

HAMISH HAMILTON PRESENTS

Five Dials



NUMBER 31

Tricks of the Light

ZADIE SMITH *Off the Google Map*

LYDIA DAVIS *The Sounds of the Kitchen*

PHILIP LANGESKOV *Short Fiction*

LEANNE SHAPTON *Darkness on the Edge of Film*

CHAD HARBACH *I've Got Heroes*

GEORGES SIMENON *I've Got a Mother*

... Plus: a memoir of astronomy by Trevor Quirk, the lovelorn manual labourers of Paris, professional chefs on the edge of sanity, Joe Moran's TV mast, a man walks into a bar at 6a.m., Yevgeny Zamyatin, the world's most hated book, and new poetry from Rachael Allen.

And... is that David Schwimmer in the kebab shop?



CONTRIBUTORS

RACHAEL ALLEN is the online editor for *Granta*. She is co-editor of poetry anthology series *Clinic* and online journal *Tender*. Her poetry has appeared in the *Sunday Times*, *The Best British Poetry 2013* (Salt) and *Poetry London*.

ANN ARBOR is a writer from Michigan currently living in London. Her website can be found at aiaa.us.

JAY BARNETT lives and works in London. More of his stories can be found at theaftermathofmygreatidea.blogspot.co.uk.

BECKY BARNICOAT illustrates regularly for *Five Dials*. Her work was featured in #6, 'The Obscenity Issue'; and #24, 'The B Issue'. Her blog can be found at everyoneisherealready.blogspot.co.uk.

MARISSA CHEN has lived in London since 2010 and was the Helen Fraser Editorial Fellow at Hamish Hamilton in 2012.

LYDIA DAVIS is the author of seven short-story collections, one novel, and the following one-sentence story: 'I was recently denied a prize because they said I was too lazy.' She is a professor of creative writing at the University at Albany, and is also known for her translations of modern French writers, including Proust and Blanchot. She won the International Man Booker Prize in 2013.

JULIA DINAN studied at the University of Cambridge, where she received the Gautier-Smith Award for theatre design. She has worked in the editorial departments of Penguin Books, *Wonderland*, *Wallpaper** and the BBC. She is based in London and is currently training as an illustrator.

PAUL EWEN is a New Zealander. His first book, *London Pub Reviews*, has been called a 'cross between *Blade Runner* and *Coronation Street*'.

CHRIS GARRECHT-WILLIAMS currently lives in New York. His poems have featured in the *Chattahoochee Review*, *Beecher's Magazine* and the *Chiron Review*, among others. He is a senior poetry editor at *Narrative* magazine and has work forthcoming in *Spinning Jenny*.

LAURENCE HOWARTH is a comedy writer who has worked extensively in radio and television. He wrote the sitcoms *Safety Catch* and *Rigor Mortis* for BBC Radio 4 and has created four radio series and toured the UK regularly with his double act, Laurence and Gus.

PHILIP LANGESKOV was born in Copenhagen in 1976. His stories have appeared in various places, including *Five Dials* 9,

the *Warwick Review*, *Best British Short Stories 2011* and *Unthology: No. 3*. A stand-alone story, *Barcelona*, was published by Daunt Books in 2013. He lives in Norwich.

JOE MORAN is professor of English and Cultural History at Liverpool John Moores University. His book *Armchair Nation: An Intimate History of Britain in Front of the TV* was published by Profile Books in September.

PHILIP OLTERMANN was born in Schleswig-Holstein but moved to England when he was sixteen. His book *Keeping Up with the Germans: A History of Anglo-German Relations* was published by Faber and Faber in 2012. He is currently the *Guardian's* Berlin correspondent.

TREVOR QUIRK is a writer living in Saratoga, New York. He studied physics as an undergraduate and more recently received a degree in science journalism from Boston University. He is presently working on a novel. His website can be found at trevorquirk.com.

LEANNE SHAPTON is an illustrator, author and publisher based in New York City. She is currently working on *Women in Clothes*, a collaboration with Sheila Heti and Heidi Julavits, about how women dress.

GEORGES SIMENON is best known as the creator of the fictional pipe-smoking detective Jules Maigret. At twenty-four, the Belgian novelist decided to spend a few years cruising the canals of Europe on his barge, the *Ostrogoth*. Simenon alleges that Jules Maigret was originally brought to life one evening on that very barge.

ZADIE SMITH's most recent book, *The Embassy of Cambodia*, is out now. Her piece in this issue is a favourite extract from her last novel, *NW*.

SIMON WROE is a former chef who writes about food and culture for *Prospect* and the *Economist*. He is thirty-one and lives in London. *Chop Chop* is his first novel.

YEVGENY ZAMYATIN is the author of *We*, the first work banned by the Soviet censorship board during the communist regime. The Russian novelist, satirist and playwright was a chronic dissenter, initially aligning himself with the Bolsheviks and later the Left Socialist Revolutionaries. Yevgeny also worked as a marine engineer for the Imperial Russian Navy and lived in Newcastle upon Tyne while supervising the construction of ice-breaker ships in 1916.

THE UNABLE TO CONTRIBUTE PAGE

MAHMOUD ABDEL NABI has worked as a correspondent for the website rassd.com. According to news reports, he was arrested while covering clashes between supporters of ousted president Mohamed Morsi and supporters of the Egyptian army in the Sidi Beshr neighbourhood in Alexandria. According to the state-run newspaper *Al-Ahram*, a prosecutor charged Abdel Nabi and at least fourteen others with possessing weapons and inciting rioting. Abdel Nabi was being held at Burg Al-Arab prison outside of Alexandria. His trial, which was delayed several times, is ongoing. He remains in custody.

MOHAMMAD BADER is a cameraman for Al-Jazeera Mubasher. He was arrested while covering confrontations between Egyptian security forces and supporters of Mohamed Morsi at Ramses Square and was charged, according to news reports, with attempted murder and possessing a weapon. The charges were the same as those levied against hundreds of protesters detained during the clashes. His lawyer, Mohamed Shaaban, has conveyed that Bader denied the charges. Al-Jazeera also denied the charges against Bader and said he had been carrying out his journalistic duty. He was being held in Tora prison, south-east of Cairo. He was acquitted in early February, just as *Five Dials* was going to press.

PETER GRESTE is an Australian journalist and correspondent. He has reported from locales such as Belgrade, Kabul and Santiago. In 2011, he won a Peabody Award for a BBC documentary entitled *Somalia: Land of Anarchy*. In December 2013, Egyptian secret police arrested him on suspicion of illegally broadcasting news harming 'domestic security', according to the Interior Ministry. He remains in prison.

MOHAMED FAHMY is an Egyptian-Canadian freelance journalist

and author of *Baghdad Bound* and *Egyptian Freedom Story*. He is Al-Jazeera English's Cairo bureau chief. Fahmy was arrested in a raid on a makeshift office suite in Cairo's Marriott hotel late in December. He remains in prison.

ABDULLAH AL-SHAMI, an Egypt correspondent for Al-Jazeera, was arrested while covering the dispersal of pro-Morsi sit-ins at Rabaa Al-Adawiya in Cairo. On 17 August 2013, the journalist was transferred to Abu Zaabal prison, according to news reports and his brother, Mosa'ab Elshamy. Al-Shami was accused of possessing weapons. His pre-trial detention was extended at least twice in late 2013. Authorities had not lodged charges against Al-Shami in late 2013. He remains in prison.

MAHMOUD ABOU ZEID is a freelance photographer. He has contributed to the UK-based citizen journalism site and photo agency Demotix and digital media company Corbis. He was detained during the dispersal of pro-Morsi sit-ins at Rabaa Al-Adawiya in Cairo. After his detention, Demotix sent a letter to the Egyptian authorities, confirming that Abou Zeid was covering the clashes for the agency. Abou Zeid was first detained by police and held in Cairo stadium with other protesters and foreign correspondents who were released the same day. He was transferred to Abu Zaabal prison in northern Cairo after his detention was extended by fifteen days. Egypt's general prosecutor's office extended his pre-trial detention in September 2013 on accusations of 'possessing weapons'. Abou Zeid's lawyer told the Committee to Protect Journalists in November 2013 that no charges had been filed against the photographer.

For more information, please visit the Committee to Protect Journalists at cpj.org.

Editor: CRAIG TAYLOR

Publisher: SIMON PROSSER

Assistant Editor: ANNA KELLY

Five Dials staffers: REMI GRAVES, NOEL O'REGAN, MARISSA CHEN,
SAM BUCHAN-WATTS, PAUL TUCKER, JAMIE FEWERY, ELLIE SMITH,
CAROLINE PRETTY, JAKOB VON BAEYER, EMMA EASY

Thanks to: MATT CLACHER, NATALIE WILLIAMS, PAUL MARTINOVIC,
RICHARD BRAVERY, SASHA KOREN, ALISON O'TOOLE

Design and art direction: [ANTONIO DE LUCA STUDIO](http://antonio.de.luca.studio), BERLIN

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Our Glorious Readers

and other sources...

'I WANT TO HOARD THEM,' announced *Miel*, a website which offers 'difficult, interesting, intelligent and deeply felt supplies for writers'. *Miel* was discussing the W.G. Sebald writing tips we published in issue 5 and not every single issue of *Five Dials*. Still, hoard away.

ONE DAY NOT SO LONG AGO, @ionnaonline tweeted that she accidentally printed the wrong issue of *Five Dials*, 'but then realized it was one I hadn't read yet'. Things were fine in the end: she had two to read. Also, @MichaelINShanks tweeted at us: 'I heart @fivedials.'

ANDY MAY, who can be found at @Kuhlephotography, wrote: 'Yummy food at The Five Dials in Horton. I recommend it #curedtrout #food.' We're not officially affiliated with the Five Dials Inn, which offers West Country ales and ciders, but we'd like to support them. Perhaps we'll launch an issue from Horton, Somerset, some day in the future. #curedtrout.

BACK IN DECEMBER, @rowlsmantorpe, wrote: 'Another horrendous "Hello Subscriber" email from *Five Dials* magazine. But the thing itself: really quite good.' This looked like an opportunity. We contacted Rowland, who wrote back '...those emails. I can't be the first to mention it.' Thing is, he was the first to complain, so we offered him the job of writing the subsequent email

to subscribers. If you're a subscriber, you should have received it by now. If not, consider subscribing.

A COUPLE OF MONTHS AGO we were panned by *The List*, the Edinburgh listings magazine. Actually, they did say of the magazine 'the content is excellent' but still, their reviewer detected an odour coming from its pages, a little whiff. On the downside,' wrote Paul Gallagher, 'it is too self-consciously highbrow: enigmatic illustrations scattered throughout bear no discernible connections to any of the pieces, and there is an editorial whiff of "you should be interested in this because we are telling you about it", which is a little off-putting.' So we did the right thing and asked Paul to write something for us. 'I'll take a look and let you know where I could see myself contributing,' he replied. Stay tuned.



'YOU KNOW I'M STILL *Five Dials* for life though, right?' wrote a reader named Stuart H.

'I just carved "5D" into my arm with a penknife, for God's sake!' He continued: 'Truth be told: I already had a rudimentary "1D" carved in there (I'm mad about One Direction), so I just changed the one into a five; only took about five minutes. Looks good though!'

Many thanks, Stuart.
#curedtrout.

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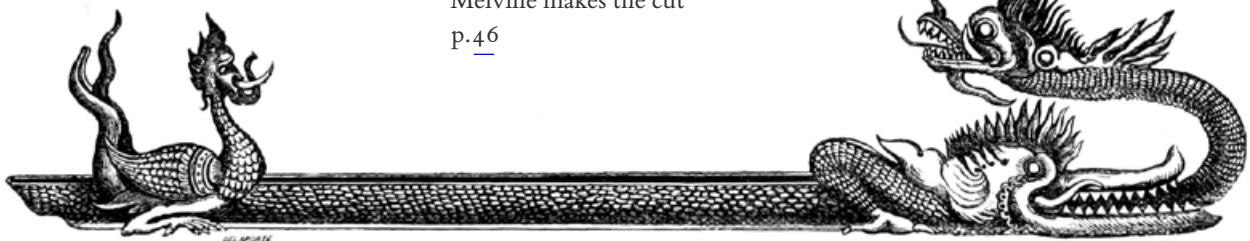
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FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

I stumbled upon this magazine, *Five Dials*, via my cousin Samantha. I'd like to subscribe. How do I do that?

[HERE IS YOUR ANSWER](#)

Following on from the last question, how did Samantha find out about this magazine in the first place? We were close when we were children. We drifted – it's what happens to cousins – but I'd still like to know how she found out about *Five Dials*.

[HERE IS YOUR ANSWER](#)

I'm looking for that book where everyone's working for a tech firm in California and they're like – oh, nothing should be private.

Red cover?

[HERE IS YOUR ANSWER](#)

I'd like to buy a sexy book. Could you help me with that?

[HERE IS YOUR ANSWER](#)

How do I contribute to *Five Dials*?

[HERE IS YOUR ANSWER](#)

Your advertisements are not like other advertisements. How do I advertise in your pages?

[HERE IS YOUR ANSWER](#)

I have written a trilogy of fantasy novels. What would be your top names for the elven characters?

[HERE IS YOUR ANSWER](#)

I'd like to excerpt *Five Dials* in my high-school newspaper. Can that happen?

[HERE IS YOUR ANSWER](#)

Have you got any moody Camus videos to show me?

[HERE IS YOUR ANSWER](#)

What have you all been listening to these days?

[HERE IS YOUR ANSWER](#)

How much money do writers make?

[HERE IS YOUR ANSWER](#)

I'd like to host a *Five Dials* launch. How do we set that up?

[HERE IS YOUR ANSWER](#)

I'm a cowboy on a ranch in Montana. I'd like you all to come out here and launch an issue while sitting atop one of my horses. It's been my dream for a while to be involved in *Five Dials*. The night sky, the campfire, the PDF. How can we make this happen?

[HERE IS YOUR ANSWER](#)

How do you feel about the whole Snowden thing?

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What's that song where someone mixes in snippets of different Montreal bands?

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What's Zadie Smith been up to lately?

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Are you people looking for work experience?

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Our Town

‘Ah! my poor dear child, the truth is, that in London it is always a sickly season.
Nobody is healthy in London, nobody can be.’

— JANE AUSTEN, *Emma*



PLACE: Old Street

DATE: December 14, 2013

TIME: 1:05 pm

—

ILLUSTRATION OF OLD ST BY JULIA DINAN

THIS ISSUE'S ITINERARY:

A low-down dirty shopping arcade, security gates, security trees,
kebab shops in my area, plastic containers that were full of chopped cucumber,
a clattering of metal down a side street, Denmark Hill, Cowcross Street,
a flight of downward stairs, the depths.

Yates Lane, NW8

Zadie Smith uses Google Maps, then doesn't

From A to B:

A. Yates Lane, London NW8, UK

B. Bartlett Avenue, London NW6, UK

*Walking directions to Bartlett Avenue, London NW6, UK
Suggested routes*

- | | |
|---------------------------|---------|
| A5 | 47 mins |
| 2.4 miles | |
| A5 and Salusbury Rd | 50 mins |
| 2.5 miles | |
| A404/Harrow Rd | 58 mins |
| 2.8 miles | |
1. Turn *left* on *Yates Lane* 40 feet
 2. Head *south-west* towards *Edgware Rd* 315 feet
 3. Turn *right* at *A5/Edgware Rd* 1.6 miles
Continue to follow A5
 4. Turn *left* at *A4003/Willesden Ln* 0.7 miles
 5. Turn *left* at *Bartlett Avenue* 0.1 miles

Destination will be on the left
Bartlett Avenue, London NW6, UK

These directions are for planning purposes only. You may find that construction projects, traffic, weather, or other events may cause conditions to differ from the map results, and you should plan your route accordingly. You must obey all signs or notices regarding your route.

From A to B redux:

Sweet stink of the hookah, couscous, kebab, exhaust fumes of a bus deadlock. 98, 16, 32, standing room only – quicker to walk! Escapees from St Mary's, Paddington: expectant father smoking; old lady wheeling herself in a wheelchair, smoking; die-hard holding urine sack, blood sack, smoking. Everybody loves fags. Everybody. Polish paper, Turkish paper, Arabic, Irish, French, Russian, Spanish, *News of the World*. Unlock your (stolen) phone, buy a battery pack, a lighter pack, a perfume pack, sunglasses, three for a fiver, a life-size porcelain tiger, gold taps. Casino! Everybody believes in destiny. Everybody. It was meant to be. It was just not meant to be. Deal or no deal? TV screens in the TV shop. TV cable, computer cable, audio-visual cables, I give you good price, good price. Leaflets, call abroad 4 less, learn English, eyebrow wax, Falun Gong, have you accepted Jesus as your personal call plan? Everybody loves fried chicken. Everybody. Bank of Iraq, Bank of Egypt, Bank of Libya. Empty cabs on account of the sunshine. Boomboxes just because. Lone Italian, loafers, lost, looking for Mayfair. A hundred and one ways to take cover: the complete black tent, the facial grid, back of the head, Louis Vuitton-stamped, Gucci-stamped, yellow lace, attached to sunglasses, hardly on at all, striped, candy pink; paired with tracksuits, skin-tight jeans, summer dresses, blouses, vests, Gypsy skirts, flares. Bearing no relation to the debates in the papers, in Parliament. Everybody loves sandals. Everybody. Birdsong! Low-down dirty shopping arcade to mansion flats to an Englishman's home is his castle. Open-top, soft-top, drive-by, hip hop. Watch the money pile up. Holla! Security lights, security gates, security walls, security trees, Tudor, modernist, post-war, pre-war, stone pineapples, stone lions, stone eagles. Face east and dream of Regent's Park, of St John's Wood. The Arabs, the Israelis, the Russians, the Americans: here united by the furnished penthouse, the private clinic. If we pay enough, if we squint, Kilburn need not exist. Free meals. English as a second language. Here is the school where they stabbed the headmaster. Here is the Islamic Centre of England opposite the Queen's Arms. Walk down the middle of this, you referee, you! Everybody loves the Grand National. Everybody. Is it really only April? And they're off! ♡

Stoke Newington, N16

Schwimmer Bites Kebab. By Jay Barnett



I think the moon was full that night. It looked round enough. Probably why I'd been kept up by the foxes down by the wooden pallets and discarded Dulux cans, making their incredible brouhaha. I don't know whether they screw or play or fight.

I've been meaning to ask Google.

The glass and cement of our building was hot from Saturday's sun; my windows were open. All night the screams blew in, my net curtain dancing a little.

I turned to late night television for distraction, settling on reruns of *Club Reps*. Sunburnt idiots playing up to camera from the island of Rhodes circa 2003.

I hadn't heard a fox for the duration of two episodes, the sky was indigo blue. That was the last thing I remembered.

I awoke with backache, my room alight with the evening sun. The clock said it was 7.50 p.m.

My mouth was dry. Like a towel.

My stomach rumbled. It was breakfast but technically dinner.

A kebab would do.

Kebab shops in my area are ten a penny. City Flames is the closest. When the legs aren't in the mood it's a perfectly reasonable choice of meat product. But none is worth the walk quite like Fiesta, run by a group of Turkish men some

twelve strong. They stand behind the glass counter, locked into allocated tasks all of their own. At peak times lines file out the door. Bawdy men in bad shirts, yelling orders hard to hear over the din of fans, the tiled walls bouncing sound waves all out of shape. Though it might appear out of control, everything remains ordered, reined in by the calm unity of the twelve men in their red Fiesta T-shirts. Each a cog in some remarkably well-oiled machine.

I turned on to the Kingsland Road. It felt too lively for a Sunday evening. I could see a few people gathered outside Fiesta about a hundred yards up the way. As I got closer I noticed they were smiling and laughing at their mobile phones. Judging by the turquoise carrier bags in their hands, they'd already been served.

It wasn't wall-to-wall busy in there. Maybe seven or eight people.

The twelve-man kebab machine seemed different, lax, like something had knocked it from its usual stride. Not a bad thing: there was a sense of glee about the place. Three of the twelve had gathered around a hot grill, smiling at a picture on a smartphone. A man waiting for his order leant on the counter, a scorpion tattoo on his forearm.

'Left a good tip, I hope?' he said.

'He handed over £20 for two small kebabs and didn't even ask for change!' Daz said as he passed a plastic bag of hot food to a young girl with hoop earrings.

Daz was the only man working there who seemed to have a name – possibly not his real name. He ran the show, or it seemed that way. Perhaps his allocated task was public relations. He was a man of great magnetism, the official voice of Fiesta.

'Why's he in town?' asked the girl with hoop earrings.

'Don't know,' said Daz. 'You should've asked him.'

'I felt shy,' she said.

'Theatre, I bet,' said a man leaning against the tiled wall. 'Bet you it's theatre.'

One of the twelve men clocked me.

'What can I get you, mate?' he asked.

I looked at the illuminated menus above the grills, at the lists, the prices, the misleading pictures of things.

'Large chicken shish, please. Everything on it.'

He pulled a skewer of raw meat from under the glass and gave it to one of his co-workers.

It was placed on the grill and began to sizzle alongside other skewers, all of them watched over with meticulous care to ensure optimum cooking time.

The machine had been set in motion.

The girl with the hoop earrings went to leave. 'I might follow him,' she said. 'Which way did he go?'

'Left,' said a man squirting ketchup over chips.

They sat hot in their polystyrene tray, oil shining in the glow of the drinks fridge. The smell of the salt and vinegar stirred me to order my own, but as I went to open my mouth a man I recognized from the bar across the road came running in.

'What's happenin', Daz?!' he said. 'I heard *Friends* was in!'

'Yeah!' Daz replied. He turned to the men at the grill still

fussing over the smartphone. 'Show 'im.'

The men passed the phone over; the man from the bar looked at it.

'How about that!' he said. 'What was he doin' 'ere?'

'Theatre, I bet,' said the man leaning against the tiled wall.

'Well, whatever the reason, I hope he pops into the bar later.'

I looked over the bartender's shoulder, at the phone in his hand. On it was a picture of Daz and his co-worker, each with their arm around a man stood between them. He was instantly familiar, though I struggled to find his name. I stood for a moment, looking at the picture, the smell of meat, the noise of fans all around me.

'Ross,' I said. 'It's Ross.'

'Schwimmer, innit?'

I turned to face the tiled wall, and looked at the man leaning there waiting for his order.

'What?' I asked.

'David Schwimmer, innit?'

'That's it, yeah,' I said.

'He was in about ten minutes ago,' said Daz. 'Everyone had their cameras out; all this lot had pictures done with him,' he said, gesturing to everyone around me.

My chicken had been fully barbecued. It was passed to a man standing by plastic containers that were full of chopped cucumber, red cabbage and sweetcorn relish. He looked at me.

'Everything,' I said, waving my hand across the plastic containers.

He began to pack it in. Sauce first, followed by the chicken. Finally the healthy stuff, finishing with tomatoes. I wondered how many kebabs he'd made in his life. No more than a few thousand, surely.

He put it all in a carrier bag and passed it to me.

'Thanks,' I said.

A lady left, smiling into her phone. She spoke in a foreign language. The only words I could make out were 'buvo', 'nuo' and 'Ross'.

I hadn't paid yet. If I wanted, I think I could have slipped away amidst the kerfuffle left by Schwimmer. As a regular customer of Fiesta, I thought better of the idea.

I approached the till. The man there asked me what I'd ordered.

'Chicken shish,' I said.

He told me what I owed and I paid.

I placed the loose change in my pocket, stood for a moment.

I didn't want to leave.

The place was buzzing in the aftermath of Schwimmer. Everyone around me was texting pictures to friends and lovers in towns far and wide.

David Schwimmer. Basking in the red glow of Fiesta's illuminated sign. Smiling with thumbs up, his arm around a drunk girl holding an open tray of chips.

The only news I would later text to friends was, *David Schwimmer was in the kebab shop. I saw pictures of him.*

As I left, there were still a few people outside. Loud, full

of joy, disseminating JPEGs from their smartphones.

'Jenny will die!' a girl said. 'She loves *Friends*.'

'How *you* doin'?' her boyfriend said.

'That's *Joey*, you dick,' she told him. 'Not Ross.'

I walked off in the direction of home. It still felt too lively for a Sunday night.

On the wind from behind me, the boy's voice came again ... 'How *you* doin'?'

I looked at the path, thinking about the warm food in my carrier bag. My saliva glands readied at the thought of chilli sauce hitting my tongue. A clattering of metal down a side street distracted me. I turned my head.

A fox stood on top of a wheelie bin, sniffing whatever was inside. A shabby, elegant thing. City fur, dirty ginger from oil and fumes. I watched as it scratched away at the top of the bin's contents, kicking up nothing but used tissue and bits of plastic.

Who eats with David Schwimmer tonight? I thought.

Then I remembered it was Saturday, not Sunday.

I'd won a day back and felt all the better for it.

The fox looked at the sky, gave me a parting glance, then darted for the nearest dark place it could find. ♦

OUR TOWN

East Poultry Avenue, EC1A

Paul Ewen steps out of The Cock and into the light

Usually when I wait for a bus in the morning, I will its prompt arrival so I won't miss my train to work. But I want today's bus to arrive quickly because it's 5.30 a.m. and I don't want to be murdered. I'm standing rigid amidst wind-blown, fox-strewn rubbish. When the bus materializes, most of the passengers have their eyes closed, like corpses. I'm half asleep, but I don't close my eyes. Not because I'm scared. I'm excited.

My train will leave at 6.07 a.m. It's the first train of the day from Denmark Hill, destined for Farringdon, via Blackfriars. Staff from King's College Hospital are waiting on the platform too, heading home from their graveyard shifts. Unlike us normal folk, these night workers can't stop by a pub for an after-work pint. It's six in the morning! Even though their throats are parched, laced with disinfectant, there's nowhere open round these parts, not at this unearthly hour. No, if they really fancy a relaxing drink after work, they're going to have to tag along with me. Come along! Because that's where I'm heading right now. I'm going to the pub!

'A missable doorway opens to a flight of downwards stairs flanked by old market signage.'

PAUL: Tough night?

NIGHT WORKER: Um... it was a bit full-on, yeah.

PAUL: I'm going to the pub now, want to come?

NIGHT WORKER: No, thanks.

The Swiss writer Robert Walser once wrote: 'A metropolis is a wave-filled ocean that for the most part is still largely unknown to its own inhabitants.' While many of us, in the metropolis of London, have yet to awaken, others, in the more hidden depths, are drinking beer. I want to explore the same deep waters. Thus it is, on a bitterly cold Monday morning, before starting work for the week, I'm heading down the boozier.

The train passengers, like their bus equivalents, are sleeping soundly. Many wear headphones, perhaps containing lullabies. The undulation is a useful thing for would-be sleepers, but every time the doors open, a frightful alarm is activated. It was the same on the bus. Meanwhile, we clickety-clack onwards, passing tall tower blocks where the only lights come from stairwells.

On Cowcross Street, leading from Farringdon Station, the pavement is dotted with freshly laid piles of sick. Some of the shopkeepers are already out, dousing it down with buckets of bleachy water. Just around the corner, hordes of young folk are pouring out of Fabric nightclub. It's the end of the night for the dance-floor crowd, while opposite the club, at Smithfield Market, the meat workers are still hard at it, earning their keep. In contrast to the ragged club crowd, they seem decidedly fresh, darting about, loading endless vans with meat for the trade. Dressed in white coats, trousers and hats, they resemble officials at a radiation site, or the government agents who fumigate Elliott's house in *ET*.

Although mere seconds from the nightclub's doors, The Cock Tavern is very discreet, hiding itself from the jingly-jangly kids. It's positioned within the poultry section of Smithfield, protected behind a cavalcade of departing vans. A missable doorway opens to a flight of downwards stairs flanked by old market signage. At the bottom, in the basement, a pub has been open and serving drinks since 6 a.m.

There are many basement bars in London, plenty of which keep strange hours. The numerous drinking dens and clubs in Soho are perhaps the most well known of these. But The Cock is not an all-night bar. And it's not a members' club, somewhere to be 'buzzed in'. It's a morning bar, a pub, a public pub. The fact that it opens at 6 a.m. makes it, I believe, all the more anomalous.

An easel-mounted menu awaits one's arrival, offering all manner of cooked breakfast options. Unsurprisingly, steaks are the dish of choice, with 20oz T-bones, 16oz rumps, and

sirloins and fillets on offer. The more adventurous diner may also opt for liver, kidneys, black pudding or bubble and squeak, but given I normally have Weetabix for my breakfast, the eggs and bacon meal is radical enough. A vegetarian option is provided too, although my advice to people of such a persuasion is to stay safe and snug in bed.

One of the first things I do upon arrival is send my mum a text.



I'M IN THE PUB!

My parents live in New Zealand, and if I still lived there too there'd be no reason for alarm. New Zealand is thirteen hours ahead of London, given current daylight savings, so being in a New Zealand pub at this time would not be considered amiss. An English pub, however, is a different kettle of fish. My mother normally avoids sending me texts at this hour, knowing she'll wake me up. She sends me one now though, and noting a hint of concern, I respond immediately.

ALL FINE! I THOUGHT I WAS GOING TO GET MURDERED, BUT I DIDN'T!

Because of the distance and expense involved with travelling from London to New Zealand, I don't get back home as often as I would like. But before my next trip, I think I shall first come to The Cock, in order to acclimatize to the different time zone.

‘There is no day or night down here, no seasonal rain or shine.’

The decor and styling of The Cock is decidedly no-frills. The Ladies toilet is denoted by an A4 sheet of paper stuck to the door, with the word ‘LADIES’ handwritten in biro. White sheets of paper also double as tablecloths, and mine is quickly ringed with watery stains from my pint. The flooring comprises sturdy wooden boards, but the walls are plastered in a kind of lemon-chiffon shade, a fact I would hesitate to voice aloud at the bar. The barman seems fairly no-nonsense too.

PAUL: Have you heard of Robert Walser?

BARMAN: No.

PAUL: It just goes to show, you see. He was right.

BARMAN: Who?

PAUL: Robert Walser. You and I both live in London, but we swim in different depths.

BARMAN: I dunno what you’re on about.

PAUL: I think I’m a jellyfish. What are you?

BARMAN: No.

Framed black and white photos are mounted around the bar, depicting the market in its yesteryear. One image features bomb damage sustained during the Blitz; others announce visits from the royal family, or the arrival of frozen lambs from the colonies. New Zealand sheep have preceded my visit to Smithfield by more than a hundred years. In the early days, livestock could only be transported to the market on the hoof, a practice that by the end of the eighteenth century was causing mayhem in the surrounding streets. By the mid nineteenth century, most of the animals coming to London were arriving by rail, and by the 1870s, the first frozen meat began arriving from New Zealand, Australia and South America. Anyway, that’s quite enough information for now. It’s too early in the morning for a blinking history lesson.

I begin nursing a second pint, aware that, in normal circumstances, my bedside alarm would not as yet have sounded.

My breakfast is served on a white oval plate. The bacon rind resembles webbed toenails, and I carefully remove this, brooming it to the side of the plate. The meal is filling and delicious. When my plate is collected, the waiter, who is actually the barman, looks at my fatty rind leftovers and scowls.

The Gents is freezing. I have a good mind to put my hands under the hand dryer, *before* I wee. The water is icy as I wash my hands, face and neck. I did harbour concerns that I might be a bit too presentable in The Cock, a bit too fresh and sparkling. But I needn’t have worried. Instead of rising in time to shower, brush my teeth and spray deodorant

beneath my arms, I stayed in bed. Like the night-shift crews, I suspect I’m a bit whiffy.

It’s not just meat workers in here this morning. One table is playing host to Fabric nightclub personnel, and the group behind me are nursing staff from Bart’s (St Bartholomew’s) Hospital. Celebrities have also been known to drop by. Lucian Freud reputedly conducted all his meetings in The Cock, and frequently dined on grilled kidneys with his good friend Frank Auerbach. Numerous sporting heroes are noted patrons, and Liam Gallagher and William Hague have been known to visit too. The meat workers form the bulk of the clientele, however, some still attired in their bloodstained garb (perhaps the daring vegetarian visitor can imagine these stains originating instead from tomatoes).

There is no day or night down here, no seasonal rain or shine. The widescreen TV is the only window to the outside world, and this morning it features a live panel debating the day’s news. Like me, these TV presenters have risen at some ungodly hour, but I imagine they were collected from their homes and chauffeur-driven to the studio, without fear of death. And now they’re drinking coffee and hot tea, which again differs from my own experience.

The lack of windows is a bit disorientating. According to official statistics, the sun will rise at 7.32 this morning, but we won’t see head nor tail of it. I’ll be on my third pint by then, swimming near the ocean floor. Maybe the lack of natural light helps the night-shifters imagine it’s evening outside, reassuring them that they’re normal people, soon to return home for *Holby City*, before bed. It doesn’t help me though, especially when I’m standing next to a man at the bar who is covered in blood.

PAUL: I thought I was going to get butchered this morning.

MEAT WORKER: Maybe you still will...

The lads haven’t finished upstairs yet...

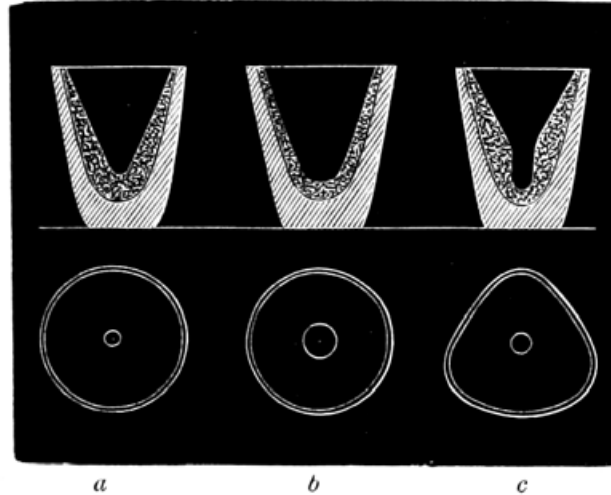
PAUL: Lovely to meet you.

I yawn, which is a bit unfair. I still have an entire day to try and get through, while my fellow patrons will soon be hitting the sack. Returning my glass to the bar, I thank the barman, saluting him.

The sun’s up when I emerge from the depths. It’s shining brightly, and I want to crow like a happy cock that’s escaped the butchers’ knives. The market bustle has died down, but when I walk back along Cowcross Street and into Farringdon Station, I’m nearly trampled by suits with briefcases, stampeding on their way to work. I’m on my way to work too. But unlike this lot, I don’t rush madly because I’m a bit pissed. ♦

The Language of Things in the House

by Lydia Davis



The washing machine in spin cycle: 'Pakistáni, Pakistáni.'

The washing machine agitating (slow): 'Firefighter, firefighter, firefighter, firefighter.'

Plates rattling in the rack of the dishwasher: 'Neglected.'

The glass blender knocking on the bottom of the metal sink: 'Cumberland.'

Pots and dishes rattling in the sink: 'Tobacco, tobacco.'

The wooden spoon in the plastic bowl stirring the pancake mix: 'What the hell, what the hell.'

An iron burner rattling on its metal tray: 'Bonanza.'

The suction-cup pencil sharpener taken up from the top of the bookcase: 'Rip Van Winkle.'

Markers rolling and bumping in a drawer that is opened and then shut: 'Purple fruit.'

The lid of a whipped butter tub being prised off and then put down on the counter: 'Horó-scopy.'

A spoon stirring yeast in a bowl: 'Unilateral, unilateral.'

*Could it be that subliminally we are hearing words and phrases all the time?
These words and phrases must be lingering in the upper part of our subconscious, readily available.
Almost always, there has to be something hollow involved: a resonating chamber.*

Water going down the drain of the kitchen sink: 'Late ball game.'

Water running into a glass jar: 'Mohammed.'

The empty Parmesan cheese bottle when set down on counter: 'Believe me.'

A fork clattering on the countertop: 'I'll be right back.'

The metal slotted spoon rattling as it is put down on the stove: 'Pakistani.'

A pot in the sink with water running in: 'A profound respect.'

A spoon stirring a mug of tea: 'Iraqi, -raqi, -raqi, -raqi.'

The washing machine in agitation cycle: 'Pócketbook, pócketbook.'

The washing machine in agitation cycle: 'Córporate re-, córporate re-'

Maybe the words we hear spoken by the things in our house are words already in our brain from our reading; or from what we have been hearing on the radio or talking about to each other; or from what we often read out the car window, as for instance the sign for Cumberland Farms; or they are simply words we have always liked, such as 'Roanoke' (as in Virginia). If these words ('Iraqi, -raqi') are in the tissue of our brain all the time, we then hear them because we hear exactly the right rhythm for the word along with more or less the right consonants and, often, something close to the right vowels. Once the rhythm and the consonants are there, our brain, having this word somewhere in it already, may be supplying the appropriate vowels.

Two hands washing in the basin: 'Quote unquote.'

Stove dial clicking on: 'Rick.'

Metal rug-beater being hung up on a hook against the wooden wall of the basement stairs: 'Carbohydrate.'

Man's wet foot squeaking on the gas pedal: 'Lisa!'

The different language sounds are created by these objects in the following way: hard consonants are created by hard objects striking hard surfaces. Vowels are created with hollow spaces, such as the inside of the butter tub whose lid and inner volume created the sounds of the word 'horóscopy' – 'horó' when the lid was coming off, and '-scopy' when the lid was put down on the counter. Some vowels, such as the e's in 'neglected', spoken by the plates in the dishwasher, are supplied by our brain to fill out what we hear as merely consonants: 'nglctd'.

Either consonants function to punctuate or stop vowel sounds, or vowels function to fill out or colour consonants.

Wooden-handled knife hitting counter: 'Background.'

Plastic salad-spinner being set down on counter: 'Julie! Check it out!'

Drain gurgling: 'Hórticult.'

Orange juice container shaken once: 'Génoa.'

Cat jumping down on to bathroom tiles: 'Va béne.'

Kettle being set on clay tile: 'Palérmo.'

Wicker laundry basket as its lid is being opened: 'Vobiscum' or 'Wo bist du?'

Sneeze: 'At issue.'

Winter jacket as it is being unzipped: 'Allumettes.'

Grating of wire-mesh dryer filter being cleaned with hand: 'Philadelphia.'

Water sucking down drain of kitchen sink: 'Dvořák.'

First release of water from toilet tank as handle is depressed: 'Rudolph.'

I don't think I've heard or read these words recently – does this mean I always have the word 'Rudolph', for instance, in my head, maybe from Rudolph Giuliani but more probably from 'Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer', just as I always seem to have in my head, though I don't want it, the tune of the 'Mexican Hat Dance'?

Zipper: 'Rip.'

Rattling of dishwashing utensils: 'Collaboration.'

Rubber flip-flop squeaking on wooden floor: 'Echt.'

If you hear one of these words, and pay attention, you are more likely to hear another. If you stop paying attention, you will stop hearing them. You can hear the squawking of ducks in the scrape of a knife on a plastic cutting board. You can hear ducks, also, in the squeaking of a wet sponge rubbing a refrigerator shelf. More friction (wet sponge) will produce a squeak, whereas less friction (dry sponge) will produce a soft brushing sound. You can hear a sort of monotonous wailing music in a fan, or in two fans going at once if there is some slight variation in their sound. There is no meaningful connection between the action or object that produces the sound (man's foot on gas pedal) and the significance of the word ('Lisa!').

Bird: 'Dix-huit.'

Bird: 'Marguerite!'

Bird: 'Hey, Frederika!'

Soup bowl on counter: 'Fabrizio!'

Stade de l'Amour

Chris Garrecht-Williams on the manual labours of love

When we arrive at the Stade de France the sun is still well above the sconced Parisian skyline. It's a Thursday evening in June, though Paris denies it and remains as grey and wet as it was in March, April and, but for a two-day respite, May. Arriving, I can't help but be stung, once more, though lightly now, by the knowledge that it will never be me sliding across the immaculate grass of a stadium while eighty thousand voices flare in the sky above us. Not that I put much effort into the pursuit of such a moment, but it seems a strong alternative to the superfluous hard hats, reflective vests and steel-toed boots that outfit our experience here. In our bags we carry lunch, or dinner, or breakfast. Couscous, an apple, mostly sandwiches, perhaps a boiled egg. We're here to lay a temporary floor over the stadium's field so that a three-hour Bruce Springsteen concert doesn't reduce the grass to a Glastonbury soup. The eighteen of us will spend the night carrying large plastic squares, laying them down one by one, and screwing them together with a large metal T. More surprising than the technological absurdity of

our situation is that nearly all of the men labouring under the stadium lights migrated to Paris, not for the promises of riches or a career, but because they fell in love.

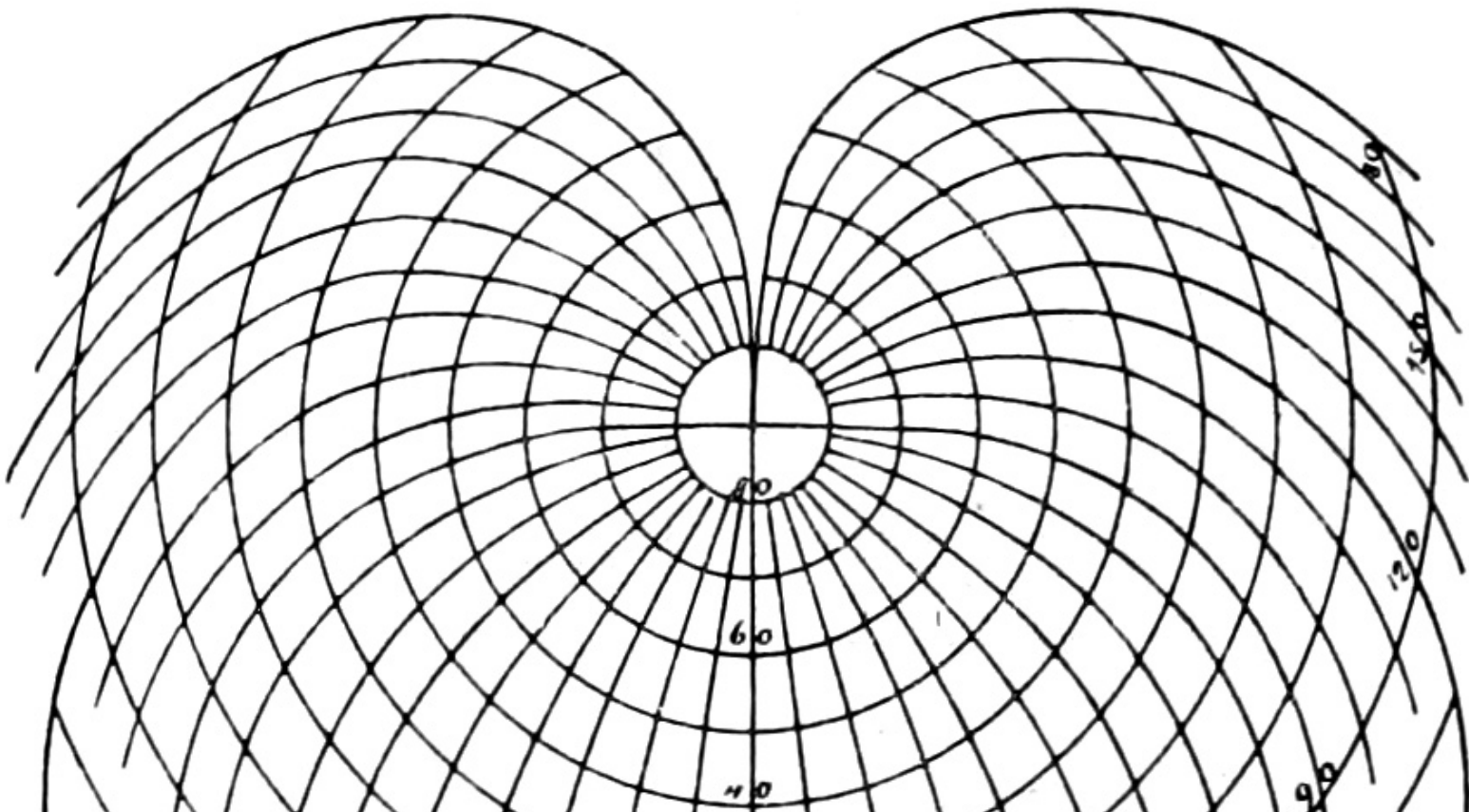
Tal works with the tempered methodology of a seasoned labourer. He is neither fast nor slow, but steady, unperturbed, like a man who knows he must walk a long way but is in no rush to arrive. He is Israeli and met his French wife in India while he was travelling around on a motorcycle he bought for the equivalent of five hundred dollars. Steve labours like a boxer, attacking the work as if punishing it for being in front of him. He met his Spanish wife in England twenty-two years ago when she was an exchange student there. They reconnected years later when a letter he had written, asking her back, was found, dusty but otherwise unharmed, after a decade behind her mother's mantle. His wife and her mother have a business in Paris. He has a large tribal tattoo on his left calf, is at least 6' 2" and is shaped like the kind of guy you'd be happy was on your side as you left the pub on a Saturday evening in the shadowy parts of Manchester. When I asked

him what brought him to Paris, he looked up, said 'Love', then continued lifting, dropping and attaching the plastic sheets.

My first love arrived with the remarkable predictability of adolescence. Late high school, the invention of sex, the parting and subsequent heartbreak, all of it commonplace, miraculous. The bench we called our own still faces west from under the cherry tree at 102nd and Riverside. Since then, through relationships both fleeting and serious, I seem to have been in the various stages of love without pause. This has led to a thematic consistency in my conversation that I worry bores my friends, but is of course never boring to me.

The Craigslist ad was for stagehands, nineteen euros an hour, must speak English. I don't remember much else about it other than, 'This isn't a job for ladies who want to stand around talking shit all day.' I'm not sure if this was referring to actual women, or serving as a caution to men, but either way not a woman is in sight. Not among our crew, laying the floor, nor among the gaffers, riggers, truck drivers or the white-helmeted supervisors who occasionally appear for little more, it seems, than to show that we are being supervised.

I've been told there are people who can do one thing with their hands and another with their mind, but in my experience repetitive manual labour produces an alpha state in the brain not dissimilar to a



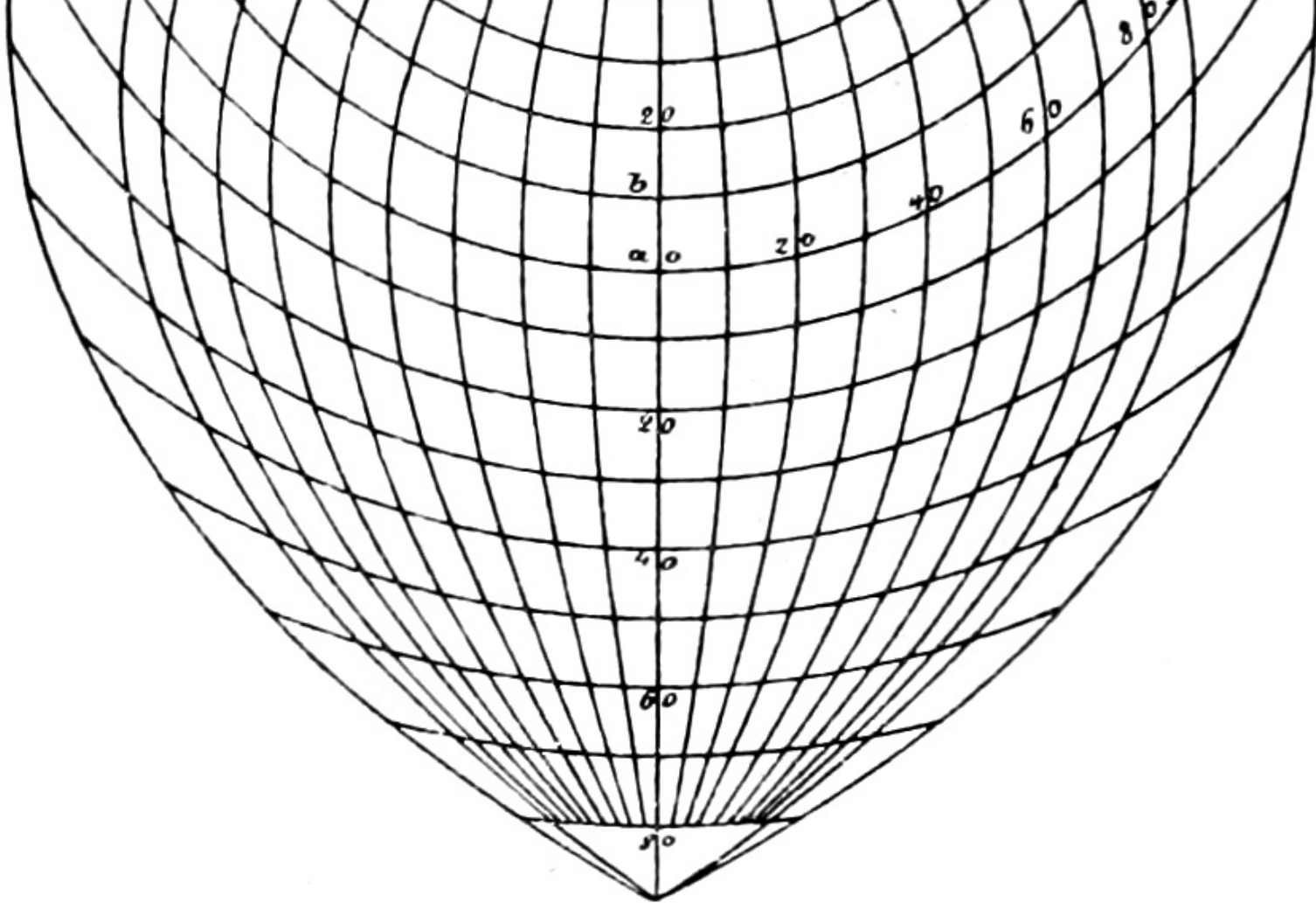


Fig. 53.

violent hangover. While carrying plastic squares in the early evening I think, 'Now is a good time to figure some things out.' Then, 'I should really be doing some thinking, where was I?' Then, 'I don't care about anybody else, but when I think about you, I . . . We're not even halfway done, what time is it? How can those guys work so slowly? I could just leave. At least the birds haven't started yet . . . Ooh, I don't care about anybody else, but when I think about you, I . . .' And on and on in a repetitive murmur until the early hours of the morning when thought ceases altogether.

I can only gloss the love that brought me into adulthood; to approach it is to approach a story I don't know how to contain. After eight years together we broke across the ragged peaks of our hearts and learned many great things and some less so.

I learned where my heart was again with a Sicilian from Staten Island. Driven, smart, sexy, a natural history of the senses I wasn't ready for. Once, in the mountains of the Dominican Republic, we poured rum down the slopes of each

other's chests; later we smoked cigars under the pine trees. In Rio San Juan our hotel room hung over the Caribbean Sea. Between our bed and the horizon, fishing boats flecked the water like specks of dust on a blue-green quilt. We fucked honestly, which, though it ought not to be, is rare. I hear she is on her way towards marriage now; what natural bedmates happiness and regret can make.

On Friday morning, ten hours after we arrived, just as the sky begins to brighten, we head to the metro for our trip back to Paris proper. The trains start running at around 5.30 and are immediately packed. In a country known for its thirty-five-hour working week there are, of course, other economies. We crowd in.

Early on Sunday we return to lift the floor back up. Looking out over 7,350 square metres of plastic at seven in the morning, and knowing not only that you have to lift it all up, but that you'll be back to lay it down again, is a moment in which you are conscious of the absurdity of your life. If we are to imagine Sisyphus happy, it is because his struggle is his own, his rock is his thing—it

bears his name. We, on the other hand, being replaceable as light bulbs, see the nameless futility of our job, are witness to the irrelevance of our identities, and, whether we are in love or not, this is a leaden concept for us to carry around on a Sunday morning in Paris.

Steve loves his wife. He also feels that moving here was one of his great mistakes. His nest egg is gone, good job gone, house gone. He is forty-seven and delivers pies six days a week. On the seventh he pulls up a plastic floor.

Two of us are named Carlos. One is from Ecuador and first came to Paris with a job at the United Nations. He speaks fluent French, Spanish and English, though the crew assumes his English is poor. He hated working in an office, quit the UN after a month and started a construction company that specializes in remodelling interiors. Most of his clients come through the UN, and many have their expenses paid by their governments. I think he is the smartest man among us. He is one of the few who didn't come to Paris for a woman.

The second Carlos's family has a chain

of ice-cream shops in Buenos Aires. It's not uncommon for people there, sitting around on a Friday night, drinking Fernet and Coke or wine or nothing, to order ice-cream delivery. You call and ask for a pint of chocolate and one of dulce de leche and why not some vanilla, and twenty minutes later your buzzer rings and you have an ice-cream party. I like to imagine that his girlfriend used to order on the nights she knew he would be delivering, but I have no idea.

We don't mix with the others. While they deal with karabiners, cranes, vast tentacles of wiring and various tons of steel, we lift, carry, drop and turn. Still, there is some science to our approach, and our self-selected leaders orchestrate the labour. The white helmets tell us things we already know and make half-hearted jokes concerning their futures as inspirational speakers, but they are about as inspiring as a plate of tripe – as, I suppose, is the job. Like a vast field of flattened tripe.

proud to be making his own way.

On Thursday morning this Carlos wakes up, showers, eats, kisses his girlfriend and goes to work, where he calls people in Spain who talk to him mostly because of his ridiculous and charming accent. Then, leaving work at six, he gets on the metro, rides out to the Stade de France and carries plastic tiles through the night. When we leave, he goes home, showers, eats, kisses his girlfriend, who loves him but thinks he's crazy, then goes back to work, calling Spain to sell magazine subscriptions or cable television or whatever it is he sells. About the financial crisis he said to me, 'Here it is a crisis because people who have gone to university can't find jobs; at home it was a crisis because we had no food.'

I am here because I fell in love with a woman. I have called it other things. She resists, and is as strange to me as maths, though far more interesting. Her history of love is a tangle of kelp behind her ears.

ties, DJs or functionaries of any office. We will labour through the decisions that brought us here, and in the morning find a favourite accent among our pillows. Perhaps we are all fools. Love develops and changes. People cheat and leave. They run away. Sometimes, it departs for no reason at all.

Our last shift is 30 June, the day Paris finally bursts into summer. The heat is dangerous and we move slowly beneath it. Argentine Carlos has brought his friend Alex, with whom he works at the telemarketing firm, which I have discovered isn't really a telemarketing firm. Alex is from Mexico City and is in Paris with his French wife. He and Carlos call dentists in Spain to persuade them to sell the gold fillings they collect from their patients. I imagine someone is getting rich from this, and think how the logistics seem bizarre and how many better ways there are to make money in the world than carrying things.

'How much of love is the story of it? How much of desire is born of resistance?'

What love I have known compounds itself in the pressed glass plates of memory. The deepest, most affecting experience of it I've had was a moment of parting. Three baby beavers huddled near us at the edge of a lake. They were not a metaphor, but something real pressing up against my hostile imagination. I got up and ruined my shoulder, throwing rocks against a wall of trees.

As we move more convincingly into adulthood, many of us take to treating love the way a tai chi master treats aggression, but not here, not in this most motley of crews, who do not deflect it but rather let it define the movements of their lives. How much of love is the story of it? How much of desire is born of resistance?

Argentine Carlos came to Paris both to be with his girlfriend and to try to make a life away from the family business. His friends cautioned him against moving to Europe in the middle of the crisis, but he's found a job as a telemarketer and is

She is a scholar and an artist; to say pretty would be misleading: she is the ember in every room. When she is tired she moves in bed like a puppy. Her stockings are full of holes; her bathroom is a mess.

The few French men among us are the children of immigrants. The rest of us arrived here as adults for the same basic reason as immigrants everywhere: a better life. What makes most of us odd is how we define the adjective, following little but the guidance of that most and least trustworthy compulsion.

Why leave the good job back home? Why leave the mother, father, siblings, friends, the girls you thought it might work out with or might at least finally make out with, to come to a grey, cold city, suffering record unemployment, its cafes promoting happy-hour beers at six euros a piece? If we stay, none of us will be professors or doctors, lawyers, judges, government officials, actors, firemen, cops, insurance salesmen, TV personali-

Also on the last day of work a woman appears. Out from some hidden office she arrives and might as well be in a chariot, waving up at us, but she never takes her eyes off the work, weaving her forklift through the pallets like a barracuda. Though catcalls wouldn't be surprising, none issue. After so many hours, the appearance of this clearly superior and capable woman inspires something close to reverence in our crew.

None of us ever want to do this job again, but come August, when the work starts up, I imagine we'll all be there, loyal to rent and occasional flowers. We'll walk through the truck entrance, down ramp P-0 and out into the centre of the arena. It'll still be daylight, though the angle of the shadows will be sharper, the hemisphere tilting towards autumn. Few people. Forklifts scuttling through the halls. A band of strangers sitting at the southern end, smoking and staring at the sea of grass that awaits them. ◇

Nothing to Hide

Illustrations by Becky Barnicoat

Am I the only one who doesn't care about the #NSA? I have nothing to hide and if it stops a terrorist attack. Privacy was gone long ago.



If NSA wants to spy on my phone I dont care. Nothing to hide. I just dont know how they will keep themselves awake.



I don't care if the NSA looks at my emails; as long as Outback Steakhouse lets me add a lobster tail on the side, I will love this country.



If the #NSA wants to see my dick jokes, lame chats with my husband and me bitching about my weight then go for it. I don't care.

Who cares if the NSA broke privacy rules? They are looking for terrorists, not average Americans who sit on they ass social networking.

So the NSA can see and intercept more domestic emails/calls than we thought, well who cares, if you arent hiding anything whats the problem?



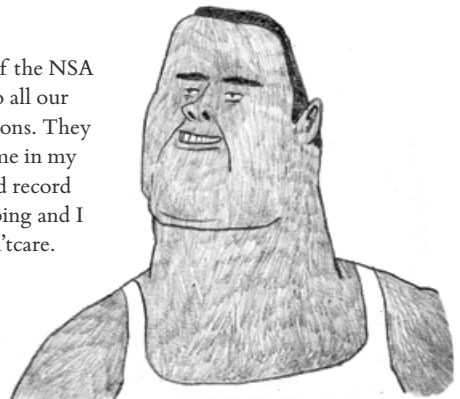
Wd rthr hv NSA listening 2 my boring phone clls than gvng terrorist opportunity 2 discuss plans 2 harm us. I hv nothing 2 hide wht abt you



This NSA thing is crazy but like I don't have anything private I have to hide, I sent a dick pic once but who hasn't seen my dick?



Who cares if the NSA listens in to all our conversations. They could come in my room and record me sleeping and I wouldn't care.



POEM

United States Versus

by Ann Arbor

United States v. Nixon

United States v. Lopez

United States v. Virginia

United States v. Windsor

United States v. US District Court

United States v. Curtiss-Wright Export Corp.

United States v. 2,507 Live Canary Winged Parakeets

United States v. Approximately 64,695 Pounds of Shark Fins

United States v. Forty Barrels and Twenty Kegs of Coca-Cola

United States v. Article Consisting of 50,000 Cardboard Boxes More or Less, Each Containing One Pair of Clacker Balls

United States v. 2,116 Boxes of Boned Beef, Weighing Approximately 154,121 Pounds, and 541 Boxes of Offal, Weighing Approximately 17,732 Pounds

United States v. One Lucite Ball Containing Lunar Material (One Moon Rock) and One Ten-Inch by Fourteen-Inch Wooden Plaque

United States v. 11¼ Dozen Packages of Articles Labeled in Part Mrs Moffat's Shoo-Fly Powders for Drunkenness

United States v. Eighteenth Century Peruvian Oil on Canvas Painting

United States ex rel. Gerald Mayo v. Satan and His Staff

United States v. One Package of Japanese Pessaries

United States v. Thirty-seven Photographs

United States v. One Book Called 'Ulysses'

New York Times Co. v. United States

Korematsu v. United States

Schmuck v. United States

Dusky v. United States

Roth v. United States

Hamburger v. Fry

Death v. Graves

Roe v. Wade

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The Greenwald Book

*No Place to Hide: Edward Snowden,
the NSA and the US Surveillance State*

★ *Coming in Spring 2014* ★

===

'We're supposed to know virtually everything about what they [the government] do: that's why they're called public servants. They're supposed to know virtually nothing about what we do: that's why we're called private individuals.'

— Glenn Greenwald

Out Now

One Way and Another

By Adam Phillips

Introduced by John Banville

'Adam Phillips is that rarest of phenomena, a trained clinician who is also a sublime writer. He is a psychoanalyst with a special interest in the treatment of children; as a writer his interests appear limitless. Comparisons, if not entirely odious, are certainly inadequate, yet it is hard to resist suggesting that the literary figure Phillips most resembles, in his irrepressible curiosity and breadth of reference, is Sir Thomas Browne. Phillips insists that psychoanalysis and psychoanalytic writing are a kind of poetry, and the ingenious machinery that is his own work harks back to the Metaphysical poets from whom Browne took so many of his conceits of style and topic.'

— John Banville

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cookbooks?

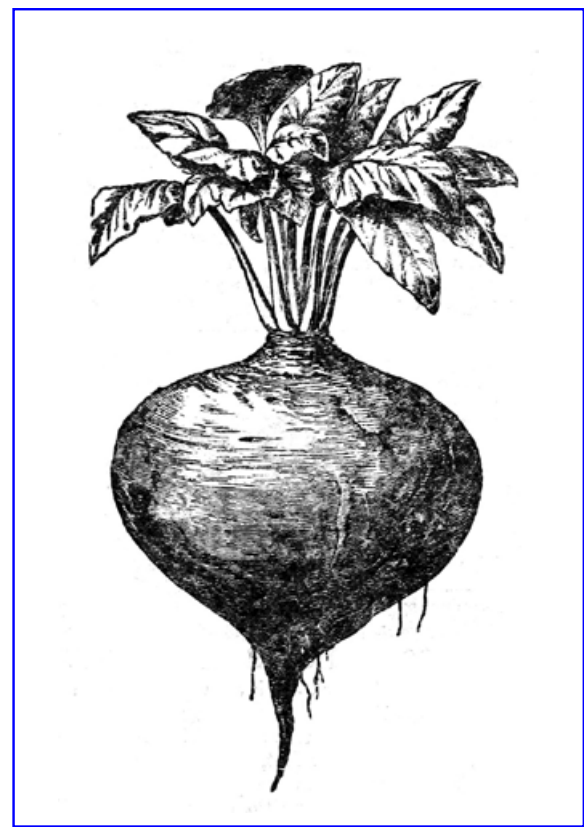
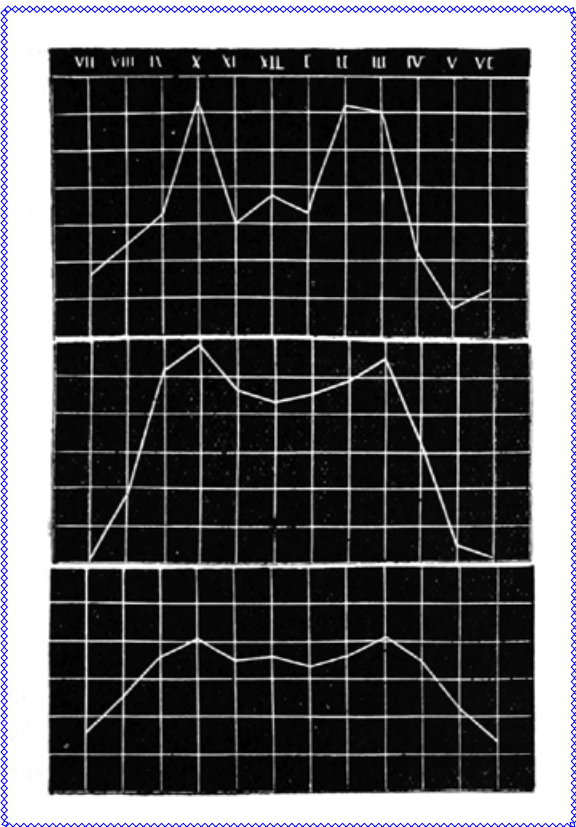
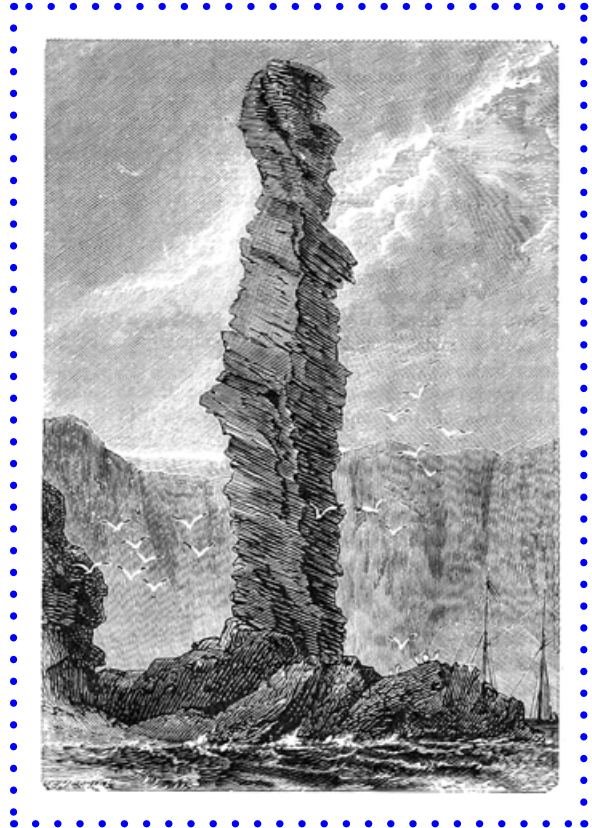
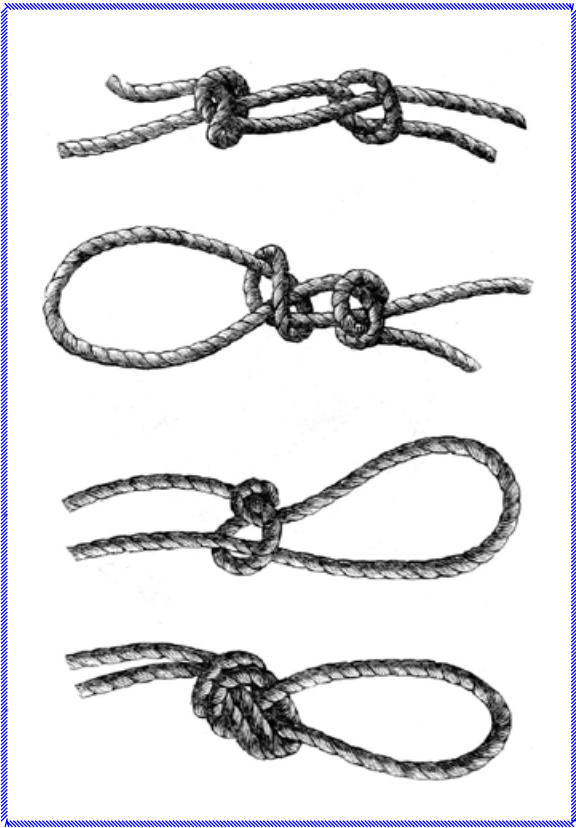
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Have you ever
been in a maximum
security prison?

If so, this might be for you:

*The Maximum
Security Cookbook*

ADS THAT DON'T LOOK LIKE ADS



A Few Questions for Trevor Quirk

This relates to the piece on page 23

When did you start writing your essay?
What were its origins?

The strange thing about anything I write is that it never has distinct points of origin; and if it does they're arbitrary. A few years ago, I'd been asked to write an essay for a class I took in grad school, which had we'll say a 'progressive' structure (the class did) and left much up to student initiative. Naturally, with so much academic freedom, I struggled to think of an idea. Later, I was sitting in a classroom, waiting for undergrad students to arrive (I was a TA), and noticed the vibrant afternoon light broken by the blinds of a window. I think little moments like that are mesmerizing. It had occurred to me numerous times before that I'd been a student of light—of its aesthetics and its physics—for several years. In my writing, I found myself describing it more than anything else. I thought it might be useful to explore it as a personal metaphor. Guess it was.

Solitude and loneliness are recurring themes in the essay. Are solitary people drawn to astronomy?

Tough to say. I guess a classic astronomer—like, say, Tycho Brahe—would be the appropriate historical invocation: awake while all others are asleep, peering into the sky, compiling reams of excruciatingly meticulous data and, in Brahe's case, hoarding them. Modern astronomy is, no surprise, very different from that. Many astronomers don't work with optics at all, but receive sets of data from gargantuan international telescope projects and look for patterns through recondite programs. So all the working realities that imposed solitude—which can engender loneliness—are pretty much gone. In my case, all the loneliness and solitude were self-imposed. I was not a very nice person in college. Part of the essay is an attempt to express why the parts of me that were going to make me lonely anyway were captivated by astronomy.

You mention the human eye is sensitive to a 'pathetically small band among the greater stretch of light'. We can't see the world. We can't know the world. Even the certainty of physics is capsized by quantum mechanics. Why is it important for you to keep examining the world using the form of essays?

The relationship between the two ideas you've presented—between art and epistemology—is really tricky. I personally think 'certainty'—if certainty requires intelligibility—was capsized long, long before quantum mechanics, by Newton sure enough. Quantum theory only, albeit dramatically, recapitulated that we are not privy to the god's-eye view of the world. Our minds impose structures on the data provided by the senses; and those structures have a specific shape—i.e. limits and scope. This is a cliché among historians of science that is ignored virtually everywhere else, especially in mainstream culture (I assume it's similar in the UK). Peruse some best-selling science books that broach impressive topics like human nature or morality or consciousness and try to find any mention of intractable mystery—you'll see what I mean. The essay briefly touches on the intoxicating appeal of limitless explanation; and I was susceptible to this delusion when I was younger. I think differently now. Living in a world that can be fully explained now seems to me a kind of hell.

The role of the essay—or any literary art—should be to achieve the fullest possible expression of what it's like to engage with these ideas, of what it's like for a person to entertain the idea that he can't truly know the world, as you said, and what patterns of meaning that generates. To make an extremely crude scientific analogy, literature is not so much about analysing the data of consciousness but about creating the best possible kind of data. Analysis is the job of literary critics, theorists and philosophers. Like I said, the analogy is crude, though, because the

analysis we apply to literary 'data' is not really scientific in any meaningful respect, and not for lack of effort. The human organism is just too diverse, peculiar and complex to be treated that way. Safe to say that the science of humanity is a far cry from accounting for humanity, maybe permanently so.

How important are the constellations to you now? Do they still provide any comfort? Do you look up at the night sky?

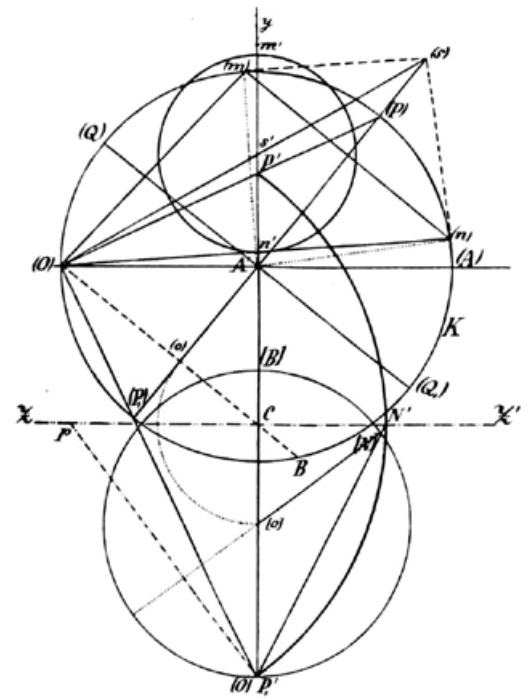
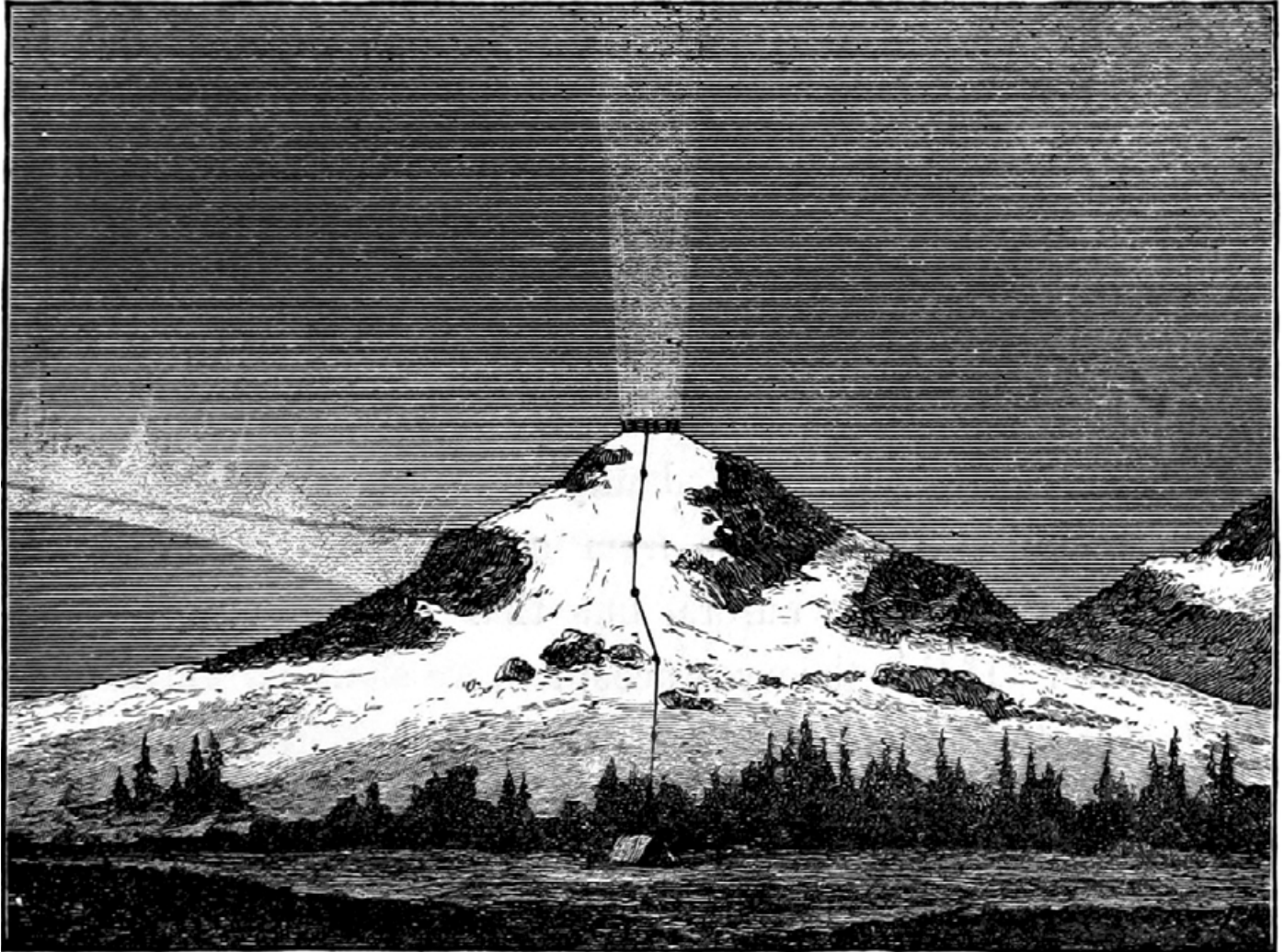


Fig. 11.

Today, I can identify exactly two constellations. They never were of great interest to me in themselves; they're very Earth-centric constructions, if you think about it. But I also can't think of a better example of how human beings impose rich meanings on to utterly arbitrary patterns; we make stories out of white dots in the sky. That might seem absurdist and bleak, but only superficially, only if we ignore the fact that meaning is as much a 'real' part of our world as atoms and stars and photons and optic nerves. So, yeah: I still look up, on clear cold nights, and sometimes get the ineffable reverence that I used to feel, the slight hint of a meaning larger than any I could comprehend. A strange sensation. I think they call that wonder. ◊

Source of Light

Astronomy is a passive science. You can never get There. The light must bring There to you. By Trevor Quirk



—For Mark

After the certainty of my teenage mindset had burned off I had my first epistemic crisis. I still, on occasion, suspect and dread that *nothing* is true — at least as far as I'll ever know. When it came time for undergrad I figured science was the antidotal course of study, so I chose physics and astronomy. From then on, much of what I retained from my education had to do with perception and nature of light. Snell's Law, for example, describes the angle at which light will depart one medium while entering another; it explains why a branch stuck in water will appear to bend at the surface.

It now seems significant to me that light, like truth, is constantly changing course. It is hard to truly see.

For what it's worth, here's the law:

$$n_1 \sin(\theta_1) = n_2 \sin(\theta_2) = n_3 \sin(\theta_3) = n_4 \sin(\theta_4) \dots \text{you get the idea}$$

θ_1

During undergrad I spent a week at the gleaming white observational complex atop Kitt Peak, in an arid Native American reservation an hour's drive from Tucson, up a gravel one-laner that veered off the tarmac gone soft in desert heat. The observatory towers seemed runic,

wizardly, looming high in thin Arizona air, their metal drummed in the wind. By the generosity of a professor, I was there to assist observing along with another student. My schedule soon inverted; we drank coffee watching the sun dim and fall. I'm a sap for sunsets. I'm known to halt mid jaywalk in traffic to admire them.

The sunset at Kitt Peak did not disappoint. We would wait out the sun's slow plummet, peering off the balcony of Arizona U's observatory, the home of a 2.3m-diameter telescope. The sky was broken at high cirrus into molten patches. Creases between the clouds looked like purple arteries. You should have seen it: blazing, conflagrant, volcanic, magmatic

– the scene was like a thesaurus entry on the word ‘fiery’.

‘It’s no wonder,’ our professor said, ‘that the Native Americans consider these mountains spiritual.’

Her colleague would later explain that such sunsets depend on the amount of atmosphere the light must penetrate. At zenith, when the sky is blue, the sun must pierce only an areal glaze; so results noon’s full punishing glare, the truest experience of light short of a spacewalk. Yet when the sun is low, rising or falling, it enters the Earth at oblique angles, through great barometric pillows, colliding with air’s stubborn molecules, N_2 , O_2 , arriving at your eyes false, kindling with colour. This is further intensified by aerosols, the colleague declared, by which the light assumes the scarlet viscosity of lava. It’s called Rayleigh Scattering. I decided I disliked this colleague, so quick to puncture the experience with his imperious facts.

made those conversations memorable, profound even.

By twilight, most people are too tired to lie.

Control rooms are claustrophobically narrow, the space so small that you have to physically try not to look at people. The creepiness of staring is lost to weariness, if not the reluctance to strain your neck. Discussions meander senselessly and take on no definitive shape – but nobody cares. You have time to address every conceivable complexity and nuance. However rare, it is quite a thing when two people find themselves with nothing left to argue about, when they wholly agree on something that exists, outside.

θ_2

I have never understood that discordant mix of wonder and despair the stars are said to evoke. The night sky doesn’t seem the vacuous panorama, replete with dis-

astronomical structures: galaxy clusters. I understood ‘stars’ on a purely macro level, as pockets, globules, beavies and knots of light ranged along many prodigious arms. It seemed easy, then, to relate such inconceivable magnitude (the structure of the firmament!) to my sense of self. When people asked me what I studied, I wanted to induce headaches. It’d be a lie to say otherwise. I wanted people to confuse their awe of the cosmos for their awe of a mind that meant to know the truth about them. At a time when I felt uncertain about so much, it was a perverse consolation to have others think I knew far more than I did.

I was an awfully lonely student.

Despite myself, I learned things. You start to see projections of human qualities everywhere in astronomy. It’s basically a meticulous kind of *seeing*. Astronomers cut spectra at manageable intervals, mimic the eye by dividing the perennial continuum of light. The whole true thing

‘By twilight, most people are too tired to lie.’

Stars in the desert warm in slow degrees like sodium floodlights. When night arrived we closed the U-boatish hatch of the observatory and descended into the telescope control room. Observing at a world-class telescope is boring, through and through. Astronomy is, after all, a passive science. You can never get There. The light must bring There to you. It’s a waiting game, in truth: an operator slews the telescope to the target, the great optical hulk groans coldly on its metal gears, and then . . . nothing. Wait.

Quickly, other people become the most interesting objects in the room. Time dilates to a glacial flow, the air textured in static. I’d talk with people I normally found insufferable, making sure to mentally archive future topics, terrified that we’d run dry and have to simply listen to the oxidized behemoth outside, grumbling, counting all the night’s photons. I resigned to talk for fear of silence, boredom, but came upon a truth that

tant replicas of our own sun; nor does it seem the brightly wondrous curvature at the lacteal arm of the Milky Way. I spent a few summers in the high desert of Baja. Under the most achingly clear skies of my life, I felt I should have felt more. Awe, terror, reverence, something. Looking up, I only felt uncertain. The night is backlit by something that illumines and flows. The stars are pinholes through which light trickles and bleeds.

I had no firm reasoning for studying astronomy. My fascination was superficial by definition: I liked the way stuff *looked*. There was some self-importance to the decision. I had a notion that astronomy’s superiority stemmed from its radical inapplicability to everyday life. This sort of thing made sense to a student whose inferiority complex could be measured in solar-masses. But that’s the point. Colossal egos have a tendency to bend truth around them. It was no coincidence that I chose to study one of the largest possible

is all too much and must be broken down. In astronomy, the Earth serves as the sole point of reference, our big blue collective eye. Light from another object – a star, a galaxy – is a spring affixed to the Earth. The spring will stretch if the object pulls away and contract if it approaches. This is the Doppler Shift. It explains why light waves from a receding object seem longer and redder than they would if the object was lying still. Likewise, objects hurtling towards us have light that is shorter, bluer.

At unimaginable scale, in torpid galactic movements, we see the arc of our own lives. Young galaxies are rancorous and petulant; furnaces churning hydrogen to blue yield star after star after star. The red geriatric galaxy has lost most of that seminal hydrogen and has since condensed into an ornery, armless tuber. Does this process sound familiar? Andromeda and the Milky Way are spirals and still retain their blue, star-choked youth. Centaurus, Maffei 1 and Canis

'We see what we want in what's already there.'

Major are all red dead dry ellipses, coughing up nothing so much as stardust.

Young galaxies are blue because they're partly composed of stars that burn hot, like a pilot light, or a flame at the wick. Galaxies are born alone. Over time they wheel towards each other, gravitate, brush arms, establish bonds, merge (marry, you could say). They commune and form clusters where they take root and become red with the tired light of senescent stars, sanguine and quiet and dimming.

You can't talk about anthropomorphizing the heavens with no mention of constellations. Hercules, Orion, Auriga, the Gemini twins, Cepheus. I worked under an astronomer who could point these out in the sky with his eyes closed, given the date and latitude. He once gave a series of lectures on constellations in a sleek and expensive planetarium. There, projected on to the dome, I watched the already tenuous links between stars drawn into vague skeletons of birds, bulls, objects, people; then, further exaggerated into coherent shapes with the help of detailed overlays. Children are shown the Big Dipper first because it is one of the few asterisms that actually resembles its name.

I could have traced my own initials, my entire name, among the stars in the night sky – and at that age I probably did. We see what we want in what's already there.

θ
3

Colgate's teaching telescope is housed in the Foggy Bottom Observatory; a thimble protruding from the treacherous hill on which the University leans. I spent a summer there studying yet more galaxy clusters, but also took shifts for the observatory's nightly gander at quasars: individual galaxies so epically distant they appear like stars.

The population of rural Hamilton, New York, is tripled by Colgate's student body. During summer vacation the underdeveloped, one-local-bar-only sort of town seems abandoned, haunted. Boutique shops and B&Bs close, postal service gets patchy, local fauna inch across the trafficless streets. I shared my apartment building with one other student, both of us living in suites with room enough for three. I never met him. The property surrounding Colgate is abrasively Old Boyish – landscaped, Greek-lettered fraternities and sororities

fringed by bunker-pocked country clubs, beyond that a crowd of humble professorial cottages and splits, beyond that the residential scene gets bleak in a hurry and then finally intensely rural. Colgate is a palatial assortment of renovated buildings, with turrets, cannon crenels and the whole antebellum deal, all clashed with hideously expensive modern additions: glass staircases, sterile geometric tiling, high-speed lifts, sparkling marble and one spiffy planetarium. The newer buildings bear the names of loyally generous alumni. I worked in the Robert H. N. Ho Science Center. Colgate is one of those schools that make big things of their founding dates. Slanted against the sun's rise, it smells simultaneously of money and manure, the pond at its base seeming less a communal treasure and more like a moat.

Not my favourite place, Colgate. I'd just as soon strike it from memory. Still, I like to remember those boring nights, dictated by the telescope's slew. At shift's end I'd be dispatched under a sky on the cusp of morning, the air loamy with dew. I schlepped my bike up that awful hill just for those vibrant morning descents. A perfectly timed ride meant





I would arrive at my building just as the sun's thorny halo emerged. I tried to do the whole thing without thinking even once. It always began with a sole's push, a staggered mount, the familiar chill as the blue-white lights curled off and down the slope, the speed always gaining, a hand trembling above the handbrake, the mist from the pond fizzing bluely like seltzer, the vicious downhill pace, stars trembling furiously overhead as though their light was boiling, off the hill now, pedalling until home where I thumped up the stairs to lie in bed, eyes percolating with morning light, awake.

I was intensely lonely that summer. This had little to do with bucolic Hamilton, or Colgate. I now think that those nightly rides were brief moments of redefinition, when my head's rabble was quieted and humbled. I stopped trying to swallow suns. In the vast isolated expanse of wind-milled Hamilton, I saw that solitude only equates to suffering if you are determined to seem larger than the universe you occupy, to know exactly all there is to know. I would not find truth in scale. When I returned home at the end of my last collegiate summer, I knew I was finished with astronomy.

θ₄

All my life I've dreaded being wrong. This is not so much a fear of personally lacking the truth but a fear that there isn't a truth to be had. Period. It manifests as a Heisenbergian buzz in the head, a sort of staticky doubt that I cannot shake.

In undergrad, I would paralyse myself during maths exams by internally verifying basic stuff, over and over, like $34a + 56a$ does really = $90a$, or 'x' is the one that means multiply, or 'therefore' is in fact spelled with those nine letters. I've actually made myself sick thinking like this. At parties, I would get alarmed and climb into myself when hearing others argue about social taboos – religion, sex, politics, etc. – not because I detested those subjects but because their discussion tends to reveal personal beliefs that seem truly irreconcilable. This sort of argument erupts among loving family and hateful enemies alike. You've seen them happen, these rhetorical bouts of conflicting truth and uncompromising conviction. Do these arguments ever end in concession, I wonder? Does anyone ever admit their own error and concede their opponent's rightness?

So, what? Everyone is right because no one is right. 'There is no absolute truth' is itself an absolute truth.

Am I the only one who finds this sort of thinking juvenile and wholly unacceptable? What, other than compromise, exists between us?

Mostly, I think the human quest for truth has only mapped the titanic scope of our ignorance. You can see it in the most basic facts. The brain can distinguish roughly ten million colours. Nearly 70 per cent of all of our sensory receptors are found in the eyes, and almost half of the cerebral cortex's synaptic flurry is involved in processing the river of light the eye admits. Yet the human eye is sen-

sitive to a pathetically small band among the greater stretch of light: something like 400 nanometres to 700 nanometres. This means we see almost nothing of what truly happens! Even the domineering eye is overwhelmed by the very light it's designed to collect and is always busy splitting the raw stream of the sun it can never truly see.

It's no mystery why physics appealed to me so much when I was this age. Physics concretizes and imparts a series of truths – subjectively verified, objectively stable. It not only puts ground beneath our feet but assures us that we stand on the *same* ground. Hard truths can be comforting too.

Scientifically minded twentysomethings often experience this as a sort of veracious bliss. Whatever knotty questions arise, you can rely on Newton, Maxwell and Faraday. It's intoxicating, this bliss, but it doesn't last. Any senior physics undergrad will tell you that the basis of your education gets uncomfortably prodded throughout electromagnetism and relativity, and by the time you reach quantum mechanics it's been nauseously inverted. Professors begin to advise, incredibly, that you just take the wildly illogical tenets of quantum on faith, because even they don't really understand them.

θ₅

For good measure, I continued lying to myself about astronomy until graduation. The last observatory I visited was

the great mitt of Arecibo, Puerto Rico; the grey panelled dish that swallows the trundling waves of radio light. While one complete gamma wave can cycle inside an atom's bubble, a full-cycle radio wave can stretch for miles. For this reason the Arecibo telescope, embedded like a canted sink in the dense ocean-fed jungle, has a 305m diameter and is the largest of the world's telescopes. Its Gregorian reflector, a white, hexagonal, 800-ton dome, is strung aloft from three looming concrete turrets by cables thicker than a person. The reflector functions as the true telescopic mouth of the observatory, assuming regurgitated light from the commodious reflective dish below.

The Arecibo telescope is a difficult sight to believe. I had stood before the annular track that angled like a speedway around the dish, unable to believe what I saw. The whole tableau was surreal, a science-fictional landscape in the jungle. Viewing the telescope each night was to

rhoeic effects of the Arecibo cafeteria food that everyone seemed to warn me about. (I wasn't. Don't ask.) With other visiting students I had poolside conversations in which we all lied and knew we were all lying about various subjects: our knowledge of astronomy and its history, standardized test scores, our acquaintance with some of the big-league astronomers in attendance, our eclectic understanding of music theory.

There's a resigned sadness to the trading of white lies, when people feel obliged to indulge each other's bullshit. Like a beam of light bouncing eternally between facing mirrors, this exchange is ultimately pointless. I mean, I can remember exquisitely the lies I told at Arecibo, yet I remember none of the people I told them to.

I visited Arecibo partly to present the culmination of my undergraduate research. My partner and I had studied a specific cluster of galaxies, straining their

the whole crew gathered in a wedge on the facility's balcony for the obligatory group picture. The experience was excruciating. It didn't help that a particularly enthusiastic astronomer had taken it upon himself to document every moment of the trip with his digital camera and refused to relinquish everyone before he got an image that satisfied his photometric standards. We'd all been positioned to face the sun. And it was noon; high, hot noon. I had forgotten my sunglasses, which I treat the way an asthmatic treats an inhaler. The sun was quivering roughly twenty feet above my head, glaring down like a furious parent. If my eyes remained open for longer than a few seconds they would begin, simply, to leak. This seemed to concern people. I eventually settled for squinting so severely that my face felt like crumpled rubber, and what I could see came through a fuzzy lattice of lashes. There were, incredibly, angles past which

'My mother was concerned. My doctor, curious. Me, upset.'

feel knuckle-headed. I was convinced, despite all contrary evidence, that what I saw was nothing but untrue.

That trip to Puerto Rico, from its very premise to the flight home, was strewn along a sequence of minor, seemingly unrelated lies. The trip had initially been awarded to me, then revoked (a well-deserved punishment for some studently dereliction on my part), then, after I'd redeemed myself, awarded again, given that I was still interested, which I said I was, which was a lie. I had lost my astronomical interests back in Hamilton.

My memory of Arecibo is also rife with extremely silly pretences. I told every enquiring scientist that I planned to study astronomy in grad school as a sort of proxy answer for 'I haven't a clue what I'm doing after graduation', which was a strange proxy indeed, considering it was the only thing I was sure I'd not be doing. I managed to convince myself that I was immune to the violently diar-

hydrogen light through all the analytic rigmarole astronomers use to make some sense of what they see. Galaxies residing in clusters have usually had their gas stripped away. Our research seemed to violate this well-established paradigm in astronomy – the galaxies we'd analysed were, according to our presumably broken data, swimming in hydrogen. So our presentation was basically an academic plea for help.

We met with one of the big leaguers about it and he made some suggestions, referring us to a paper he'd written a while back. Years later – after we'd applied the corrections detailed in the paper to drive down the hydrogen content to more acceptable levels, after I'd graduated and forgotten about it – I returned to my alma mater for a conference and was told that the results had been true all along. There was no need to correct them.

The day before we departed Arecibo

I physically could not lift my head. I was simply not allowed. After the photo op was concluded and we thankfully walked through marquee-shaded doors, my face ached for hours.

θ₆

Just around puberty my mother noticed patches of my skin that didn't bronze in the summer's glare. Wrists, chin, knees, elbows – all splashed with pale Rorschach shapes. The translucent skin revealed purple and blue veins underneath, pulsing across a blotch fringed in pink. Whatever it was, it burned easy. I feared it would spread, and soon enough I noticed in the mirror pale raccoonish discs around my eyes. My mother was concerned. My doctor, curious. Me, upset.

Under the sedulous gaze of a puzzled specialist I would learn what little there was to learn about the condition. Vitiligo, aka Blanca Derma: a benign, genetic,

immunological condition in which melanocytes up and die or otherwise quit their job of sustaining skin pigmentation. Its cause and mechanisms were debated but mostly unknown. Every doctor I saw, though, did promise that it would worsen if I exposed it to sunlight, which is a tall order, I felt, for anyone who doesn't live in a closet.

I remember my father visiting my room to comfort me as I lay facing the wall. He said of all the afflictions a person could have this was hardly the worst. It could have been cancer, he said, or something. I didn't say anything but can remember clearly what I was thinking. So far, the beliefs I've had difficulty sharing – including what I couldn't share that day – the precious beliefs that seemed uniquely mine, have usually been embarrassingly selfish, in this case: that a bizarre inconvenience like vitiligo wasn't supposed to happen to me; that the world affected me only inasmuch as I permitted

composed of make-up, which, if you think about it, would ultimately double the mockery I would face at school.

This all reached its zenith when I visited my uncle in LA, who brought me along on one of his surfing expeditions into Baja, Mexico, to a desolate beach scalloped out of the Pacific coastline. The place hadn't a trace of civilization; the last touch of which was El Rosario, a day's drive across the cactus-caltrope high desert. We were camping with my uncle's remote friend, Kurt. Both men had tawny Californian tans and wave-toughened skin cured by ocean salt. Both were also frighteningly intelligent and had been friends so long they'd developed a way of communicating with a cryptic sparseness – all nods and guttural intonations.

One day, under dazzling spears of sunlight that rotated like spokes in a wheel, we sprawled out among millions of stones polished smooth by winter squalls.

It was pleasant, lying there, with

was fruitless and would only intensify the effect of stress on the spreading – on and on, all under hammering sun.

For years after, when friends asked me how I got 'those white marks', I always lied, referring to some mysterious accident on a surfing trip on the beaches of Baja.

At the beginning and end of every trip out there, we'd spend a night sleeping on a tarp in the sand, miles from the beaches. Starlight in the high desert has its own special presence. All the sand turns a spectral white. The immense utensil-shaped cacti elongate in twilight shadows. It is frenetic city nightlife inverted. The sky is bustling, alive. The land static, a hoary relic. Meteors break across the hemisphere like water, trickling down. Faint satellites arc along their orbits and disappear when looked at directly. Coy stars flicker, winking in, out.

My memory is dominated by images like these. Yet somewhere around my parents' house is a photograph of me that

'Skin is the first of our layers the light touches.'

it to. It turns out that this idea is not only profoundly wrong but has terribly lonely implications. A world that brightens with the whites of my eyes and dims to nothing with their closing is a world unto me alone. This sort of belief is far bleaker than the truth it means to supplant.

Predictably, I developed a sun phobia. I became somewhat dependent on high-SPF lotion and restricted my daily time in sunshine. High noon was a sort of dead hour for all outside activities. If I was ever caught lotionless in daylight I would haul ass to the nearest reflective surface and make busy checking if the patches were spreading. I applied sunscreen during winter. I took preposterously large supplements of vitamin B9 (folic acid). I once borrowed my mother's make-up without her knowledge and applied it to my chin and eyes before the first day of a new school year, though I quickly removed it; the make-up merely replaced the white blotches with patches obviously

my sunglasses secured around my head. Kurt peered out from under his canvas Dixie hat and inquired about my elbows and knees, the white blotches that clashed with my decent Pacific suntan. I explained what I could. He said nothing, resuming his lounge on the glittering oval stones. I may have mentioned being afraid of it spreading or wishing that I knew, so as to avoid, what caused it. The doctors had mentioned sunlight, I said. Kurt shifted, said he gathered that stress had something to do with it too, the spreading. My uncle grunted, nodding soberly.

Skin is the first of our layers the light touches. The fringe of pink had returned to the blotches. My elbows had purpled, cracked, peeled. The overhead sun threatened to blanch my skin only if I stressed that it would. I felt paralysed, in a closed loop, worrying that sunlight would cause it to spread, and worrying that the worrying itself would cause it to spread, and worrying that worrying over worrying

I've remembered since I left there. I'm no older than ten in the photo, a kid with sun-bleached hair and a tattered hat, a young face drenched in the special light where the afternoon glow leaves off and evening's red softness begins. I am squinting, staring into the late sun, the skin of my brow creased like a gorilla's. I get those phosphene bloomers just thinking of it. Even in memory, I can see the light but not its source.

Every insight is followed by a potent doubt, it seems. I wonder if the epiphanic moments shared by the old astronomer and the curious toddler and everyone between will decay in time, if age will qualify and expunge everything I know. I wonder if there are corners and nooks in this universe that light cannot reach.

Trust what you can. The astronomer's great comfort is taken in distance, the truer scale of things. From far out, all light shrinks to one source, like a bulb, or a particle, or a star, or an eye, receding. ◊

A Distraction

by Philip Langeskov

He is visiting a client in the country when he receives word that the ring is ready. The trip has been successful, pleasant even – the client is an exceptional host – but Umberto is now desperate to get back to the city. In the afternoon, he telephones the office and makes arrangements for an early return. This accomplished, he books himself a seat on the first train to leave the following morning. In the evening, a farewell meal – Umberto, the client, the client’s wife. The client raises his glass in a toast.

‘Your happiness.’

When the meal ends, Umberto retires to his room. He calls Maddalena.

‘I have some news: I’ll be home tomorrow.’

‘So soon?’ she says. ‘I’m pleased.’

‘Yes,’ he says, ‘I have a surprise for you.’

‘A surprise? What is it?’

‘I can’t tell you.’

For a moment they talk on, covering the minutiae of their respective days. The conversation returns to the following day. He has some things to tie up in the office first, but they arrange to meet by the fountain in Piazza di Provenzano at seven, not a minute later.

‘At the Piazza? But, darling, you must tell me now.’ She is giggling.

‘Are you sure you want to know?’

‘Yes.’

He has tickets for the opera, he says – a gift from the client.

She squeals. ‘Should I wear a dress?’

‘You should definitely wear a dress.’

After the call, he puts his papers in order and climbs into bed. In his excitement, he cannot sleep, at least not properly. Visions of the past – of his youth, of wild dogs, of chases on foot – filter through the layers of his consciousness and mingle with images that can only come from the future: a telegraph pole, a view of the sea, a sharply bending road. Of course, he doesn’t know what to do with all this, lying there in the dark, the hum of night coming in through the shutters, but it keeps him up. Consequently he is awake – or thinks that he is – when the client calls for him, just as dawn is breaking, mist rising behind the stand of beeches in the park.

At the station there is time for coffee. The client talks of his family’s history in the region, their deep roots. They watch as the train he is going to catch pulls up at the platform, a great exhalation from the brakes. The client pats his back and Umberto clambers aboard. There are very few passengers and he has a choice of seats. He takes one by the window, with a table. They move off, the carriage silent, save for the buzz of the overhead wires.

To begin with, he reads his book, but it is no good; he cannot stop his mind leaping forward to the events to come. Even to think of them makes him tremble. Rather than struggle on with the book, he places it on the table and folds his arms. Fields blur past the window. The levelness of the horizon soothes him and he relaxes into the luxury of looking ahead to the rising action of the day, going over his schedule, mapping out the steps he will have to take before seven o’clock.

As they near the city, the carriage fills with commuters. He stands, allowing someone else to take his seat. By and by, the countryside recedes and the train begins to rattle through the suburbs. He looks around at his fellow travelers, hanging from straps, or wedged into corners, reading tightly folded newspapers. He smiles. In fact, he almost laughs. He

is baffled by how downcast everyone seems, as if, in their eyes, no matter how often things go right, they will always go wrong in the end. Perhaps they look at him with the opposite feeling. In any case, he wants to reach out to them, one by one, and lift up their chins; come on, he wants to say, everything will be fine, all it requires is patience, determination – a refusal to break.

He realizes it is easy to think such things, just as it is easy, in retrospect, to plot a path from confession, to penance, to act of grace. Perhaps, though, it is enough to acknowledge that he is a fortunate man and then move on, without dwelling too much on the past, which in any case seems to be drifting out to a point beyond memory.

Even the weather seems to share in this feeling: for the first time in days, the sky is blue and deep. It is as if the universe has noticed him at last and decided to open itself up, revealing its



secrets, its exceptional qualities. In particular, Umberto thinks, leaning forward to get a better look, the light cast by the sun is magnificent; there is a clarity to it, a freshness, that touches everything. Already he is certain that this is something he will remember later, when, with Maddalena at his side, he will look back and relive the moments yet to come.

They stop on the approach to the terminus. There is a gathering of possessions, a readying for arrival. When the train starts moving again it jerks, the carriages swaying and creaking over the tracks. Umberto positions himself in front of the doors and adjusts the knot of his tie in the mirror of the window. He is here and the day can properly begin.

As he crosses the river, he looks over at the city, at its even agglomeration of buildings. He knows the sight so well, like a familiar painting, and yet he sees it as if with new eyes. Whether it is because of the sun or because of something coming from within him, he cannot say, but its monuments seem less grand, more playful. The golden hues of the churches are more prominent and tiny figures in brightly coloured clothing dot the castle ramparts. Taken together, these ancient buildings form a thread of wonder through the skyline. It is, without question, a fabulous construction, the painstaking accretion of centuries of endeavour, the bringing together of natural topography and human purpose.

fuss, no recrimination, just a natural cessation – he gratefully reflected that he had now had an experience long aspired to, something in which everything was allowed, nothing held back. There were things they had done that Umberto will never repeat, either in deed or word, but the fact of their having happened seems another weapon in his invisible armoury, something with which he could defend himself if called upon to do so.

‘So,’ Gabi says. ‘What’s new?’

He turns and looks out over the city. The skyline shimmers in the miraculous heat. He inhales and exhales some smoke, fluting it upwards into the air with a grin.

‘Well,’ he says, ‘there is something.’

‘Yes.’

‘I have an errand to run.’

‘An errand?’ Gabi leans forward, looking up at him and cupping her chin in her hand. She too emits a burst of smoke, in fact two bursts, separated by a little darting movement of her tongue. ‘Go on.’

Umberto cannot stop his face breaking into a broad smile. ‘I am going to collect the ring,’ he says.

‘The ring!’ Gabi laughs, rocking back in her chair and clapping her hands. ‘So it is ready, finally?’

‘Yes. I got the call when I was in the country.’

‘Then I congratulate you.’ Gabi puts her hand on his arm and kisses his cheek. ‘And Maddalena too.’

‘Stray fragments of conversation fill the air – of football matches, of friendship, of a murderer.’

This is his city, he thinks, and he walks towards it as if on air, his head up, breathing deeply and hoping to encourage in those around him the feeling that this is, after all, a life worth savouring.

The early part of the morning passes uneventfully, the hushed routine of the office gilded by the secret hammering of burnished plates of happiness on to the doors of his heart. He sends an email to the client in the country, thanking him for his hospitality and outlining the action points that would be followed up. He makes some coffee, shares a joke with his boss about the client’s wife, laughing companionably over the change she has made in him.

Soon enough it is eleven.

‘What a day!’ Gabi says.

‘Magnificent,’ he says, stretching his arms back and flexing them as if he were readying to take a dive into a pool.

They are on the roof of the office, their usual morning break. He lights his cigarette, turning it slowly in the flame of his lighter. Gabi is the company secretary. They are friends now, firmly so, but for a brief period – six, seven weeks – five summers previously, they had an affair. He thinks of it often, remembering it as if he were a voyeur looking in on remote and incomprehensible practices – dazzling afternoons, bewildering, the windows of her apartment open to the noise of traffic. When it ended – no

He leaves to collect the ring at one. Beneath the cherry trees that dot the avenues barely a patch of grass remains visible. There are people everywhere, tourists lapping up the sun, sprawling office workers taking their lunch. Stray fragments of conversation fill the air – of football matches, of friendship, of a murderer. Having been in the country for a few days, he is reminded of the possibilities for interaction the city provides: glances go in every direction, greetings, nods; connections being made, lines being drawn. It is not possible to know these people as individuals, of course, but as a mass it is a different matter. He recognizes the collective identity, feels its pulse, and moves through the scene with an air of shared ownership, noting the way in which his shadow travels over the crowd, thinking himself connected to it by a link that can never be broken.

He looks at the buildings that line the avenues, their iron balconies visible through the tops of trees, the occasional *Pais* flag, fleeting glimpses of people at office windows. It all seems a part of him, as if, suddenly, he belongs. He wonders if it will later be possible, in memory, to distinguish between things in any meaningful way, or whether they will become conflated as a mass.

Take the building directly ahead: will he remember in years to come that it is clad in marble while the one next to it – otherwise identical – is of red brick, or might memory confuse the two? He wants to remember the scene precisely as it is now, with

no omissions, no opportunity for error.

He will have no trouble remembering the building away to the right. It is the headquarters of Grafica. It was here, at an advance screening of a film, that he first saw Maddalena. Back then, the invitation alone – from Mario, who lived in his building – was enough to make him swell with a curious sort of pride, although in truth it meant nothing more than he had agreed to be part of a test audience. Still, as he stood there in the lobby, gauchely holding a beer, he had felt good, felt, for the first time, that he was part of the great city, had slipped into its flow of gestures and habits. Maddalena had come with Mario's girlfriend. They were introduced as they waited to go in, but there was no time to say anything.

The film was unusual. With the city itself as a backdrop, it played out as a sequence of seemingly discrete tracking shots linked together in a voiceover provided by a series of invisible narrators, all played by famous actors, or familiar figures. Their faces drifted into Umberto's consciousness as he watched. If there was a story, it was hard to follow at first – difficult to see how one thing connected to the next – but soon enough it became apparent that something was under way, some event was swelling in the background. Even so, he wasn't sure he would know how to talk about it when it was over.

At a certain point, bending to pick up his bottle of beer, his knuckle grazed Maddalena's ankle. He felt the smoothness of her skin, like polished stone, on his knuckles. In the dark of the auditorium, images flickering on the screen, he sensed the possibility – even then, at the very outset – that something might happen. But he was new to the city, still unaccustomed to its ways, and he didn't know how to make the touch go anywhere, what to do next. His hands prickled with sweat. As the film continued, he found that he was projecting himself into the events it depicted, becoming engrossed, absorbed by the drama to the extent of almost being a participant.

Without quite meaning to, he touched her again, his elbow brushing hers quite naturally as he shifted in his seat. She flinched, but then moved her elbow back towards his and left it there. The film swam towards him, a gorgeous image, but he no longer had the faintest idea what was happening.

Umberto walks on through the lunchtime city, past the Pilastrini. He is enjoying himself, feeling the warm air all around him, and the endless possibilities stretching ahead. He

knows all the streets, could name them in an instant should a tourist stop him and ask the way. They form a grid, a permanence – his daily habitat. Sometimes, to test his knowledge, he sets himself imaginary tasks, as if he is a taxi driver and has been asked to ferry someone from Terrail's to Benudo's, or from the Tullio to the Campo Santo.

As he rounds a corner, the marble façade of the Teatro del Palazzo rises over the cobbles to the right. A new opera season is about to begin. Bills can be seen all over the city proclaiming the opening night a sell-out. The return of Cece, the great soprano, is hotly anticipated.

As he walks by, he imagines himself observed from above, the speed of his movement marking him out as he weaves between the people swarming this way and that. He knows

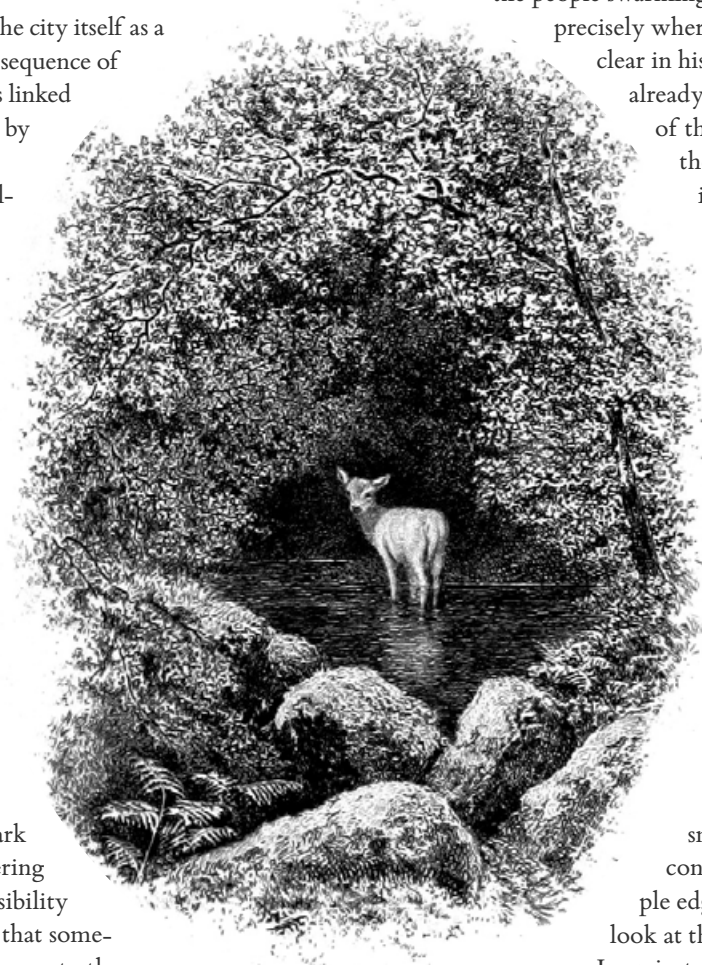
precisely where he is going, the destination as clear in his mind as if it were in front of him already. With ease he conjures the fascia of the shop, the crumbling brickwork, the faded blue awning pulled down, its windows in shade, the darkness lending a glow to the glimmering displays of gold and silver.

Everything is in his favour. The crossing lights at Passeggio della Beata change as he approaches. Nothing breaks his stride until, on Via del Corso – the street that sometimes has stalls, T-shirts and dresses hanging from wooden poles – he finds there are works under way. Normally, he would go this way, slipping down past the frosted diamond glass of L'Edera, but the pavement has been dug up, revealing the city's layers, red clay piled on top of smashed paving stones. The street, consequently, is densely packed, people edging slowly forward, lingering to look at the clothes.

In an instant his mind selects the appropriate course of action. He swerves, the path of his travels describing a blemish-free arc, heading back to Viale dei Fratelli, past Santa Giacinta, then the Irish pub with its blue board fronting and from there turning right into the shadows of Via del Moro. It is a longer route but, in the circumstances, a quicker one. Not only that but it affords him a view of the Piazza di Provenzano.

For centuries it has served the city as a space for great civic celebrations: festivals, peace rallies, public executions. These last had once been greeted enthusiastically by the people, who gathered early and dressed grandly for the occasion. Promenading in their finery, they exchanged gossip and rumour as they awaited the arrival of the carts. Even the victims chose their outfits with care, wanting to leave one final mark on the profane world.

It is one of the great squares and the view is known all over



the world. The north and west sides are given over to various *palazzi signorili*, uniformly neoclassical, pure marvels of their time. There are protruding arcades at ground level, under which cafés and restaurants, fine shops and a printer's set out their wares; above, grand balconies, from which banners hang, embroidered with the legend of the city's foundation. To the south, l'Ospedale dei Popoli, its shallow dome reflecting the sun, its narrow campanile standing alongside.

In the centre, Giambologna's fountain, by which Maddalena will be waiting at seven, spews its torrents into the air.

He enters the square by the Scalinata dei Francesi, the great sloping approach that forms its east side. He goes down the worn steps two at a time, his jacket splaying out as he does so. Without breaking stride, he moves on across the Piazza, still carrying some of the speed generated from the steps. A small child dawdles in his path, bending down and attempting to catch something in the air. The child's mother, noticing the pace of his approach, yanks the boy out of the way, as if she is unwilling to impede his serene progress even for a moment. He notices these instances of serendipity, the smoothness of his movement through the crowds, and smiles broadly. He has chosen the right place, of that he is certain.

Around the edges of the Piazza the restaurant terraces are full; wine is being poured, bread baskets laid out. He performs

plinths radiate outwards from a central point, like the scaffolding of a star. On each plinth rest intricate pieces, cushioned on red velvet. At the centre, in a circle of its own, an empty box. Leaning in to take a closer look, he tries to imagine, from the items on display, the manner in which the silversmith might have set about the task of making the ring. He luxuriates in this game of the imagination, conjuring images in his mind, consciously extending the moment, wishing it might never end.

Finally, he enters. The interior is dark and cool. Rough strips of pine separated by pillars of uncemented bricks have been placed against the walls. On these, in glowing glass cases, further displays. On the floor, scuffed boards and an assortment of patchy rugs. Along the back wall, a crimson curtain. From behind this curtain, the silversmith emerges.

'Good afternoon,' he says. And then, approaching closer, holding up his glasses, wiping his free hand on his apron: 'Aha! It's you.'

Umberto takes a breath. He has been walking quickly.

'You want to see it then?' The silversmith says, nudging him in the ribs.

Stepping out into the street, Umberto looks at his watch. It is three o'clock. He stayed a little too long with the old man, sharing a glass to toast his labours. With the grappa still warm in his throat, he feels a tremendous sense of ease now that this part

'It is as if he is orchestrating the whole scene: drawing the waiters along on pieces of wire ...'

a pirouette, taking everything in: the colonnaded square, the tapestries hanging from their stanchions, the people, the mood. A little like a child, he is unable to stop himself displaying his happiness. He nods to people, smiles. It is as if he is orchestrating the whole scene: drawing the waiters along on pieces of wire, laying a path for the wandering tourists, prompting the invisible kitchen staff in the creation of the smells that emerge from the cafés and restaurants.

Reaching the far side of the Piazza, he moves into shadow and enters la Caccia. It is a narrow, curling street, up which it was once the custom to run livestock. The jeweller's comes into view. They – he and Maddalena – had noticed it one Sunday, lingering by its windows after a lunch with her parents. It was autumn, but bright. Maddalena was girlish, filled with wonder, constantly laughing and grabbing at his arm. Together they looked through the window, pointing at jewellery of the most exquisite originality. He shared in her delight, trying hard not to pinch himself in disbelief.

In the days that followed, Umberto made discreet enquiries about the silversmith. He learned his name, his reputation. For months he carried this information around in his head, not telling a soul, terrified of taking the next step lest something should trip him up, lest he should be exposed.

The window display is unusual, as always. Several wooden

has been accomplished. He can feel the box in the pocket of his jacket and fights the impulse to stop and open it at every step. He cannot imagine tiring of its complexity, its tracteries of silver, the stone lodged at its apex.

A little conscious of the time, he increases his stride, feeling a new depth to his movements, as if, progressively, moment by moment, he is becoming more fully realized, more true to his conception of himself.

As he re-enters the Piazza, moving back from shadow into sunlight, he glances over at the fountain. He thinks of how he might approach Maddalena later, flowers in his hand, the ring concealed behind his back. At precisely the spot he imagines her waiting, a man is hunched over a briefcase, talking on a mobile phone. He watches him, willing him to move away so he can better indulge his reverie. It takes a moment to register – it is something about the man's movements, the prissy way he holds his phone to his ear – but then the knowledge is upon him. It is Luca.

Umberto stops. The crowds drift by. They come between him and this – this *man*. He feels faint and confused, feels as if he has been surrounded by a pocket of air that separates him from the things around him. It can't be Luca, he tells himself. Not here. Not today. It isn't possible. Indeed, it seems so absurd

that Umberto wonders if he can trust his eyes. He has heard of – and experienced – those occasions when one sees an old friend in the street, only for the old friend – or the image of the old friend – to dematerialize into the form of a complete stranger.

It has been so many years. With all the effort he has put into forgetting, that period of his past has taken on the quality of myth, to the extent that he can no longer distinguish between which bits of it are true and which are not; between what happened and what is dream. It could be Luca, he thinks, but it could just as well be someone – or something – else, a double, a doppelgänger; a chimera, even, assembled from those parts of his past that refuse to stay buried.

Not knowing quite what to do, Umberto makes his way to a café and takes an outside table that allows him to keep the possible Luca in his line of sight. Raising one finger in the air, he orders a coffee. As he sits, the box containing the ring digs into his ribs. It is necessary first to gather his thoughts. He counts the years, thinks of Luca as he was then and compares the memory to the man, still sitting by the fountain. It is impossible to say for certain and a part of him wants to go up to this man, to touch him, to test whether he is real.

He looks again at his watch. Luca – or the man who could be Luca – is still on the phone, gesturing with his hands and occasionally taking a handkerchief to wipe the sweat from his brow.

At the top, he turns right, on to Viale dei Fratelli, and Umberto, dashing up the last steps, is able to keep sight of him easily enough. The afternoon crowds are thinning, time marching on. The office can wait, Umberto knows, Gabi will cover for him.

Luca is about twenty yards ahead. He seems to sway down the avenue, drifting into this shop and that, as if intentionally holding back the revelation of his destination. At length, he comes out on to the corner of Piazza Verona. He stops. He puts down his briefcase and looks into the vortex of traffic, building already towards rush hour, the weekend escape, that leaks out on to le Carmo. What is he doing? Why is he here?

They are heading towards the river. It is lunacy to be following him like this, but he can think of nothing else to do. It is as if he has stepped away from himself, into another realm, another version of his life. At the water's edge, Luca stops and looks left and right, following the sweep of the river. Boats pass from both directions, tourist craft overlaid like junks, barges carrying the necessities of the city east towards the docks. There are shouts from the decks, the reek of motor oil. Gulls turn in the air, calling as they follow the churning wakes.

As Luca moves slowly along the bank, Umberto feels a surge of strength pass into him, a pulse so strong that he is moved to shake his head. How easy it would be simply to sidle up to Luca

'It is lunacy to be following him like this, but he can think of nothing else to do.'

His presence sullies the scene. Umberto lights a cigarette. There was a time when he had prepared for just such an encounter, going over in his mind how he might act, but with the passing of years that readiness has disappeared and now, quite suddenly, with the moment directly before him, it seems beyond contemplation. He cannot even envisage what it would be like to have it out, not here, not in public. Luca's finger jabs the air. That he should appear like this, on this day, seems an affront, a rebuke against the years of vigilance, all that Umberto has done, all the changes he has made.

Luca finishes his call. As he begins to move, Umberto follows him, not wishing to let him out of his sight until he has settled on a course of action. It is infuriating, but it must be resolved; he has to know. The thought that he might bump into him later, with Maddalena, is too terrible to contemplate. He can see how it will be, with Luca coming up, fat arms spread wide, laughing in that way of his, the mole on his cheek glistening with sweat, a slap on the shoulder, a chuck under the chin. Il Piccolo, he will say with a wink. Old friend. And tell me, who is this? No. He would not be able to bear it.

He follows Luca across the Piazza. The climb back up the Scalinata is agonizing. Umberto hangs back, blending in with the crowd, as Luca climbs a few steps and then stops, climbs again and then stops again, turning each time to take in the view.

and, without saying a word, place his hands on his shoulders and twist him sharply into the river. He would be gone – like that – taken away on the current. By comparison, a confrontation seems impossible, because to confront him would be to alert him to Umberto's presence and that knowledge would never be erased.

Still Luca ambles by the water, scanning the buildings on the far bank as if waiting for some sign. Eventually, he crosses, joining Via Lisboa, traversing Piazza Mentone, turning left into Via San Rolfo and then into Via Giuseppe Verga, where he comes to a stop outside the Hotel Huppert. It is the sort of unprepossessing place you would expect to see in a detective drama on television, drab concrete, peeling stickers in the window. If Luca is to be in the city, Umberto thinks, it seems better somehow that he should be here, in a shabby hotel, in a narrow street, south of the river. Umberto stops and draws into an alcove. Up ahead Luca bends over his case, fumbling for something. At length he stands up and, casting his eyes left and right, goes smartly up the steps and into the hotel.

Umberto can do nothing but wait. He steps out into the street and looks up at the building. Its brown windows are shuttered against the light. This part of the city is quiet, off the track. He can hear sounds from far off, sirens, the low moan of river craft. Ten minutes pass, twenty. Then, a glint from the hotel's revolv-

ing door. Luca emerges, case in hand, again looking left and right, as if he knows he is being followed.

Moving quickly now – so quickly that Umberto has to lengthen his stride – Luca blunders down Via Capri, past San Marco, its neat cloisters in shadow, and on into the Giardini Pubblici, where he stops and sits on a bench. Once again Umberto has to wait, nestling near a bush, wanting neither to crouch nor to stand fully upright. Luca, sitting forward, his elbows resting on his knees, is on the phone again.

When he starts to move, he leaves the park through Palestra and cuts across Piazza della Scala until they are in front of Stazione di Monte, its great portico, that splendid arch, standing boldly in the face of the sun. Umberto follows him more closely than ever, not wishing to lose him in the rush of commuters streaming up the steps and into the great hall with its high windows, its coffered ceiling.

Inside, Luca stands scanning the departure board, watching the letters turn. Umberto can guess which train he is going to catch. Finally, the platform number clicks over and swells of people move towards the platform. Luca is one of the last, holding his position before slowly bending down to pick up his briefcase. He follows him on to the platform. When Luca stops, Umberto stands to one side, to allow other passengers to pass. Stewards help stragglers with their luggage; couples argue over what they need for the journey. The vaulted roof of the shed is high above them, an atrium of light. Up ahead, Luca pauses on the steps, gives the platform a last look and then climbs aboard. Umberto waits until the train begins to pull out of the station, before feeling light enough, at last, to wave it on its way.

He buys flowers from their favourite stall on Via Richardson and carries them in the crook of his arm, enjoying the speculative glances they draw from those around him. The air is heavy with fumes, the traffic backed up in both directions. People watch him from their idling cars; he can sense their eyes following him. Horns blare, drivers lean on their door frames, straining to discover the cause of the hold-up. The congestion stretches away into the shimmering distance, to the far end of Viale dei Fratelli, where a bus stands at an awkward angle, slewed

across the carriageway. There are blue lights, a gathering of people.

With the approach of evening, a change comes over the people on the streets. All around him, arm in arm, carrying themselves with nothing but pleasure and spectacle in mind, are couples in evening dress, splendid gowns that reach almost to the ground. Others are in groups of two and three, or more, strolling idly, conversing. Umberto is thrilled. He sees in it something of the masquerade ball and he is determined to play his part. He walks among them, as if in secret, behind a mask, turning to admire their finery.

Reaching the top of the Scalinata, Umberto pauses. The Piazza is awash. Groups are seated on the terraces, sipping drinks, smiling, laughing, putting up their hands to shield their eyes

against the sun. Some gather on the balconies of private apartments, leaning at the railings, waving programmes, shouting to passing acquaintances, sharing jokes and good wishes.

Umberto has always had it in his mind to come upon Maddalena as she waits, to approach from a distance, emerging out of a throng. He can imagine her looking up, noticing him, perhaps taking a few steps towards him and then seeing the flowers, his hand behind his back. She will give him a quizzical look, her head tilted to one side, before breaking into a smile.

The moment is near at hand, but he holds himself back. It is pleasurable to do so, the feeling of anticipation running through him like a current. Casting his eye here and there, he greets the people milling closest to him with a smile, a nod. When they nod back at him, it seems to Umberto that they know something already, that they know why he is here.

The clock of l'ospedale dei Popoli chimes seven, the notes echoing around the Piazza and bleeding back into one another. Still, he waits, pacing behind the wall at the top of the steps. People flood by, some picking up the hems of their dresses and tripping down the Scalinata. He had imagined a crowd, but he hadn't imagined this. It is beyond all imagining.

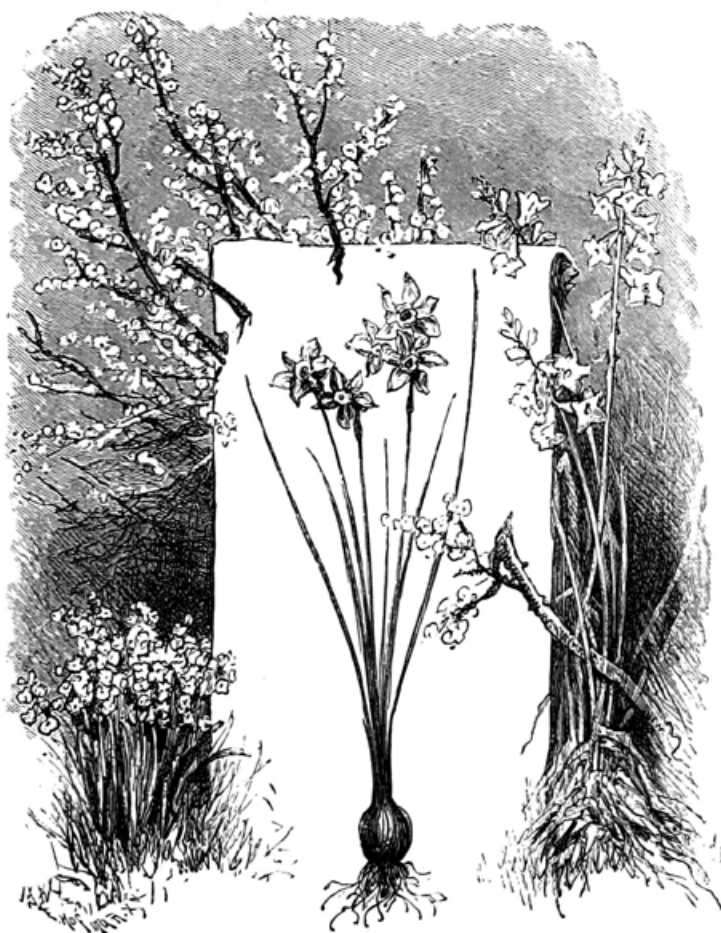
To his left he hears a woman's voice.

'Isn't it wonderful,' she says, 'this part, before it has even started?'

'Hurry, hurry,' another says, following on behind.

'Wait,' a man says. 'We'll get a better view from up here.'

'Are you sure?'



'There is a lull; the clapping stops.'

'Of course. Look. They're coming.'

Umberto looks. In the Piazza, there is a parting of the ways, a disruption to the scene. The crowd moves back, hedged together, as, from multiple entry points – alleyways, side streets – performers make their way into the square. They are dressed entirely in black and each carries what appears to be a coloured tile, first holding them above their heads and then, swooping low, close to the ground. As the lines of performers dance and turn, converging on the centre of the Piazza, the crowd begins to clap in unison.

'What's happening?' Umberto says, leaning towards the man standing alongside.

'A performance,' the man says. 'You'll soon see.'

'But I have to meet someone, down there, by the fountain.'

'You might be out of luck, then.'

Umberto takes out his phone and calls Maddalena. There is no answer. He tries again. No answer. As the performers near the fountain, they lay their tiles on the ground, forming a square, and then draw back into a semicircle and join in the clapping. More performers follow, in groups of four this time, some carrying, slung between them, wooden poles, others pulling what appear to be blocks of wood. Umberto watches as these performers join forces with the others and begin to erect some kind of structure. The wooden blocks are pulled into position, forming a platform. Into this, one of the poles is inserted, then another, then a cross-beam. Again, the performers fall back, settling into two angled lines which make a funnel. Into this funnel, a final performer enters. She dances across the Piazza, tumbling and then holding herself before tumbling again. As she nears the structure, four dancers break from the funnel to join her. She is lifted into the air, her legs in split position, her hands raised to reveal, held taught between them, a rope. Held aloft like this, she is carried to the cross-beam.

'It's a gallows,' the man says, nudging the woman alongside him.

'I can see that,' she says, putting her arm around him.

There is a lull; the clapping stops. Umberto scans the crowd for some sign of Maddalena. Above the noise of thousands of conversing voices it becomes possible to hear the sound of pipes, of timbrels – a great tumult of activity coming from somewhere as yet out of sight. Everyone turns and looks, trying to discern where the noise is coming from. On the balconies, binoculars rove this way and that, their lenses glinting, before settling on a spot to the west of the Piazza, near the entrance to la Caccia, where a commotion has broken out. There is clapping, cheering, great jollity.

Umberto forces himself to look away, counting to fifteen in his head, before turning back to scan the Piazza. The crowd sways; some raise their hands above their heads, resuming the

clapping, while others scramble on to plinths and watch through their mobile phones.

Without a moment's notice, the crowd breaks and scatters across the square. Something is pushing them back, some procession, it seems. To the sound of drumbeats, with performers tumbling in front of them to clear a path, a bank of men, riding three abreast, enter the square, their horses fighting the bit. Then come drummers and, after them, an open carriage, in which sits a large man, a black cloak wrapped around him. He has a thick neck, a bald head. Of course. Umberto sees what is happening, what scene is being played out. As the carriage moves slowly towards the scaffold, the man raises his clasped hands in the air. The crowd wails its disapproval, shrieking 'Shame! Shame!' and holding their downturned thumbs in the air.

Again, there is a lull. The man waits by the scaffold. Umberto watches, his eyes darting around the scene, willing Maddalena to appear. Then, the distinct sound of horses' hooves can be heard, a bugle. Into the square, a lone female rider, flanked by three attendants. The crowd begins to applaud, a ripple spreading and gathering force. All eyes are on the rider to the front. Her face is hidden by a mask. From underneath it, her long brown hair emerges, plaited to one side. She is wearing a dark blue dress and her back is perfectly straight, as if she is determined not to betray any sign of terror.

Umberto tries Maddalena again, but there is nothing. Meanwhile, the woman raises her hand, her fist clenched, as she arrives at the scaffold. The crowd mimics her salute.

Umberto looks around. And then – at last – he thinks he sees her, a flash of something recognizable, a dress, pushing towards the Scalinata. He is able to follow the figure for a moment or two, but then loses her in the scrum of people heaving to get a better view. Step by step, watching as he goes, he descends into the crowd. At a certain point, it is no longer possible to see the spectacle, but he can sense the direction in which it is heading by the reaction of those around him, their scale of jeering or applause. He pushes against the flow, ducking into little pockets of space that open up here and there, jostling his way through as the clapping resumes, the noise rising to a crescendo.

Soon – very soon – he will find her. Not for a moment does he doubt that she is here; it is simply a question of continuing to look. As he pushes on through the crowd, he wonders how he might describe her, even to himself. What kind of a woman is she? He knows his words will never capture her; knows that her movements will shake them off as soon as he has formed them. At weekends, she sleeps late, inhabiting the bed as if it were a country. With a coffee in his hand, he watches, catching the first awakening in her eyes, dreams still clinging to her, the extravagant curve of her throat as she rises. ◇

The Slaying of the Ice Monsters

Whatever happened to television masts? By Joe Moran



In the middle of March 1969, a severe ice storm hit the southern Pennines. At the top of Emley Moor, the spun metal stays of the television mast twanged and whistled in the wind and great clumps of ice fell off, denting parked cars and piercing the roofs of houses. Since being completed three years earlier, the mast had acquired an ugly reputation among the surrounding villagers, who called it 'the ice monster'. After receiving complaints from the council, the Independent Television Authority had installed signs on approach roads and a flashing amber beacon on the mast to warn of ice falls. Muriel Truelove, before taking over as landlady of the nearby Three Acres Inn eight weeks earlier, anxiously paced out the distance between the mast and the pub to see whether the former would hit the latter if it ever fell down.

At 5.01 p.m. on Wednesday 19 March, it did. A crash like a thunder crack could be heard for miles around. The top section of the mast, made of meshed steel girders clad in fibreglass, narrowly missed two cottages as it pitched into a field a third of a mile away. A Methodist chapel was sliced in two by one of the ice-laden metal stays. The other stays whiplashed into the earth, with ten-feet-deep craters gouged in fields, and road surfaces where the wreckage fell smashed into tarmac fragments. The police closed all the roads to keep back sightseers who were crowding in through the fog to look at the debris, as breakdown crews hauled it away. 'The whole superb structure which dominated the West Riding as effectively as its transmissions dominated the county's TV screens,' wrote the *Yorkshire Post*, 'has been reduced to tangled metal by nothing more sinister than drizzle.'

When the mast came down, tens of thousands of the region's viewers, from the hill-shadowed villages of the West Riding to the coastal towns across the Yorkshire plain, were watching *Discotheque*, a children's pop show on ITV presented by Billy J. Kramer. Suddenly, a few minutes before a comedy show called *Do Not Adjust Your Set* was about to start, their screens disintegrated into static. As soon as the television went blank in the Leeds control room, the duty engineer's phone began ringing off the hook. Several callers demanded that the missed episode of *Coronation Street* be broadcast on BBC1 after closedown. Yorkshire TV's switchboard logged over 5,000 calls, mostly complaints about missing *Coronation Street* or *The Avengers*. Over the next three days, seventeen Polish migrant workers put in eighteen-hour shifts in freezing 50mph winds to build a temporary mast that covered most of the region, allowing Yorkshire TV to claw back its haemorrhaging advertising revenue. The only part of the original mast that survives now does service as Huddersfield sailing club's lookout tower, offering a panoramic view of the Boshaw Whams Reservoir.

By the end of the 1960s, the television set burbling away in the living room had come to signify normality and routine. The people who rang the Leeds duty engineer to complain about missing *Coronation Street* gave little thought to how its radio waves reached them. Television had become a mundane piece of wizardry, something only really noticeable when it broke down or was interrupted. The collapse of the Emley Moor mast was a brief reminder of how much we take television for granted and how much it depends on apparatus that might, at any point, come crashing down on our heads.

And yet TV transmitters once generated much public excitement. When the BBC's Sutton Coldfield mast was completed in December 1949, it was poised like a giant pencil standing on its point, its tapering base resting on a ball bearing smaller than a cricket ball, which nested in a socket. Since rigid joints were vulnerable to metal fatigue and rust, this hinged bearing allowed the mast to move by up to two feet in high winds, supported by stays in the surrounding fields, as though it were a moored airship. This mast, wrote the *Manchester Guardian*, 'does nothing to besmirch these pleasant

'Television no longer needs to move from one place to another at a unique moment in time.'

wooded hills . . . Soaring fantastically from a two-inch steel ball on which it is poised, its slender stay-ropes reaching across the fields like the strands of a giant web, it could hardly be regarded by the most ardent rural preserver with anything but admiration and awe.' Norman Collins, the controller of BBC television, was still more florid. 'It is a beautiful sight – that slender, gleaming mast . . . it is the sort of thing that persuades me that, despite all they do to prove the contrary, engineers are artists at heart and, like other artists, have their lyrical moments, their supreme outbursts,' he wrote.

For a brief period the television transmitter was part of the industrial sublime, that awkward British genre which has emerged at various historical moments to get excited about railway bridges or electricity pylons. These high-guyed steel lattice masts were like modern-day cathedral spires, their sight and even their names – Holme Moss, Wenvoe, Kirk O'Shotts, Winter Hill, Caradon – evoking provincial pride and the arrival of a new object of worship, television, into a region. The *Radio Times* put a series of television masts on its covers, usually drawn by one of its favourite artists, Cecil W. Bacon: concentric circles of radio waves pulsing out from the top of the mast like ripples on water, and houses with aerials on top, waiting expectantly to receive the signal. Drawing in delicate pen or scraper-board in a way that resembled wood engraving, Bacon made these new structures seem both excitingly modern and familiarly British.

The life of engineers in the more isolated transmitter sites like Holme Moss in the Pennines, and Kirk O'Shotts in the middle of barren north Lanarkshire moorland, was a peculiar and solitary one, resembling the hardy masculine culture of an Antarctic base camp. To cope with the extreme cold, the walls of the transmitter building were built double and the roof covered with a thick layer of

vermiculite to protect against clumps of ice falling from the mast. The mast rigger had to climb it once a week in an insulated flying suit to chip off the ice and dislodge streamers, congealed wet fog clouds formed by strong winds. At Holme Moss, which was often snowbound in winter as heavy drifts formed on the flanks of the hill, the crew had iron rations and emergency living quarters. When the road was cut off, a local farmer walked across the snowy moors with bread, milk and eggs. During the long breaks in transmission in those early days, the mostly male members of staff amused themselves by playing cricket on the forecourt in the summer and sledging downhill in the winter. They would also play 'drosser rolling', a lethal-sounding game which involved liberating loose rocks from drystone walls and rolling them down towards the reservoir a thousand feet below.

Many of these original TV masts, including Holme Moss and Kirk O'Shotts, have stopped sending out television signals and now transmit mobile phone conversations or digital radio. The nameless engineers who kept television going in these remote places have long since moved on to other masts, retired or died. The remaining masts are mostly unsung in our cultural mythology, with a few eccentric exceptions. The Mancunian post-punk funk band A Certain Ratio recorded a song about the Granada region's Winter Hill transmitter in 1981, which consists of thirteen minutes of stubbornly monotonous drumming and a techno motif of just two alternating notes, meant to imitate a TV signal.

The Yorkshire-born poet Simon Armitage once hymned the new 900-foot Emley Moor mast, a tapering, reinforced concrete tower completed in 1971, in a ten-minute visual poem for BBC2's *One Foot in the Past* series in 1993, and elsewhere described it as 'like the afterburn of a rocket disappearing into the clouds'. In a 1996 BBC2 documentary, *I Remember the Future*, the

presenter, Jonathan Meades, stood at the bottom of this mast in order to give a sense of its height and surprising girth, and proclaimed it 'established by aliens in 1966 [sic] in order that thirty years later this film might reach you'. These 'punctuation marks of human supremacy', he mused, belonged to 'that brief and far off parenthesis when Britain was modern', the third quarter of the twentieth century, when public architecture was 'self-celebratory, bloated, grandiose'.

No one, except the odd non-conformist like Meades, rhapsodizes about TV masts any more. In the analogue era, television depended on the power of the transmitter, and how far its radio waves could reach from the top of a hill. But in the digital age, television is not so reliant on geography and landscape; as well as radiating from transmitters it can live on Internet catch-up sites and be downloaded on to laptops or mobile phones. Those of us raised in an analogue world can remember each medium's flawed attempt to transcribe a message from one physical object to another: the white noise of the radio, the hiss of the cassette tape, the crackle of stylus on scratched vinyl or the flicker of electrons against the back of the cathode ray tube. But digital media store information in binary ones and noughts that bear no telltale trace of whichever material objects are used to carry and decipher these abstract symbols. On a cathode ray tube, the numberless electrons had to be continually fired at the back of the phosphor-coated screen to make each millisecond of television picture and pull off the illusion of persistent vision, so no two televisual moments were exactly the same. On a digital television, each pixel is the product of binary code that can be endlessly decoded and revisited. Television no longer needs to move from one place to another at a unique moment in time. Now it seems to come from nowhere and be everywhere, as omnipresent as the air. ◊

Rachael Allen

I

Something is flying over our VHS shop,
over the key cutters and blank stones.
Why is no one as terrified as me?
We aim our tennis balls into
the darkness. We do not
know what makes
the moon.

We take turns with the holy remote
in crepuscular front rooms.
Villages mushroom up
around our village,
what happens,
nothing.

★

There is no heart on the circular road
there is no heart in the car park
the roundabout beats like
a palpating throat.

It is a linked and endless map, built as
a child's toy with its simplicity
of instruction. Stop; go this
way, don't go that.

Old Fears are Still Valid

I hold you only when I think too clearly.
I was told I have a bright future ahead of me
but I think it's now, or I've used it all up.
The school teacher disallowed my Etnies and since then
I've had a personal vendetta,
the receiving end of it is myself.
'Sabotage' is just a Beastie Boys song,
it has no repercussions.
Not like U2's 'I'll Go Crazy If I Don't Go Crazy Tonight'.
In my dreams you comment on my slouch.
You sick litter-box, stinky dog-bin,
half-arsed daffodil, hair-gel smell from the new leaves,
there's cotton discharge on the fumes,
the blood of my sister in the flume.
I don't have a Mercedes childhood
and poor Tom's a coke-head,
where's my text from the Office of the Dead?

I see an open bit of land from where
the estuary is torn apart; how can a landscape change
to reflect so suddenly the breaking of a person – it's bread.
This earth is drier than it was.
One digger is staccato, glances are exchanged
like fish. The birds are bloated with plastic.
Glances between my parents switch into the river
and remain there.
A washing machine tumbles down the hillside;
it isn't representative.
This is where they dump the household waste.
There was no council to decide
but there's much to administrate.
There is still skin on the black asphalt.
Cotton panties hem your thigh,
loud and little like the shouting of a child.
Cotton ferns hem the fence.
What's that light on the horizon, the one we always head to?
Bus station, flatlands, LED cloud, TEXACO.

Darkness at the Edge of Film

The author of Sunday Night Movies presents her favourite darkened frames

‘Movies,’ writes Rebecca Solnit in her book *A Field Guide to Getting Lost*, ‘are made out of darkness as well as light; it is the surpassingly brief intervals of darkness between each luminous still image that make it possible to assemble the many images into one moving picture. Without that darkness, there would only be a blur. Which is to say that a full-length movie consists of half an hour or an hour of pure darkness that goes unseen. If you could add up all the darkness, you would find the audience in the theatre gazing together at a deep imaginative night.’

Author and illustrator Leanne Shapton explains her five interpretations of cinematic darkness.

1.

Which films are these stills from?

Beauty and the Beast, Dracula, Night of the Hunter, Brief Encounter, A Woman is a Woman.

2.

*Describe the black. It’s not ‘pure black’.
What do you see in each frame?*

These are stills of filmic motion without the picture. The long seconds of black screen at the beginning of a movie are cells of unexposed film rolling past the lens. The light barely illuminates the specks and grain of the film. It’s a moving, alive black.

3.

*What do you like about the sound?
The crackle?*

The sound (mixed with the quivering grain of the black) is to me anticipation and the promise of action. The crackle reminds me of the first few seconds of a vinyl record, all promise and black silence. It’s the opposite of white noise; it focuses rather than dissipates.

4.

*Are you drawn to digital glitches in the same way?
Is there something different about the black frames
of recent films?*

I haven’t noticed digital glitches in the same way, but there is something to pixels that is different to grain, no better or worse, but more shifty.

5.

*Could we run one of the frames from the book as well,
perhaps right at the end?*

Yes.



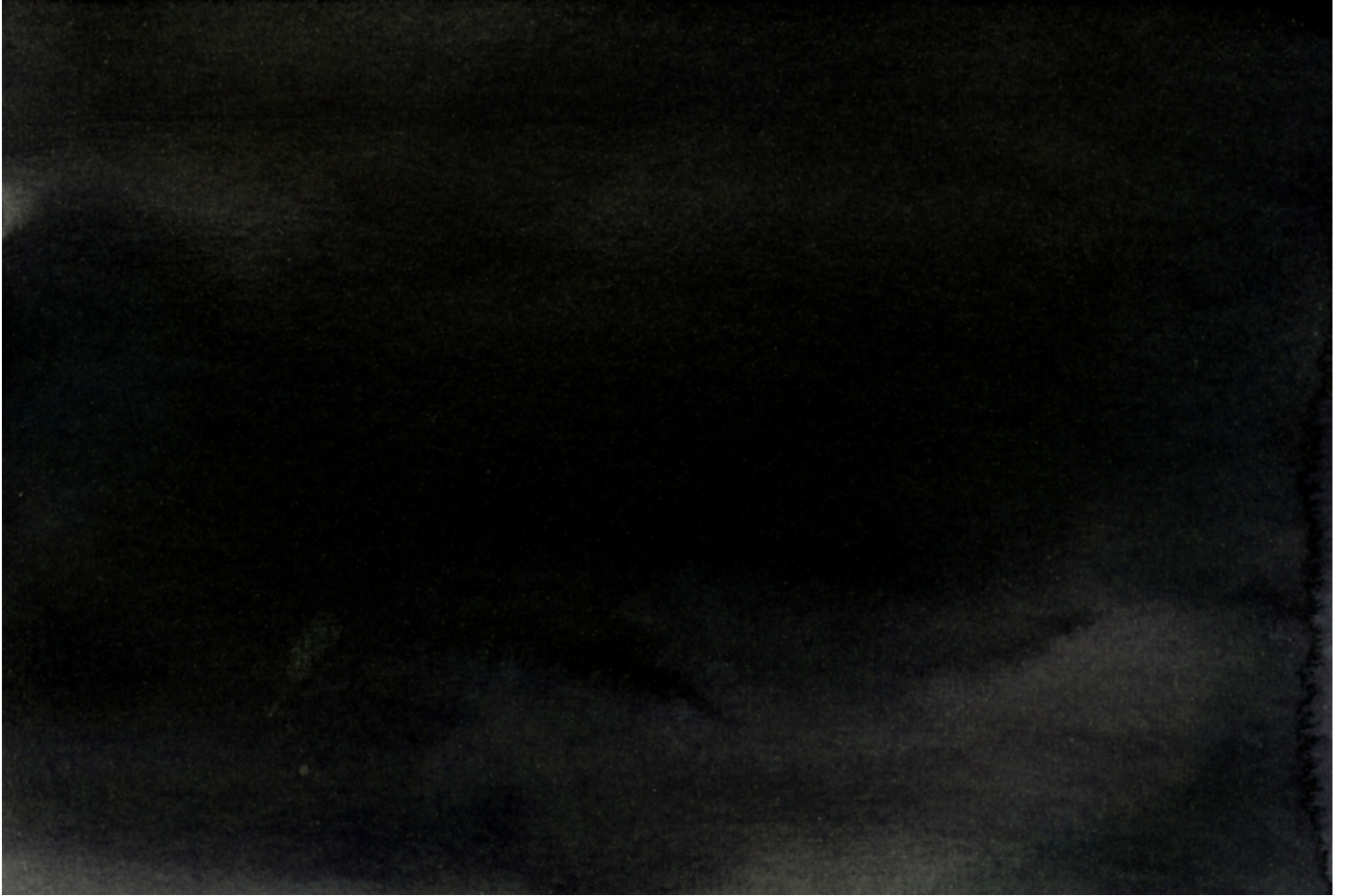
BEAUTY AND THE BEAST (1946)



DRACULA (1931)



NIGHT OF THE HUNTER (1955)



BRIEF ENCOUNTER (1945)



A WOMAN IS A WOMAN (1961)



LA RONDE (1950)

Chad Harbach

The Art of Fielding author on the trap of perfection and the possible talismanic importance of chicken salad. Also *Walden*, and *Harold Bloom*, and, obviously, *Melville*. Interview by Marissa Chen.



FD: *Much of the writing impulse is born out of emulation. As a journalist, editor and now a novelist, you must have enjoyed quite a broad range of literary influences. Who were some of your heroes, growing up?*

CH: Like a lot of people, the things that initially made me want to be a writer were the things that I read when I was young. I loved novels. These worlds in which I would immerse myself provided something in my mental life – roused special feelings in me that were not coming from my actual physical environment. They were not necessarily extremely good novels – in my case it was the Hardy Boys or any series with three or five or fifty books that I would bury myself in.

Walden was probably the first book of any serious quality that was important to me. I picked it up during a sort of gap in my literary education after high school, where I was just playing sports and living in Wisconsin and not reading much else. And I couldn't really say why I did so, or why ... I think sometimes books become very important to you long before you really understand what's in them, or why you feel connected to them, but it happens anyway. And that was the case for me, reading *Walden*. Then, when I got to college, I took up all those major nineteenth-century American writers in earnest. The ones that come across most explicitly in my writing are the classic American ones – Melville, Thoreau and Emerson. As for fictitious

heroes – Quentin Compson, the protagonist in *The Sound and the Fury* and *Absalom, Absalom!* Quentin went to Harvard and committed suicide after a year, so he went down a path that I did not go down. But I loved Quentin.

How has your relationship with them evolved over the years?

On the one hand you certainly need them less. A little bit. In some ways, you never stop emulating. Some writers have an incredibly personalized style, but I don't know how often that exists any more, really. As much as you become more mature and independent [as a writer], I think for the most part you just keep emulating – it just depends on whom you're emulating at that certain point in time.

But I also feel like some of the most important writers to me are the ones whose sensibility is so, so different from my own. So while that's a quality that may not be instantly recognizable in your work, it reminds you of what you're not doing, or tugs you a little bit in the direction you're not in. I always think it's a naughty question when people ask me about influences – you wouldn't necessarily be able to tell from my work who the writers that really influenced me were, but they're important for just that reason. To pull you to a place that you might not otherwise remember to go.

One of the things that stand out about The Art of Fielding is how openly it embraces the traditional, almost Victorian aspect of the novel. Its heroes are not the Faulkners or Hemingways that young authors today tend to favour, but rather the founding fathers of American letters, like Melville and Whitman.

Certainly the idea I had in mind was to write something like a meta-nineteenth-century novel – a novel that was going to understand and sort of adopt the form of the nineteenth-century novel but be self-aware about doing so.

It's hard to say exactly why, but I think it partly had to do with the fact that by the time I got around to writing this book it seemed that postmodernism had been through a lot of stages. No writer has probably influenced my work as much as David Foster Wallace has, and no writer has been more important to me – and more unremittingly postmodern – than Melville. Melville basically anticipated every move in postmodernism 125 years before it happened. The techniques of postmodernism and the techniques of the nineteenth-century novel seemed to me to be equally awesome and interesting and fake all at the same time, so in a way there was the feeling that I could pick and choose the qualities that appealed to me most.

Do you usually return to these nineteenth-century writers as a kind of touchstone for quality literature?

Oh, that's a dangerous game! Some of Melville's works were absolute masterpieces, but a lot of it was not that good . . . [laughs]

How do you think their work fits into the writing that's being produced today?

Certainly a lot of them were required reading for English degrees, but I did notice a lot of reading lists for creative writing MFAs – having done one myself – tend to focus on more contemporary authors. I read a lot of twentieth-, twenty-first-century writers who ended up being very important to me, but there's a lot that can be learnt from people like Melville, who employed techniques of postmodernism in a way that simply didn't exist at the time. I mean, *Moby Dick* started off as a simple first-person narrative and evolves into this massive, weirdly operatic . . . [He mimes the crest and fall of enormous waves]

Which authors do you reckon writers will be invoking a hundred years from now?

I would say David Foster Wallace. Certainly no author has been more talked about in recent years than he.

Let's move on to baseball. It's a tried and true metaphor – I'm thinking Owen Meany, Field of Dreams, A League of Their Own. Have you always wanted to write a baseball novel? How did you intend to expound on, or subvert, what we already know of that golden myth?

Since the book has come out I've met so many people who were so better steeped in the relationship between literature and

baseball than I am, and who ask me all the time, 'Why did you choose baseball as a metaphor?' I'm almost always flummoxed by that question. This book certainly began with baseball. This crisis that the protagonist Henry goes through – which is something that happens in real life, this great player who suddenly isn't able to play – was incredibly fascinating to me, and I wanted to write about [it]. So the genesis of the book had to do with baseball, and I was locked into baseball from the very outset. But the crisis of self-doubt Henry goes through is something that was not entirely particular to baseball players. It actually has a general resonance, so I never felt like I was working in the tradition [of the sports novel]. I always came to it as something I was writing about, in a very literal sort of way – it's what the book is about.

The great player who suddenly isn't able to play – was it Steve Blass you were thinking of, then?

[Excitedly] You know, I was on tour in the States recently, and I was in Los Angeles at the airport, getting ready to fly to Sydney, when I realized I had a voicemail message on my phone. And I listened to it right as I was getting on the plane, and it was.

You're kidding.

No! He called me up and left me this message, a very sweet one – the first thing he said was something along the lines of, 'Don't worry . . .' Because I can just imagine – I'm always a bit sheepish about this – his name comes up in the book a couple of times, and I always felt strange using it in my writing or in interviews, because I feel this one man shouldn't have to be burdened with having his life talked about all the time. But the first thing he said in his message was, 'Don't worry, it's nothing bad, I'm just reading the book and I'd really like to chat about some things . . .'

He has a book coming out, as it turns out – a memoir – and someone had given him my novel for his seventieth birthday, which just happened. So when I get back to the States I'm going to call Steve Blass.

What about Henry's baseball hero in the novel, Aparicio Rodriguez?

If Rodriguez were based on anyone it would be Ozzie Smith, who's probably the best shortstop who ever lived. I don't know if Ozzie Smith has the same sort of philosophical tendencies [as Rodriguez] . . .

Maybe you should check your voicemail now.

That would really be something.

What is the strongest recollection you have of the sport?

I just loved to field ground balls when I was a little kid. Whether it was with my father or my friends – just recalling the feel of the ball probably influenced the book in a major way. I'd long given it up, but Henry still liked that when he was eighteen, going on nineteen.

What would you have become if you weren't writing?

Not a baseball player, though I would have gladly become one. I was always better at math and science in school, so I probably would have been some sort of scientist – I think it was what my parents had always thought I'd become. I had a very analytical, mathematical brain. This was part of my original love of baseball too – it was very easy for me to become obsessed with statistics and numbers and calculations so I probably would have been better off if I went into a field that employed that.

When I got to college, I was, I think, rather undecided about what I wanted to study. It's hard to pinpoint the exact moment I really wanted to become a writer, only I knew I really wanted it despite having zero success and certainly, for a long stretch of time, not even being able to write anything at all. In fact, until this book was actually published, there was always the sense that I may really have to choose all over again. It was a question that was in my mind for ten, fifteen or more years – 'What will I do when I stop pretending to be a writer?'

My experience was in some ways rather unusual because I think over the course of writing the book – eleven years – I went from being a very inexperienced writer to a pretty experienced one. After all, I was spending thousands upon thousands of hours working on the same project, and for one thing I became a lot less prone to constant rewriting.

How many drafts did you end up producing?

Still too many! On the one hand it's good to have some sort of big picture, and I certainly did things like that many times – drawing diagrams and planning things out, because it's hard to keep all this stuff in your head sometimes. But inevitably all those diagrams will be either lost or left by the wayside, and you spend a bunch of time drawing up some more and then throwing them away. One step forward, two steps back. I did become a little bit more relaxed, a little bit more willing to just move forward, but I didn't really get to the end of the book until I was at



Like many athletes, Henry is superstitiously reliant on the teachings of Rodriguez's manual, 'The Art of Fielding', as well as his failproof baseball mitt, Zero. Do you have similar protocols you engage in when you write?

Nothing quite so constant as Henry's, but I do find myself getting into these ritualistic patterns, and getting very grumpy when anything disrupts that routine. I kind of wrote the book in bursts a couple of months at a time, so it was important to really immerse yourself during those times, which is impossible to do if you have other things to work on in your life – you can only stay in it for so long.

So you have these good days, and then you try to replicate those days – 'Oh, I got all this work done yesterday, and I had chicken salad for lunch. So I'm going to have chicken salad again today. And the next day, and the next day, and the next...' I kept that up for a couple of months, and then it broke.

the end. And although it took me a really long time to figure out how to execute so many things about the book, it's also funny to think back on how much the characters *did* turn out like how I imagined them originally, how much of the book I already had in mind very early on.

*Who in your opinion is the ultimate tragic/superhero?
In that order.*

Grumpy old Harold Bloom liked to talk for hours about how Shakespeare invented the modern consciousness in the novel, and I think that's to a large extent true. This split between thinking and doing is a contemporary paralysis that everyone – including myself – is still doing riffs on four hundred years later. So, Hamlet. Can I say Hamlet?

My ultimate superhero – Underdog. No justification needed there. ♦

Struggling

Philip Oltermann on the 'bestseller that no one has read'

You don't need to read *Mein Kampf* to find out that Hitler hated Jews. That he despised Marxism, disliked the Austrian state and harboured a grudge against his own father – you don't need to read *Mein Kampf* to learn that. You don't need to read *Mein Kampf* to know that millions of Germans read *Mein Kampf*, or to learn that many of them swallowed its poison without questioning. You can read history books to find all that out.

What I didn't know until I read *Mein Kampf* is that Adolf Hitler also hated the way most people read books. There is a lengthy passage, thirty pages or so into it, which works as a manifesto against the bad reader.

People who read a lot, Hitler thought, working their way through the library of worldly learning 'book by book', 'page by page', were missing the point. Of course they 'knew' a lot, but: 'their brain seems

incapable of assorting and classifying the material which they have gathered from books'. If one were to put those supposedly 'well-read' boffins on the spot, Hitler wrote, they would without fail turn red and get terribly embarrassed, struggling to come up with a thousand different examples only to opt with dead certainty for the one that illustrates their point least well.

The secret of good reading, according to Adolf Hitler, was not to read widely, but to read 'correctly': 'A man who possesses the art of correct reading will, in studying any book, magazine or pamphlet, instinctively and immediately perceive which in his opinion is worth remembering, either because it is suited to his purpose or generally worth knowing.' Hitler's ideal book-readers were skim-readers.

I should confess that I was skim-reading *Mein Kampf* as I came across this

passage. I was sitting in the furthest corner of the British Library's rare books reading room, a blue cloth-bound volume of that book weighing heavy in my hands. A mountain of academic-looking hardbacks were stacked up in front of me: a history of aviation engineering, goat husbandry for beginners and an in-depth study of nineteenth-century forestry practices. This was both an attempt to shield the book in my hand from the other readers in the room, and a potential alibi. I had convinced myself long ago that a red light would have gone off in the chief librarian's office as soon as I had typed 'Mein Kampf' into the BL's search engine. This way I might be able to convince him that I was just intellectually curious.

The reason I was reading *Mein Kampf* was just that: I had chanced upon the book in the index by surprise. Shocked to find that a physical copy was so easy to get hold of, I had realized that I had never met anyone who had actually read it, and pressed the 'order' button on a whim. The reason I was skim-reading *Mein Kampf*, rather than reading it 'page by page', is that it is a very badly written book.



Hitler's editor famously boiled down the tome's original title from *Vierinhalf Jahre des Kampfes gegen Lüge, Dummheit und Feigheit: Eine Abrechnung mit den Zerstörern der nationalsozialistischen Bewegung*. 'Kampf' is a fairly ambivalent term in German: it can refer to an external fight or battle as well as an inner turmoil. But it neatly summarizes Hitler's main obsessions in the book: from his ecstatic memories of the outbreak of the First World War and his bitterness at what he perceived as its shameful conclusion, to his fights with his father and the Darwinistic struggle for living space he sees in the fauna and flora around him. All these elements hang loosely together in the book – there is no coherent thesis or argument as such.

The editor who came up with the clever title evidently balked at giving the same treatment to the main body of the work. There are strong, forthright ideological statements, but none of the rhetorical groundwork that would make

spreading syphilis by supporting prostitution. In all this, it heavily leans on the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, an antisemitic hoax purporting to outline a plan for Jewish world domination, published in Tsarist Russia in 1903. Hitler, the skim-reader, is aware that the Protocols are considered a forgery. But for him the fact that liberal newspaper *Frankfurter Zeitung* thinks so is proof that they are real.

Hitler wrote and part-dictated his memoir in Landsberg Prison in 1924, where he spent nine weeks for his involvement in the so-called Beer Hall Putsch of November 1923. When he was released in December that year, he had problems getting the book published: the usual struggles of an aspiring writer. A small right-wing publishing house, the Deutscher Volksverlag, made him an offer that he rejected, later describing the fee as 'laughable'. Yet

single line. Millions of copies were burnt, buried and torn to pieces before the Allies arrived. Nowadays, *Mein Kampf* is often referred to as der ungelesene Bestseller, the 'bestseller that no one has read': a sarcastic comment on the bourgeoisie's collective amnesia.

In Britain a freelance translator called Edgar Dugdale had started to translate *Mein Kampf* in 1931. It was bought by publishers Hurst and Blackett in 1933, the year Hindenburg appointed Hitler chancellor, and was already in galley proofs when the German Embassy suddenly intervened, demanding approval of Dugdale's translation. The abridged version that appeared in October '33 (*My Struggle* in the UK, *My Battle* in the US) left out Hitler's wilder rants about Judaism, his theories on social Darwinism, as well as Hitler's view that Germany should have courted England as an ally in the First World War, that Great Britain was in fact 'the only power which

'At its peak, the book might have earned Hitler an estimated \$1 million royalties per year.'

these appear as the result of considered reasoning. There are moments of intense melodrama (Hitler junior: 'I did not want to be a civil servant. No, and again no.' Hitler senior: 'Artist, no, never, as long as I live!'), but they fail to rise above a turgid stream of prose that is positively clogged with unnecessary particles ('*auch*', '*mal*', '*wohl*', '*wennschon*', '*dennschon*', etc.) and mixed metaphors ('forcing the less strong and healthy back into the womb of the eternal unknown').

At the very least, its anti-semitic passages are more precise. *Mein Kampf* describes a Jewish conspiracy to enslave Germany and attain world rule by means of a pincer movement of Bolshevik internationalism and stock-market capitalism: the work of 'the Jew Karl Marx' would pave the way for the rule of international finance capital. It accuses the Jewish people of 'bringing the negroes into the Rhineland' in order to weaken the white race through bastardisation, and of

when the book was eventually published by Eher Verlag in the summer of '25, it can't have earned him much more. The original print-run was 500 copies: vanity publishing.

Sales only picked up as Hitler's political career took off. In 1930 they were reported to have reached 54,000 copies; by the time that Hitler became German chancellor in 1933, Eher boasted that the book had crossed German counters more than a million times. During the Nazi rule, it became customary for the government to give a copy of *Mein Kampf* to every pair of newlyweds in the country. At its peak, the book might have earned Hitler an estimated \$1 million royalties per year. But did anyone actually read it? When *Mein Kampf* was published, Germany had the largest reading public of any country in the world. But after 1945, all the Germans who had rushed to the shops for a copy of Hitler's tome suddenly couldn't remember having read a

could protect our rear, supposing we started a new Germanic expansion'. No ellipses were included where paragraphs had been cut: the ranting madman had become a respectable statesman. A complete version appeared in 1939, translated by James Murphy – who had worked in Joseph Goebbels's Ministry of Propaganda from 1934 until 1938. That same year, United Press International reporter Alan Cranston tried to publish a new translation, which he believed gave a more accurate picture of the German dictator's true beliefs. Hitler's US publisher, Houghton Mifflin, sued Cranston for copyright infringement and the book was pulped.

The Jewish-German diarist Viktor Klemperer once said that 'the biggest riddle of the Third Reich was how Hitler was able to come to power when the bible of national socialism had already been in circulation for so many years'. His view was that too few had read *Mein*

Kampf, not too many. Anyone who had read the book thoroughly would have been able to spot the madness that was to come.

When Hitler shot himself on 30 April 1945, the copyright for *Mein Kampf* reverted to the Southern German state in which he was officially registered as a citizen. Until 31 December of next year, when the copyright runs out, the rights and royalties for the book are managed by the state authorities of Bavaria. As I found out after several calls to publishers and distributors around the globe, most of the requests for reproduction are dealt with by the Bayerisches Staatsministerium der Finanzen, Postfach 22 00 03, München. I include the full address because it is not without irony: the legacy of the dictator who thought he was an artist is nowadays not managed by Bavaria's Ministry for Culture, but the pinstriped types at

tions are made for short quotations and extracts from the book, but they have to carry the editorial equivalent of police tape: 'Author and publisher distance themselves emphatically from the ideology expressed in these excerpts.' The Bavarian Finance Ministry continues to regard *Mein Kampf* as a 'central instrument of National Socialist propaganda'. Its decision to limit the circulation of the book, it says, 'is rooted in respect towards the victims of the National Socialist regime'.

There's no doubt that this is a principled stance. Bavaria also refuses to accept royalties from sales of the English-language edition of the book. From 1976 about £4,000 a year was channelled to the German Welfare Council, a charity designated to help Jewish refugees who have settled in the UK.

But there are also unwanted consequences. Until it authorized the annotated edition, Bavaria had effectively

pirated copies have been bestsellers in Croatia, Turkey and Russia. In India it is published by six different publishers and regarded by some as a business motivation manual in the same category as Spencer Johnson's *Who Moved My Cheese* (or so the *Daily Telegraph* likes to claim). There's a Manga version of *Mein Kampf* in Japan. And of course, even in Germany you can access the book within seconds: a few key strokes reveal thousands of PDFs stored on non-German servers. Most of these editions aren't footnoted. As it stands, teenagers who google them don't necessarily find out that the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* were fake.

Does the fact that Hitler was an evil man make *Mein Kampf* an evil book? Yes, but also a ridiculous book. Is it dangerous? After reading it, I don't think so. But then I'm an educated person with knowledge of the holocaust. Restricting the book's circulation means those who aren't

'To restrict its circulation is to lend its ideas the glamour of illegality.'

the Ministry of Finance.

You can't but feel sympathy for the Bavarians. They put a lot of thought and vigour into the way they police the publication of *Mein Kampf*. Possession of the book is illegal in Austria – though not, as frequently claimed by members of the far right, in Germany, where Schreiber's lawyers have focused on restricting the reproduction of the original text. In April 2012 it was announced that an edition of Hitler's book, annotated by the German Institute for Contemporary History, would be published before 1 January 2016. Until then, the Bavarian authorities have ruled out a publication of the full text and have taken successful legal steps against reprints in Poland and Sweden. If you link to a PDF of Hitler's book on your website, as an academic from Berlin's Technical University did in 2011, you are more than likely to have a stern letter from Schreiber's people on your doorstep within days. Rare excep-

taken its hands off the wheel that could have helped steer the book's presentation worldwide. The income stream it does generate through English-language editions has often been managed clumsily. In 2001 the German Welfare Council realized that many of the refugees it used to support with the royalties had passed away, and returned the profits it had accrued to Random House. 'Jewish charity's £500,000 from *Mein Kampf*,' ran the headline. It is thought that another charity has since been found and continues to receive cheques for *Mein Kampf*-generated royalties to this day. Random House and Curtis Brown, the agency who manages the English-language rights of the book, refuse to name it, however. The assumption is that as soon as the organization is named, it would have to stop accepting the money.

Without a direction, its route across the seas of globalization has been erratic:

like me, those who may only have limited knowledge, who might be susceptible, won't find an annotated version. It also lends the book's ideas the glamour of illegality, to give it an appeal that it can only sustain because it exists in the shadows.

As I flicked through its pages in the British Library, I remembered something the writer and diplomat Salvador de Madariaga had once said about the peculiar abundance of 'sch' and 'f' sounds in the German language: *Flaschenpfand, Schadenfreude, Faschismus*, etc. 'No German can make P explode neatly without letting off after it the surplus pressure of the steam in his soul'. English 'damp' became German *Dampf*, 'steam'. Where in English there was 'camp', in German there was *Kampf*. I shut the book, which now nestled much more lightly in my hand. That is the odd thing about *Mein Kampf*: the more closely you read it, the less dangerous it feels. It vaporizes. ♠

‘You endured life. You didn’t live it.’

Georges Simenon’s message to his mother

Friday 19 April 1974

Dear Mama

It has been close to three and a half years since you died, at the age of ninety-one, and perhaps it’s only now that I’m beginning to understand you. Throughout my childhood and adolescence I lived under one roof with you. I lived with you, but when I left for Paris at the age of nineteen, you were still a stranger to me.

Come to think of it, I never called you Mama; I called you Mother, just as I never called my father Papa. How did that come about? I don’t know.

I went back to Liège now and then for short visits. The longest was the last, when I spent a whole week, day after day, at the Hôpital de Bavière – where as a boy I served at Mass – looking on at your death agony.

That expression, to be sure, hardly applies to the days that preceded your death. You lay in your bed, surrounded by relatives or persons unknown to me. There were some days when it was all I could do to get near you. I watched you for hours. You were not in pain. You had no fear of dying. And you didn’t tell your beads from morning till night, though there was always a black-clad nun sitting there, day after day in the same chair, in the same place.

Sometimes you smiled; often, in fact. But when I speak of you, the word ‘smile’ takes on a rather special meaning. You looked at us, at these people who would survive you and follow you to the graveyard, and now and then a widening of your lips gave you an ironic expression.

It seemed as though you were already in another world, or rather, in a world of your own, your familiar, inner world.

Even as a child, you see, I had known that smile. There was melancholy in it, and resignation. You endured life. You didn’t live it.

You seemed to be waiting for the day when at last you would be lying in your hospital bed, resting, before going to your eternal rest.

Your doctor, who had performed the operation, was a childhood friend of mine. He told me you would die slowly and peacefully.

It took about a week, my longest stay in Liège since I had left it as a boy of nineteen. After visiting hours I couldn’t resist the temptation to renew such pleasures of my youth as mussels with French fries and eel au vert.

Is it shameful to mingle gastronomic recollections with my memories of your hospital room?

I don’t think so. They go together. Everything goes together to form the whole, which I am trying now to

unravel and which, to judge by the way you looked at me, with an expression of mingled indifference and tenderness, you may have understood before I did.

As you are well aware, we never loved each other in your lifetime. Both of us pretended.

Today I believe that the images we had of each other were both false.

Can it be that the knowledge that one is dying makes one more lucid than ever before? I don’t know yet. But I am just about certain that you classified the people who came to see you, the nephews, nieces, neighbours and so on, very accurately.

At the moment I arrived, you classified me as well.

But it wasn’t your image of me that I looked for in your eyes and calm features: what I was beginning to see was a true image of you.

I was anxious and unnerved. The day before, I had received a phone call from Orban, my old schoolmate, now head surgeon at the Hôpital de Bavière, who had operated on you. I had to drive with all possible speed over Swiss roads, the German Autobahn, and a bit of Belgian highway.

I suddenly found myself facing the big, varnished door of the Hôpital de Bavière, where as a child I used to pull up panting, especially in the winter, after a breathless run through the deserted neighbourhood, keeling to the middle of the street because I was afraid.

I found your pavilion right away. And then your door. I knocked and someone called out, ‘Come in’.

It gave me a shock to see at least four or five people in your little hospital room, not to mention a nun all in black, who seemed to be on guard, like a sentry.

I made my way through to your bed to kiss you. And then you said very simply, as if it were the most natural thing in the world to say, ‘Why have you come, Georges?’

That little sentence weighed on my mind, and I thought about it later on. Maybe it has told me something about you.

I kissed you on the forehead. Someone, I don’t remember who, stood up and gave me his chair. I looked at you intensely. I think I had never in all my life looked at you in that way.

I had expected to find you moribund, in a semi-coma. I rediscovered your eyes, which I have tried to describe but which I shall have to describe again, because it was some time before I began to understand them.

Were you surprised to see me? Did you suppose I wouldn’t come to be with you in your death agony and attend your funeral? Did you think I was indifferent, even hostile?

Was the look in those pale-grey eyes one of genuine surprise, or was that one of your tricks? I can't help thinking that you knew I'd come and were expecting me, but that since you had always distrusted everyone, and me in particular, you were afraid I would not come.

The people around you didn't have the tact to leave the room. I had to put them out by telling them I wanted to be alone with my mother for a little while.

The nun didn't budge. She stayed there in her chair, as motionless, as impenetrable and, I'm certain, as indifferent as a statue. She never said a word of greeting when I came in. She never said goodbye when I left.

It looked as if she had the keys to the gates of death, heaven and hell, and was waiting for the right time to make use of them.

For a long while you and I just looked at each other. There was no sadness in your face. There was no emotion I could identify for sure.

Triumph? Possibly. You were the thirteenth of thirteen children. Your father was ruined before you were born. You were five years old when he died.

That was your start in life. You were left alone with your mother. Your brothers and sisters had all gone off, some to the graveyard. You lived in a modest, extremely modest, apartment, in a poor neighbourhood in Liège, and I've never known what you and your mother lived on until you were nineteen and went to work as a salesgirl in a department store.

I have a bad photograph of you, dating from that time. You were pretty; your face still had the roundness of youth, but in your eyes I see an iron will and distrust, distrust of the whole world.

There was a shadow of a smile on your lips, but there was nothing youthful about that smile; it was full of bitterness, and your eyes, fixed on that camera lens, were hard.

'Why have you come, Georges?'

Perhaps those few words are the key to your whole life.

When we were left alone except for the nun, you couldn't think of anything to say to me, nor I to you. Your emaciated hand was resting on the bed sheet, and I took it. There was no warmth in your hand; it seemed lifeless.

Would you really have been disappointed or grieved if I hadn't come? I wonder.

You knew those people who were cluttering up your room when I arrived; you knew, in a manner of speaking, what each one of them expected of you. Money, one of your two dining-room cupboards, linen and so on.

Because you've never had illusions. You've never trusted anyone. As far back as I can remember, you've suspected everyone of falsehood, of ulterior motives.

I wasn't six yet, I'd just started school at the Institut Saint-André, when you first thought I was telling you lies. You've thought so ever since. The last time you came to see me was at Épalinges. I'd invited you to spend a few weeks with me. You were already very old and infirm, and I was secretly thinking of sending you to one of the excel-

lent rest homes in the region.

Épalinges, which I put up for sale two years ago and haven't sold yet, is an enormous, rather luxurious house. It required a large staff. You spent the better part of your days in the garden, in the dancing shadow of a birch tree.

Your main worry was not how you would spend the last years of your life. When you managed to corner a member of the staff, an anxious look came into your eyes and you asked, 'Had this property really been paid for?'

You'd had the same worry when I invited you to La Richardière. La Richardière was an estate with a big pond full of ducks, an enormous vegetable garden, a forest and a few meadows. There too you spent a good part of your time out of doors in an easy chair. I seem to remember that I had three horses at the time. They required a groom. A gardener took care of the garden and barnyard. There too, in short, I had considerable help. That was in 1931.

You observed their comings and goings. You kept your eye on them. And once, when you were alone with Boule, you asked, 'Has my son a lot of debts?'

In fifty years I've never been able to convince you that I work and make a living.

Your distrust wasn't confined to me. It was innate in you. The fatherless five-year-old, left alone with her mother, couldn't believe in miracles.

But, at bottom, I was the main object of your distrust.

Was it love? Fear that I'd get into trouble? Were you afraid that I was mixed up in some shady business?

No one but you knows the answer, Mother. I can only conjecture, and there perhaps the days I spend at your bedside have helped me.

I have just called you Mother rather than Mama. You see, I've been accustomed to calling you Mother since my earliest childhood. I have a good many childhood memories, more than most people. My memory of recent events is often sketchy, but I remember the first years of my life very clearly.

I wonder if you ever took me on your lap. If you did, it left no trace in my memory, which means that it didn't happen very often.

I don't believe that the 'Father' and 'Mother' I was taught to use originated with you, and I can't hold it against you. My father was a soft-hearted man, but like all the Simenons I've known, he was not expansive.

I remember a trifling incident that may be significant. One day, in a moment of discouragement, you said to him, 'When I think, Désire, that I've never heard you say: "I love you."'

My father answered – with tears in his eyes, I'm sure: 'But you're here.'

Is that what hardened you? Can it be that you felt torn between your own family, the Brulls, and the Simenon tribe you married into, and that this feeling threw you off balance?

I shall try to understand all that, Mother, and tell you about it. ♦

MUSIC

John Updike crackles on vinyl



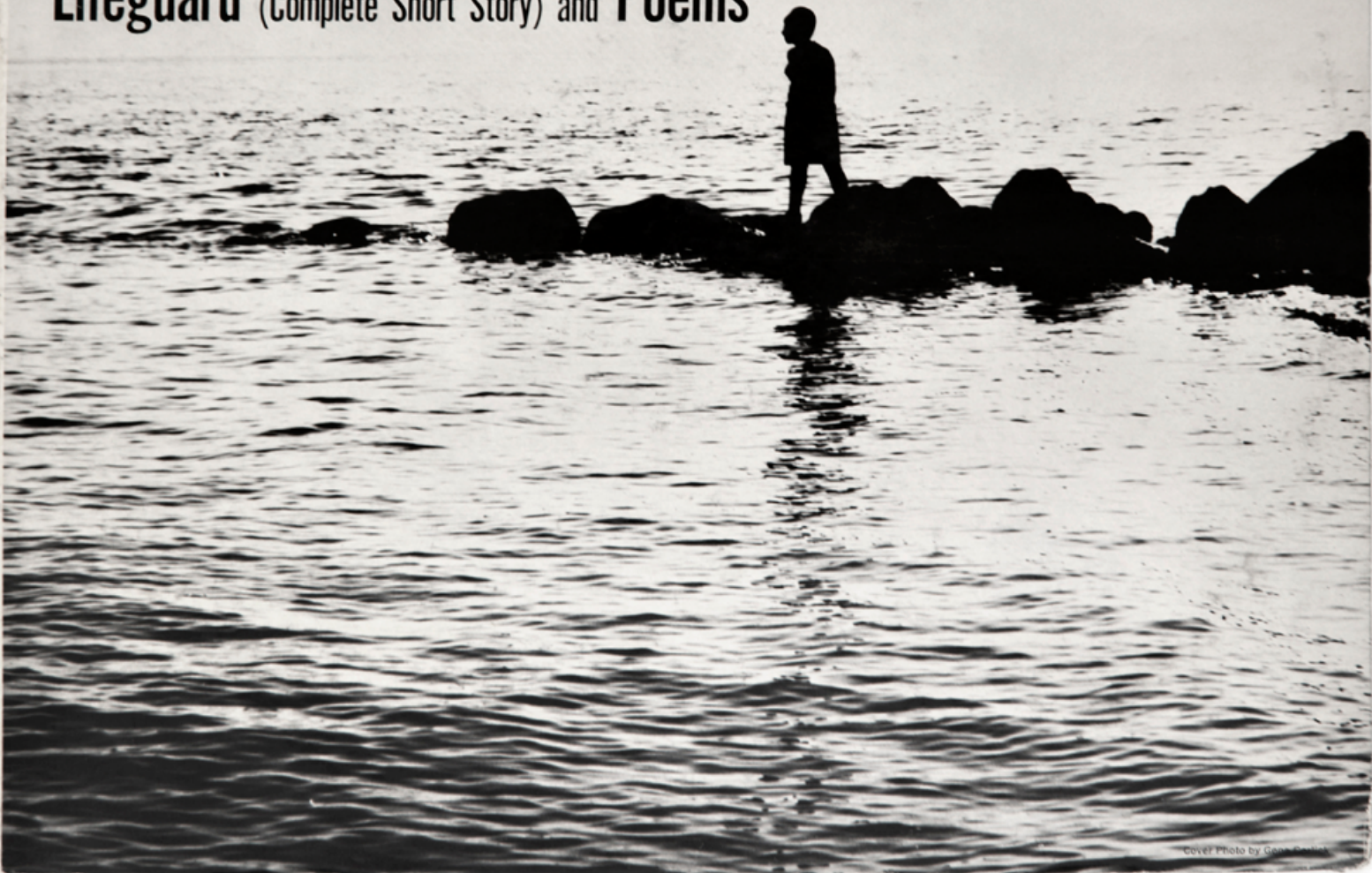
John Updike

CMS
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READING FROM HIS WORKS

THE CENTAUR (Excerpt)

Lifeguard (Complete Short Story) and **Poems**



John Updike

READING FROM HIS WORKS



John Updike was born in Shillington, Pennsylvania in 1932. He took his A.B. at Harvard and then attended the Ruskin School of Drawing and Fine Arts at Oxford, England. Upon his return to the United States, he joined the staff of THE NEW YORKER, to which he has contributed many stories, essays and poems. Mr. Updike has written four novels; THE POOR-HOUSE FAIR; RABBIT, RUN; THE CENTAUR and OF THE FARM. His other writings include three collections of short stories: THE SAME DOOR; PIGEON FEATHERS and THE MUSIC SCHOOL; and two books of verse, TELEPHONE POLES and THE CARPENTERED HEN.

The selections included on this recording were chosen by Mr. Updike. "Lifeguard" from PIGEON FEATHERS, © 1962, is the inner soliloquy of a young divinity student gone lifeguard for the summer. From the height of his wooden throne he delivers a private and silent Sunday sermon upon the masses of flesh beneath him, culminating in a blessing and a con-

THE CENTAUR (Excerpt)

Lifeguard (Complete Short Story) and Poems

fession that he himself still awaits "the call." Perhaps not since the seventeenth century has theology been the occasion for such a rich and antic weave of prose. In THE CENTAUR, © 1963, for which Mr. Updike received the 1964 National Book Award for Fiction, the ancient legend of Chiron, the centaur who gave up his immortality so that Prometheus might be free, is retold in the personae of a Pennsylvania high school teacher, George Caldwell, and his fifteen-year-old son, Peter. On this record the author reads the first pages of Chapter VIII, in which Peter, now a failed artist living in a Manhattan loft, murmurs to his Negro mistress of the Olympian museum he would visit as a child.

The poems included are all selected from TELEPHONE POLES AND OTHER POEMS, © 1963. In his poetry Mr. Updike blends a wry lyricism with a rare passion for visual and technical detail. The method is wit; the mood is elegaic. Mr. Updike, as a storyteller-reader, evokes the precise mood and illusion that his writings intend. Who, but the author himself, can interpret the emotional intent and impact of his writing. Upon hearing his first reading, played back, he remarked, "It's not a voice; it's just a whisper!" But it is a whisper with an extraordinary range, capable of expressing rage, lust and urgency; it can be persuasive, cajoling, entrancing and exasperating; it is fitted perfectly to the cadences of writing so aware of sound.

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A Nail in the First Act

What happens in a professional kitchen during the power hour? By Simon Wroe.



The evening had begun so pleasantly too. An expectation bubbling over from the afternoon, laughter tinkling off the dining-room glass, a curl of cinnamon and clove in the air, the warmth and camaraderie of Saturdays all around. In the kitchen, Ramilov, the new chef de partie, was telling the pastry chef how shit he was.

‘You are so shit, Dibden,’ he said, ‘I’m going to get you Gregg Wallace’s cookbook for Christmas.’

‘But I don’t like Gregg Wallace,’ said Dibden.

‘That’s the point,’ said Ramilov. ‘No one does.’

‘I’ll have you know,’ said Dibden defensively, drawing himself up to his full spindly height, ‘that I was taught by the best. Chef Ducasse at the Dorchester, no less.’

Dibden returned to the tart cases he was attempting, in vain, not to break. The pastry was too crumbly. What was a mild annoyance at five o’clock could be a disaster by nine, but on this occasion Dibden in his great foolishness had

chosen to overlook it. Perhaps that family motto hung too heavily about his neck; it seemed he could not resist it. Lurking in his service fridges, ready for the night ahead, a whole catalogue of bodged mise awaited him: soufflé mix made with over-beaten egg whites that would explode when baked, a chocolate ganache at least three weeks old, over-ripe raspberries, under-ripe pears, quince jam that would not set, fondants that would not rise, and a crème anglaise that tasted faintly but unmistakably of garlic. His mise en place was a ticking bomb; yet after a quiet lunch, before the madness of Saturday dinner, it looked just fine. I remember learning at university about the Russian formalists, who said, in a nod to Chekhov’s gun, that if a man hammers a nail into the wall in the first act he must be hanged from it by the third. Well, Dibden was that man and he had been busy with the hammer.

‘I’m going to take your mum on a package holiday to Tenerife,’ said Ramilov.

‘That’s not even a nice place,’ Dibden protested.

‘Exactly!’ shouted Ramilov. ‘Exactly!’

The problem with pastry was that whoever worked it was unregulated. All the other sections straddled starters and mains; they had to work together on every check, which kept them in time with one another. Ramilov couldn’t drag his feet over a ravioli order if it was coming up with one of Dave’s steaks. Each cog kept the other cogs turning. But pastry was alone in the wilderness.

At five thirty Chef Bob walked purposefully into the kitchen, doing up his apron.

‘Right, gentlemen, we are entering the power hour. You all know what that means. Chop chop.’

He pointed to the clock on the wall above Dibden. One hour before service began.

‘You ready, shithead?’ he asked.

Dibden did not have a nickname, but there was no shortage of suggestions. Ramilov thought he should be called ‘Bumble Stumblefuck’ but it was too hard

to shout quickly. In retrospect I think Ramilov was actually very fond of Dibden.

'Yes, chef!' Dibden replied. He paused and examined Bob's countenance to see if he might be amenable to further discussion this evening. Bob liked to say that he was always there if anyone needed to talk about anything, that he welcomed questions and suggestions on all aspects of the operation. Dibden decided to try his luck.

'I'm thinking of doing some apple crisps, chef,' he said. 'I thought they'd go well with the soufflé.'

'Shut up, you prick,' Bob said. Wolfishly he turned his attention to a gastro of braised pork cheeks. But he had hardly begun chewing when a sound in the dish pit made him freeze. Hopping, terrified Shahram, obliged on Saturdays to work more than his customary nine hours, had turned to song.

'*Mhut va fuck iffat?*' he bellowed at the little kitchen porter. 'Are you praying?'

Through the doorway, Shahram gave

scratched to pieces and when the hi-fi finally recognized it, it seemed to groan too. Mercilessly, it played the song all the same.

Trapped in a cage,
A cage of pure emotion.

Bob clapped his hands and bellowed the words loudly.

'Come on, chefs!' he cried. There was Bob for you – Mr Good Times.

With some reluctance the other chefs joined in. Ramilov added a low hoarse baritone, Dave droned loudly and tunelessly, Dibden mumbled like a posh person making an excuse. The quiet dark-eyed girl on fryer watched in silent disgust.

This was the power hour. The last chance to make everything right. Had you done enough to keep your head above it? Were you set? At every section chefs were topping up their service fridges, cadging chopping boards, filling

mise, continued around it. Saturday night was different. There were no quiet sections, no empty tables. Everyone front and back of house got short shrift. At six thirty the squabbling, shit-talking kitchen fell quiet in anticipation. The radio was switched off. This was the moment when those head chefs with a taste for the grandiose might choose to give a short rallying speech to the brigade. One for all, all for one, that sort of thing. Bob rarely did, though occasionally he would remind the chefs that if he said anything personal about them during service it was not a heat of the moment thing, he really did mean it.

And then . . . silence. The kitchen stood at attention like an army in the moment before battle, awaiting the first volley of arrows, listening for the first signs of attack. As the silence grew, so too did the anxiety. A deluge was coming. The longer this silence went on, the harder the deluge would be. It was an

'This was the hour when the slow chefs worked fastest and the fast chefs smoked.'

Bob an edgy smile that made it clear he understood nothing that had been said to him.

'You're not doing that in here!' shouted Bob, swallowing painfully. 'I'll have no praying in this kitchen. No pray. Get it?'

'Chef.' Shahram pulled nervously at his crotch and showed his small gappy teeth.

'And stop looking so fucking nervous,' said Bob.

'Probably wants to blow us up,' said Racist Dave, the gruff northern sous.

An olive flew across the kitchen, striking Dave in the eye, causing him to cry out. Ramilov, the thrower, chuckled to himself. 'Racist Dave' was another nickname he could not endorse. *What's Dave about him?* he used to say.

'Right,' Bob said, ignoring them. 'Power hour. Let's have "The Cage of Pure Emotion".'

Dave, groaning quietly, wiped the oil from his eye and reached for a broken CD case next to the hi-fi. The CD was

the squeezey bottles with olive oil and wine vinegar, dicing butter, refreshing the water in their spoon washes, sprinkling salt on the ice cubes in the deep steel trays to slow their melting, laying damp blue roll on top of the herbs to stop them from wilting. Ramilov was demanding kisses from the waitresses in return for the complimentary bread. This was the hour to eat, if you had time, or it was the hour to get your head down and blitz through any mise outstanding. This was the hour when the slow chefs worked fastest and the fast chefs smoked. This was the hour when every chef took a gamble. Would they have enough of this or that to last them the night? How busy would their section be? Would the great collective unconsciousness that governed all their fates be in the mood for the steak or the fish pie?

On other nights of the week this in-between hour might pass unnoticed, with service dawning slowly while life, and

awkward, sleazy-wink sort of silence; not, in fact, a silence at all, but a digest of many small noises, each lacking the particular accompanying sound that made them whole. It was the sound of absence: the absence of pans clunking on the blazing burners, of chefs' cries bouncing off the tiled walls, of plates clattering on the work surfaces. Such stillness hung about the place, one struggled to imagine that bodies had ever whirled and jagged about it. The sheer and total industry of the kitchen was at a standstill. Ice melted slowly in the trays.

Croak!

Then, suddenly, there it was. The sound everyone was waiting for. A *croak* cutting through the empty noise. The ticket machine hacking up the first check of a long night and Bob tearing the paper off to cry . . . *Ça marche! Check on!*

This was how it always began.

The night Dibden went down, the night the Fat Man came to dinner, was no

‘Then it got worse. Around eight there was a brief flurry of dessert checks ...’

different. The early, breathless anticipation; the first rush gathering momentum as one by one each section joined the fight; the strange little bubbles of calm between the frenzies. Dibden did not get a dessert check on until seven thirty, a single order for caramelized pears and ice cream. And though the pears were harder than somewhat and took an age to cook, he produced the dish with only cosmetic mumblings from Bob about how shit he was and how he needed to play the game.

Then it got worse. Around eight there was a brief flurry of dessert checks from the early tables and suddenly Dibden had four different tickets on his grabber and was trying to cook twenty different things at once. Then Bob, wolfish as ever, stuck his fat finger in the garlicky crême anglaise Dibden was heating on the side of the solid top and declared it fucking gash. The whole lot went in the bin and Dibden found himself in the inconvenient position of having to separate egg whites from yolks and heat cream and split vanilla pods with twenty dishes still to make while a very fat and unfriendly chef bawled in his ear about the ingenious things he was going to do to his intimate parts.

‘Dibden’s sweating like a nun in a fish market,’ Ramilov observed.

Dibden did not even have time to object that this was offensive to nuns.

Then it got worse. A raspberry soufflé burst in the oven and had to go in the bin and Dibden had to get another in fucking ASAP but he could not send the other desserts for the soufflé table because the soufflé would be twenty minutes and everyone else would have finished by the time it arrived. He managed to fob off a flat fondant and a caramelized pears on to another table that was waiting, pushing the fondant through the pass to the waitress with the button nose before Bob, momentarily distracted by a table of mains, could speculate on its lack of height. He flicked the first spores of white mould from the top of the

ganache tartlets and prayed to the god of the kitchen, a most unobliging god by all accounts, that Bob would not notice.

As Dibden was scooping some runny quince membrillo into a ramekin for a cheese plate, Camp Charles ran in, asking about the desserts for the soufflé table that had now been waiting for thirty minutes. It seemed a reasonable question. Bob, particularly, was impressed by its reasonableness and began to demand an answer to it in language that was less reasonable. Now the mint was trembling in Dibden’s hands, his mouth was slack and his head lolling one way and then the other. Punchdrunk. Spavined. Former. And all the while the machine hacked out dessert checks and everyone else was too busy with their own drastic situation to improve Dibden’s and soon Bob’s greedy fingers would poke their way into a ganache and deduce that all was not well there and his keen eyes would spy the crumbling pastry tarts and exhausted fondants and stewed raspberries and there would be separate, clearly labelled portions of hell to pay for each of them. The more mistakes Bob spotted, the more particular he became, until Dibden could not hold a plate without provoking his ire. In time there were so many orders to do and mistakes waiting to be made that Dibden did not even know where to begin and only stood there paralysed in the middle of the kitchen, a latter-day Buridan’s ass, dying of indecision between the proverbial stack of hay and pail of water while Bob screamed blue fury at him.

In the middle of this shitstorm something happened that made everyone, Bob included, forget for a moment about Dibden and his ongoing torture. Camp Charles appeared once more at the back of the kitchen, this time in a state of great anxiety. Ordinarily the maître d’ was an unchanging façade of civility. No one, customers or staff, could tell what he was really thinking, which was a great boon in the service industry, where people

were usually thinking the worst thing imaginable. Now his plump face bore signs of strain. One hand wrung the other.

‘What’s the matter with you, gay boy?’ said Ramilov, who loved Camp Charles unconditionally, for his constant innuendo and the professionalism he wore so effortlessly alongside it. ‘Why don’t you touch my arse? It’ll cheer you up.’

Under normal circumstances Camp Charles would have been delighted to take him up on the offer – though he maintained he was not actually gay, just very unimpressed. ‘I’ve sucked enough dicks to know I’m straight,’ he once told Ramilov, which was the only time I ever saw Ramilov lost for a response. But now the maître d’ ignored the invitation. ‘The Fat Man’s here’ was all he said.

Dave stared at Camp Charles in horror. ‘What did you say?’ he asked.

‘*The Fat Man is here,*’ Camp Charles repeated.

The kitchen fell silent. Bob, midway through a complicated volley of abuse to do with Dibden’s parentage, seemed to turn to stone. I craned my neck past him and saw what looked at first like a moderately sized marquee blocking the dining-room doorway. As my eyes recalibrated I realized it was the largest man I had ever seen. He spotted the table the front of house was fussing over for him and began moving towards us like a ship pulls out of harbour, its movements slow but possessed of absolute authority, the great sails of fabric that were his clothes tightening and slackening with the motion. I would have remained transfixed had Dibden not made a plaintive cry for eggs and sent me off at a scramble for the dry store. ♦

This text was excerpted from the novel Chop Chop by Simon Wroe, to be published by Viking in April 2014.

FROM THE ARCHIVE

‘But I want even that pain . . . let it happen.’

We by *Evgeny Zamyatin*

Translated by Clarence Brown

We’s protagonist, D-503, is an unlikely dissident. A seemingly devout believer in the rigid control (rather than ‘messy’ freedom) and ultra-logic that governs his futuristic homeland OneState, he is the architect responsible for the centrepiece of OneState’s space programme, the INTEGRAL. With very little interference (from the mysterious I-330), however, D-503’s view of OneState’s collectivist, mathematical fundamentalism soon becomes muddled. What if, he wonders with a certain amount of discomfort, he possesses a soul?

*OneState is a city constructed entirely of glass, a mass of immaculate geometry and marching workers. Superficially it resembles the scene you might witness at the start of the working day in Manhattan, La Défense or Canary Wharf. Zamyatin’s own inspiration came not only from early Soviet Russia (where *We* became the first novel banned by the regime), but also from the collectivism he witnessed while working as a naval architect in the shipyards of Newcastle upon Tyne. *We* has gone on to be reflected in the work of George Orwell, Aldous Huxley and Margaret Atwood, not to mention in the interactive, open-access communities (virtual and real) that are held by many as a logical vision for the future.*

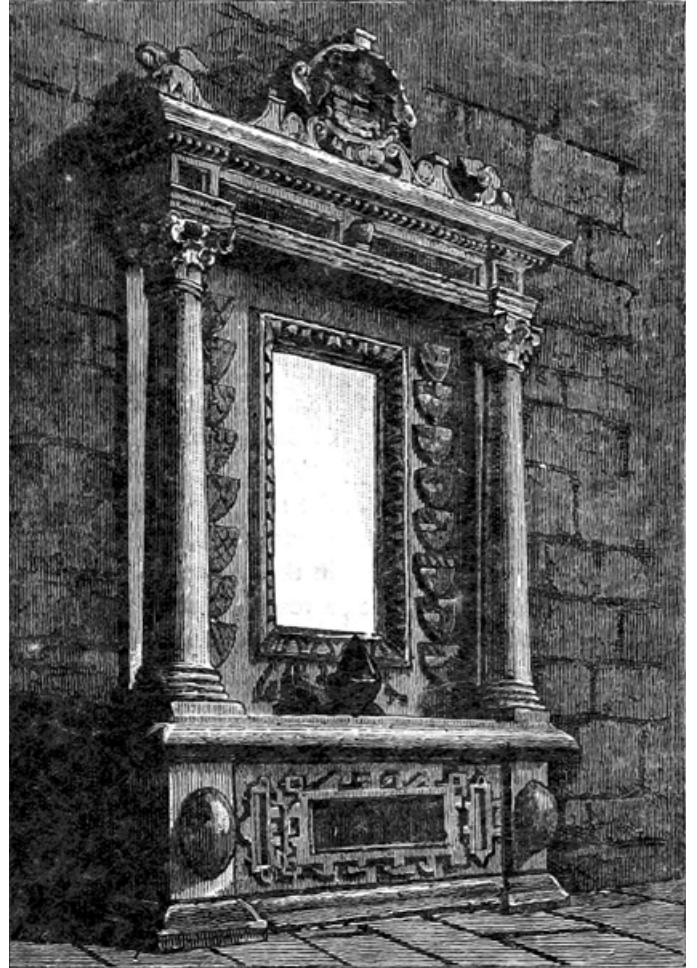
— Paul Tucker

RECORD 2

BALLET

HARMONY SQUARED

X



It’s spring. From beyond the Green Wall, from the wild plains out of sight in the distance, the wind is carrying the honeyed yellow pollen of some flower. The sweet pollen dries the lips – you keep running your tongue over them – and every woman you meet (and every man, too, of course) must have these sweet lips. This somewhat interferes with logical thought.

And then what a sky! Blue, unsullied by a single cloud (what primitive tastes the ancients must have had if their poets were inspired by those absurd, untidy clumps of mist, idiotically jostling one another about). I love – and I am sure that I am right in saying *we* love – only such a sky as this one today: sterile and immaculate. On days like this the whole world seems to have been cast of the same immovable and everlasting glass as the Green Wall, as all of our structures. On days like this you can see into the deep blue depth of things, you see their hitherto unsuspected, astonishing equations – you see this in the most ordinary, the most everyday things.

Here, take this for instance. Just this morning I was at the hangar where the INTEGRAL is being built – and suddenly I caught sight of the equipment: the regulator globes, their eyes closed, oblivious, were twirling around; the cranks were glis-

tening and bending to the left and right; the balance beam was proudly heaving its shoulders; the bit of the router was squatting athletically to the beat of some unheard music. I suddenly saw the whole beauty of this grandiose mechanical ballet, flooded with the light of the lovely blue-eyed sun.

But why – my thoughts continued – why beautiful? Why is the dance beautiful? Answer: because it is *nonfree* movement, because all the fundamental significance of the dance lies precisely in its aesthetic subjection, its ideal nonfreedom. And if it is true that our ancestors gave themselves over to dancing at the most inspired moments of their lives (religious mysteries, military parades), that can mean only one thing: that from time immemorial the instinct of nonfreedom has been an organic part of man [...].

Blessedly blue sky, little baby suns on each badge, faces undimmed by anything so crazy as thought. Rays, you see. Everything made out of some kind of uniform, radiant, smiling matter. And the beat of the brass: Tra-ta-ta. Tra-ta-ta. Brass paces gleaming in the sun. And every pace carries you up higher and higher into the dizzying blue . . .

And then, just the way it was this morning in the hangar, I saw

'I can't imagine a city that isn't girdled about with a Green Wall.'

again, as though right then for the first time in my life, I saw everything: the unalterably straight streets, the sparkling glass of the sidewalks, the divine parallelepipeds of the transparent dwellings, the squared harmony of our grey-blue ranks. And so I felt that I – not generations of people, but I myself – I had conquered god and the old life, I myself had created all this, and I'm like a tower, I'm afraid to move my elbow for fear of shattering the walls, the cupolas, the machines...

And then there came a moment, a leap across the centuries, from + to -. I recalled (association by contrast, apparently), I suddenly recalled a picture in the museum: one of the avenues they had back then, after twenty centuries – a stunningly garish, mixed-up crush of people, wheels, animals, posters, trees, colours, birds... And they say it really was like that. It could have been like that. It all struck me as so unlikely, so idiotic, that I couldn't help it, I burst out laughing.

[...]

RECORD 3

JACKET

WALL

THE TABLE

I've looked over what I wrote yesterday and I see it wasn't as clear as it should be. It's perfectly clear for any of us, I mean. But who knows? Maybe you unknown people who'll get my notes when the INTEGRAL brings them – maybe you've read the great book of civilization only up to the page our ancestors reached about 900 years ago. Maybe you don't even know the basics – like the Table of Hours, Personal Hours, Maternal Norm, Green Wall, Benefactor. It feels funny to me, and at the same time it's very hard to talk about all this. It's just as if a writer of the twentieth century, for instance, had to explain in his novel what he meant by 'jacket' or 'apartment' or 'wife'. Still, if his novel was translated for savages, there's no way he could write 'jacket' without putting a note.

I'm sure a savage would look at 'jacket' and think, 'What's that for? Just something else to carry.' I think you'll probably look at me in the same way when I tell you that not one of us, ever since the 200-Years War, has ever been on the other side of the Green Wall.

But, my dear readers, you'll have to do just a little thinking. It helps a lot. Because, you know, all human history, as far back as we know it, is the history of moving from nomadic life to a more settled way of life. So doesn't it follow that a more settled way of life (ours) is by the same token the most perfect form of life (ours)? If people used to wander over the earth from one end to the other, that only happened in prehistoric times, when there were nations and wars and trade and discoveries of this and that

America. But why do it now? Who needs it?

I'll admit that people did not take to this settled way of life right away and without any trouble. When the 200-Years War destroyed all the roads and the grass covered them over – during that first time it probably seemed very uncomfortable living in cities that were cut off from one another by all the tangled green stuff. But what of that? After man's tail fell off, it was probably some little while before he learned to shoo away the flies without a tail. I don't doubt that during that first time he probably missed his tail. But now – can you even imagine yourself with a tail? Or: can you imagine yourself walking down the street naked – without your 'jacket'? (Maybe you still run around in 'jackets'.) Well, it's the same here: I can't imagine a city that isn't girdled about with a Green Wall. I can't imagine a life that isn't clad in the numerical robes of the Table.

The Table – at this very minute, from the wall of my room, its purple figures on their golden ground are looking down at me sternly and tenderly, straight in the eyes. I can't help thinking of what the ancients called an 'icon', and I feel like composing a poem or a prayer (which is the same thing). Oh, why am I not a poet, so that I might celebrate you properly, O Table, O heart and pulse of OneState!

All of us as schoolchildren (and you too, perhaps) used to read that greatest of all monuments of ancient literature that has come down to us, the *Railroad Timetable*. But set even this next to The Table, and what you'll see is graphite and diamond: they're both one and the same element – C, carbon – but how eternal, transparent, and brilliant is the diamond! Who doesn't catch his breath when he ruffles through the pages of the *Railroad Timetable*? But the Table of Hours – it turns each one of us right there in broad daylight into a steel six-wheeled epic hero. Every morning, with six-wheeled precision, at the very same hour and the very same minute, we get up, millions of us, as though we were one. At the same second according to the Table, we lift the spoon to our lips. And at one and the same second we leave for a stroll and go to the auditorium, to the hall for the Taylor exercises, and then to bed.

I'll be completely honest with you: even we haven't yet solved the problem of happiness with 100% accuracy. Twice a day – from 16:00 to 17:00 and again from 21:00 to 22:00 – the single mighty organism breaks down into its individual cells. These are the Personal Hours, as established by The Table. During these hours you'll see that some are in their rooms with the blinds modestly lowered; others are walking along the avenue in step with the brass beat of the March; still others, like me at this moment, will be at their desks. But I firmly believe – let them call me idealist and dreamer – but I firmly believe that, sooner or later, one day, we'll find a place for even these hours in the general formula. One day all 86,400 seconds will be on the Table of Hours.

[...]

[...]

I opened a heavy, squeaking, solid door, and we found ourselves in a gloomy, untidy place (which they used to call an 'apartment'). It contained that same strange 'royal' instrument as well as a riot of colours and forms that were just as disorganized and crazy as their music. The upper surface was a white plane; the walls were dark blue; old books were bound in red, green, and orange; the candelabra was of yellow bronze; a statue of Buddha; and the lines of furniture made lopsided ellipses that could never be accommodated in any conceivable equation.

[...]

And now we stopped in front of the mirror. At that moment all I could see were her eyes. An idea hit me: the way the human body is built, it's just as stupid as those 'apartments' – human heads are opaque and there's no way to see inside except through those tiny little windows, the eyes. She seemed to guess what I was thinking and turned around. 'Well, here are my eyes. What do you think?' (Without actually saying this, of course.)

I saw before me two ominously dark windows, and inside there was another life, unknown. All I could see was a flame – there was some sort of 'fireplace' inside – and some figures, that looked ...

That would be natural, of course. What I saw there was my own reflection. But it was not natural and it did not look like me (apparently the surroundings were having a depressing effect). I felt absolutely afraid, I felt trapped, shut into that wild cage, I felt myself swept into the wild whirlwind of ancient life.

'You know what?' she said. 'Go into the next room for a minute.' Her voice came from there inside, from behind the windows of her eyes, where the fire was burning.

I went out and sat down. On a little bracket on the wall was a bust of one of their ancient poets, Pushkin, I think. His asymmetrical, snub-nosed face was looking straight at me with a barely detectable smile. Why am I sitting here? Why am I meekly putting up with this smile? And what is all this, anyway? What am I doing here? How did this ridiculous situation arise? This irritating, repellent woman ... this weird game ... ?

Inside, the door of the chest banged, there was the rustle of silk, and I had a hard time making myself not go in there and ... I don't know what I was thinking: probably I meant to say some very sharp things to her.

But she'd already come out. She was wearing an old-fashioned dress, short, bright yellow, and had on a black hat and black stockings. The dress was made of a very thin silk – I could clearly see that the stockings were long and came way above her knees. And the neck was cut very low, with that shadow between her ...

'Listen,' I said, 'it's clear that you want to show off your originality, but do you really have to ...'

'It's clear,' she broke in, 'that to be original means to distinguish yourself from others. It follows that to be original is to violate the principle of equality. And what the ancients called, in the idiotic language, "being banal" is what we call "doing your

duty". Because ...'

I couldn't control myself: 'Yes, yes, yes! That's exactly right! And you've got no business ...'

She went up to the bust of the snub-nosed poet and, lowering the blinds to cover the wildfire behind the windows of her eyes, said something that, for once at least, struck me as completely serious (to calm me down maybe). She said a very reasonable thing:

'Don't you think it surprising that people were once willing to put up with someone like this one here? And not only put up with him – they adored him. What a slavish mentality! Don't you agree?'

'It's clear ... that is, I mean ...' (Damn that 'clear' I keep saying!)

'Oh, of course I understand. But the fact is, you know, that people like him were rulers with more power than those who actually wore the crown. Why weren't they isolated and wiped out? In our world ...'

'Yes, in our world ...' I had only begun when she burst out laughing. I didn't hear the laugh, only saw it with my eyes. I saw the curve of that laugh, ringing, steep, resilient, and lively as a whip.

I remember how I was trembling all over. I should have ... I don't know ... grabbed her, and – what? I don't remember. But I felt that I had to, I don't know, *do* something. What I did was mechanically open up my gold badge and look at the watch. It was 16:50.

They say there are flowers that bloom only once every hundred years. Why shouldn't there be some that bloom only once every thousand years? Maybe we just haven't heard about them up to now because this very day *is* that once-in-a-thousand-years.

[...]

I'm not sensible, I'm sick, I have a soul, I'm a microbe. But isn't blooming a sickness? Doesn't it hurt when the bud bursts open? And don't you agree that the spermatozoan is the most terrifying of all microbes?

I'm upstairs in my room. I-330 is sitting in the sprawling cup of the armchair. I'm on the floor, my arms around her legs, my head in her lap, and we're both quiet. Silence. My pulse. I'm a crystal, dissolving in her, in I-330. I feel with absolute clarity the way the polished facets that dissolve me in space are melting, melting. I'm vanishing, dissolving in her lap, in her. I'm getting smaller and smaller, and at the same time wider, larger, off the scale ... Because she ... she's no longer herself, she's the whole universe. And for one second I and this chair shot through with joy beside the bed – we are one; and the old woman with the marvellous smile at the gates of the Ancient House, and the wild wastes beyond the Green Wall, and the silver-on-black ruins that drowse like the old woman, and that door that just slammed somewhere, probably far away: all that is in me, with me, listening to the beating of my pulse and flying across the blessed second.

I try to tell her – in stupid, confused, drowned words – that I

am a crystal, and that is why the door is in me and why I can feel how happy the chair is. But such balled-up nonsense comes out that I stop, I'm ashamed, I ... and suddenly I say, 'I-330, darling, forgive me... I don't understand, I'm talking such nonsense.'

'What makes you think nonsense is bad? If they'd nurtured and cared for human nonsense over the ages the way they did intelligence, it might have turned into something of special value.'

'Yes ...' (I think she's right. How, right now, could she not be right?)

[...]

RECORD 24

LIMIT OF FUNCTION

EASTER

CROSS IT ALL OUT

I'm like a machine being run over its RPM limit: the bearings are overheating – a minute longer, and the metal is going to melt and start dripping and that'll be the end of everything. I need a quick splash of cold water, logic. I pour it on in buckets, but the logic hisses on the hot bearings and dissipates in the air as fleeting white mist.

Well, of course, it's clear that you can't establish a function without taking into account what its limit is. And it's also clear that what I felt yesterday, that stupid 'dissolving in the universe', if you take it to its limit, is death. Because that's exactly what death is – the fullest possible dissolving of myself into the universe. Hence, if we let L stand for *love* and D for *death*, then $L = f(D)$, i.e., love and death...

Yes, that's it, that's it. That's why I'm afraid of I-330, why I fight against her, why I don't want ... But why do those two exist side by side in me: *I don't want* and *I want*? That's just what's so horrible: what I want is that blissful death of yesterday. What's so horrible is that even now, when the logical function has been integrated, when it's obvious that it contains, as a hidden component, death itself, I still want her, my lips, my arms, my chest, every millimetre of me wants her...

Tomorrow is the Day of Unanimity. She'll be there, too, of course, and I'll see her, only from far away. From far away: that's going to be painful, because I need her, I'm drawn irresistibly to be ... next to her, to have her hands, her shoulder, her hair... But I want even that pain... let it happen.

Great Benefactor! How absurd – to want pain! Can there be anyone who doesn't know that pain is a negative quantity, and that if you add them up it reduces the sum we call happiness? So, it follows...

But ... nothing follows. The slate's clean. Naked.

Evening.

A windy, feverishly pink, alarming sunset comes through the glass walls of the building. I turn my chair so that this pinkness won't stick up in front of me, and I leaf through these notes. What I see is that once more I've forgotten that I'm not writing for myself but for you, you unknown ones that I love and pity, for you, who are still trudging somewhere in distant centuries down below.

[...]

Tomorrow I'll see the same sight that's repeated from one year to the next, bringing new excitement each time: the mighty chalice of harmony, the people's arms reverently uplifted. Tomorrow is the day for the annual election of the Benefactor. Tomorrow we once more place the keys to the unshakable fortress of our happiness into the hands of the Benefactor.

It goes without saying that this has no resemblance to the disorderly, disorganized elections of the ancient times, when – it's hard to say this with a straight face – they couldn't even tell before the election how it would come out. To establish a state on the basis of absolutely unpredictable randomness, blindly – could there be anything more idiotic? Still, it looks like centuries had to pass before this was understood.

I don't suppose that it's necessary to say that here, as in everything else, we have no place for randomness; there can't be any surprises. And even the elections amount to little more than symbolism, to remind us that we are one, powerful, million-celled organism, that we are, in the words of the ancient 'Gospel', one Church. Because the history of OneState does not know of a single instance when so much as one voice dared to violate the majestic unison of that glorious day.

They say the ancients somehow carried out their elections in secret, hiding like thieves. Some of our historians even say they carefully masked themselves before turning up at the election ceremonies. (I can just picture that fantastically gloomy spectacle: a night, a city square, figures in dark capes creeping along the walls, the crimson flame of the torches guttering in the wind.) Why all this secretness was needed has never been fully explained. Most probably the elections were connected with some mystical, superstitious, or maybe even criminal rites.

But we have nothing to hide or be ashamed of; we celebrate our elections openly, honestly, in the daylight. I see how everybody votes for the Benefactor and everybody sees how I vote for the Benefactor. And how else could it be, since *everybody* and *I* add up to the one *We*? How much more uplifting, sincere, lofty than this is the cowardly, thievish 'secret' of the ancients! And how much more expedient it is, too. Because even if you suppose the impossible, by which I mean some kind of dissonance in our usual monophony, you've still got the concealed Guardians right there in our ranks ready at a moment's notice to stop any Numbers that might have gotten out of line and save them from making any other false steps – as well as save OneState from them. And finally there's one more thing...

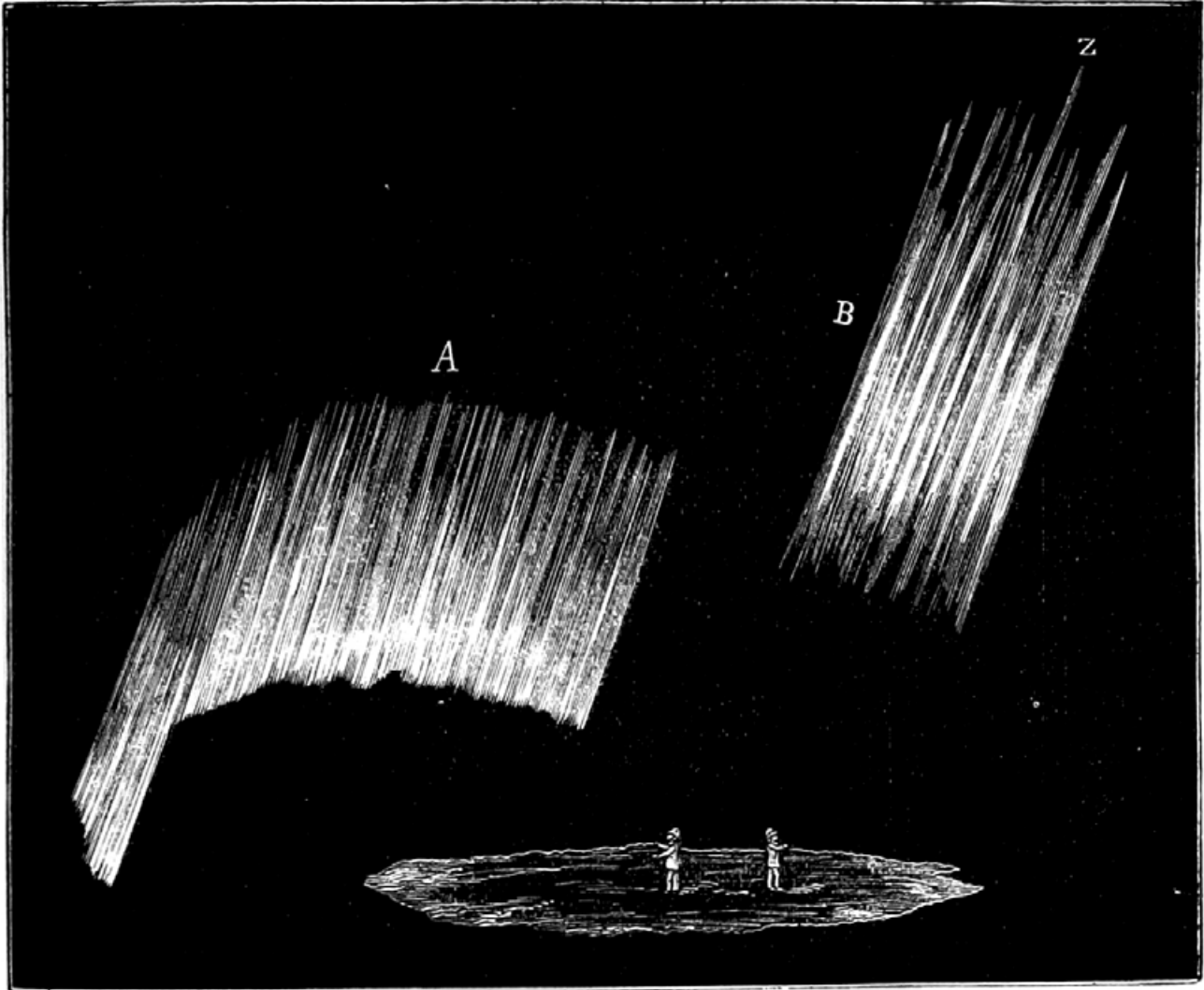
I'm looking through the wall to the left. I see a woman in front of the mirror in the closet hurrying to unbutton her yuny. I get a quick hazy glimpse of eyes, lips, the tips of two pink buds. Then the blind goes down and in an instant all of yesterday floods back over me and I forget what the 'one more thing' was and I don't care, I don't want it! All I want is one thing: I-330. I want her to be with me every minute, each and every minute, only with me. And all that stuff I just wrote about the Day of Unanimity – nobody needs it, it's all wrong, I want to cross it out, tear it up, throw it out. Because I know (maybe this is blasphemy, but it's true) that the only holiday for me is being with her, only if she's there next to me, shoulder to shoulder.

Without her the sun tomorrow won't be anything more than a disk of tin and the sky will just be tin painted blue, and I myself... ◇

AND FINALLY

Five Minutes to Midnight

A series on the ends of days. By Laurence Howarth



23.55

... around the quarrelling couple, shimmies through the drinkers outside the pub, slipstreams then overtakes the slow-moving Jamaican woman and strikes out on to open pavement. He is pleased with his manoeuvres, though aggrieved about having been forced to sidle along the narrow strip of pavement between the lamp posts and the kerb, which is a lane for losers.

He advances down the street, slicing through the grease and neon. He doesn't relish this section of the walk from the train station to his flat, past the shops and fast-food outlets for the people who used to live in the area, but tonight he is impermeable. He has had a tremendous day. He feels each of its several triumphs – the deal struck, the meeting bossed, the woman amused, the fart disavowed – bearing him along on a sedan chair of self-satisfaction.

At the same time, he becomes aware of a strange sense in the pit of his stomach that something is missing. He frisks himself

for the source of this deficiency but can't locate it. He feels light-headed, as if the blood in his brain were turning to popping candy. It's like he's empty somehow. Not literally empty of course. No, in fact literally empty: he hasn't had any dinner. Yes, that's the problem. He is absolutely famished.

23.56

He keeps walking. He'll eat something when he gets home: perhaps make himself a cold roast beef sandwich. No. There's nothing like that in the fridge. So he'll get something from one of these takeaway places, a pizza or a burger. No. He does not eat from those establishments. So he'll go home and cook a meal from scratch, a simple but satisfying supper for one. No. He really is bloody hungry right now and waiting half an hour to get something inside him is inconceivable. So he'll have to buy a

wrap or a pasty from the little supermarket and stuff it down his throat and just get it sorted! No. This day will not end like that.

He keeps walking. He remembers quite a nice restaurant he was once taken to, in a different part of town, which stays open twenty-four hours a day. What a brilliant idea that is, he now thinks. His stomach tightens at the memory of their meatballs. There was talk of them opening a branch around here but then they didn't.

He keeps walking but his feet feel puffy and sore. A radical thought strikes him: could he go to sleep? If he takes off all his clothes the moment he enters his flat and gets straight into bed, could he achieve oblivion before his hunger becomes deafening? No. It might work but it's too cruel. Nothing and no one can force him to go to bed hungry, not now he's an adult.

He stops and stands still in the middle of the pavement.



23.57

The street lamp above his head spits on him, splashing light over his shoulders and down the back of his neck. His fellow pedestrians flow past indifferently like ants around a billiard ball. He had resolved not to set off again until he knew where he was going but he fears his predicament is being revealed in full by his motionlessness. Panic grips him and he scurries across the street and heads back in the direction he came from.

He walks past a fish and chip shop and realizes he doesn't want fish and chips. Perhaps this is how he should go about it: let his feet make the decisions. He passes a kebab house without threatening to break stride. These are wise soles. He approaches a Chinese takeaway and is surprised to find himself walking past that too. He turns round and walks back towards it but again walks straight past. Do his feet know something he doesn't? He crosses the road.

He passes an Indian restaurant. Why did he let himself get into this mess? He should have eaten before they went to the bar or after they went to the bar. Or at the bar! Some tapas would

have done it! For want of an olive, the kingdom was lost. He passes the mini-supermarket. This is getting ridiculous! He crosses the street. If he's not careful, he's going to get so hungry he's not hungry any more. He passes the pizza place. Come on! He crosses the street and doubles back on himself. He overtakes another glacial Jamaican woman. The same Jamaican woman. Oh God. He sprints off and hurtles into a convenience store.

23.58

The sandwiches look perhaps not terrible. But would one of those be enough? He needs to knock this on the head and that might be a job for a pork pie. They sit a bit though; they'd squat in him all night. The chiller cabinet drones on as it faces him down with its prepared snacks from manufacturers such as Barn Farm, Advanced Foods and Pix. He wonders whether a samosa would be ridiculous. His stomach butts in by threatening to digest itself. He snatches a chicken and bacon baguette, puts it back on the shelf, grabs it again and barrels off to the till.

Four seconds later, he returns to the chiller cabinet and swaps the chicken and bacon baguette for a different chicken and bacon baguette, for reasons that will never be understood.

He stands in such a way as to indicate that he is in the queue for the till but not of it. He clutches the baguette to his waist, trying to make it as inconspicuous as he can without appearing to be stealing it. He reaches the front of the queue and passes the baguette to the shop assistant, who handles it like a meteorite. The moments that follow, in which he struggles to make out the price of the baguette and becomes embroiled in a protracted misunderstanding about whether he wants a carrier bag, are among the most excruciating of his life.

23.59

The plastic film lies dead in the waste bin. A shred of iceberg lettuce tosses itself off the edge of the bread and plunges sickeningly to earth. He looks down at his imminent dinner with a mixture of ravenousness and disgust and lifts it to his mouth. As he does so, he instinctively glances around him, like a squirrel with a prized nut. And there she is again – Bob Marley's massive mum. Looking at him this time. Recognizing him. His brain screams and he drops the baguette into the bin.

He turns and jogs down the street, facing straight ahead at all times, until he reaches his building. He gets out his keys, carefully opens the front door and enters. He ascends the two flights of stairs to his flat and, with the keys that he's still gripping, lets himself in. He closes the door, places the keys on the floor, walks into the kitchen and gets out two onions. This is fine now: he's cooked this dozens of times before. He'll be eating by a quarter to one at the latest. It's fine. He peels one of the onions and slices it. Tears flow down his cheeks as he begins to prepare the chicken cacciatore.

00.00



Five Dials

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Tricks of the Light

