*); cf. "A Discourse on the Law of Nature and Nations." 27.

I cannot make sense of a part without placing it in relation to a whole: that is common sense, and also a basic principle of interpretation-theory. And do not suppose that the conformity of such principles with common sense is always obvious [. . .] However, the fact of the matter is that without some fore-understanding of the whole we can make no sense of the part; and our fore-understanding of the whole is largely constructed from our present understanding of the part.¹⁷²

Notice that Kermode doesn't say that the "fore-understanding" of the whole, which derives from the theoretical assumptions of one's institutional training, is *entirely* constructed from that of the part. If this were the case, we couldn't understand a part of a work without already understanding the work as a whole, but we couldn't understand the whole without already understanding the part, and so we couldn't understand these works at all. We seem to need, Kermode suggests, some idea concerning the meaning of the whole before situating the part in relation to it, and such an idea is abstract in the sense that is unconstrained to a certain extent by the interpretation of these various parts. But if Kermode's point is granted, then perhaps an analogous one might be granted as well—that it is possible (perhaps in some sense even necessary) to divine a satisfactory interpretation of a part without reference to the meaning of the work as a whole and thus in a way that is more or less free from institutional assumptions. Were it to exist, this sort of detective work would be radically empirical.

As an outsider, the rich conversations of *Ulysses* criticism are largely beyond my scope. Indeed, it seems fair to say that I have no definite fore-understanding of what this work is about. But nonetheless I would deny that I utterly lack an understanding of the man in the macintosh. Indeed, I believe that *in some sense*—perhaps it could be described as intuitive or "fortunate"—I can lay claim to knowing something about the man in the macintosh, namely who he is.

¹⁷² Kermode 5.

As far as this essay constitutes a response to Gordon, readers might be wondering whether I am claiming that his hotly contested interpretation—that M’Intosh is the ghost of Bloom’s father—is wrong. Not in the least: Gordon’s reasoning often seems to be quite ingenious, and I don’t see any reason why M’Intosh might not be many, instead of one. On the other hand, Gordon believes, if I’m not mistaken, that there is a definitive, singular answer to this question, and that his own interpretation is very probably the one. And indeed his arguments are courageous and warrant the Socratic echoes at the end of a recent article: “if there is a better answer out there to the questions raised in essay, I will welcome it. I invite enlightenment. I await instruction.”¹⁷³

Am I claiming that my interpretation is better? “Better for what?” I would reply. Mine is better for tethering the great canonical *Ulysses* to the popular work of Conan Doyle. With slight distaste, Hugh Kenner wrote, “Since Conan Doyle, the best seller *par excellence* (today one-third of all fiction printed in English) has been the detective story, juxtaposing the insolent amorality of the clue-reader with the trepidant admiration of the decent but muddled citizen.”¹⁷⁴ And despite the fact that Kenner claimed a foundational significance for these detective stories,¹⁷⁵ my own motivations for linking Joyce’s work to the most popular of the popular writers, perhaps the most vulgar of the vulgar, may seem inscrutable.

¹⁷³ Although these remarks concern a more specific hypothesis concerning Macintosh and Rudolph Bloom, they seem to illustrate Gordon’s attitude concerning his interpretation in general. Cf. “The M’Intosh Murder Mystery.” *Journal of Modern Literature*. 29.1 (2005): 100. Also cf. “The M’Intosh Mystery.” *Modern Fiction Studies*. 29 (1983): 671-679, “The M’Intosh Mystery: II” *Twentieth Century Literature: A Scholarly and Critical Journal*. 38.2 (1992): 214-225, and *Joyce and Reality: The Empirical Strikes Back*. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse UP, 2004.

¹⁷⁴ Kenner, Hugh. *Dublin’s Joyce*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1956. 161.

¹⁷⁵ “The mythology of the nineteenth century,” Kenner suggested, “is summed up in two stories: the partnership of Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson, and the tumble of Alice into a schizoid mathematician’s womb-world. The first underlies *Ulysses*, the second *Finnegan’s Wake*. Holmes and Watson epitomize humanity dissected into ratiocinative violence and sentimental virtue, the latter avid of absorption into the former (170). Of course, the characters of Conan Doyle fall into the labyrinth of Professor Moriarty, the criminally insane mathematician.

Kermode, for one, believed that “the interpretative inadequacy of our predecessors is assumed by all of us, however we explain it.”

We shall become accustomed to the notion that the first person to misunderstand the content of Mark was the man who wrote it; and that eighteen centuries of interpretation intervened between the writing down of the parables and the advent of interpreters who knew how to read them. We do not usually put it as aggressively as that [. . .] but we rarely speak as if fully aware of this complicated hermeneutical background; we are more likely to ask, am I right or wrong? And we like to be more right than anyone before us [. . .]”¹⁷⁶

And indeed De Quincey’s commentary on James Mackintosh seems to illustrate Kermode’s point. He criticizes Mackintosh’s argument concerning the *Eikon Basilike* as being too legalistic and impersonal, lacking the spontaneity and indeed the passionate engagement required to do justice to the mystery. Doing justice, for De Quincey, seems to have meant conserving the attractiveness of the mystery by highlighting the impossibility of its solution. The conflicting testimonies become the focus of study, having taken on an interest quite apart from the question that occasioned them. One might say that De Quincey is accusing Mackintosh of misunderstanding his own Baconian allegiances and the work of literary history in attempting to solve the mystery. For in practice, the philosopher fails to acknowledge that the testimonies and arguments, the schools and their assumptions, are the real attractions, not some pipe-dream “fact of the matter.” In respect to the *Eikon* riddle, Mackintosh asks the wrong question, the pedestrian question—Am I right or wrong?—when “the real question is,” as Kermode says, “why do we want to solve it anyway?”

In the minds of other critics though, Mackintosh asks the right question but is incapable of properly answering it. His contemporary Macaulay describes him as bookish and somewhat passive, as master of all topics, knowing all that has been said about them, but for all that,

lacking the genius to settle an issue when it *is* at issue. Mackintosh's speeches in Parliament, which lay out counterpositions, doubts, and replies in explicit detail, are just as likely to give aid to the opposing side as to win the day. And so Macaulay, in contrast to De Quincey, convicts him of not being partisan enough, of arguing as if it were an exercise instead of a battle. Such a man cannot correct us or advance our fields of study: on more general abstract issues he will perform remarkably, but when it comes to the hotly contested ground, the struggle for the facts, he is certain to fail.

Interestingly enough, Mackintosh himself mentions these two types of criticisms, which seem to endure almost as steadfastly as the literary riddles themselves. He notes the tendencies either to dismiss Bacon as "empirical and superficial," since he was not a metaphysician and therefore not properly theoretical, or to underrate him as too general or wide-ranging because he made no advances in a particular science, settled no issues, added no "facts." The cause of these criticisms, Mackintosh suggests, was the peculiar character of Bacon's intellect, which was able to hold the most "distant objects" together in his contemplation without them collapsing into one another. Such a "discursive" or "comprehensive" understanding, required an equally powerful imagination and reasoning. Indeed, in Bacon's case—and this claim is much more radical than perhaps it seems—imagination and reason were neither at odds with nor independent of one another, but instead two aspects of the same activity, the same "undivided Intellect," the same power of discovery.¹⁷⁷

I might add that John Douglas, whose deception has occasioned the detective work of the first half of the novel, emerges from his hiding place of his own free will, for Holmes has been

¹⁷⁶ Kermode 17.

¹⁷⁷ Mackintosh, James. "On the Philosophical Genius of Lord Bacon and Mr. Locke." 17-21.

unable to detect the precise location of Douglas's cell. When he finally pops out of the wall, Douglas brings with him a bundle of papers telling the *complete* story of the mystery in which they are all involved, a story from which Watson extracts the romance forming the second half of the *Valley*. Having authored this story unseen and yet within their midst, Douglas offers it to Dr. Watson, saying "You're welcome to them—you and your public," and then addressing the detective, nods toward his papers, "I've heard of you, Mr. Holmes. I never guessed that I should meet you. But before you're though with that, you will say I've brought you something fresh" (VF 211).

CHAPTER 4

EPILOGOS

It is well known, although perhaps not sufficiently appreciated, that Descartes's *Discourse* is not the only source for the epochal events of the stove-heated room. He recorded the events of that day and night in a small notebook that over the course of time has been "lost." Fortunately, or unfortunately depending on one's perspective, Descartes's great biographer Adrien Baillet had access to this notebook and preserved some of its contents in *The Life of Monsieur Descartes*. The account centers on the occurrence of three successive dreams during the night of November 10, 1619. Descartes considered them to be an extremely important moment in his life, for at the very least they ratified his discovery of a "wonderful science," if they did not constitute the discovery itself.¹⁷⁸ Indeed, after the third dream, Descartes evidently concluded that "it was the Spirit of Truth that had wanted to open unto him the treasures of all the sciences by this dream."¹⁷⁹

John Cole notes that these dreams have been and continue to be a source of anxious embarrassment for Cartesians, who have tended either to ignore them, to minimize their importance, or even to deny their historicity. The source of this enduring anxiety is captured quite well by Jacques Maritain in his discussion of the contemporary reactions:

It is undeniably very annoying to find at the origin of modern philosophy a "cerebral episode," to quote Auguste Comte, which would call forth from our

¹⁷⁸ Whether the dreams capped a discovery made earlier in the day or week or whether the dreams themselves were taken to be the discovery is unclear.

¹⁷⁹ My emphasis. All quotes are from John Cole's translation of Baillet. Cf. Cole, John. *The Olympian Dreams and Youthful Rebellion of René Descartes*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1992. 32-40.

savants, should they meet it in the life some devout personage, the most disquieting neuropathological diagnosis; and one can understand the dissatisfaction of these philosophical people in reading Baillet's account. "The Life of M. Descartes by M. Baillet," wrote Malebranche, "is bound to render him and his philosophy ridiculous." [Christian] Huygens, strongly endorsed by Leibnitz, wrote in his turn: "The passage in which he relates how [Descartes's] brain was over-stimulated and in a fit state for visions, and his vow to Our Lady of Lorette, shows great weakness; and I think it will appear so, even to Catholics who have rid themselves of superstition."¹⁸⁰

A "cerebral episode," "disquieting" neuropathology, a "great weakness": surely these dreams have been felt to besmirch Descartes's reputation; perhaps they are dangerous to the foundations of modern philosophy itself.

Baillet tells us that Descartes's resolution to destroy his own house took its toll both mentally and physically. Nevertheless, the philosopher believed that he had succeeded, for "it was enough that his imagination presented his mind to himself entirely naked, to make him believe he had really stripped it bare." By the end of the process, Descartes's mental edifice had been reduced simply to a desire, "the love of Truth."¹⁸¹

But the reconstructive aspect of his plan proved as troubling as the deconstructive. Descartes was at a loss as to which way to proceed, an indecision that "agitated his mind violently." Indeed, he fell into such a funk that he neither ventured out from the stove-heated room nor received visitors until "his brain took fire, and fell into a sort of enthusiasm, which so affected his mind, already over-tired, that it left him in the condition to receive the impressions of dreams and visions." "Completely filled his enthusiasm," Descartes had three consecutive dreams.

¹⁸⁰ *The Dream of Descartes*. Trans. Mabelle L. Andison. Port Washington, New York: Kennikat Press, 1969. 15-16.

¹⁸¹ See the dedication to Elizabeth above, p.32.

In the first, he saw a street filled with ghosts so terrible and frightening that he could barely advance. These spirits seemed in some way to be connected to “a great weakness” in his right side, which rendered Descartes incapable of walking upright. Instead, he scuttled along, leaning on his left side. Feeling ashamed at his carriage, he tried to straighten his posture, but great gusts spun him around three or four times like a whirlwind. But “even this was not what alarmed” the dreamer; what really frightened Descartes was that “his difficulty in dragging himself along meant that he thought he would fall at each step.”

Luckily, he spotted an open school and sought “a refuge and a remedy” for his predicament. Thinking that he would find them in the school church, he searched the grounds intently, so intently that he passed an acquaintance without greeting him. He did not realize his error until arriving at the entrance of the church, at which point he turned back to locate the acquaintance. But the great wind, which had constantly threatened to topple him, suddenly redoubled its efforts, thrusting Descartes back toward the church. Then another person appeared, addressed him familiarly, and told him to find “Monsieur N.” for he had something to give Descartes, which the dreamer imagined to be a *melon* from a foreign land.¹⁸² Observing a crowd of students that had collected around the man (or perhaps around Monsieur N.), Descartes marveled at how they held themselves upright and steady, while he was faltering.

At this point, Descartes awoke and, feeling a pain in his side, worried that the dream (or perhaps the pain) had been the work of an “Evil Spirit who had wanted to seduce him.” Fearing the worst, he prayed that God would protect him from any evil effects of the dream and from his own secret sins. For even though he considered his life to be more or less blameless “in the eyes

¹⁸² Incidentally, the “foreign,” Greek word *μηλον* signifies an apple (and, metaphorically, a woman’s breast), as well as a sheep, goat, or sacrificial beast. In Latin, *mālum* signifies not only an apple, but also (by similarity to *mālum*)

of men,” he thought these undetected sins so terrible as “to call down upon his head thunderbolts of heaven.” And thinking on “good and evil in this life” for approximately two hours, he fell asleep again.

Descartes’s second dream was both very simple and very unsettling. He heard a sudden, loud noise, which he took for thunder, and started upright at once. Terrified, he opened his eyes and “noticed many sparks of fire scattered around the room.” But this was not the first time he had experienced this phenomenon, and now as in the past, his eyes seem to “sparkle” enough to make out the objects in his bedroom. On this particular occasion, though, Descartes was able to “reassure himself about his mind” by finding “reasons drawn from Philosophy.” He fell asleep again in relief.

Unlike the first two dreams, there was nothing horrible about the third. A mysterious book appeared on a table before Descartes. The dreamer opened it and seeing that it was a dictionary, he was delighted because he hoped that it would be “very useful” to him. But at the same moment, another book appeared, which he discovered to be a poetry anthology entitled *Corpus Poetarum*. Opening the second book, he chanced upon the poem “What way in life shall I follow?” but then a stranger suddenly appeared who recommended another poem called “Yes and No.” The dreaming Descartes recognized it as one Ausonius’s¹⁸³ *Idylls* and assured the stranger that it was included in the anthology. Even though he boasted perfect knowledge of the volume’s “order and scheme,” Descartes could not locate the poem in question, and during the search, he realized that the dictionary itself had disappeared. When it reappeared a moment

misfortune, illness, or weakness. Cf. *Liddell and Scott’s Greek-English Lexicon*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998. and *Perseus Digital Library*. Tufts University. 23 June. 2007. <<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/cgi-bin/resolveform>>.

¹⁸³ A native of the Bourdeaux region, Ausonius was a schoolmaster and poet, writing throughout the middle and late fourth century CE. In the late twentieth century, Wolfgang Zaugg changed his name *John Wolfgang Ausonius* in order to hide his German and Swiss roots. Later, he was arrested by the Swedish authorities as a serial killer,

later, the book was no longer as complete as before. At long last, Descartes found the Ausonius poems in the *Corpus*, but “Yes and No” was not among them, so he told the stranger that in any event he knew a better poem by the same author, the poem he opened to earlier. But now that he was looking for it, Descartes wasn’t able to find “What way in life shall I follow?” Indeed, he came upon some little portraits in the book, which convinced him that this was not the volume he knew after all. At this point, the man and the books vanished.

Baillet tells us that remarkably Descartes decided that he was dreaming (and not having a vision) while he was still asleep and moreover that he interpreted the three dreams before being fully awake.¹⁸⁴ Descartes interpreted the dictionary to be “all the Sciences taken together,” while the *Corpus Poetarum* represented “in particular and in a more distinct way the union of Philosophy and Wisdom.” For he thought that the poets were full of maxims, which were “more serious, more sensible, and better expressed” than the works of philosophers. The source of this excellence he attributed to “the divinity of Enthusiasm” and the “strength of Imagination.” Indeed, Descartes seems to have believed that his own dreams were a sort of poetry, being the “favors” of “Revelation and Enthusiasm.” The source of the dreams (and perhaps the interpretations as well) was none other than “the Spirit of Truth,” who “had wanted to open unto him all the treasures of the sciences . . .”

targeting “immigrants.” Cf. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Ausonius>.

¹⁸⁴Nathaniel Hawthorne’s “The Haunted Mind” seems to be connected to these curious events: “What a singular moment is the first one, when you have hardly begun to recollect yourself, after starting from midnight slumber! By unclosing your eyes so suddenly, you seem to have surprised the personages of your dream in full convocation round your bed . . . Or, to vary the metaphor, you find yourself, for a single instant, wide awake in that realm of illusions, whither sleep has been the passport . . .” He goes on to describe those dark thoughts, which are the “devils of a guilty heart,” as well as the sudden illumination of his bedroom by the flickering hearth, before taking comfort in a third reverie: “Her influence is over you . . . You sink down in a flowery spot, on the borders of sleep and wakefulness, while your thoughts rise before you in pictures, all disconnected, yet all assimilated by a pervading gladness and beauty” (108). See above, p.130.

Although Descartes considered the first two dreams to be “warnings” and “threats concerning his past life,” while the third represented the path he would walk in the future, the details of his interpretation—at least the details that we possess—are rather cryptic. For instance, the little portraits in the poetry anthology supposedly were explained by the visit of an Italian painter the next day. The melon in the first dream was said to signify “the charms of solitude, but presented by purely human solicitations,” while the wind “was nothing other than Evil Spirit,” who attempted to compel Descartes to enter the school and its chapel when he intended to do so of his own free will. The second dream represented Descartes’s remorse and guilty conscience, the thunder being “the Spirit of Truth descending to take possession of him.”

Despite reporting it, Baillet was uneasy with all of this, complaining that “this last notion surely smacks of Enthusiasm.” He spends a paragraph assuring his readers that Descartes was not drunk, even though the German locals were celebrating St. Martin’s Eve. Perhaps at the end of his rope, Baillet adds that Descartes himself thought “that his human mind had nothing to do” with the dreams. The philosopher was so impressed by them that he appealed to the Virgin Mary, asking her to aid his understanding. Indeed, he vowed to make a pilgrimage to the Italian town of Loretto and its Notre Dame, hoping, in Baillet’s curious words, “to interest [her] in a more pressing way.”

But Descartes was delayed for some unknown reason and four years passed before he undertook the journey. A few days after his decisive dreams, the enthusiasm “left” Descartes, and he spent the rest of the winter working on a treatise, hoping to finish it by Easter. But the fate of this work remains a mystery: “it seems very likely that he then interrupted work on this treatise, and that it was never fully completed. We still do not know what [the subject of] the treatise could have been, nor even whether it ever had a title.”

I want to offer a new perspective on these infamous dreams. Recall Descartes's *Discourse* with its unstable house and curious fear of falling.¹⁸⁵ What alarms Descartes during the first dream is the possibility that he might fall with each step. During the Middle Ages and Renaissance, the term "falling sickness" referred throughout Europe to the disease that we now call "epilepsy."¹⁸⁶ Indeed, the disease was defined in respect to this most obvious symptom of full-blown epilepsy, the fact that sufferers collapsed during the height of their attacks. More than any other, the epileptic was in danger of falling, and the names for this disease—*grand mal* and *morbus maior*—suggested a great illness or weakness as its cause.¹⁸⁷ If Descartes's first dream concentrates on the fear of falling and the search for a "remedy," and epilepsy was ubiquitously known as the "falling sickness," one wonders whether Descartes also feared the judgement broached by Comte, Malebranche, and Huygens, namely that he himself might be in a danger of some "disquieting neuropathological diagnosis."

Baillet tells us that during the day before the dream, Descartes was consumed by the difficulties of pursuing truth, of rebuilding his house, and could make little headway as to how he should proceed once he had divested himself of the authoritative opinions of others. He became "violently" agitated, which "so exhausted him that his brain took fire." Thereafter, Descartes "fell into a sort of enthusiasm, which so affected his mind, already over-tired, that it left him in the condition to receive the impressions of dreams and visions." The connection between distress, anger, and sleeplessness, on the one hand, and epilepsy, on the other, had been

¹⁸⁵ See above, pp.19-22.

¹⁸⁶ All of the following medical details are taken from Owsei Temkin's authoritative work on the history of epilepsy. Cf. *The Falling Sickness: A History of Epilepsy from the Greeks to the Beginnings of Modern Neurology*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1971. 85-86.

¹⁸⁷ Temkin 7.

stressed as early as the Hippocratic writings,¹⁸⁸ and because of the lasting authority attributed to the ancient corpus, this connection continued to be emphasized by Galen and throughout the Middle Ages and Renaissance.¹⁸⁹ Indeed, as late as the writings of Stahl at the turn of the 18th century, one reads that “some idea arising from wrath or anxiety expresses itself through the disturbed motions [of epilepsy] and lies as the bottom of the disease.”¹⁹⁰ According to the writer of *On the Sacred Disease*, the most important of the Hippocratic texts devoted to epilepsy, such “dietetic” factors contributed to the purely physiological causes of the disease: when abnormal warming of the head changes the consistency of the brain, the surrounding phlegm is melted and flows downward, causing the body to fall. For incurable cases, the abnormal heat actually causes part of the brain to melt along with the phlegm.¹⁹¹ Anger, anxiety, and sleeplessness promote the conditions in which the brain “takes fire,” upon which the sufferer is in a condition fit “to receive the impressions of dreams and visions.”

Baillet’s description of the context of Descartes’s dreams is so suspicious that one wonders how any commentator could escape the notion that the great philosopher had suffered some sort of fit, or at least that Baillet was worried that he had. Perhaps, by way of amelioration, it might be claimed that Descartes was simply suffering from exhaustion and that, after all, his “visions” were just a series of vivid dreams. But no less an authority than Aristotle held that the epileptic attack often originated in sleep, and indeed that sleep was so similar to epilepsy that “in some way, sleep *is* epilepsy.”¹⁹² Regardless of their cause, what is most interesting to me is the way in which Descartes’s dreams seem to be about this very anxiety concerning epilepsy.

¹⁸⁸ Temkin 34-35, 38-39.

¹⁸⁹ Temkin 62, 121, 137

¹⁹⁰ Temkin 215.

¹⁹¹ Temkin 51-56.

¹⁹² Temkin 34.

I have noted the pervasive fear of falling and search for “remedy” in the first dream, but consider the fact that *in the dream* this fear is occasioned by a terrifying group of ghosts, a great weakness in his right side, and a whirlwind that spins him around. In the lay opinion of the ancient public, the “sacred disease”—another euphemism for epilepsy—was caused variously by the goddess of the moon, against whom the sufferer had somehow sinned, by the goat-god Pan, and also by the “heroes.”¹⁹³ According to the E. R. Dodds’s great work *The Greeks and the Irrational*, the “heroes” were “simply the unquiet dead associated with Hecate.”¹⁹⁴ For the medical doctors, both ancient and Renaissance, overwhelming fright was thought to be one of the main, if not the main, psychic cause of epilepsy.¹⁹⁵ Certainly these facts cast a different light on the dreaming Descartes’s fear of falling, associated as it was with “the ghosts who so frightened him.” In such light, the fact that the ancient doctors, following Aristotle’s (or Pseudo-Aristotle’s) *Problems*, considered premonitory weakness in the right side to be a particularly bad sign for epileptics, indeed a sign that their illness might be incurable,¹⁹⁶ takes on a heightened importance, as does the episode involving the whirlwind.

The Hippocratic corpus was adamant that among natural provoking factors, the wind was particularly significant; indeed, it was thought to be the *main* factor in chronic adult epileptics.¹⁹⁷ But more than this, the fact that Descartes’s is a dizzying whirlwind also suggests a fear of epilepsy, for Ancient, Medieval, and Renaissance physicians continually noted the connection between dizziness or vertigo and epilepsy. The former could be the beginning of epilepsy, but where the falling disease had taken hold, the patient inevitably suffered from vertigo and

¹⁹³ Temkin 16-16.

¹⁹⁴ *The Greeks and the Irrational*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1951. 77.

¹⁹⁵ Temkin 34.

¹⁹⁶ Temkin 60.

¹⁹⁷ Temkin 55.

dizziness as well.¹⁹⁸ Indeed, the connection was so strong that whirling wheels were thought to be diagnostic tools in unmasking the epileptic, who, being faced with a rotating potter's wheel for instance, would be induced to fall.¹⁹⁹

How significant is it that in his dream Descartes seeks a “refuge and remedy” in the halls of academia? Again, it puts me in mind of the joke that opens the *Discourse*.

Good sense is the most evenly distributed commodity in the world, for each of us considers himself to be so well endowed therewith that even those who are the most difficult to please in all other matters are not wont to desire more of it than they have. It is not likely that anyone [everyone?] is mistaken about this fact.

Remembering that good sense or reason is “the power of judging rightly and of distinguishing the true from the false,” one must wonder whether his own ability in this respect is not precisely what Descartes doubts. Among all others, isn't the epileptic inherently less capable of right judgement in the midst of his hallucinations and enthusiasm? Do the sober halls of academia with its tradition, its arguments and good sense, present a tempting remedy, particularly for those who doubt the solidity of their own houses? In any event, it seems no mere accident that Descartes's first dream in the stove-heated room begins, like the *Discourse* itself, with him seeking refuge in the books of the learned.

But Descartes wakes up feeling “real” pain, whereupon he fears that “it [the pain? the dream?] had been the work of a Evil Spirit who had wanted to seduce him.” One of the more interesting moments in the tangled history of epilepsy occurs during the shift from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance. In the European popular mind, epilepsy comes to be associated more and more with possession, and by the time of Descartes, the medical doctors themselves had begun to weigh in on the problem. Interestingly, they oftentimes did not dispute the agency of

¹⁹⁸ Temkin 35, 43, 99.

malevolent spirits, although the question of whether these spirits acted directly as a physical force or indirectly in the genesis of the disease was a topic of much debate.²⁰⁰ Indeed, as late as the stove-heated room episode, it was taken for granted by many physicians that the disease might be inflicted by God “for the punishment of human crimes,” or demons through intermediate natural causes, or that the disease simply might be naturally occurring. In 1602, Jean Taxil had maintained the close connection between possession and epilepsy, claiming that “it was scarcely possible to find any case in literature of a demoniac who was not epileptic,” for “in the fury of their affliction, they [i.e. the possessed] were seized by epileptic convulsions.”²⁰¹ Perhaps the suspicion that at least some epileptics were possessed was inevitable, given that Satan was the first to “fall.” The Satanic fall supposedly resulted from excessive pride, while the first recorded mention of epilepsy comes in one of Heraclitus’s fragments in which he seems to equate the disease with overweening pride: “Self-conceit : Sacred Disease.”²⁰² Such a connection recalls Cavell’s interest in philosophy’s temptation to “self-importance” and the arrogance of autobiography, as well as Montaigne’s essay “Of Presumption.”

For his part, Descartes prays that “God [will] protect him from the evil effects of his dream and preserve him from all of the miseries that could threaten him as his punishment for his sins, which he acknowledged to be great enough to call down upon his head thunderbolts of heaven, although he had led a more or less blameless life in the eyes of men.” And after two hours spent pondering “good and evil in this life,” he fell asleep for a second time. But “immediately a new dream came to him in which he thought that he heard a sudden, loud noise, which he took for thunder.” Later, Descartes described that dream as being marked by a great

¹⁹⁹ Temkin 49.

²⁰⁰ Temkin 137-147.

fear and remorse concerning the secret sins that he may have committed in his previous life, and he suggests that the thunder he heard should be interpreted as “the Spirit of Truth descending to take possession of him.”

Baillet interrupts his account at this point, seemingly irritated with such talk. “This last notion surely smacks of Enthusiasm,” he adds testily. But what interests me is that again, regardless of its cause, Descartes’s dream itself seems to concern the possibility of epilepsy. I noted earlier that often it was taken for granted, even amongst the medical establishment, that the disease could be the result of the wrath of God “for the punishment of human crimes,” secret sins perhaps that only God would be in a position to know and punish. But more importantly, the fact that Descartes dreams of a storm, which threatens to hurtle thunderbolts down upon his head, is particularly significant. Among the ancients, Galen already had identified lightning and thunder as provocations for an epileptic attack.²⁰³ But with the rise of Paracelsian or hermetic medicine in the 16th century, the thunderstorm became much more closely associated with the disease.

In his battle with traditional medicine, Paracelsus wrote several commentaries devoted to epilepsy, claiming that this tradition’s inability to cure the *great disease* was a sign of its own weakness. And among his followers during the late 16th and early 17th century, the cure of epilepsy continued to be a point of emphasis.²⁰⁴ Reasoning analogically, with the human being the microcosmic mirror of the macrocosmic outer world, Paracelsus suggested that the diseases afflicting us mirror or correspond to certain natural phenomena; the processes that give rise to the latter are similar to the ones resulting in diseases. By observing and explaining these natural

²⁰¹ Temkin 139.

²⁰² Temkin 15. This fragment is sometimes translated as “Bigotry is the sacred disease.”

phenomena, the doctor could hope also to explain the affliction in question. The natural phenomenon corresponding to the falling sickness, he tells us, is the thunderstorm; indeed, epilepsy is a microcosmic thunderstorm.²⁰⁵

This rather allegorical approach continued certain undercurrents in the history of epilepsy that may have been latent in the ancient remedies, which sometimes seemed to possess a more or less vague resemblance to the symptoms of the disease.²⁰⁶ In the work of certain late 16th century thinkers like Aldrovandi, the allegorical approach also could be seen in the “moral interpretation” of epilepsy, where the disease was likened to pride. His work, significantly entitled *A History of Monsters*, connects the pathology of this disease with certain features of vice.²⁰⁷ If epilepsy, for Paracelsus, was a thunderstorm of the body, the falling sickness, for those pursuing the “moral interpretation,” was the physiological analogue to moral weakness, specifically pride. Given the medical atmosphere in which Descartes lived, it seems that the dream of the thunderstorm, following so closely on the heels of the “falling” dream and the remarks concerning divine “possession” or punishment for secret sins, again suggests a fear of epilepsy. One might look to the events subsequent to his second dream for confirmation.

Descartes awakes at once, and, “having opened his eyes . . . notice[s] many sparks of fire scattered around the room.” He had experience this phenomenon before, Baillet tells us, “on many other occasions, and it did not seem too strange to him, when he awoke in the middle of

²⁰³ Temkin 35.

²⁰⁴ Temkin 172

²⁰⁵ Temkin 173. In fact, according to Paracelsus, “the genesis of thunder is one form of the genesis of epilepsy in man. There are three more forms corresponding to the fruits and impressions of the other three elements. As fire gives birth to a thunderstorm, earth engenders the earthquake, water the storm, and air a milder form of the thunderstorm without rain, hail and real lightning. Altogether, therefore, the macrocosm reveals four kinds of epilepsy” (174). It might be wise to recall Dante’s *Inferno* and the concluding lines of Canto III: “Then, the earth of that grim shore began to shake: so violently, I shudder and sweat recalling it now. A wind burst up from the tear-soaked ground to erupt red light and batter my sense—and so I fell, as though seized by sleep.”

the night, that his eyes sparkled enough to make out the objects closest to him.” It is difficult to read this without glossing over what Baillet is saying: Descartes is seeing things, and moreover, this is not an isolated occurrence. Perhaps one might put this event down as some innocuous disturbance of the eyes, which have been tightly closed and now opened suddenly. But as early as the ancient physician Soranus, this *particular* disturbance had been noted as symptomatic of the onset of an epileptic attack. “The patients,” he notes, “also perceive tiny sparks, so to speak, or fiery circles borne around their eyes.”²⁰⁸ Indeed, Descartes himself seems to worry about the import of these sparks, for “on this last occasion, he wanted to find reasons drawn from Philosophy, and he was able to reassure himself about his mind.”

Although the notebook in which Descartes recorded these dreams has been lost, Baillet is not the only source for their content. The notebook contained not only a description of the dreams but also many thoughts on philosophical topics, as well as mathematical speculations. Although he failed to record the dream episodes, Leibniz took extensive notes on the philosophical reflections, recording many verbatim. We therefore know that the subject of mental illness had occupied Descartes during this time, for one of his reflections not only suggests a sort of moral significance to mental illnesses but also bemoans our inability to diagnose them properly.

I call mental illnesses “faults.” They are more difficult to diagnose than physical illnesses, because we very often experience the health of the body, [but] never that of the mind. I notice about myself that when I feel depressed, whether confronted by danger or occupied with melancholy affairs, I sleep deeply and eat ravenously. But when I feel elated, I neither eat nor sleep.²⁰⁹

²⁰⁶ Temkin 178.

²⁰⁷ Temkin 179.

²⁰⁸ Temkin 38.

²⁰⁹ Cole 26.

In his notebook, these thoughts preceded a paragraph detailing various optical illusions that could be produced. “In a room,” for instance, “arrange various mirrors in order to reflect the rays of light, so as to represent tongues of flame, chariots of fire, and other figures in the air.”

Just as the first dream seemed to look forward to the first section of the *Discourse* in which Descartes detailed his experience in the schools, the second dream prefigures the turn away from the books of the learned to the “book of world.” The second dream was preceded by two hours worth of thoughts concerning good and evil in this life, and the dream itself seemed to be concerned with a secret sin, despite the fact that Descartes “had led a more or less blameless life in the eyes of men.” In the *Discourse*, Descartes tells us that the reason he left the schools to travel amongst ordinary people was that he thought he “could discover much more truth in the reasonings that each person makes concerning matters that are important to him, whose outcome ought to cost him dearly later on if he judged incorrectly.” That is to say, he leaves the schools because of his concern for “good and evil in *this life*,” the practical judgements of the workaday world, instead of “those reasonings that a man of letters makes in his private room, which touch speculations producing no effect, and which for him have no consequence.”²¹⁰ The second dream is concerned specifically with the consequences of faulty judgements, the good and evil that come from them, and its conclusion, like that of the *Discourse*, seems to be that the opinion of the many doesn’t count for much in this respect. For one may have secret “faults” that are more or less hidden from “the eyes of men” but which may result in dire consequences nonetheless. Indeed, these faults may result in one being incapable of judging the true benefit of actions, of “distinguishing the true from the false,” even though his or her life may appear exemplary to others.

Disenchanted with both the books of the learned and the book of the world, Descartes resolves to dedicate his life to the book of himself, which begins with the analogical conclusions drawn concerning the mind and the unstable house, the various earthly cities and the city of God. And he makes bold to claim that “for me this procedure was much more successful, it seems, than if I had never left my country or my books.”²¹¹ Likewise, he claims that in his third dream, as opposed to the nightmare visions of the previous two, there was nothing fearful; indeed, “this last dream, which had all been very soothing and very agreeable, seemed to him to reveal the future, and it showed him nothing but what would happen in the rest of his life. Contrarily, he took the two preceding dreams as warnings and threats concerning his past life.”

I’m not going to examine this third dream too closely because, in a sense, the body of my dissertation itself constitutes such a commentary. But I do want to point out that Descartes supposedly decided that “it was a dream while he was still asleep but also interpreted it before he was fully awake,” “uncertain whether he was dreaming or thinking.” “In some way,” Aristotle said, “sleep is epilepsy,” but Descartes interprets without needing to know whether he dreams or wakes.

Recall that the dream concerns two books: the *Dictionary*, which he interprets to be “all the Sciences taken together,” and a book of poetry, the *Corpus Poetarum*, which represented “in particular and in a more distinct way the union of Philosophy and Wisdom.” In order to stave off defensive doubt, it bears repeating: the sciences taken together are a collection of words assembled in a rather contingent fashion, an order with no intrinsic meaning even though its elements form the materials of all meanings; philosophy, on the other hand, actually attains what

²¹⁰ Descartes 6.

²¹¹ Descartes 6.

it desires in a sort of poetry—a philosophical poetry, both “a gift of the mind,” as the *Discourse* describes poetry, but also an act of will, the purposeful destruction and rebuilding of one’s own mental edifice.

As commentary, Baillet paraphrases a section from Descartes’s notebook, but I think it would be wise to give the original:

Just as the imagination uses figures to conceive physical things, so the intellect uses certain physical bodies like wind or light to represent spiritual things. Philosophizing in a more elevated way, it follows from this that, by thinking, we can lift our minds on high. It could seem surprising that there are more serious things in the writings of the poets than in those of the philosophers. The reason is that the poets have been inspired in their writings by enthusiasm and the force of the imagination. There are in us the seeds of understanding, as in flintstone [there are sparks of fire]. Philosophers educe them by reason, but poets strike them by imagination, and they shine forth the more.

At the risk of stretching the connection past its breaking point, one might say that the poets in their enthusiasm produce the sparks of understanding by falling like a hammer blow, while philosophers educe them, which is to say, lead them out of their hiding places. But it may be possible both to fall, and having fallen, to lead forth the sparks that have been produced in the falling.

Baillet writes that after his decisive night, the philosopher vowed to make a pilgrimage to the Notre Dame of Loretto. After a discussion of philosophy and poetry, Descartes himself recorded the decision to do so in his notebook:

The sayings of the sages can be reduced to a certain very small number of general rules. Before the end of November, I shall travel to Venice and from there to Loretto, on foot, if I can accomplish it easily and in stages. If not, I shall do it with at least as much devotion as has been customary for anyone else.²¹²

²¹² Cole 28.

I haven't noticed anyone commenting on the peculiar history of this destination. The church at Loretto is itself constructed around a rude dwelling, supposedly the hut in which Mary was born, received the annunciation, and gave birth. According to Catholic tradition, the house miraculously was translated from the Middle East to its present site outside of Venice. Montaigne himself, despite his skepticism, made a pilgrimage to Loretto, remarking approvingly that "there is more show of religion here than in any place I have seen."

The little village stands on a hill overlooking a plain, which the normally verbose Montaigne describes succinctly: "In short, it is a very beautiful place." After detailing the various acts of charity he witnessed, Montaigne wrote: "These examples they see every day, and they are pretty nonchalant about them. Not everyone who wants is readily allowed to give; at least it is a favor to be accepted." He then relates the story of a Parisian who, suffering some infirmity in one of his legs, had fallen into a fever. The man, having abandoned all medicines and aids, fell asleep, perhaps in the church itself, and thereafter dreamed of a flash of lightning. While still dreaming, he concluded that he was cured, and indeed upon waking, it was so. In closing, Montaigne says, "from his own mouth and from all his men that is all you can get for certain."²¹³

This is all interesting enough, regardless of its probability. But in relation to Descartes, I wonder if the 16th century inscription, found on the eastern façade of the basilica, would surprise anyone. The inscription refers to the three miracles associated with Mary but then adds an

²¹³ Montaigne. *Complete works of Montaigne: essays, travel journal, letters*. Trans. Donald M. Frame. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1957. 973.

astonishing detail. The walls of the house, which have “remain[ed] solid and uninjured” for centuries, do not rest on any foundation.²¹⁴

²¹⁴ Cf. Thurston, Herbert, “Santa Casa di Loreto.” *New Advent Catholic Encyclopedia*. 23 June. 2007. <<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/13454b.htm>>.

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