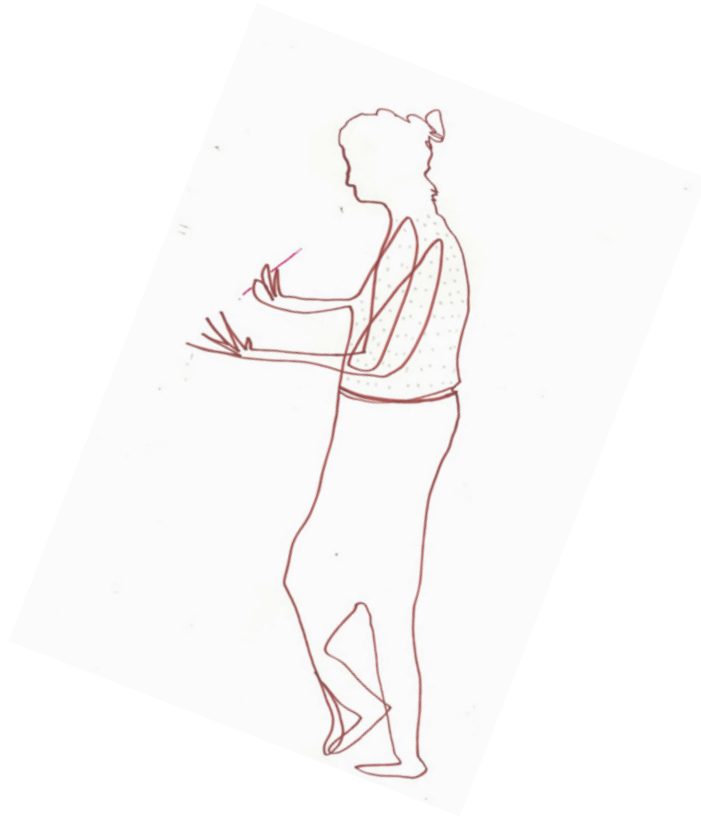


Five Dials



NUMBER 20

General Interest

- MORGAN MEIS 6 *Remembering Guru*
JON MCGREGOR 10 *I Will Now Write Footnotes*
JONATHAN SAFRAN FOER 13 *Not The Kind of Excerpt You'd Expect*
KIRSTY GUNN 26 *New Fiction*
KEITH RIDGWAY 29 *On Lunch With An Agent*
ADAM LEITH GOLLNER 34 *Hemingway's Wine*

... plus Alain de Botton, Mark Dow, Niven Govinden and reports on adoption in India and aftershocks in Japan



CONTRIBUTORS

ALAIN DE BOTTON is the author, most recently, of *The Pleasures and Sorrows of Work*.

MARK DOW is working on a manuscript of prose called *Each Thing Starts*; excerpts have appeared in *Agni*, *The Caribbean Review of Books*, *Paris Review*, and *The New York Times*. He can be reached at mdow@igc.org.

SOPHIE ELMHIRST is a journalist. She is currently an assistant editor of the *New Statesman* and has previously worked at Save the Children, the *Guardian* and *Prospect* magazine.

SONIA FALEIRO is a San-Francisco based reporter and writer. Her non-fiction narrative, *Beautiful Thing: Inside the Secret World of Bombay's Dance Bars* has been translated into several languages, and is forthcoming in the UK and the US. Her website is soniafaleiro.com

JONATHAN SAFRAN FOER's book *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* is currently being turned into a film directed by Stephen Daldry. It stars Tom Hanks.

JEREMY GAVRON's most recent novel is *An Acre of Barren Ground*.

DONI GEWIRTZMAN lives in New York City. He is an associate professor at New York Law School, where he teaches constitutional law. His work has appeared in the California Law Review and the Georgetown Law Journal.

ADAM LEITH GOLLNER is the author of *The Fruit Hunters: A Story of Nature, Obsession, Commerce and Adventure*. His writing appears in *The New York Times*, *Gourmet*, *Bon Appetit*, *the Globe and Mail* and *Good Magazine*, among others.

NIVEN GOVINDEN's novels are *We Are The New Romantics* and *Graffiti My Soul*. His short stories have appeared in numerous publications. Most recently, he was shortlisted for the 2011 Bristol Prize for his story 'Marseille Tip'.

KIRSTY GUNN is the author of four novels, including *The Boy and the Sea*, which was named Scottish Book of the Year 2007. Her latest book, *44 Things* was published in March 2007 and is a meditation upon domestic life and creativity.

JON MCGREGOR is the author of three novels, most recently *Even the Dogs*. He was born in 1976, and lives in Nottingham, England. He is the winner of the Betty Trask Prize and the Somerset Maugham Award, and has twice been longlisted for the Man Booker Prize.

MORGAN MEIS writes a weekly column at The Smart Set (thesmartset.com). He is the founding member of Flux Factory, an arts collective in New York, and has a PhD in philosophy from The New School for Social Research.

AMBER QURESHI was awarded a Monbusho Scholarship to study Pure Mathematics/Econometrics as a research fellow in the Graduate School of Chiba University, Japan, where she also for years tended bar. She is an Executive Editor at Viking Books in New York City.

KEITH RIDGWAY is the author of *Animals*, *The Parts*, *The Long Falling*, *Horses* and *Standard Time*. He lives in Edinburgh.

Thanks: SIMON PROSSER, ANNA KELLY, JAMIE FEWERY, SAM BUCHAN-WATTS.

Subscribe: fivedials.com

Designed by DEAN ALLEN

On Cable Street and General Interests

RECENTLY I WAS speaking to a student – a friend of a friend – who was preparing to move to London from Liverpool. During our conversation his phone kept cutting out – he was propped up near the window of his student house, trying to pick ancient Blu-Tack from the walls.

‘I found a place to live when I get there,’ he announced. ‘I found a place in the East. On Cable Street.’ I repeated the name back to him, just to clarify. ‘Cable Street,’ he confirmed. ‘Something happened there; London history.’

I visited Cable Street not so long ago. On the west wall of the old Town Hall is the mural created by an artist named Dave Binnington. It’s still visible, untouched by the tags of Shadwell graffiti artists. In 1980 fascists wrote ‘Rights for Whites’ in six-foot-high letters in an effort to cover his work, which depicts in bright colours the events of 4 October 1936, when Sir Oswald Mosley and the British Union of Fascists were prevented from marching down the street by groups of anti-fascists and members of the area’s immigrant communities.

I was on Cable Street on a summer day, and not cool London summer, or rain-swept London summer, or grim wintry London summer, but translatable summer, so that a visitor from California might have stood with me under the mural’s stylized depictions of determined faces and ‘shall not pass’ banners and police armed with truncheons and might have said, ‘Yeah, this counts as summer.’

On that particular afternoon, groups of Asian teenage boys performed lazy bits of gymnastics on traffic guard rails. People were drinking beer outside the Best-one shop. I always feel curious on Cable Street, and by that I mean the street makes me curious about London. Although *Five Dials* is an international magazine, and we do enjoy popping up in various places around the world to launch issues, we are at heart a London magazine, grounded here and, as it turns out, very curious about the place. We have a feeling that our readership might be curious

about this city too, whether they live in Yorkshire or Denver, Colorado (hello, Shannon Piserchio). Beginning in this issue, and expanding into the autumn, we’ll feature a section called Our Town. Apologies to Thornton Wilder fans: it will not be an ongoing critical examination of the issues of the 1938 play. (But what was *up* with Emily in Act Two, anyway?) And, much as we like Talk of the Town, it will not be led by a timely essay on current events, as we employ no one with that kind of acumen. It’s an excuse to write about this place: its people, its politics, even the Poundland on Seven Sisters Road. We often use *Five Dials* as an excuse.

For instance, on another afternoon I visited an older writer and social historian named Bill Fishman at his semi-detached house not far from Kenton Station, which is near the end of the Bakerloo Line. We sat in the front room and I forgot to take notes on the surroundings because I was too busy eating peanuts from the bowl set in front of me. Bill began telling stories right away, spinning back through time to talk of his rabbi grandfather in the Ukraine, the pogroms, Cossacks shooting anyone who looked Jewish. I tried to urge him forward in history, to his London, but it took time. Bill’s ninety-one and he thinks about his grandfather often. ‘A Jew with a beard,’ he said. ‘He made his way across Europe from the Ukraine. He never told me that story, about his journey to London. I begged him. He said no.’

Bill’s one of the last survivors of the Battle of Cable Street. He hasn’t kept particularly quiet about the incident (I heartily recommend his own writings), but I still wanted to hear him talk about it, especially after I’ve walked down that street time and time again. Bill finally left the subject of his grandfather and the Ukraine behind him and came gently into the twentieth century, to the autumn of 1936, to the days of Mosley.

‘I actually saw him two weeks before the great battle,’ Bill said. ‘I was leaning against a pub which is still there in Bethnal Green Road and I saw this crea-

ture coming forward, marching ahead. A handsome man. Hooked nose. Moustache. All his followers with their heads up in the air – “Hail Mosley”. He came and stopped in front of this pub. There were a few Communists standing nearby. I remember the first words that came out of his mouth: the alien menace. What kind of people was he talking about?’

Bill then pointed to the painting of his grandfather on the wall. ‘I remember the day we stopped him. Creeping out of the house, early out of the house, and jumping on a train which took me to Bow. My father wouldn’t go to Cable Street. He wouldn’t be involved in politics as he had a small shop and we were living on the margin. Half past eight and there was a massive crowd, and the main thing was to see so many girls, very pretty girls, very nice. They all had signs across their bosoms and they were chanting: “One, two, three, four, five / We want Mosley dead or alive.” These young girls, they got bashed up when it all began, when Mosley and his men came into the street. Mosley came into this narrow, long road. There were large buildings on the side where Lemman Street meets Cable Street. They were mainly inhabited by women of Irish descent. I could see these women as Mosley’s men advanced, throwing filthy old potatoes at them. They went berserk. A grand old fight took place.’

The fight has been well documented. Mosley was turned back; the Chief of Police ordered the retreat. But Bill wanted to talk about what happened later, as morning turned to afternoon. ‘Dancing,’ he said. ‘It was in the Cannon Street Road, which leads to Cable Street, about a hundred yards to the left of where they’d advanced. I can see them even now, dancing outside a pub. I’ve forgotten the name of the pub, a Jewish pub, and they were all dancing, feet flying this way and that, a beautiful sight in the afternoon. I got home at sunset and my old man was waiting for me. He was about to hit me when my mother stepped in. My father looked at me and said in this quiet voice, “Yes, I’d heard we’d stopped them.”’

When I got up to leave, Bill was still deep in London’s twentieth century. By then the bowl of peanuts on the table had been decimated.

‘I also saw Gandhi,’ he said, while I was putting on my coat.

‘He was visiting,’ his wife interjected. ‘He was wearing that loin cloth, wasn’t he?’

‘I clapped eyes on Gandhi on the Whitechapel Road. We watched him coming, just walking along, and I said, “That’s Gandhi”.’ His wife nodded – this sort of thing happened all the time.

‘But we’ll have to save Gandhi for another visit,’ said Bill.

AS FOR THE REST of this issue, we haven’t really put it together with a theme in mind, other than one of ‘General Interest’. We love that dusty old phrase, now fading back into the world of twentieth-century magazines. We’ve got contributions from Jon McGregor and Jonathan Safran Foer, and some new fiction from Kirsty Gunn. One of our corre-

spondents, novelist Jeremy Gavron, spent time in a hospice in north London. The beautiful results – which may not be what you expect – are reprinted here, along with articles on Gang Starr, David Foster Wallace, adoption in India, earthquakes in Japan, advice on how to handle a literary agent, and an excerpt from a book that’s mostly not there at all. (Read on.)

A few weeks ago we took the *Five Dials* operation to the Art Car Boot Fair, a gathering just off Brick Lane where artists sell their wares. Our friend Bob and Roberta Smith unpacked and sold his paintings across the courtyard, and we covered a car in paper and asked passers-by to help us create the visuals for the issue. And yes, we cheated by inviting over a few *Five Dials* illustrators – Becky

Barnicoat, Sophia Augusta, Richard Todd and Emily Robertson – and some artists like Fiona Banner and Francis Upritchard. The artwork was made in the sunshine and then the rain and then the sunshine again. That’s how we’ve illustrated the issue. It was like art farming. We harvested the good stuff.

And to make this issue even more general, it starts with an article that was performed at the launch of our last issue in New York. Doni Gewirtzman wrote an account of his parents’ divorce and read it out to a rapt audience. The thing is we didn’t get to run it in the Parenting issue. Here’s a photo of Doni at the reading – he did a brilliant job. His article is on the next page. Keep reading.

—CRAIG TAYLOR



Woodcuts

by Doni Gewirtzman

I DON'T HAVE kids, but parenting seems really messy to me. Things are constantly getting ripped apart and put back together in imperfect ways, and there doesn't seem to be any way to know which wounds cause a scar, which don't, and which end up getting litigated at the *real* International Court of Justice, where you sit at the defence table while your children get as much time as they need to make their case to Oprah or Gandhi or whoever happens to be on call that day. Parenting seems to involve doing a lot of unforgivable things, and forgiveness is the price you pay for being born.

I grew up in a three-bedroom Manhattan apartment on the seventh floor of 250 Riverside Drive, a nine-storey apartment building on the corner of 97th Street and Riverside. My parents had moved there in 1969, a year before I was born. The apartment is rent controlled, meaning that it is considered a really bad thing to reveal just how obscenely low the rent on this Upper West Side classic six actually is.

The building is located in one of the few areas of Manhattan that has some sort of real topography, planted at the base of a steep hill that runs from West End Avenue towards the Hudson River. When I was little, I would allow gravity to drag me down the slope, descending faster and faster, trying not to lose my balance before I reached my home at the bottom.

The western windows in the apartment's living room overlook Riverside Park and the river beyond. It used to be two large rooms but became one gigantic room when the hippies who rented the apartment in the late 60s tore down the wall to accommodate their friends who used it as a crash pad. At sunset, the room would fill with fiery orange light and during the winter I would watch the snow cover the park. There was a playground right across the street, and every day after school I would look out the windows to see if my friends from the neighbourhood had shown up so I could run down and join them.

The living room was where the action was. For my bicentennial themed sixth

birthday party, we decorated it with red, white and blue streamers and my father made a cake with the forty-eight contiguous states etched in different colours of icing. There was a big long yellow table where my mother made origami tree ornaments, papier mâché piñatas, tie-dye T-shirts and a ton of other 70s craft projects that I enjoyed but was never particularly good at. I'd watch my father sit at the table and carve slits into blocks of linoleum to make woodcuts, and we would roll paint over them and press the blocks on to pieces of paper. The prints were usually of people much older than him, ancient and haggard and wrinkled and sad.

At some point during the summer of 1979, just before my ninth birthday, while my mother and me and my younger brother Lev were away at a small beach cottage we rented in Fire Island for a month, my father began to have an affair with a woman who lived in an apartment on the first floor, just to the left of the front entrance. She had moved into the building around the same time as my parents, and her apartment was also rent controlled. She was a close family friend, and I had grown up knowing her and her daughter. Her husband had left her shortly after their daughter was born, and she was the first single mom I had ever met. Somewhere, in a photo book long tucked away in an area reserved for things too painful ever to be seen again, there is a photo of me when I was four or five, curled up in her arms in the backseat of our family car.

I think the affair remained a secret for a few months, but when my mother discovered what was going on, everything lost its balance. In those days, there were no guidelines or self-help books or talk shows to tell people how to dismantle a marriage while doing the least amount of damage possible. They were operating in uncharted territory and totally overmatched by the challenges ahead of them. So everyone went berserk.

I don't remember much from that time. My mother went to stay with friends in Maine for six months to pull herself together, while my brother and I remained in the apartment with my father as he

continued his relationship with the woman who became my stepmother. There are glimpses of handwritten love letters between my father and his mistress, sprung from the divorce papers I found in a file cabinet while sneaking around; there are angry words scrawled in lipstick up and down the hallway; there are my hands tearing at my stepmother's hair as my brother wraps his arms around my legs; there are sadness and anger reaching into places where they had no business being.

More than anything, I wanted it all to end. I would come home from school like Sissy Spacek in the movie *Carrie*, after she sets her entire high-school graduating class on fire, filled with power and rage. I'd run to the front windows and watch the world suck the sad, wounded, heartbroken remains of 250 Riverside Drive into a whirlpool of pavement and brick at the valley where 97th Street ends and the river begins. There would be a spasm of violence and energy and force and feeling, and a chasm would open up and take it all – the fiery sunlight, the snow, the loud crunch of metal and wood and bone as the playground snapped apart, the park folding in upon itself.

But the building was stubborn and withstood the shockwaves. When my mother returned from her time away, she took back the apartment on the seventh floor, while my father moved into the apartment on the first floor with my stepmother. With everyone determined to cling to their rent-controlled apartments, they have all stayed in the building for the past thirty years. Every day, my mother walks past the door of the apartment where my father lives with his wife. They have never reconciled.

In my bedroom now, there are two woodcut prints my dad made when I was little that I combined into a single frame. Unlike photos from that time, which usually make me go blank and numb, I like looking at the prints. One is of me as a boy with my bowl haircut, gently placing my hand on my mom's shoulder. She is wrapped in a thick shroud and her eyes stare down at the floor. The second is of me with my dad. I am sitting in his lap, leaning my head against his leg while he looks directly out at the frame. No one makes eye contact. We are slit into deep solid lines, each of us on our own, connected by touch at a single distant point. ◇

What Guru Told Us

Morgan Meis on an anniversary

Dear *Five Dials*,
I remember hearing Gang Starr for the first time. It was in my friend's garage, the one at his mom's house in South Central LA that he'd converted into a hangout spot, which was the fashion at the time. The neighbourhood dogs were barking pointlessly in all the yards, you couldn't see to Baldwin Hills for all the smog, and the LAPD helicopters chop-chopped the sky, ever present.

It was a warm day, as I recall, and the sound coming out of the garage was damn smooth. I liked the raspy voice of the MC. He was rapping about the streets, which was also the fashion. He wasn't just bragging, rhyming about how hard he and his crew were. He wasn't wagging a finger in condemnation either. There was a balance to the song, something real from the standpoint of someone who knows. The opening line of the song goes, 'Brothers are amused by other brothers' reps / But the thing they know best is where the gun is kept.' It's something Johnny Cash would have understood.

The song was 'Just to Get a Rep' and the MC went by the name of Guru. Guru dropped into a coma in April last year after a heart attack related to his fight with cancer. On 19 April, he died. I was reminded of him again when a friend put on one of his *Jazzmatazz* albums the other day, the one with Chaka Khan. He's been dead more than a year already is the thought that crossed my mind.

'Just to Get a Rep' might not be the best Gang Starr song, but it is the one I'll always listen to with a special fondness. One of the difficult things about doing hip-hop in the late 80s/early 90s was navigating the whole gangsta rap thing. MC Ren of N.W.A would say things like, 'There's nothin' that's real that you can escape — otherwise, people wouldn't be putting so much fuss over the record, if you could escape reality. Wherever you go, reality is there to set you straight. There's no Utopia nowhere, you know.' That's a pretty strong claim when

you think about it. Ren was, essentially, claiming reality for gangsta rap.

How do you respond to that? Do you try to out-gangsta the other guys? Do you go off in a completely different direction like the post-hippy sound of De La Soul? Even if you do, the pressure of authenticity can be overwhelming. De La Soul got so tired of being called hippies (by the likes, even, of Arsenio Hall) that they released a second album called *De La Soul Is Dead*.

The gangsta rap persona was overwhelming for any young MC trying to create a sound and an identity. Guru understood all that. I suppose there is a reference to that problem in the name, Gang Starr. It's as if they are looking for an escape even in the word itself, and there it is ... 'Starr'.

'Just to Get a Rep' had a street edge to it; Guru was down. Still, it was clear that he saw the tragedy and ugliness of the gangster life. Plus he wore that Black Muslim cap and he'd throw out fancy words, complicated diction. Guru once rhymed 'mic' with 'teletype'. I heard someone refer to him as the 'wise uncle'. I like to think of Guru that way. Just like your wise uncle, Guru was dangerously close to being full of shit, getting a little too self-righteous. If you aren't careful the wise uncle can metastasize into Don King, constructing a diction that no fellow human being should ever have to decipher. Or he could end up down at the corner of Slauson and Crenshaw selling bean pies, warning everyone about the blue-eyed devil and preaching the wisdom of W. D. Fard. But Guru always reined it back in the nick of time. 'Jazz Thing', the song made famous in *Mo' Better Blues*, is preachy and didactic but redeemed, nevertheless, by the delightful phrase 'Thelonus Monk, a melodious thunk'. For all his dubious claims to greater knowledge, Guru had a natural ear for the language of music and for the music of language.

Guru (and his amazing DJ, Premier) had acute ears for jazz and they brought

it into hip-hop vocabulary more successfully, arguably, than anyone else at the time. Sounds easy enough, but it took real work. Jazz — after the swing period — doesn't lend itself immediately to the 'flow' of a hip-hop beat. By the 60s, it wasn't unusual to come across a 5/4 time signature in a jazz composition. Try rapping over that. Guru and Premier never let it worry them. They had the feeling that the stripped-down sound of early hip-hop was itself part of a larger story.

Often, Gang Starr songs would dig pretty deep into music history. What, for instance, are all those crazy space noises dancing around the baseline in the background of 'Just to Get a Rep'? That's a sample from Jean-Jacques Perrey's *E.V.A.* Perrey was a Frenchman who moved to New York in the 50s and started experimenting with loops and electronic noises with his new friend Robert Moog (of Moog synthesizer fame). Perrey also cut a few albums for Vanguard with Gershon Kingsley, sometimes credited with having written the first ever electropop song ('Popcorn') and a friend to John Cage.

That's the sort of stuff Gang Starr was comfortable referencing. Musically, they were always tying hip-hop back to its roots just as Guru was doing his best to address the coherence and narrative unity of the black experience. Guru and Premier wanted young DJs to appreciate experimental electronica music and stick-up kids to think about Marcus Garvey. Probably they failed in both. Thing is, 'Just to Get a Rep' still sounds great whether or not anyone ever got the message. Whenever Guru's voice pops up over a jazzy baseline, I feel like I'm hearing something that will last even though Guru himself left the building a year ago.

I still hear his music coming out of cars driving down the street in Brooklyn. That happened just a few days ago. I heard a DJ in Antwerp playing Gang Starr last summer. Yeah, Guru is going to be alive for a very long time.

—Morgan Meis

Our Town

'You think I don't know London? I been here ten years now, and it ain't have a part that I don't know. When them English people tell strangers they don't know where so and so is, I always know. From Pentonville right up to Musket Hill, all about by Claphand Common. I bet you can't call a name in London that I don't know where it is.'

—Spoken by the character 'Big City' in *The Lonely Londoners* by Sam Selvon

W8

HE CAUGHT ME making a sign of the cross as the tea was brought to my table: an orange brew in a chipped mug and a madeleine the size of a brick.

'Roman, are you?' he asked, friendly but loud.

I shook my head briefly and stared at the offerings. The cake was as garish as the tea, thickly sandwiched with red jam and dusted with spindly desiccated coconut. My table was by the door and the girl had to walk the length of the cafe to reach me. Her wrist shook under the weight of the mug, literally too hot to handle. Through loose fingers it clattered on the tabletop, splashing a corner of the madeleine. Patches of coconut immediately disintegrated into an orange-grey mulch. A saucer may have lightened her effort, but this was a no-saucer place. The owner, from his seat at the counter, the master of all he surveyed, spotted the mess at once and sent her back to make one fresh.

'I should be crossing myself too with the staff I've got,' he said cheerfully, as he wiped my table. 'Blimey.'

Across town at the Savoy, the woman who had brought my tea the day before, heaven in three china tiers, also observed me crossing myself, but had said nothing; better trained in the customer experience and how not to dispel it. They were more vocal about what they saw on the Hammersmith–Chiswick border.

It was easier to explain away at the former place. Already tipsy from Bellinis at the American Bar, my senses had felt heightened. I was all too aware of what I was about to undertake: a public and pleasurable gorging of sponge and cream, choux and cream, shortcrust and ganache, and possibly the thinnest sandwich or two to hold everything together. This fattening of my sides and strain on my liver needed to be forgiven in advance. It gave the cakes a better taste. Also, if that failed, I was ready to employ a man-made abso-

lution, knowing how the excessive sweetness would be washed away afterwards with a trio of whisky sours at Dick's.

The doilies were to blame for my fall into religious ritual. Vintage lace doilies atop plates, Edwardian glass-domed cake stands, polished silver tea strainers and other paraphernalia, making me feel as if I were about to take part in an extravagant seance. It was hard not to be attuned in this way. All around us were ghosts.

I thought about those who felt the full force of sin thunder through them as they verged towards illicit pleasures: kids double-dropping on the last day of term, and married men who spent twenty quid in red-light flats during their lunch hour. Did touching the four points of the compass allow them a free pass? Or did it do for them as it did for me: faintly underscore each mouthful with bitter notes due to a tart berry or the sudden detection of unsweetened pastry.

My Savoy waitress seemed to be aware of these things. Her smile was tight-lipped as she replenished the sandwiches and brought a pot of hot water to top up the tea, and when that grew cold, another. Her dark hair, two tones away from being jet, was pulled back into a horseshoe ponytail that seemed to be uniform for those working the room. Still, there was something Catholic about her. The rich tan of a Southern European, a shimmering of lines across her forehead denoting some seriousness: the marks of a God-fearer. I worked hard to detect a crucifix under her blouse but found none. Her words were heartfelt when they extolled you to enjoy your feast, but the way her eyes lingered over both the table and the diner themselves suggested that she wanted you to feel it afterwards, to understand that recompense needed to be made.

How that came about was down to the individual, whether they splashed tea on themselves in the midst of their gluttony, had their credit card declined at the end of it all, or simply had an uncomfortable

nap in a sitting-up position as the body worked itself to exhaustion to digest these latest indulgences.

In Hammersmith there was none of that; more an honest curiosity.

'Eat!' the owner said, slapping me on the back once fresh tea had been laid. 'The cake's on the house, son. To make up for the inconvenience, yeah?'

He then sat at the table and watched me eat, replacing one inconvenience with another. This was the thing about a makeshift afternoon tea at a greasy spoon – the staff had too much time on their hands. It made simple neighbourhood anonymity difficult to achieve. I would otherwise have been sipping tea in Surrey, but had learned from past mistakes.

In both places they looked at me with the sympathy they'd give a comfort eater. Neither seemed to understand that there was no shame in a person ordering a full afternoon tea for one. I had a dozen such spots all over London to fall back upon; from the restored lobbies of previously musty hotels, to trendy places that looked like nightclubs, to the trusted formica-topped establishments still scraping a living in the city. A writer working on his book all day needs these things.

They had misinterpreted the reason I was crossing myself, but perhaps I had too. I had previously accepted it as a tic that came to the fore sporadically, nothing more, the way the Lord's Prayer would suddenly come to you, or the members of long-forgotten bands. The notion that I was absolving myself for my work, allowing me temporarily to forget the successes or failures of the day, and to eat quietly in a state of grace had never occurred to me until now. Maybe I was just giving thanks to well-made sponge, like this factory-made Madeleine, stale but good. Maybe I just needed to stop thinking. I waited for him to pause for breath and ordered another

—NIVEN GOVINDEN

THE POUND SHOP: a concept so simple, so pure, you have to keep reminding yourself of its parameters. Everything costs £1. *Everything*. A tin of HP baked beans: £1. A packet of Weetabix Oatibix Flakes: £1. Five fluorescent Alice bands: £1. Twenty-four ladies' razors: £1. A bumper pack of Wotsits: £1. Sadie Frost's autobiography, *Crazy Days*: £1.

Poundland – for this is another country, with its own laws – rewires the retail experience. Your eyes flick from product to price tag – how much does this tennis racket cost? – *but there are no price tags*. Even a tennis racket costs £1 (a tennis racket!). If you haven't been to a pound shop for a while, there is a natural period of acclimatization. You want to stand in the aisles and shout, 'Look! This mop! One pound!' (According to Poundland chief executive Jim McCarthy, the most frequently asked question in his shop is, 'How much is this?') Even Poundland seems to be amazed by itself. Under certain items there are little signs: '£1. Wow! Wow!'

My Poundland, the Poundland on Seven Sisters Road, nestles between pawn shops and betting shops and charity shops, and is but a few steps from the Manhattan Bagel Bakery and the Ocean Breeze fish bar. Seven Sisters Road is a jammed, juddering thoroughfare that links Holloway Road and Finsbury Park – it is not like Manhattan, there is no ocean and not much breeze, unless you count the gentle wind of pollution that blows along the street. Walking into Poundland is as close as I can get as a low-earning adult to the feeling I had when entering a toyshop as a child. It's a wonderland, brimming with possibility. I can feel my heart beat. That might simply be from the noise, though: inside the shop is a cacophony of jaunty signs and jostling customers and announcements over the Tannoy that invite you to follow Poundland on Twitter (which I can only think might get repetitive).

But as with any masterpiece, there are flaws. I want to buy pens and some Flash cleaner but am told by the patient shop assistant that you can use your credit card only for purchases over £5, which seems at odds with Poundland's guiding principle (I panic-reach for loo paper, batteries and chewing gum to make up the

amount). Also, don't come to Poundland if you're a completist. Reading glasses (£1 a pair) are available only in six strengths. The Dalmation dressing-up kit (£1) will equip you with ears and a tail, but leave you exposed elsewhere. The lino floor tiles (a packet of four: £1) will cover a neat corner of a room, enough for a chair, perhaps, or a shrine.

You'd think that the economics of Poundland were simple. You'd be wrong. Take pens. I have never seen such a selection of pens as those lining the shelves of the Seven Sisters Road Poundland. The display is a thing of beauty, and confusion. £1 will buy you seven ballpoint pens or four rollerball pens or three executive gel pens or six ball pens or six handwriting pens or ten gel pens or sixteen retractable pens or two never-get-lost pens (belt clips attached). What, you might ask, is the substantive difference between a rollerball pen and a ball pen, or a gel pen and an executive gel pen? Is an executive gel pen so fine, so *executive*, that it is a good thing, a recommendation, that you only get three compared to ten (non-executive) gel pens? Or is the executive-ness of the executive gel pen overblown? What, in fact, is the divergent feature of an executive gel pen? (Also, what is a handwriting pen?)

Poundland does not answer these questions. Poundland only feeds the mystery, which feels somehow right on Seven Sisters Road, named after a circle of seven elm trees which you can no longer see. There is something miraculous about the place, but also potentially disappointing. Nowhere else in the world does the possibility of 'false economy' hang so heavily in the air.

Not long ago, a pound-shop manager said he wished, at times, that they 'could charge £1.05 or £1.10'. Even McCarthy admitted that he had considered expanding his pricing repertoire. But he quickly backtracked: 'I would lose the magic if I changed the policy.' Poundland, this is how you stole my heart. What other shop has a mission, a creed, a statement of intent so clear that the slightest deviation would render its *raison d'être*, its vision, its very *name*, devoid of meaning? The boss is right: there is magic at work. In Poundland, you know exactly what you're going to get – things for a pound – but there are tantalising unknowns: how *many* things?

Forget pens. Thirty-five HB pencils, with erasers: £1. Thirty-five! Wow! Wow!

—SOPHIE ELMHIRST

N1

IN THE SANDWICH shop on Upper Street the man in the reflective vest inspected the posters of West End shows that served as wallpaper. He ordered a tri-coloured – a sandwich made with mozzarella, tomato and a suspect slice of avocado – and he just couldn't keep quiet, shifting on one foot then the other. The Spanish man behind the counter scooped endless Coronation from a serving dish, smeared butter, chopped 'salad'.

On the rain: 'This weather,' the man in the reflective vest said, waving a finger at the Spaniard. 'It's not natural, you know what I'm saying? It's not like the weather you've got where you come from. And in my homeland, god bless it, the skies would not *stand* for this. Not *stand* for this.'

On misery: 'Misery is based on weather, you know what I mean? Misery – now think about this – misery is something that comes from discomfort, which comes from dampness, which comes from rain, which is always coming down where? That's right. Misery and London, man. Two links on the same chain.'

His sandwich was done. Hot mozzarella curled over the lip of the baguette. As he went to take it from the Spaniard he spotted a poster for the production of Eve Ensler's *The Vagina Monologues*, which had enjoyed a long run at the New Ambassadors Theatre. He paused and the sandwich stayed for a moment in both their hands. 'Vagina monologues?' he asked. 'What does that mean?'

The Spaniard said nothing.

'I've had a few monologues to vaginas in my day, you know what I'm saying? Get right down there, delivering a speech. Vagina monologues? People are paying for that? That's London, man. What else is there to do in this rain but talk to a vagina? "How are you? I'm fine. How are you? I'm a vagina." That's this city, man. And more than anything that's just really sad. Did you put my drink in here?' He held the take-away bag aloft. The Spaniard nodded so he grabbed it from him, shook his head and walked out into the rain. But before he left the safety of the awning he called back to us one more time: 'Vagina monologues, man.'

—THE EDITORS

A Letter from Fukushima

By Amber Qureshi

People don't really talk about the way an earthquake sounds. You hear it before you realize you're feeling it: a low rumble, vast and deep, within as well as without you, the sound of entire buildings shaking, objects falling, screaming, sound coming closer at lightning speed, fear and horror made audible, palpable. You are given sights: things move that shouldn't. Power lines and poles. Walls shake. Bridges turn into snakes. Your heart falls into your stomach, and the power goes right out of your legs – you often see women drop to their knees in the middle of the street. But your body and your brain can still choose to deny the evidence. Here are twenty other ways to know an earthquake has happened, many of them specific to the earthquake that happened on 11 March 2011, at 2.46 p.m., in Eastern Japan – it's happened in this way nowhere before or since.

1. The power goes out, everywhere. Entire cities go dark and stay dark indefinitely.
2. Cars stop. Every Japanese person knows to stop the car in an earthquake, even on the highway.
3. Stores empty out, stay unlocked, outside wares left untouched, and people head for the middle of the street (where all cars have stopped, remember), for whatever open spaces they can find.
4. Animals go crazy – some hide, some run in circles.
5. Commercials stop running on TV for three weeks. All non-news programming stops for three days.
6. Every foreigner goes home. French and British governments charter planes, fly citizens back for free. Tumbleweeds at Narita Airport Immigration Control, at Foreign Passport Check (incoming), a month after the disaster.
7. Daily updates on radiation levels on the radio and TV, in newspapers. Air and water. Also, the names of the dead, which increase after every aftershock.
8. The smell of smoke in the air – fires are rampant after earthquakes. When a tank rocks into an explosion in Chiba, the entire prefecture smells like burning oil.
9. Escalators are off in nearly every train station and major building in Eastern Japan to save power. Anyone who has been on an elevator in a quake avoids one now, no matter how tall the building.
10. Aftershocks – earthquakes in their own right – happen without cease, of varying scale and duration, dozens of times a day. Strangers' eyes meet, a rarity in Japan: you're thinking the same thing (see above re heart, knees). Suddenly everyone is a human Richter scale. 'Just now was a low 6.' 'That long one this morning was definitely a 4.'
11. Aftershocks happen on their own schedule, not yours. You might be at a traffic light. In bed. Napping under a tree. On the toilet. Walking across an I-beam on an unfinished twenty-seventh floor.
12. Convenience signs are not lit up: there is no excess light in any town in Eastern Japan. The Fukushima power plants supplied 60 per cent of Eastern Japan's power, and the whole region is markedly darker to save energy.
13. You get a flashlight with your room key checking into a hotel – just in case.
14. Gasoline traffic jams. People line up for three hours to get the rationed ten litres of gas – and stations still run out.
15. People line up in parks to collect water from fountains.
16. As far away from the Tohoku region as Tokyo, companies use outdoor toilets for three weeks in order to save water.
17. Every concert, festival, holiday, birthday, housewarming and trance party is cancelled for the month of March. The service economy, a source of national pride, is especially hard hit.
18. Volunteer efforts, entirely home-grown, are so massive and efficient that centres in the southern part of the affected region close down within weeks of the disaster, the clean-up work being done.
19. No reported lootings, killings or any other quake-related crime in Japan in the entire month. Looting would be 'unthinkably selfish' for a Japanese person, locals say. The police actually stop patrolling affected areas to join in disaster relief.
20. Sirens sound across the country at 2.46 p.m. on 11 April 2011, one month in. The cherry trees explode into bloom, somehow more beautifully than ever, so much of a privilege as to be sanctified. ◇

Excessive Innovation and the Anxiety of Influence: A Footnote to the David Foster Wallace Tribute Issue

by Jon McGregor

LANGUAGE is born of imitation. Imitation is how we learn to speak in the first place, and it's how we find our place in the various groups and subcultures which draw us into adulthood. Most people have an ear for the best new bits of language they come across – a better or richer or more efficient or just smarter-sounding way of expressing ideas which are anyway always slightly beyond language's grasp¹ – and are able to absorb these into their own personal dialect.² This selective imitation is how languages originally developed (I assume, not having studied linguistics in any depth),³ and how they continue to develop today.

It follows, then, that literature functions in the same way; that writers have always imitated and reworked the best innovations of other writers, and that by doing so they've kept literary culture rich and inventive and in a state of constant development.⁴ I'm not the only writer, surely, whose first thought on reading a great piece of work is to wish I could have

written that?⁵ Nor whose second thought⁶ is to wonder just how it was done?

Some examples of literary innovations I've recently been tempted to incorporate into my own work: the sonorous yet oddly inarticulate voice of Peter Hobbs' excellent first novel, *The Short Day Dying*, achieved in part by simply doing away with commas; George Saunders' narrators' sense of slightly overreaching their own understanding, which he evokes by having them ever-so-slightly misarticulate a few key words or phrases, usually drawn from the jargon-heavy worlds of self-help and business management, in a way which is funny and sad and nuanced and very difficult to imitate;⁷ Raymond Carver's radical concision;⁸ Alice Munro's importing of novelistic temporal leaps into the short story; James Kelman's clipping of dialogue to signify stunted speech patterns.

But sometimes, problematically, a literary development is such an innovative leap that the thing becomes inextricably linked with that writer in such a way as to constitute a virtual moratorium on that thing. Take, for example, B.S. Johnson's *The Unfortunates*, in which the chapters are pre-

sented loose in a box and the reader invited to shuffle them before reading, which is both a great solution to the problem of sequencing an essentially non-linear narrative and a brilliant evocation of that non-linearity.⁹ (And which also happens to be a moving and quite brilliant piece of English post-war writing, a fact which is usually overshadowed by loud cries of 'Look! Loose chapters in a box!') But who would now get away with presenting a novel in the same way, no matter how appropriate it might be?¹⁰

And take for further example Russell Hoban's *Riddley Walker*, whose central idea, that post-apocalyptic language would resemble in its shattered grammar and lost understandings a kind of pre-modern language, has been impossible to reuse without provoking recollections of Hoban's original work.¹¹ Although in this instance other writers haven't been entirely inhibited from making use of the innovation, just as neither have they been inhibited from following W.G. Sebald's use of found images set within text. Which I think supports the notion I'm grasping towards: that it's *okay* to make use of innovations, even radical and apparently one-off innovations, and that doing so shouldn't detract from the work of the innovator nor reflect badly on the innovation-user. (Unless of course the innovation is made use of in a sloppy or unnecessary or weakly constructed way, in which case let the usual modes of literary criticism apply.)¹²

Which brings us, circuitously, to David

1 See Wittgenstein, Foucault, et al.

2 For example, my daughter, who is not a black teenager from south London but a white five-year-old from Nottingham, has recently started saying 'Oh my days!' to express a kind of exasperated surprise. I have no idea where she got this from, a nor why she even needs to express exasperated surprise, but I think it's a lovely and almost song-like or biblical-sounding expression which I'm tempted to start using myself.
a. The top deck of a bus in south London, possibly.

3 And you thought I'd actually *read* Wittgenstein, Foucault, et al?

4 This is, you know, some of the writers some of the time. Not all of the writers all of the time. Not by a long stretch.

5 My second, third and fourth thoughts, obviously, are: Don't kid yourself; I bet other writers don't think like this; and Why don't you get a proper job?

6 Well, fifth; see footnote 5.

7 Which hasn't stopped a whole generation of North American writers attempting to do so, I've noticed. Which given that this whole essay is about not being inhibited from imitating innovative leaps in literature is not an attempt I'm criticizing here, just an attempt I'm pointing out is much harder to pull off than it appears.

8 Or was it Gordon Lish's radical concision? Or Carver's radical acceptance of Lish's radical concision which itself was a radical projection of Carver's instinct towards a radical concision? Or was it? Etc, etc, ad infinitum.

9 And pretty much an ideal solution to the problem Philip Larkin was highlighting when he described the novels he'd read in his role as a Booker Prize judge as having 'a beginning, a muddle and an end'.

10 And which publisher's production department would even reply to an email suggesting such a thing?

11 The central section of David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas*, for example.

12 You may, for example, feel that I'm using too many footnotes here, even given the fact that I'm deliberately and tentatively-humorously overusing them to underline the central point of this essay. Which is fine. I'm new to this, and excited about it; I've only just discovered the 'Insert: Footnote' function on my computer.³

a. I wonder, how did writers manage footnotes on manual typewriters? Scraps of paper and glue?

Foster Wallace's innovative use of footnotes.¹³

Personal note: when writing non-fiction, I often find myself bogged down in a proliferation of complicated multi-clause sentences which attempt to contain too many ideas – as well as asides separated by dashes, some of which are themselves multi-clause – and a general excess of juggled information, and end up being unwieldy and basically just difficult or unsatisfactory to read.¹⁴ And since I can see that other writers are able to tackle this problem – are able to order their thoughts in a clearer and more linear fashion, or are able to craft lengthy multi-clause sentences which are a joy to read¹⁵ – I realize that the problem is mostly one of my having certain shortcomings as a writer. But I think there's something else, and it's a something-else which David Foster Wallace had worked out how to tackle before I'd even learnt how to type.

My non-fiction writing has usually ended up so multiply clausal because I'm trying to convey a lot of information at once: the story, the background to the story, the historical and geographical context, my personal reflections, some sense of the greater narrative, etc. Partly this everything-at-once hurtle is because I've been offered less space for the piece than the story ideally requires, as well as because of the shortcomings mentioned above; but

13 Which were only one small part of the cluster of linguistic and structural innovations which he brought to his writing, and in particular to his non-fiction writing: a gleeful verbosity would be another, as would rigorously grammatical sentence construction, as would the utterly unafraid juxtaposition of what used to be called low and high cultures, as would the sort of humanely demanding tone which I'm tempted to compare to a trekking guide who urges you to keep up while at the same time solicitously making sure you're able to do so. But I'm assuming, for the purposes of this essay, unless the editor directs otherwise, that you know DFW's work and recognize these aspects of it. Since otherwise your reading of this essay is basically redundant.^a

a Since how would you be inhibited from imitating an innovation of which you were ignorant?^b

b Alliteration deliberately gratuitous.

14 The sentence construction here is deliberately awkward and unwieldy and just basically difficult or unsatisfactory to read, for the purposes of a joke.

15 W.G. Sebald, obviously. Except technically that's fiction. Although, come *on*.

often it's also because I think that's just the way my brain works, and – here comes the point – the way a lot of our brains work now¹⁶ that we're so used to getting our information from computing networks rather than from individual sources.

For example, if I want to read up on the work of research scientists in Antarctica, I might go to a government science website, browse a few blogs and Flickr streams from the scientists themselves, zoom around on Google Earth, check the terms I don't recognize on Wikipedia, look at any archive materials which might be available online and find some video which has been shot on research trips; and I'll do all this with the browser tabs open simultaneously, flicking between them as I need to.¹⁷ So if it happens that I then go on a field trip to Antarctica,¹⁸ and see some of these things for myself, and want to tell a story about that experience, the flow of my narrative is instinctively going to be rather fragmentary and broad-ranging and have something of the this-and-this-and-this-at-once quality which my own prior reading – and lived experience – has had.

So what's the best way of capturing that this-and-this-and-this-at-once quality?¹⁹ Footnotes.²⁰ And not just the terse footnotes to which we were accustomed before David Foster Wallace got going, as in mostly citations or glossary-type definitions, but footnotes which serve as the written equivalent of a split-screen or second tab, with whole supplementary paragraphs and parallel thought-streams and additional context, and even, where

16 'Zeitgeist' alert: proceed with caution.

17 Take as implicit here that I'll also be checking email, news, football scores and popular social networking sites, as well as changing my mind about what music to listen to given the near-universal choice offered by services such as Spotify. This kind of fidgety inefficiency is a given, isn't it?

18 Which I did, in 2004, courtesy of the British Antarctic Survey and Arts Council England, both of whom are still waiting ever so patiently for anything substantial to result, and to both of whom I remain grateful. When something of substance does emerge, as I still maintain it eventually will, it's likely to utilize – you may surmise from the drift of this entire essay – footnotes.

19 Footnotes?

20 Ta-dah!

needed, footnotes to the footnotes.²¹

The most notable feature about the way David Foster Wallace used footnotes is that the reader is given a choice as to how to deal with the supplementary text – to read it in full at the exact moment the footnote occurs, to come back to it at the end of the sentence or the end of the paragraph or some arbitrarily later moment,²² or even to ignore it entirely²³ – and that this element of choice enables a sense of this-and-this-at-onceness which fits so well with the way in which we're now accustomed to taking on information and ideas and which is one of the many reasons why I personally find David Foster Wallace's non-fiction so approachable and yet

21 And this was a further innovation which was often commented on and seen as somehow a humorous device but which I think was more of a genuine working-through of the way DFW's narrative brain functioned and the way in which he wanted us to read his work.^a

a With the quality of this-and-this-and-this-at-once which I'm attempting to describe.

22 Or even, apparently, in the smartphone 'app'^b edition of *Infinite Jest*, to touch the footnoted word and see the footnote hover over the text as something like a speech bubble, which I'm just discovering now is also the way footnotes appear within the OpenOffice.org Writer software and I imagine also within Microsoft Word, and which presumably is how DFW viewed his own footnotes whilst working on his own writing, and which I'd like to imagine he would have enjoyed – whilst having well-constructed arguments for the primacy of the printed book – seeing demonstrated on someone's phone.

a Is it just me who thinks it sinister that this jaunty abbreviation of 'software application' just happens by sheer coincidence also to be an abbreviation of 'Apple', the name of the computing hardware/software company whose supporters spent years banging on about the monopolistic tendencies of Microsoft but now keep quiet about how relentlessly closed and monopolistic is the system their beloved overlords are apparently intent on creating?

23 Although what sort of an idiot would do this while still claiming an interest in reading DFW's work is somewhat difficult to imagine. But it does take all sorts. And the openness of the option is one of DFW's generousities as a writer, I think.

so exhilaratingly²⁴ dense.²⁵ And also why I find it so inspirational; it makes me wonder, as with all great innovations, whether I could make use of that technique as well.²⁶

The trouble is, David Foster Wallace's use of footnotes was such a big innovative

leap²⁷ that it became almost a trademarked feature of his writing, and took on a kind of protected status which was only amplified by his death, a protected status which has evolved into a kind of undocumented yet widely supported Footnote Moratorium.²⁸ But the innovative leap seems to me to be such a good one – such a useful technique for both writers and readers, and such a successful reflection and utilization of the this-and-this-and-this-at-onceness which I've outlined above as being very much of our time – that to let the Moratorium continue indefinitely would be something of a travesty.²⁹

So my proposal is this: A Footnote Moratorium Cessation Treaty (Proposed),³⁰ in which those who sign up to it would acknowledge that David Foster Wallace was more or less the first to use footnotes in such an extensive and parallel-textual way,³¹ and that, while anyone who uses

footnotes in a similar way might be seen to be imitating his innovation (and, almost inevitably, doing so less successfully), the innovation is of too great a use to our written culture to allow it to be left behind. This Treaty will of necessity retain a (Proposed) status until the use of footnotes reaches a certain critical mass; by which time, of course, there's likely to be a Footnote Moratorium Cessation Treaty backlash, whereby footnotes will be considered to be overused and possibly rather tiresome. But that will come later. For the time being, the early adopters of the FMCT (Proposed) will be innovation-imitation innovators, and will be making use of a device which, I can now testify, is quite apart from anything else a whole lot of fun.

And. Now I feel like a distant cousin at a family gathering who has unexpectedly started singing some old and possibly even inappropriate folk song in the hope that others will join in.³² The rest of the family are looking at one another awkwardly. This distant cousin has about half a verse to go before he either peters out in embarrassed silence or hears the rest of the family singing up³³ alongside him. Here comes the chorus.

Oh my *days*.

24 .And which, I'm guessing, ^a is probably a version of the way he was in conversation when in a position to hold forth on a given topic or, more likely, cluster of topics.

a. Not that I'd know. I never met him. And the peculiar wistfulness I feel on knowing I now never will makes me feel bad for all the mockery/disbelief I've previously directed towards those who claim any sense of loss or sadness whatsoever when someone to whom they have no actual personal connection dies, e.g., Michael Jackson, Princess Diana, et al. Because knowing that there will be no more work from DFW^b is a genuine loss. Not to mention knowing that his family and friends must miss him desperately, and the feeling of potential-associated-sadness by projection which that kind of knowledge also always triggers. Not to mention also the whole other level of recognizing the experience of attempting to support someone living through anything like the appalling depression which DFW was apparently subject to, the consideration of which gives rise to another more pointed dose of potential-associated-sadness by projection; this being something else which people feeling sad about Jacko and Diana also cite, and therefore I again feel bad for any previous mockery/disbelief directed their way.

b Publication of *The Pale King* notwithstanding; leaving the question of its brilliance or otherwise aside, it's demonstrably not a finished piece of work.

25 . 'Dense' here being a good thing, pretty obviously I hope. And note that 'dense' used as a critical insult often reflects badly on the critic and/or the culture which has produced that critic, since why should the compressing of several ideas into a single text be considered somehow a bad thing?

26 . See the top of this essay. See also footnotes 5 and 7.

27 . He wasn't alone, I'll concede. Mark Danielewski's *House of Leaves*, published four years after *Infinite Jest*, made similarly extensive use of footnotes and endnotes. And let's not forget that Laurence Sterne and Henry Fielding both cut loose with footnotes a long way back. Not to mention Joyce, Salinger, Fowles, Barth . . . but it was DFW who attained a reputation or notoriety for his use of them; and it was DFW who as far as I can tell has inhibited most writers from using them since, say, the early noughties.

28 I'm excluding academic and technical writing here, of course, and the standard type of footnote which predated DFW's use of footnotes, as well as the minor and somewhat tentative footnotes seen in literary journals such as the *Believer*.

29 I'm trying not to go so far, here, as to say something mawkish and intrusive like, 'It does a disservice to his memory'; but I'll admit I'm coming pretty close, and acknowledge the mawkishness and intrusiveness of doing so. But you can see why I'm coming so close, can't you?

30 I'm not entirely sure of the mechanics of such a thing: while an international conference with biscuits and fizzy water and translation headsets and people saying things like 'the dialectics of the discourse' might be fun, it's difficult to see where the funding would come from. It seems more likely that should this essay find a publication I'll ask the editor to attach an endnote alluding to a newly created page on a popular social-networking site where people can add their names to the FMCT (Proposed) in vast and influential numbers.

31 Or, okay, maybe he wasn't absolutely the first; but see footnote 27.

32 See also the first of Robin Williams's pupils to stand on his desk and say, 'O Captain, my Captain'. See also 'I'm Spartacus.' See also drunk man on bus trying to sing 'Auld Lang Syne' at 7 p.m. on New Year's Eve.

33 To sign up to the FMCT (Proposed) in vast and influential numbers, find 'Footnote Moratorium Cessation Treaty (Proposed)' on Facebook and click both 'like' and 'share'. Or send a suitably endorsed postcard to: Footnote Moratorium Cessation Treaty (Proposed), c/o Five Dials, Hamish Hamilton, xxxx,.

Tree of Codes

by Jonathan Safran Foer

Not so long ago, our friends at Visual Editions released a new book by Jonathan Safran Foer. We enjoyed it so much we asked if we could run an excerpt, in order to alert our far-flung subscribers. They agreed. The problem was that unlike Foer's other books, this one contained very few words. Picking up a copy of *Tree of Codes* is an odd experience. The book is too light for its own good, mostly because large sections of each page are missing. It is a book that relies on the absence, rather than the presence, of words. We asked Britt and Anna, who run Visual Editions, to explain further.

'*Tree of Codes* is as much a sculptural object as it is a work of storytelling,' they wrote to us. 'With the story literally carved out of another book, *Tree of Codes* has a different die-cut on every single page.'

'Our early conversations with Jonathan started when he said he was curious to explore and experiment with the die-cut technique. With that as our mutual starting point, we spent many months of emails and phone calls, exploring the idea of the pages' physical relationship to one another and how this could somehow be developed to work with a meaningful narrative. This led to Jonathan deciding

to use an existing piece of text and cut a new story out of it. Having considered working with various texts, he decided to cut into what he calls his "favourite book": *The Street of Crocodiles* by Bruno Schulz. 'As Jonathan began to carve out his story, we started doing our production homework and were turned down by every printer we approached. Their stock line was 'The book you want to make just cannot be made.' Thankfully, we found Die Keure in Belgium who relished the challenge.'

Here are the results

Apart from them,

mother and I ambled

, guiding our

shadows

over a keyboard

of

paving stones

we passed

the

chemist's

large jar

of pain.

we passed

houses,

sinking, windows and all, into

their gardens. Overlooked

beyond the margin of time

an endless day. An enormous

last day of life

The sleeping garden

screamed

the garden turned in its sleep, its

back rising and falling as it breathed

August had expanded into enormous

tongues of greenery.

August

painted

The air

with

a mop

.

Hours pass

in

coughs.

half-naked

half-animal, half-

shameless

,

half-

hoarse with shouting,

mother

was

lying in a patch of

yellow

in the still

broken only by the

ticking of a

clock

, motionless

like a glove from which a hand had been withdrawn.

the silence talked, the

bright

silence

argued,

time

filled the room,

the bright silence rising
from the clock

submerged in the green
and

blind with age, we rediscovered

life, the quality of blood, the
secret of private time

The Word Cloud

by Jeremy Gavron

FOR THE PAST year I have spent one Friday morning every month walking around the Marie Curie hospice in Hampstead, North London, where I work as a writer in residence, asking patients, visitors, staff and volunteers for words and phrases that catch something of their moods or what is on their minds that particular morning. When I have spoken to as many people as possible, I type up the words I have collected and organize them into the unpunctuated blocks you see below. I have to be quick, as the day patients start going home after lunch, and the aim is to give back the finished block, which I photocopy on to a different coloured paper each month, to as many people as possible. Usually I manage to turn it round in about an hour, which means that any artfulness in the arranging of the words is more instinctive than considered, but then instinctive responses are what I ask of those who contribute their words and phrases.

The idea, which grew out of discussions with my colleague, Michele Wood, the hospice art therapist, was to include more people than those I speak to indi-

vidually about their writing in a collective literary project, a communal story of a sort. I came to the hospice after my own experiences with death and illness had stirred my interest in the significance of language and stories at particular moments in our lives and at the ends of our lives. The form of the word block is borrowed from something my family and I made for brother's funeral a few years ago. Then we collected words and phrases we associated with him and put them together into a similar block.

The hospice has two wards for inpatients, some of whom come for respite stays, others who are close to the ends of their lives. It also provides facilities, such as a gym and a whirlpool, and services such as massage, art therapy and psychotherapy, to outpatients who come in for the day. When I first started collecting words, some people treated the project with suspicion or found it hard to understand what I was doing. But as the months have passed and people have read the results of their contributions, the word blocks have come to be a part of hospice life. Day patients and staff now know to expect

me and sometimes even have a word or phrase ready for me. The inpatients tend not to see me more than once. Most have either gone home, or died, between one month and the next. But sometimes they have seen the previous months' blocks up on the walls, and sometimes an inpatient is a former outpatient. In any case the project gives me an excuse to knock on doors in the wards and introduce myself to the inpatients, and this sometimes leads to other conversations about writing. In recent weeks I have been asked to come back to see one inpatient who wanted to write something to leave to her young daughter, and another who wanted help with completing a novel she had been writing for many years.

Everyone seems to read the word blocks differently. Some see them merely as lists or meaningless jumbles. Others like the way the words and phrases flow into or contrast with each other. They have been described as collages, poems, prose poems. I think of them more as collective stories. Each one is to me a story of the hospice on a particular morning, written by forty or fifty hands.

marie curie hospice hampstead election excitement my friend is
now an mp a glass of wine a hug music looking for notes hanging
on a hung parliament my head is like a tree full of monkeys
good heavens good exercise gives me a chance to fight boredom
exhaustion frustration my hip has come out nine times i have
been through it believe me mister my son my neck pip the hospice
dog i love my dog mitzy and moth harmony love grace incredible
kindness do not stop laughing clip the hedge stretch the capacity
i have been resuscitated cherry blossoms blueberries peonies rain
on the window wonderful shower it was sunny a minute ago i am
frantic breathless chaos i have no time today is not a great day for tea
parties cornflakes memories sadness maintaining perspective i am
scared overwhelmed exhilarated uncertain contemplative relaxed
calm white green i have a headache i can't follow that eff off i am
not a hundred per cent i am tired but happy feel the cold breeze
feeling mixed having my hair done will cheer me up i am grateful
how lucky i am a done deal catch you later friday may seventh two
thousand and ten

marie curie hospice hampstead the hottest day of the year i'm
gearing up for my holiday i'm retiring in three weeks i hope i'm
leaving today my husband is in the next room we both have cancer
i'm thinking about my family in lithuania my family came from
the pale of settlement i have three sisters in county cork and one
in wexford six of us left out of sixteen i'm thinking about calcutta
about growing old so far from home about forests and lakes in
sweden i have a ticket to fly out today i thought it would be over
i've got family in holloway islington ireland my son in france my
daughter in luton in manchester she worries about me she's my wife
my mother my son died last week it's my third time it's relentless
brutal a constant triage a strange place to be i'm blank wordless
shorn of time harassed inundated confused tired lost don't know
which way to turn too much to do eff off patience understanding
i'm reading khalil gibran i'm starting a new chapter courage
inspiration pennies from heaven a colostomy bag at the ready i try
to enjoy the moment i believe in miracles there are angels here i'm
resilient that's me friday ninth july two thousand and ten

marie curie hospice hampstead i've had a fantastic life i've got no right to be unhappy the last days of life are still life i've had a norovirus mrsa four infections in a row forty gallstones and twenty still inside me i've been sick since i was seven years old it's a relief to hear someone say death to normalise death it's a frightening road the cancer came out of nowhere i can't swallow you just have to hang in there i enjoy my life top of the morning life is what you make it i've had a transplant they didn't think i'd pull through i've got a young woman's marrow in my bones i'm getting younger my hair's less grey i want to get cracking i try to be happy my daughter is combing my hair i'm a little fighter i've got one foot in the grave everything's a compromise a difficult decision losing control my goal for today is to get out of bed it's a difficult moment i try to be optimistic i would like to go home just to have a look around i haven't been home in eight weeks my lovely machine that feeds me my little best friend it saved my life cancer is a label peace respect salvation walk with angels prolong life as independent as possible this place is number one you get through the day you learn so much from cancer friendship love sweetness uncertainty memory i could just kick it from one end to the other gosh and gorblimey i'm cold warm tepid my fear has gone you can't take it with you i'm having a hand massage it's perfect letting go bring me sunshine absolutely friday twelve november two thousand and ten

Insistence Is a Form of Pressing

by Mark Dow

A REPRESENTATIVE for the airline that had lost my luggage on a flight to Tulsa for my niece's bat mitzvah asked me to specify two objects in the missing bag. I mentioned my father's copy of *Without Precedent: The Story of the Death of McCarthyism* by John G. Adams, his former boss. I was returning it to him, and did once the bag had been delivered to the hotel and I'd retrieved the piece of paper that had kept my place. It was the bottom half of an 8½×11 sheet, white and wide-ruled. The rule was blue, and the vertical double-line delineating the left margin was red. Water had soaked into the left edge of the half-sheet where it peeked above the pages it was tucked into. A sheet of paper is flat, but it is three-dimensional; the dried water had left a tideline of blurred blue ink seemingly high up in the micro-fibres of the paper. Colours had separated. Red horizontal lines remained where the blue ones had been. A note scribbled on the scrap still gave the location of a faded sign painted on the side of a brick building just north of the Amtrak station in Wilmington, Delaware, so that I'd be able to find it again. The sign said: 'Guaranteed Destruction of Confidential Records'. Over the public address system, the train conductor, upbeat but tongue-tied, said: 'You will be asked to present an idea.' Passengers laughed. Then he walked north on the southbound train to collect tickets and check IDs.

MY FATHER, when he was in law school and not yet my father, would sometimes take the weekend train from Boston to New York to visit his maternal grandfather in Washington Heights in upper Manhattan. One Saturday his grandfather, a tailor, walked in and found him underlining something in a casebook. The act of writing is considered a violation of the sabbath. My father's grandfather just shook his head and walked out. Then, after the sabbath, he insisted on pressing my father's pants with the heavy iron, because, my father says, he wanted to do

something nice for him. My father likes remembering that.

About fifty years later, I was stretched out on the den rug, recovering from knee surgery, watching the Academy Awards broadcast with my mother. My father took pleasure in bringing me ice for the knee, and I liked that, the pleasure he took in it. He was pausing after an ice delivery before returning down the hall to the room that he, and therefore

the rest of us, my mother, my brothers, David, Steven, Stuart and Leon, and I have always called his study. On the TV screen someone famous was thanking people. The famous person concluded by telling his wife how much he loved her. During the applause and fade, my father, still standing, said he found this distasteful. He might have said 'inappropriate' or 'ridiculous', but it was just one word. What he objected to was the famous person's publicly stating his love. It's something to be expressed privately, he said. It's between the two people. This made sense to me, and it explained something to me about myself, and about my father to me. When I'd asked him to tell the story of the Fuck-You Letter on videotape,



he surprised me by seeming surprised that I'd ask. He didn't want to say the F-word on camera, even though he'd say it when no recording was involved.

THE DOWNFALL of Senator Joseph McCarthy owes much to the fact that the 1954 Army-McCarthy hearings were nationally televised. McCarthy's chief counsel on the Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations was Roy Cohn, and Cohn's assistant and lover was G. David Schine. Schine was drafted. The Army gave him various special privileges but refused Cohn's urging that Schine be granted commissioned officer status without his even having completed basic training. Schine was inducted as a private.

There had already been battles between McCarthy and the Army. When, a few months after his induction, Schine was going to be transferred down to Georgia, Cohn demanded the names of officers running the Army's own Communist-

vetting panels, called loyalty boards. The Army refused, claiming executive privilege. Counselor of the Army John G. Adams had a staff of eight lawyers, the youngest of whom, Norman Dorsen, Melvin Dow and John Simon, all just out of law school, 'had been plucked from the Korean wartime draft pool by the Judge Advocate General's Corps'. A letter later signed by the Secretary of the Army explaining the Army's refusal to turn over the names of its loyalty board members to McCarthy was drafted by Adams's staff. In *Without Precedent*, Adams writes: 'Into this letter of defiance one of them - Melvin Dow - had worked artful and well-reasoned arguments. (Around the law office his colleagues referred to the document as the "Fuck-You Letter".)'

PINBALL MACHINE rule # 3 states: 'If person "B" is playing with the machine, and person "A" has just finished, then if person "C" walks into the room and

wishes to play, he will be allowed to play when person "B" gets finished.'

Rule #4 states: 'If a person interferes with the person playing in any way, shape or form, he automatically loses the next game he calls. If the person refuses this punishment, he will be handled by higher authority. If the person whose game is being interfered with tries to handle the situation physically, he will also be punished.'

My mother is apparently the one who saved the sheet of paper titled 'RULES FOR THE PINBALL MACHINE'. Near the top edge there's a notation in her handwriting: '1973ish'. The rules were typed out by the oldest child, though they are numbered in my father's handwriting. The sheet had been taped to the lime-green side panel of the horseshoe-themed Derby Day unit, manufactured by the Chicago-based Gottlieb Corp., in our playroom in Houston.

There were five of us boys. Sometimes my father, losing patience, would say: 'You laugh together, but you cry alone.' Each of our handwriting looks a lot like the others', but none looks anything like either our father's or mother's.

Rule #6: 'All disputes over the pinball machine will be settled by the children. If it is necessary to take the argument to the parents, the parents will decide who is at fault and that person will be punished accordingly. The parents may also find it necessary to punish the boy who brought the argument to them if they feel that it could have been settled without them.'

When I asked how much English my paternal great-grandfather spoke, my father showed me something on the shelves in his study. For his bar mitzvah in 1941, his father Harry Dow's father, whose first name is my middle name, had given him a multi-volume bilingual edition of the Five Books of Moses. But it wasn't the books themselves that he wanted me to see, nor the English inscription, which was a rote and sincere *mazel tov* with name, date and occasion, repeated in now-greyled, translucent ink on the fly-leaf of each of the five volumes. What my dad wanted me to see, and still could be faintly seen on the browned paper, were the thinly pencilled horizontal lines his grandfather Ruben Yedidowitch had first drawn to keep his letters in neat rows.



The Wolf on the Road

by Kirsty Gunn

TWENTY MINUTES in, the sky started lifting. The thick grey pelt of early morning cloud was pulling apart, exposing a kind of light that was pale as the shell of egg or dry bleached bone. All day it would be cold. Anna knew it by the colour, colourlessness, rather, of the sky. She knew from the moment she could see the dawn appearing that it would never be blue or sunlit or golden, that there would be only the thin cold stillness you got this part of the country, this season. Only white or bone or grey.

She feels now, looking back, that the sky itself was like a premonition. The sky, the colour of the winter light. She had no idea what she was doing. To be out there alone as she was that hour and Neil and the boys asleep back at the hotel . . . It just describes the person she was then, she thinks now, that she would be acting as though by instinct, with no symmetry of reason or awareness. She can't even remember what her thoughts were that morning, if she'd had any thoughts. Noting the sky, sure, and driving that red rental car like it was her own, with the same kind of inevitable feeling she had when she drove at home, that knew the way to all the places she needed to go . . . She remembers that. And that word: inevitable. As though being out that morning and her certainty with directions, with her plan, was just like driving to the supermarket or dropping the kids off at school. Following turns in the road as though they were familiar, as though every exit and signpost were known to her when really everything she was doing that morning was unaccounted for and new.

Was that what it was like to be in the midst of an affair? To be pulled along with no consideration of consequences, acting as if by rote, as part of a routine? Did all women feel that way? Like the woman in Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*, remember? Or that film she'd watched last year on TV when Isabelle Huppert had run off and left her husband behind in Paris? Was that what it was always like?

The feeling of leaving – that you would simply get up in the morning and go?

Inevitable really did seem to be the word for it. A word you could hold in your mouth like a piece of food. Like 'edible'. 'Inevitable'. In a way, the same kind of word. A word that wasn't quite finished, even so, that left itself whole inside your mouth after you'd finished saying it, the last syllable sitting against your palate like an object and making you aware, somehow, of the length and loll of your tongue. She says it again, out loud: 'Inevitable.' A word that stays with you. Long after you'd left your sons and husband and your life with them behind.

That morning, certainly, it had been as though she'd had no choice. The destination fixed, the route already planned. *Just get up and go* – that's how it really had seemed. The hotel had still been closed up for the night when she'd walked out the front door, the lights in the lobby bright but no one on the desk to see her. And all the ski posters up there on the walls, and the leaflets on the low tables: 'Snowy Mountain Chairlift', 'Hilltop Ride'. Like they were reminding the hotel guests why they'd chosen to stay there. 'Best snow of the season right now,' someone on reception had said when they'd been checking in. 'You've come at absolutely the right time.'

The sky had folded back some more as she was driving, had lifted some more. Anna had looked at her watch. Seven forty-five. So an hour had passed behind her. Already a whole hour had gone since leaving that bright lobby, and before that, being up in the dark and noting the time then on the bedside clock before gathering up her things, a little bag, a coat, the car keys, and slipping out the door . . .

'Just think of time in pieces,' he'd said, hadn't he? Robert had said. 'One hour. Another hour. Then call me from the box at the end of the road like I told you.'

The sound of his voice comes back at her now, as she remembers all this, the slow drowsiness of it, but insistent. It pulls at her still. There was the road, running smoothly alongside her, with his

voice in it, and the seconds, minutes passing like the awareness of breath. Even the car had seemed to have a kind of an animal pull to it, all muscle and speed, like it was running alongside the road with her, keeping pace, breath for breath, second for second . . . Seeming to run the road down with its own strong sense of destination and need.

'Call me at nine,' Robert had said, 'and we'll sort something out . . .'

That had been the night before, of course, when they'd made that plan. When, as they'd arranged, she'd phoned from the hotel to work out how they were going to see each other, what they were going to do. *We'll sort something out* had been his phrase the night when they'd first met as well. 'You'll have to call me from the box at the end of my road because you won't get reception on your mobile,' he'd said to her. 'But not too early, okay? I'll be sleeping.'

Had there been something, Anna wonders these years later, in Robert's manner right there at the beginning, when they'd first met, that in its very carelessness was fixed to draw her in? For it's possible to see, isn't it, from her perspective now that she's older, that he may not have expected that she would follow through the way she did? Because for her part, she'd done exactly what they'd talked about that night in London when they'd met. She'd left Neil and the boys eating spaghetti in the hotel restaurant, their faced burned and happy from the day's snow and sun, said, 'Hold on for a sec, I just need to get a cardigan from our room,' and had gone instead to the telephone by the bar and called him just as he'd said she should, so that they could find a way to meet the next day. Yet there'd been a feeling even then, which she'd barely dared register at the time, that he seemed bemused, perhaps, or even a little surprised, that she had actually got in touch.

'It's too much now for me to take this in,' he'd said to her down the phone. 'I thought you were skiing. I thought you were . . .' He'd paused, or so it seemed to Anna, 'with your husband.'

'I was,' Anna had said. 'I am – but –' 'Shhh. Don't worry,' he'd said then. 'We'll do as we said. But just make sure you don't call me before nine. I like to sleep, remember? I won't be ready for you before then.'

'Okay,' Anna had said. She'd felt like a child.

'Okay.'

Then she'd gone back to the table and Davey looked up and said, 'Where's your cardigan? I thought you were getting a cardigan, Mum,' but the other two were still twirling pasta round their forks, having a race to see who could be fastest, and didn't seem to have noticed she'd been gone.

SO THAT'S HOW she'd come down off those hills that day, where she'd been with her sons and husband, a day a long time

ago, come down off the hills – may as well call them 'The Inevitables'. Because it's a good name, isn't it, Anna thinks now, for a place where a story might start and where it might go to, where it might end. She and Neil had always loved it there. Since way back, before they were married, and then afterwards, from when the boys had been able to walk and they'd gone up there each winter . . . They loved that part of the country, and even better that they could get some skiing in over the early part of the year. As the boys had got older it had become a sort of ritual. Staying in the same hotel she and Neil had discov-

ered, taking the same room with the little balcony that overlooked the treetops and the long drive that wound down from the hotel to the road. They used to stand there and smoke cigarettes together after they'd got the boys off to sleep, they'd have a whiskey or two and it used to feel fun, like their own special game, coming to this place no one else seemed to want to come to, when everyone said skiing was so much better in France or Italy . . . It was the feeling, with the boys tucked up in bed, that they'd only just started going out and that this was their first year together and they didn't even have children yet or a house with a mortgage and bills and arrangements and endless lists of things to do . . .

So when did it stop being fun and just become routine, another routine? When did it start to feel that anything in her life that was given, like a gift, just seemed to cause a kind of hunger, a wild ravenous feeling inside her that nothing was enough, nothing?

So yes, Anna thinks now. Call the hills 'The Inevitables'. Make them part of the story, too.

For the feeling had only got stronger. And perhaps had always been there, from the beginning, before she was married even, and just lay sleeping . . . But then suddenly it seemed the boys were seven and nine and they weren't little babies any more and she couldn't pretend they needed her and relied on her in the way they used to. And Neil – well, Neil was Neil. And she'd known from the moment they first met that he would be a man who would be dependable and safe but in that same way would go down into himself more and more as he got older, the comforts of work and home and family satisfying to him and fulfilling and just that, just comfort . . .

So, no wonder then . . . She can see it so clearly . . . No wonder that when she'd met Robert that night, at a New Year's dinner party when it was cold outside and snowing, and made her think of being up north, up in the hills, she'd been ready to run.

'Hello, you,' he'd said, across the table from her, before they'd even been introduced. 'Where have you come from?'

Anna smiles now, thinking about it. Because, really. What a line. Unbelievable, it seems, that she would have fallen



for that. Because no one made that sort of comment any more, once everyone started getting married. But, there, Robert had looked at her, spoken, and suddenly at the dinner party that night it was as though all the years of contracts and partnership and children and safe, safe houses had fallen away, as though in a second he brought her up close to herself and she felt open to the world and vivid and alive. Ten years of marriage fallen off her like a heavy winter coat and now she could run free.

And yet . . .

Anna thinks about this a lot these days. Ten years not such a long time, really. To find a life not enough, the choices that you made not enough. To feel distant from a husband, to discover that two people don't really know each other much any more, or have that much to say that isn't about the children you've had together. Ten years is not that long at all. For you need way more than ten years to discover that it's not the big, long things you choose, like a husband or having babies, that show you who you are, but the moments in your life, the sightings. That's how she thinks now. And that though that moment of meeting some particular man at a dinner party was no doubt the beginning of the journey she made that winter morning, when this story opens, and that though, no doubt, she'd felt all those things about her marriage back then – entrapment, boredom, worse – really, it's not the journey, length of time of a marriage, the road, but the thing that springs out at you, makes you swerve, be alert to yourself, turn the corner, that's the real.

But there she was that morning all those years ago, even so, and it felt like the act of escape sure enough, back then, to be leaving. All the things that she had wanted, that she had *wanted* . . . She has the image still of Neil lying there in the hotel bedroom, unknowing in the dark. The two beautiful sleeping boys. She'd looked at them and not even kissed them goodbye. As though they meant nothing to her, she'd just slipped out the door, as if it were a gap in the fence she herself had constructed. Making all of it wild and chaotic . . . Choosing Robert. Driving to him. Choosing him, this new man she didn't even know, over everything that was familiar. Just catching his eye

at a dinner one night, then the two of them starting to talk . . . And the rise of herself within herself . . . Chaos. Is what it was. She remembers strongly even now the charge of that feeling. The wonder of it. The way she couldn't see anyone else in the room then, hear anyone else. Poor Neil down the end of the table and instead this new man close to her, his eyes holding her eyes, and him saying, 'Well, I know exactly where those hills of yours are, where you and your family go skiing. From what you tell me, I'm very near. I have a house right there.'

'Really?' she'd said to him, looking steadily into his eyes. 'You know where I am?'

'Sweetheart, I've been going there my entire life.'

She'd smiled. 'I don't believe you.'

'If you want me to prove it,' he'd said then, 'come and see for yourself. Your hills from my gate. I'll be staying in my house at the end of this month. You said you'd be there then. You can come to me.'

Which is when the affair started, she could say afterwards. Or at least the literal beginning of the affair. The way he'd made it into a kind of bet that she would end up being in the car that morning. Following the line, the road . . . One hour. Then another hour. Just like Robert had said. Time in separate pieces. All choices come down to this – no choice. *Inevitable*. So that even when she'd called him from the hotel lobby, and then later, much, much later from her mobile out in the corridor and his voice had been thick with sleep and he'd not known who she was, this woman calling him in the middle of the night – 'What? Who?' he'd said – still, all that inevitable too.

'Give me a minute,' he'd said.

And she had. She'd stood in her knickers and T-shirt out in the hallway, the rest of the hotel asleep, her own husband and little boys oblivious, and she'd waited. For him to wake up. Remember who she was. Already imagining, as she was standing there, shivering, the going towards him, the road being devoured under the wheels of the car and the miles closing in with each second, closing the distance between her and him, imagining what his house would be like when she went inside it with him, into his house, into his hallway, his bedroom, into his dark open bed.

SO, SURE, THAT MORNING, all she'd wanted was to get there. It was nearly nine o'clock, and any minute she would be pulling off from the main route and going down the exit, following the slip road for a few miles until she reached a turning she would take and there, ahead of her, would be the telephone box Robert had told her about, which marked the end of his drive, sitting out in the middle of nowhere like it was waiting for her.

The car pulled beneath her, a loping, easy feeling but hungry too. The trees flicked past, the miles ahead empty and the sky-lifting hills, the snow and her family at her back . . . There'd been no other cars on the road at all that morning, had there? Maybe one or two earlier, while it was dark, but where she was now too remote and too early for there to be any traffic. She swept around a corner and saw something up ahead.

It had taken a second or two to register, another, and then, as she got closer, at the speed she was driving, she saw it was an animal, wounded? It was leaping and twisting in the middle of the road. As the car rushed past she caught the look in its eye – then swerved, veering suddenly, dangerously out of the lane and off towards the verge, regained control, and saw in her rear-view mirror that it wasn't wounded, there was no blood, but something else had it leaping from one side of the central reservation to the other, across the concrete boundary and back . . .

What was it, the animal? Something terrified, something wrong with it to make it twist and turn like that, back and forth, back and forth. Was it wounded after all? And any minute some other car might come upon it, bring it down . . .

Anna's own car ran on. For what else could she do? Later, she thought about that a lot. What else could she have done? A main highway after all, the charge of speed at her back, and you could only go in one direction, couldn't stop, couldn't slow down even – but still, there'd been that feeling of stopping, that look in the animal's eye, its yellow, yellow eye, that just for a split second had focused on her as she'd swept past . . .

That feeling comes back on her now.

For as she'd rushed past, her own heart jumped up at her with the shock of swerving, and the shock of what she'd seen and even so driving on and away, Anna had tak-

en in, at some point, hadn't she, that there'd been a group of houses, impoverished little new builds, with tiny yards that led out onto the back of the motorway with poor excuses for windbreaks or sound breaks put up to protect them from the road, and she had understood then that that's where it must have got out from, from that cramped little place in which it had been, no doubt, illegally kept . . .

That it was now out there on the road. Not knowing what it was doing, how it had got there, where it would go . . .

That look in its eye . . .

But still, what could she do? *The thing that springs out at you, makes you swerve, be alert to yourself, turn the corner. . .*

She'd kept going. Saw it getting smaller, smaller in her rear-view mirror. Still twisting, leaping. Back and forth, back and forth. The car picked up speed again and she drove on, and for a few minutes even then did nothing . . . Then she slowed down, reached for her phone, put in the number without taking her eyes off the road and miraculously got reception, a clear line.

'Where are you?'

And everything had changed by then. When she replied, answered him.

When she said, 'Just . . .' and heard

herself speaking the word. For what was in that 'just'? Just . . . nothing? That she'd said only that in answer to him because she had no other language for him then, to describe what had happened . . . wasn't able to think what to say?

'Anna?'

'Just . . .'

Or was it that in that one word she came back to words, while the road went by, the trees flicking past . . . That all she'd needed in the end was the space to answer him — a word, a 'just' — before she spoke again.

Whatever it was, before he said, 'Well, come back for goodness' sake,' it was like the present had become the past and everything that had brought her to that moment, every thought and feeling, gone.

And she could answer him fully then: 'I know, I am. I'm on my way.'

And see? How the rest of it, now, like the story before, becomes fixed now, how all of this part becomes inevitable, like the part that went before? How Neil told her that he would call the police, that she needed to tell him exactly where she was as they would have patrols out and would have someone in the vicinity who could help. That people did it all the time, he said, kept

these things as pets and sometimes they escaped, trying to get back, he supposed, to the hills they'd once, long ago, in another lifetime, come from. He told her to take the next exit and get back on the main road headed the other way, that they could be by the second chairlift at eleven, that the boys would be pleased, that they'd been asking at breakfast where she was.

'What were you thinking?' he said.

'Heading off like that? Without telling us?'

'I don't know what I was thinking . . .' she'd replied.

Which was the truth. She had no idea what she was doing, remember? The story began that way. Through the morning. Through the night before. The beginning of her leaving, the idea she had of breaking with them all . . . The whole passage of time commandeered by feelings that were strange to her, unknown. The only dead certainty, the thing she knows now with a jolt of clearest sense, is that when the car turned the corner that morning and swept past what she'd seen on the road, caught the look in its eye before leaving it for ever twisting and turning in her rear-view mirror all those years ago . . . Had been the moment when she herself had broken free. ◇

THE WRITING LIFE

How To Deal With A Literary Agent

by Keith Ridgway

In our continuing column on how to be a writer, we are pleased to feature an excerpt from The Spectacular, a story by a first-time contributor to Five Dials, Keith Ridgway. The following is fiction, of course.

I HAD LUNCH one day that June with my agent, Stanley Whitmarsh. I see him once every six months or so, and he explains to me why I have no money. I travel west to eat and drink with him — into the strange part of London, the comfortable, monied, afternoon London of Notting Hill and Holland Park and Shepherd's Bush. It is not really London at all. Publishers and agents live there.

The books I write are well reviewed. Nobody buys them.

We shook hands outside Notting Hill Tube station and trotted under the black sky to a gastropub, convinced of an impending downpour, and Stanley chose the wine. He wanted to know what I was working on. I made something up. The truth was that every sentence I started bored me half to death, despite the poplar tree. Who gives a damn, frankly, about novels?

—Rosemary left me, I said.

—Oh God. Oh Clive. Oh I'm so sorry.

He put his hand over mine. I was embarrassed.

—It's fine. It's okay. It's mutual.

I extracted my hand awkwardly. Stanley's remained there like a vacated shell.

—She left you, you said.

—Yes, but. We both agreed that she should. That I should, I mean. I've moved out.

He inclined his head a little and took his hand back.

—What happened?

—Nothing happened. I should give you the new address.

—Are you okay?

—Yes, I'm fine. Really.

He wanted to talk about it. I didn't.

I imagined people noticing us. There is the writer Clive Drayton, having lunch

with his agent Stanley Whitmarsh. This has never happened.

—Money, I said.

—Money.

—Is there any due?

He didn't think so, but he would check, he told me, whether there was something due from Italy, which it was possible there might be, and Spain, about which he was less sure. It would be nothing very much in any case. *Bits and bobs. Drips and drabs.* I wanted to get drunk.

—It's difficult for everyone, Clive. You know that. Literary fiction is not doing well. It's big successful trash, memoirs . . . you know . . . celebrity shit.

—I need . . .

I trailed off and poked my crumbling burger with a fork.

—What? You need what?

I had been about to say that I needed some way of making my rent. Mr Malik had taken for June in advance, and I had enough for July and August, and September, perhaps, if I ate only rice. But I would be flat broke, and after that the only option would be a humiliating request to Rosemary. Or an aggressive one, demanding half the value of the house. The advance I had been paid for my last novel had long gone. It was the trickle of royalties from an inexplicably popular Japanese translation of my first novel which had provided me with my living for the previous few years – a trickle the weakness of which had been much obscured by the healthy flow of Rosemary's earnings as a marketing consultant. My latest cheque had dwindled to a few thousand. And that was running out.

—I need to feel that I'm not wasting my time.

—You're not. It'll come back to us. The important thing, though, is this.

Stanley has a habit of announcing that he's about to say something important, and then pausing for an age while he thinks of something important to say. I played with my food and noticed that I was drinking the wine faster than he was. He wasn't keeping up. I wondered if it was a signal that there would not be a second bottle. I thought about getting a new agent.

—Great writing, he announced suddenly, spitting a particle of chicken at my chin. Great writing wises. Rises. It rises.

It comes to the surface.

He closed his eyes briefly, regretting the image.

—They're going to forget about celebrities any day now. They're going to forget about the brand name. They're going to stop thinking that those peripherals have anything to do with them, with their role, and they'll put them back in their place. They're going to remember great writing. Because they'll want to be great publishers again. Because that's what it's actually about, and readers will remind them. This is temporary. You're a great writer. You just have to keep going. Your time is coming. I know you don't care about money.

—What?

—I know that's not what's important to you.

—Who told you that?

—Let me finish.

—I care about money.

—I know you do. Through me. I am your carer. Of money. I'm not your carer. God.

He guffawed unpleasantly.

—I care about the money *for* you. But my point is that great literature has been a staple of our culture for six hundred years, seven hundred, whatever. It's not going to disappear because some asshole has worked out how to turn a fat profit on the autobiographies of other assholes who've worked out how to write their name with their own shit.

He took a gulp of his wine. Stanley's grip on metaphor is all wrong, like a boxer handed a tennis racket.

—The market's top heavy, ridiculous. Either you're a hit or you're nowhere.

—I'm nowhere.

—You are building a backlist of quality, Clive. Reviews, translations, respect. All you need is for the climate to change – even a little. And . . . or . . . to have a bit of luck with the next one. Or the one after that. Something that catches the bastards' attention. That's all it takes. A spark. Then you're in the window. You're on the shelves in numbers. You've got your public.

He nodded, pleased with his reasoning, and waved his cutlery at me.

—Then your career will catch up with your talent. You're too good a writer to be doing well now. You can't write badly – that's your problem.

I looked at him incredulously.

—Of course I can write badly.

—There isn't a paragraph of bad writing in any of the four novels for which I am your humble agent and representative.

—Don't talk shit, Stanley.

—You're too hard on yourself.

—And anyway, I resent the suggestion that I can't write badly. It sounds like a deficiency.

He laughed, but I was serious. I should be able to write anything I want, at will. In any way I want. A writer who can't write badly is not really a writer at all. Writing is, after all, a performance. An actor who cannot affect a limp or an American accent is not much of an actor. I tried to explain this to Clive, but it distracted him into film talk. There was once an option sold on one of my books. It expired. I asked him had he ever heard back from them. He had not.

I filled our glasses, restoring ostensible parity. But I had drunk much more than he had. Through the window the street was dry and busy. The threat of rain was empty. No downpour had occurred. People walked normally, in all directions, in great numbers. No one seemed to care about anything very much at all.

—Would you get a job? Stanley said.

—What?

—Something to tide you over.

—Tide?

—Tide you over. See you through.

—Until when?

—Until you finish the new thing.

—I don't know how to get a job. I haven't had a proper job in ten years. I'm a writer. What are you talking about? What kind of job?

—Don't panic, he said. Teach? Creative writing.

—I couldn't do that.

He had forgotten.

—You could. Everyone wants to be a writer. God help us. As if we didn't have enough shit-awful writers. You could raise them to the level of shit-bad writers.

—I thought you said those days were ending. And anyway, I don't know how to write badly, remember? I am too talented to make a living, apparently.

Stanley stared at me seriously.

—You're depressed, he announced. Tell me about Rosemary.

I told him about Rosemary. We got a second bottle. ◇

The Agony Uncle

Alain de Botton will tell you the right thing to do

I've recently become fascinated by history and spend most of my spare money buying books about the past (my wife threatens divorce if this doesn't stop!). I can't understand why I was never fascinated by history before; at school, I thought this was the most boring subject. Perhaps it is to do with my age (I've just turned fifty), or maybe I was just badly taught at school. What are your views on history?

—David, Aberdeen

History is one of those subjects that almost no one seems to enjoy at school, but almost everyone wants to find out more about as they get older. Perhaps it's only normal to be completely bored at the thought of having to write an essay on the Industrial Revolution when you're fifteen; after you've spent a couple of decades working in a factory or office, the topic promises to shed valuable light on how our society got to be in the questionable place it's now in.

The American essayist Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–82) loved history, but felt most of us fail to derive proper benefit from the subject because we write and read it in the wrong way. The central problem is that we imagine the past to be extremely foreign, and so we don't use it as the supreme practical guide to life that it can be. Historians have an almost professional investment in suggesting that their subject is quite mysterious. When we read old documents, they warn us that words we think we understand were actually used in very different ways hundreds of years ago (words like *nation* or *democracy*, for example); they don't encourage us to draw comparisons between ourselves and the lives of ancient Romans or Greeks. They emphasize how easily we can turn the past into a fantasy by not reckoning with its distinctiveness.

Emerson appreciated these cautious arguments (history was becoming professionalized as a subject in universities at the time he was writing), yet he nevertheless called for greater imaginative licence in our approach to history. He suggested that we should read history as a compen-

dium of moral lessons. Because human beings don't basically change in time, we are the same sort of people as those who built the Colosseum or fought the wars of religion or populated China in the sixth century B.C. 'There is one mind common to all individual men,' wrote Emerson in his characteristic lumpy, lyrical New England English: 'Of the universal mind each individual man is one more incarnation. All its properties consist in him.'

In our lives, we are restricted in the kinds of ideas and practices we can follow. We cannot be both a monk and a Roman soldier, or a Ming Chinaman and a Cuzco Indian. Yet Emerson argued that we all have bits of the monk and the soldier, the Chinaman and the Indian, within us – even if we have never picked up a gun or worshipped in a temple. Each of us contains the whole of human history in latent form, and it is by reading history books that we can learn to develop these hidden sides; Roman history teaches us about our 'Roman selves', monastic history can reveal to us the desire for retreat and contemplation which society today denies us.

For Emerson, history is a liberating force because it shows us that what our society thinks of as abnormal, another may more justly have accepted in the past. When we feel oppressed by our society's definition of the normal, we should turn to history books and identify with the characters and modes of life, as we might find they suit us better than what is around us. The past can teach us to grow more acceptable to ourselves.

Have you ever watched Oprah Winfrey on television? What do you think about her?

—James, Exeter

For thousands of years, our ancestors didn't talk about their emotions. They killed bison and elk, returned to their caves and didn't share with others how they had been afraid of woolly creatures, had felt small and had longed for the lost comfort of the womb. Then, gradually,

mental health came to be equated with the ability to reveal vulnerable feelings to others. Over the last two centuries, staying silent about our fears and longings has gone from being viewed as brave and stoic to being viewed as dangerous; a kind of bottling up, a repression or, even worse, a denial.

Those responsible for changing our attitudes to our emotions include Wordsworth, Rousseau and Freud, but in the modern age, perhaps no figure has done more to popularize the virtues of a certain kind of emotional outpouring than the American chat-show hostess Oprah Winfrey. Her show, broadcast in almost every country in the world, is underpinned by a faith that if we could only express honestly what we felt (and preferably with tears), then our sorrows would be lightened. We would be purged of our sins, and be happy. Over the years, Oprah's show has allowed an extraordinary range of feelings to be aired for almost the first time in a public arena – feelings about jealousy, abandonment, incest, polygamy and matricide. Guests are regularly seen breaking down in tears, embracing and shouting, while the genial hostess watches proceedings with a generally benign eye. Expressing emotions, however distasteful they sometimes are, is after all better than denial and repression.

And yet paradoxically, the one good idea we can draw from Oprah Winfrey concerns not so much the virtues of self-expression (we can get those from Freud or Nietzsche), but the dangers. However welcome an openness about our inner lives can sometimes be, after watching a few episodes of Oprah, we come away with a clear awareness of its excesses. Oprah functions as the perfect symbol of the risks of personal expression. Her name and chat show enable us to refer in a quick and globally recognizable way to a deeply problematic emotional attitude. We can now be easily understood from London to Taipei if we say of an evening which has spun out of control, 'It suddenly seemed like we were on Oprah,' or of a person who has spoken too much, quite simply, 'She's so Oprah.'

By this, we indicate that someone has, by complete loyalty to the idea that emotional openness is good, lost sight of a tragic but inescapable fact of social life – that our feelings are almost always

more endearing to ourselves than to others – and therefore that self-expression is not always ideal. If we raise emotional outpouring into the supreme virtue, we are likely to become very trying people

to be around.

It is unfortunate that there has to be a golden mean in this area of life too. It would be nice if we could always express our anger and feel our pain publicly in

the rawest ways and not prove offensive. But because we can't, we should be grateful to Oprah Winfrey for offering us such a handy symbol of the risks of self-expression.

ON WINE

Hemingway on Mâcon

by Adam Leith Gollner

‘ORDER OF the day is to have a drink first,’ Ernest Hemingway liked to say. He considered a half-drunk bottle to be the enemy of man. And if his battles with hard liquor were hard fought, a soft spot for wine made him a loving connoisseur. He'd set out duck hunting with pints of Chianti, throw back bottles of Tavel at lunch, and celebrate a book's completion with brut Perrier-Jouët. His works are spiked with references to Sancerre, Châteauneuf-du-Pape and Haut Brion. *The Sun Also Rises* radiates indelible wine moments, from the romance of Basque wineskins to the scene of Jake washing down suckling pig with three bottles of Rioja Alta.

Hemingway's own grape seduction began when he moved to Paris in his early twenties. ‘In Europe then,’ he later wrote, ‘we thought of wine as something as healthy and normal as food and also as a great giver of happiness and well being and delight.’ Being broke, he sought out bargains from lesser-known appellations. His memoir of Paris, *A Moveable Feast*, esteems the powerful red wine of Corsica because one could ‘dilute if by half with water and still receive its message.’ The black grapes of Cahors also enthralled him. A letter to a friend confessed how ‘if I had all the money in the world, I would drink Cahors and water.’

For whites, he turned to Mâcon. What they lacked in authority, they made up for in rustic honesty. Unlike most wines, they weren't ‘tricked or adulterated’. Such simplicity reflected his style. Easy to drink, fresh and lively, Mâcons remain an affordable way of tasting white Burgundy. They may not be as buttery as the Meursaults or Montrachets grown just to the north in the Côte d'Or, but they're delicious wines at a fraction of the cost. Vast quantities of green-gold Mâconnais chardonnay still flood Parisian bistros.

The wine's renown dates back to the seventeenth century, when a giant named Claude Brosse spent thirty-three days ox-carting two barrels' worth to Versailles. After one sip, Louis XIV declared Mâcon superior to the court's Suresnes and Beaugency. Its distinctive minerality stems from the region's chalky soil, said to be full of animal carcasses driven off nearby cliff tops by Paleolithic hunters. Such big-man backstories would certainly have appealed to Papa, who told reporters that he once got drunk with a bear in Montana. They lived together, he claimed, and were close friends.

Another close friend was F. Scott Fitzgerald, with whom he drank five bottles of Mâcon on a rainy-day drive from Lyon to Paris. The journey is recounted

in *A Moveable Feast*. They chugged wine straight from the bottle, something Fitzgerald had never done before. ‘It was exciting to him as though he were slumming or as a girl might be excited by going swimming for the first time without a bathing suit,’ remarked Hemingway. Arriving at a hotel, they then drank several double whisky sours, a carafe of red Fleurie and a bottle of white Montagny. Fitzgerald had an attack of hypochondria and passed out at the table, with Hemingway wondering how such a small amount of alcohol could ‘turn him into a fool’.

Hemingway, who ended up committing suicide before the book was published, anticipated the speculation that he'd fabricated aspects of their relationship. ‘If the reader prefers, this book may be regarded as fiction,’ he wrote in the preface. Subsequently, it emerged that he'd undergone electro-convulsive therapy while working on *A Moveable Feast*. A side effect of shock treatment can be memory loss, and Hemingway's powers of recollection were certainly affected. In 2009 his son Patrick published an excerpt of Papa's final letter: ‘This book contains material from the *remises* of my memory and of my heart. Even if the one has been tampered with and the other does not exist.’

What does still exist is the sort of Mâcon favoured by the Lost Generation. Seek out the wines of Henri Perras, who makes an archetypal unoaked – or, as Hemingway might have put it, untampered with – Mâcon-Villages. Other fine producers include Château de Fuissé, Merlin, Robert-Denogent, the Bret Brothers, Cave de Lugny and Verget. After four or seven bottles though, things might start getting a little hazy. ♦



Official Numbers

Sonia Faleiro on the reality of adoption

A FRIEND RECENTLY adopted a baby. The baby's assimilation into a family with parents with full lives and other, biological, children, was immediate. That same week, I heard that another friend and her husband had adopted their first child, also a baby girl. A photograph on my friends' Facebook page showed the two asleep with identical expressions of bliss.

I wondered at the coincidence of hearing of two adoptions in a single week, both by parents with successful, high-paced careers, both of baby girls, and so I started to ask friends, 'Have you adopted or know someone who has?'

The numerous responses ranged from 'We're considering it' to 'My cousin was adopted.' From these responses I concluded that either there had been an upswing in the number of adoptions, or the stigma around adopting and admitting to adopting had eased, and so while the numbers may not have changed, the number of people willing to talk about adoption had. And perhaps that this perceived upswing was restricted to the same type of people surveyed: the upwardly mobile, well-educated, well-travelled middle class.

Official statistics didn't support my first, most important, assumption – that there was an increase in adoptions.

In 2009, CARA, the Central Adoption Resources Agency, the government agency that regulates adoptions in India, completed 1,852 adoptions. The previous year, this number was 2,169. The number of inter-country adoptions has always been greater than domestic ones, not just recently, but for the past ten years. But this number fell as well, from 2,990 to 2,518. These figures exclude agencies with only domestic licenses (as opposed to domestic and inter-country licences). But even if one multiplies CARA's numbers by five or ten, we're still talking about a small number, which fell further last year.

Statistics on the number of orphans in India vary from thousands to millions, depending on whom you talk to and the type of orphans they consider.

For example, UNICEF's numbers include all children without parents, taking into account those on the street. CARA, on the other hand, will consider only children in licensed adoption agencies. The imprecision of these figures is an insight into the distance between children in need of parents, and agencies that can change this. At the least, the figures tell us that in India today, a huge mass of children are growing up without parental care.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that now more than ever before, people are willing to adopt. They do so for several reasons: having exhausted all medical options, they still cannot have children of their own; or they believe it's better to tend to children already born than to produce more. Adoption by single women, who don't want to marry but wish to experience motherhood, is a newer impetus, representative of the modernizing of India (as the word 'modern' is understood in the West), the willingness of Indian women to defy convention and perhaps most of all of their new financial independence.

One reason for the low numbers might be the expense and time adoption entails. But while the one-off fee to adopt a child may vary, it's often less than the cost of delivering a baby in a private hospital. A private room for an expectant mother at Bombay's upscale Breach Candy hospital costs 7,000 rupees per night. Doctor's fees cost between 50,000 and 1,00,000 rupees. Shalini Menon, who along with her husband Sunil adopted a nine-month-old baby girl from a CARA-affiliated agency in 2009, says that the fees for the entire process – from the application form, stamp paper and court registration, to the lawyer's fee – were less than 15,000 rupees. And the waiting period for a child, though it may last up to two years, may actually be shorter than a full-term pregnancy. The Menons waited sixteen months, but they know of couples who waited as little as six months.

Parents might also be deterred by the extensive paperwork, and by adoption

guidelines, which vary from agency to agency and use bewildering terminology. Among the dozens of pieces of paper requested, notarized and in triplicate is a signed letter from the couple's domestic help, when applicable, promising to look after the child while the parents are at work.

But if people want to adopt, and there are children in need of adoption, why then are the official numbers so low? And why are prospective parents often warned of long waiting periods because 'there aren't enough babies'?

Often, 'we have no babies' means just that. And the reasons for this are ideological differences and bureaucratic inefficiency.

'Even though the demand for adoptive babies has grown,' says Dr Aloma Lobo, Chairman of CARA, 'there aren't enough babies to adopt. Legally. This doesn't mean there aren't children in need of care and protection, because obviously there are. What I'm saying is that these children, instead of being placed in the adoption stream, are in institutions that do not undertake adoption or believe in it. I'm referring, for example, to "orphanages" that house children relinquished by unmarried mothers, or children placed in the agency by relatives (after their parents have died or disappeared). These orphanages are not licensed. Also, many established non-adoption institutions like the SOS villages do not carry out adoptions but instead have what they call group foster care.

CARA has developed a reputation for a tough but fair screening process that ensures good parents receive children without an undue wait. But no one controls where all the orphans or unwanted children, particularly infants, go. Those that end up in unlicensed 'orphanages' or agencies may never enter the legal adoption system, and therefore will never be processed under CARA's guidelines. Their absence from the system is one reason for the scarcity, leading many parents into what Dr Lobo describes as a 'parallel adoption stream', to 'adopt' children outside the system.

This is why official numbers stay low. The numbers of inter-country adoptions are higher because non-resident Indians and foreigners require paperwork from their own government to bring a child

home, and so are more likely to adopt legally.

It is not uncommon for a child to be 'adopted' within the same family. Journalist Sachin Kalbag, an adoptive parent himself, says, 'Someone I know "adopted" a child abandoned by an unmarried relative. The mother, who was well educated, gave up her rights to the child in an affidavit, but didn't insist on a legal adoption.'

This story is a familiar one. Another woman told me of a relative with a boy and two girls who'd given up one of the girls to a family member unable to conceive. Her action was seen to benefit both parties. One woman became a mother; the other had one less dowry to worry about. (It should be noted that in cases like this, it's almost always a girl, never a boy, who's given away.)

Babies are also procured through criminal means. Male infants are snatched in hospitals, as well as in public places, both urban and rural, like a city market or a village water pump. This is a steady and ongoing crime. In November 2010, Mumbai newspapers reported on the theft of a two-month-old baby boy from a health clinic. That was the second incident of the sort reported that month.

Babies may also be sold. But the purchase of a child, even from parents who freely authorize it, even when the parents insist they would otherwise abandon the baby, is a criminal offence. In the late 1990s, news of the sale of babies within India and to parents abroad, particularly in the United States, exploded, forcing police in several South Indian states, where the crime was most rampant, to crack down on baby sales.

The police latched on to involved large rings. But a baby sale by an individual is less easy to track, particularly when carried out in collusion with hospital or nursing home staff. Such sales are a significant reason, perhaps the most significant reason, argues Nandini Sengupta, author of a forthcoming book on adoption in India, for the scarcity of children in the legal stream.

Parents who cannot afford or do not want a child may offer it to a compromised hospital rather than to CARA, because unlike CARA, a hospital will pay them for the baby. The fee for a girl, it is said, is 1,000,000 rupees; for a boy it's as much as 3,000,000 rupees. The mother

signs a legal bond relinquishing her claim over the baby, and the hospital gives the child's new parents a birth certificate ensuring that they become, just as they would have done, had they gone through CARA, parents in perpetuity. Some parents, unwilling to be marked as adoptive, take the collusion further. They fake a pregnancy, and when the baby is 'due', admit the 'mother' into the nursing home from where the baby is to be procured. When she leaves, it is with an infant chosen because he resembles the parents, so he can be passed off as their biological child.

Not all sales involve large sums of money. A baby may be bought for a few hundred rupees, sometimes for one hundred. This may happen when an unwed mother is pressured by her family to give up her child immediately. The child may be purchased directly by prospective parents, or through a middleman who then funnels it to agencies that specialize in extra-legal adoptions.

It may appear morally difficult to accept baby sales. But well-meaning adoptive parents who benefit from such sales make a clear distinction between a 'sale' in which the primary aim of the sale is profit for the biological parents or worse, middlemen, and 'rescue' in which a child, nearly always a girl, perhaps with mental or physical disabilities, would otherwise have been killed or left to die. For such people, purchasing a child from a hospital that colludes with parents in exchange for financial benefits for both is a sale. Paying a mother, entrenched in grinding poverty and clearly unable to support another child, particularly a girl, to convince her not to abandon her child is a rescue. Some rescues, in fact, may not even involve money. One source I spoke with told me that he didn't think, he knew, that if he hadn't rescued the baby he would go on to adopt, the child would have been 'abandoned in a field to die of dehydration or left to be mauled by wild animals'.

Not everyone bypasses the system because they have to. The majority, says Sengupta, want to. This majority, more than any other factor, ensures the sustenance of the extra-legal adoption system. Their motivation may be one of three. While the stigma around adoption may have decreased in the cities, particularly

in families with well-educated, working parents, elsewhere it is still cause for social ridicule and ostracism. And extra-legal adoptions don't require an extended waiting period. People willing to pay do so, getting the baby they want when they want. But perhaps the biggest attraction of extra-legal adoptions is that they allow prospective parents to baby-shop.

While CARA and licensed agencies attempt to match parents with a baby who looks like them, in the gender of their choosing, they refuse more specific demands, particularly with regard to skin colour. The demand for male infants, particularly those that are light skinned, is high; people who request them are placed on a long waiting list. The majority of children traditionally awaiting adoption are girls. (This is also true for dark-skinned children, older children and children with behavioural problems and physical disabilities.) On the flip side, this is exactly the reason why more people are now asking to adopt girls – some do so on principle, but many others do so because the wait is shorter. Parents who are determined to find their perfect baby in terms of gender, age, skin colour and features find that their demands are most likely to be fulfilled outside of licensed agencies where they may reject babies at will.

From conversations with experts at CARA and elsewhere, it's clear that many more people than ever before are adopting, and that the majority of these adoptions are extra legal rather than legal. This may be unsurprising given our tendency to sidestep the system. From getting a driver's licence to getting a passport, and now, getting a baby, it seems that in India today extra legal rather than legal is the norm. What's surprising perhaps is that in this particular case one may convincingly argue that it isn't the system that's broken, but our attitude.

The writer would like to thank the following people for speaking with her: Dr Aloma Lobo, Jo Chopra, Sachin Kalbag, Zarreen Babu, Shobha Viswanath, Firdaus Variava, Shalini and Sunil Menon, and Nandini Sengupta. ◇