



# Essays & Fictions

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## *Water Dogs*

Veronica Vela

Tampico is never in bloom like most other cities. It is a place for water dogs, and the stories that come out of here could make the most romantic person forget the meaning of stars. Tampico is where we are, and Miguel and I decided we'll finally make it out – for good this time. We'll go up through Monterrey, all the way into Texas. We'd parachute in if we could. The Undertaker has a plan for my brother and me and promises he'll

take good care of us. "I have visited places much worse than this," he says, "although it is not much better than the wastelands in San Juan. You live here, you can live anywhere, through anything." It's regular, small-town village life. Everyone complains about some thing or another.

The Undertaker has had a hard life. People say he was abandoned on a hill in the southern neck of Reynosa. His mother continued south, to Veracruz, with afterbirth sliding down the insides of her legs. She left him, a dusty, brown baby, parched, in one-hundred-degree weather. His mother was said to have left sons in all thirty-one states of Mexico. He grew up crooked and bare-chested and had the ultimate misfortune of having his only love murdered. People say that, while driving through Las Petacas, he found her skinny body hanging from the limb of a tree. But people say lots of things.

"Enough with the town already. How big is it?"

"Big enough to carry three hundred onions. Big enough to haul a skinny guy like you. The ride is a real

bitch. You sure you can do this? Your brother over there said you can't even gut a fish without crying."

"My brother is nineteen and still wets the bed. He wakes our mother up so she can change the sheets. So what does he know?"

"Good, fine. I get paid before the drive. You bend at the knees all right?"

"I bend just fine." Miguel is watching me while he plays with his gun. "Sirens. Will there be sirens?"

"Nothing like that. Plenty of dogs, though. Yellow coyotes. Not the Looney Toons kind. These fuckers got mean throat holds. You'll be begging for sirens then."

"Good, fine. We'll meet you tonight. Don't worry about the money. We'll have it."

It has to start sometime. Our trip starts tonight, on Ash Wednesday. Mother says that something terrible always happens on Ash Wednesday, so we shouldn't be surprised if everything goes wrong. She only wants us to stay. I look at Miguel. "What the hell ever happens on Ash Wednesday, anyway?"

No one knows, but mother wishes us luck with a sinking feeling. She kisses us over and over again, like we are newborns. She wishes us luck hours before we're about to leave and reminds us that we are dust, and to dust we will return. *Remember that, O man.* "Remember to wear your crosses," she says.

"We won't be fighting any vampires," I say. Mother tells Miguel she'll light a candle for us and to remember the Virgin Mary on the trip. "What good is a candle," he says, "if the person you light it for doesn't believe in it as much as you?" He wanted to say that he doesn't believe in any of that shit, but didn't have the heart to be that honest. "Don't forget to pray," she says. Our *Hail Mary's*, our *Our Father's*. All of that. Miguel looks at our mother. "I'll try," he says, "for you."

Miguel thinks we're strong enough. He says he has enough guts to stomach it. What does he know? He's always been cocky and bug-eyed, walking around like he's wearing a crown on his head. Miguel doesn't even know how to endure bad weather. He'll probably want

to hide his face in my armpit every time there's a bump on the road.

\* \* \*

We haven't been to Texas in years.

We cleared the heap with our backs. The moss stubbornly held on to the ground with the most shade. Free from clouds, we took the turpentine from the trees. For years we withstood the rubbish that fell on our heads from all of the giants that were skinned, and, for years, the workers called themselves pillagers – soldiers plundering the forest with wicks of bark at their shoes. Many times, our father snuck us in, under his packs and close to his thighs, so we could work alongside the reapers that slipped into the woods on their tuckered feet. Men wearing overalls were compelled by the grim offer of raping the trees for oil – even for poor wages. Never having snow to play with, my brother and I wrapped our arms around the trees, pretending amidst

the shorn trunks and falling bark, unaware of how frightened our father was of getting caught.

The thought of my father ruthlessly stripping the trees for pennies made me doubt if I could stomach the trip across the border many mornings. My brother and I were told stories of Mexicans committing suicide after they were caught, or being shuttled back to Monterrey or wherever they happened to come from. We were told of one who shot himself through the head, but survived. Some men said these were horror stories that were made up just to keep us away, but my father knew what was real. For pennies, my father risked his life every day.

As if they were interested, my father would tell the wood-strippers about the terebinth that would grow in places like Portugal and how his grandfather died while hacking into the pulp of a terebinth rooted somewhere in the Mediterranean. He died with his mouth wide open, my father said, so that his soul could escape, his jaw relaxed, as if to catch a fly. He died the way many men had – rooting around the forest for liquid resin.

During lunch breaks, all the workers would gather in a circle, a kind of working-man's roundtable, with everyone sitting on stumps or lying on their backs with their hands behind their heads. Roy and Little Roy were father and son and came all the way from Venezuela. They often spoke of how women, the good ones at least, were as long and mean as cats. Little Roy was smaller than an average teenager and was known as Little Runt or Peckerhead, Peckerhead being the nickname my father enjoyed the most, causing him to laugh into his napkin whenever he heard it.

We listened as Little Roy spoke to the group. "You say you have never been with a woman on Valentine's Day? This one girl told me, 'Oh, sweet boy, you are a cobra, but I'm a viper. I eat the skin you shed. I'll eat you before long.' She was a snake, like all women are snakes. She was smart, though. Real sharp."

Guillermo, a true roughneck, shouted, "Sharper than a whale, huh, Little Roy? Hey, Big Roy! Pick him up by the armpits and show him who's boss, eh?" Little Roy

looked even smaller after that, like his hands were tied and he was powerless against the older grunts. In the woods, conversations like these were all men had.

Everyone had just gotten back to work, when a small blast of embers shot up in the middle of our meeting grounds. We only saw sparks at first, but the fire spread quickly. The workers scattered like chittering insects, splaying themselves across nature. We watched Guillermo, this three-hundred-pound gorilla, jet out like his head was on fire. My father took his work clothes and muffled the flames, looking composed throughout it all. Big Roy ran into the fire, stomping on the flames. My brother and I kept away and spread our arms out, as if we could contain the disaster. We watched the other workers practically scurry up tree trunks and rest on their branches out of fear. Big Roy looked at my father. "What inspires madmen like us, huh? I must look like Superman right now." "Only Mexican and with chipped teeth," my father said. "Yeah, a Mexican Superman. I like that," Big Roy said. Big Roy and my father were

*Vela 12*

soaked with sweat and went on smothering the fire that ate its way up the trees.

Once the flames were out, the men stood back and watched. Everything untouched by the fire was smoked, blackened with soot. Everyone was quiet when Roy spoke to the ground with his eyes closed. "Pretend for a minute that everything you own is set on fire. Your clothes, your family. Pretend, now, that you're not such a prick, and ask yourself what you would do. Remember that you have nothing. Not even the hair on your head. Not even your goddess wife. Everything goes up in the blaze. What happens now?" Big Roy looked up at Little Roy, who was still sitting high up on the limb of a tree. "God bless these people that stink of shit." The men silently dispersed and timidly walked out of the forest to face, once again, months of unemployment.

Guillermo stayed behind and solemnly swept up the ashes between the furrows.

\* \* \*

*Vela 13*

Not since the fire my father helped put out have we set foot on those plains. Not since my father stopped working and stopped talking shortly after the fire had we even thought about going back. Mother had it the worst with our father's silence. She couldn't understand. He just gave up. He only sits in his chair, looking roped-in, like a scared animal, all potbellied and wizened. Our father came back from Texas worse off than all of those Mexicans that had shot themselves. He slept and he ate, but he wasn't there. Now, nothing is here. In Tampico, the lights have dimmed and, if given the chance, can lull the brightest torches. What once was a bonfire, is now a fleck.

We'll pack light and take none of our mother's advice. We'll probably get into trouble on our way there and wish we had listened. We'll wish for lots of things, I'm sure.

Our meeting place is near the oval-shaped pyramid, Las Flores. During the day, Las Flores is busy with

tourists, but at night, it becomes a take-off point, because the gold that exists underneath brings travelers good luck. You'll become wise and strong on your journey—that's what smugglers say, anyway. Gold is for luck, and the pyramid has plenty of it. This is all beyond any reason. Everything is shouting at us not to go. How would you explain any of this to someone you've just met? Say, an American you've just met. You'd start talking about the pyramid, the gold, dead Mexicans, and coyotes. Miguel thinks that women would probably think we were brave. Miguel thinks he knows about women. None of it would make sense to them. How could it? I'm not as lighthearted as my brother, but I do know that what we're doing wouldn't be considered so daring. People wouldn't think we were brave or charming for crossing the border in a crate.

The Undertaker has fruit in his hand. A mango, I think. He offers us some and tells us there are plenty more. "I hope you both packed light." Two crates are sitting in the bed of a pickup truck behind him. "Real

light.” He smiles and we offer the money that was promised. “Good job. Now, here’s the deal ...”

He goes on, but my mind wanders to the back of the truck. The crates are smaller than I imagined. Maybe the Las Flores, that oval pyramid, makes them look smaller than they are. God damn it, get brave, I think. There are so many others. So many people just waiting to get fetched and then tossed across the border. A family of four is getting shoved into the trunk of a car. There are no air holes. Smugglers are rushing them to get in and telling them to hold tight. God knows if they’ll make it through.

The Undertaker knows that I’m looking at the family of four squashed into a trunk. “They’ll probably survive,” he says. “At least they weren’t stupid enough to hide a toddler inside a tire. It happens every day, kid. Listen, the trip’s gonna take about three hours or so, depending on how often we get stopped. I don’t plan on giving guards a hard time, so hopefully we’ll make it on schedule. Good for you?” “Good for me. Yes.”

I look over at Miguel. I can tell he’s nervous, but he winks and whispers to me, “Brother.” Jesus, ‘brother.’ He couldn’t have said anything worse. At this moment, my brother is a saint, the sweetest guy in the world, and I just want to tell him we should go back. *Let’s go back home, I think. Let them keep the money. Mother would be so happy to see us, she’d fall to her knees. She’d give up god and everything if we went back.* Before I can tell my brother anything, the Undertaker is already covering Miguel with onions inside of his crate. I can’t see his face anymore, and the box is sealed. I had imagined at least being able to see one of his eyes peeking through a small hole in the wood, but nothing. I’m to blame for all of this.

The Undertaker will be responsible for us for however long it’ll take us to get into Texas. He’ll escort us through the howling dogs and armed guards and into an afterlife brimming with promise. “It’ll be all right. This will all be worth it in the end,” he says.

Mother is wrong. She only says he’s bad because

he was brought up in a witches' district. I tried telling her that his pain is what makes him a better caretaker. "Smuggler," she reminded me.

"He'll provide us safe passage because he's lost something, too." I tried so hard to convince her. "He is offering people their freedom," I told her.

"At what cost?" she said. Mother didn't swallow any of it.

The Undertaker wouldn't feed us to the wolves. He gave us his word, his soul, his honor as a man. I tried explaining all of this to her. I tried telling her there are still men with dignity left.

He has led us here to the underworld of Tampico, where unsightly business takes place, just to fulfill our hopes. The pyramid looms over the pickup, and I remember my father telling me how its stairs are made of lime and seashells. What a mess this whole thing is. What a disappointment I would seem to my father. If he only knew how I was ditching my home like some cheat.

"Look, everything's ready. I'm a good guide. Smarts and experience—all I need to get you through. Let's load you in." The Undertaker nudges me toward the wooden box. "The inside might smell like bear shit, but you'll get used to it. Remember to keep calm. There's no use in getting scared. Once the crate is closed, there's no way out."

It'll be fine. There's gold spread out underneath the pyramid. Good luck everywhere. Soon, we'll be let out. Let out like a dog let out of its pen. So soon, hundreds of onions will cover me and my crate will be sealed. I can already tell I'll have a small eyehole to look out of and maybe get a glimpse of that great, oval pyramid shrinking on our way out.

## *Inclemency*

Karl Parker

This idea that now things should be made  
more sustainable is a marvelous hope-projection  
viewed through televised implantmessages  
softly wired posts shake in windscreaming rain.

*We go on in rain always have always will*  
Why say sustains enough among accidental  
storematerial to keep plugging our wormholes  
with expensive glittering manmade vomit.

*Like rain* is more like in and out the ground  
where we eroding stand. Alwaystheless  
among more than two evils two placement-series  
Certitude of fleshcovered headpieces surrounds.

## *Breathing*

Karl Parker

Cleaning these lenses  
feels what to do  
when for a moment

a moment stands by  
staring. A confusion  
of human faces makes

rainsignificance in  
where we see we must  
leave off for now.



## *Lilac Season*

Danielle Winterton

All of my plants were gifts from Arthur: an African violet, an agave, an aloe, a jade, a Christmas cactus, an orchid cactus, several spider plants, various breeds of hostas, some variegated ivy, a few bromeliads, the china lily, the betel palm, and the Venus fly trap, which ensnares insects, decomposes them, and digests their nutrients. The leaves clamp down when stimulated with pressure. Arthur showed me how to trick the plant and activate

the trap with the tip of a pencil. He warned me not to do it too often: the plant has a finite number of traps in its lifespan, he said, and too many false alarms without food will weaken it.

My favorite was the rainbow fern, whose tiny green leaves glistened with a multicolored sheen on the surface. I took it into the shower with me in the morning and held it under the gentle spray, then let it hang while I soaped up so it could enjoy the steam and humidity. When I returned it to its perch in the sunny window, water droplets acted like prisms and refracted the light, casting rainbows to skitter about on cream-colored walls: rainbows on rainbows on dark green foliage that looked like a wild mane of hair as it spilled out of the front of its hanging basket and cascaded downward for two feet, like weeping willow branches hanging over the mossy earth. I daydreamed when I stared into the tangled mass of foliage; I saw elaborate faraway lands, sloping hills, deep valleys, dense thickets, and forests, and unicorns, rivers running rampant, fairies spritzing

about, infinitesimal gnomes hiding under tiny piles of leaves. This ritual, in which I regularly indulged, brought relief from the clutches of the Wild Torment, the presence of which was outrageous that particular spring, and seemed always to be lurking in the places where safety and comfort should have been, waiting to descend on us at any time.

When Arthur stayed with me, we showered together, grocery shopped and did laundry together, cooked, cleaned and took care of my plants together. We dressed alike, in ripped faded Levi's, black and white Calvin Klein tank tops, white T-shirts from the Gap with blue-lined collars and sleeves, gray fleece pullovers from LL Bean. We were skinny, all neck and rib and hipbones. I cut my hair short, above the ears. Arthur kept his cut close to the scalp. Mine was brown, and his was blond. I was 21 years old and had just embarked on the spring semester of my junior year in college; I shared a small two-bedroom apartment with another student in Pleasantville and worked in a nearby coffee shop with

Arthur's boyfriend Paul.

At 30 years of age, Arthur had almost completed an associate's degree at a CUNY school while working weekdays in a Katonah nursery. Arthur and I once lived as roommates in a Brewster farmhouse, but now Arthur didn't have his own home. He stayed at my house, Paul's house, and at the home of his grandmother, who was housebound and perpetually ill. Arthur bathed her, fed her cats, washed her dishes, and cut the grass in her yard. Paul quipped that Arthur was holding out for a chunk of her inheritance, and Arthur didn't deny it. He carried a huge hiker's pack on his back as he traveled from work to the city to school to wherever he would lay his head down for the night. Sometimes he hustled for money and could score a place to stay in New York. He was thin and blond and muscled, charming and sweet, outrageously blunt, an AA dropout, an adult who survived copious amounts of parental abuse, a regular in the psychiatric (suicidal) ward of Putnam Hospital—a true case, he would sometimes say.

When the first blooms of spring arrived, Arthur taught me how to use flowers and foliage to create extravagant floral arrangements. I frequented the nursery where he worked and helped him with tasks, trading labor for education. We watered plants, hauled bags of topsoil and peat, moved flats and repotted seedlings. He taught me how to propagate an orchid, mount a tillandsia, and coach a vine into growing the way you wanted it to. The greenhouse was a place of perpetual quiet and light. It reminded me of the church sanctuary in which I prayed as a child. The plants seemed to vibrate and hum, and I thought I could hear them breathe as the air in the room pulsed gently, rhythmically, in-out, in-out, in-out.

Arthur began to present me with crumpled garbage bags stuffed with flowers when he returned from his travels around the county. "Hello, sunshine, and how is my little delphinium doing today?" he said gleefully as he leaned over to kiss my cheek, then swept past me into the kitchen. "These have to go into water at once!" Sometimes it was magnolia, crab apple, or

American redbud, dogwood or forsythia, or any of the fruit blossoms; cherry, peach or pear. Some of the branches he put into vases, which he placed around my apartment, and the rest remained swaddled in wet paper towels and Saran-Wrap, stacked delicately on top of each other in my refrigerator. At first Arthur avoided my questions as to where he came up with so many different kinds of blossoms and in such abundance, but finally he told me, with great pride in his eyes and excitement in his voice, that he met up with some floral designers in Chelsea who now paid him cash to bring fresh-cut flowers down to the city.

“And it’s only just beginning!” he yelled from the other room. I was in the kitchen, bent over in front of the open refrigerator, trying to make space for bags of severed blooms. “Soon it will be lilac season, and Mother’s Day, Memorial Day! I’m going to clean up on this!”

“Arthur, there’s no room for food in here!”

“Listen, Danielle, I’ll cut you in on it, just don’t hassle me,” he said, appearing in the open doorway.

He rubbed the back of his head with his palm. “Let me at least store them in your refrigerator overnight. First thing tomorrow, we’ll all be gone, me and the clippings, I have to take the 6 a.m. train and get there before the blooms start to wilt.”

He would get \$300 for what was in the fridge at that moment, he said, and each time he sold flowers I could have \$100 for storage fees and for letting him stay overnight when he needed to make a delivery, since I lived closer to New York than any of his other options. He remained true to his word, and came home the next evening from the city with a thick wad of bills. Over the course of the next several weeks, rhododendrons, tulips, crocuses, delphinium, tiger lilies, iris, hyacinth, and daffodils all passed through my refrigerator as part of their journey to an urban floral arrangement. I knew Arthur cut the flowers from other people’s yards, that he trespassed into their gardens to gather his bounty, but my delight in the audacious absurdity of his behavior, coupled with my financial need, overcame lingering

traces of guilt. He started to carry garbage bags and pruning shears in his pants pockets wherever he went, and he often made me stop the car so he could clip a particularly abundant peach blossom tree or azalea bush. I knew we were stealing, but Arthur argued that no one could truly claim ownership over a plant, and said he was proud to provide joy for claustrophobic city people who need more flora and foliage in their day-to-day lives. He said he never razed a plant, only clipped from the edges and took the extra blooms that needed to be pinched away for the plant to regenerate. I didn't fully believe him, based on the sheer quantity of blooms he lugged home, but I also couldn't give up the opportunity to make quick cash with no overhead costs.

"Just wait until the fall," he said one afternoon, looking out the window as we drove through the narrow back roads of Bedford Hills and Chappaqua. "Think about it, I could make autumn arrangements with red and yellow leaves, and maybe some potted mums, for office lobbies and fall weddings." His clear blue eyes

skirted the impeccably groomed lawns that we passed, scouting out trees to molest. They were stationed majestically near the road, and he called them out by name and by color, Japanese maple for true red leaves, sugar maple and yellow buckeye for orange and rust, American beech for golden bronze, overcup oak, green ash, and silver maple for yellow, mountain ash and dogwood for purple-red.

Paul was a giddy and gracious host who liked to put on a show in the kitchen and serve hearty meals for dinner guests, even though it was usually just the three of us. On my own, I usually ate minimal amounts of fast food and frozen dinners, but Paul impressed upon me a healthier diet. "Honey, you have to eat!" he urged when he caught me staring at my food. "And you wonder why you don't have any energy!" Equal parts protein and carbohydrates, he said, at least four servings of leafy greens and fruit every day, and two glasses of water after each cup of coffee or alcoholic drink. For breakfast and

lunch, we ate bland cereals, peanut butter sandwiches, small green salads, cold beans, and fruit. At dinner there were large portions of salad, pasta, chicken and rice, acorn squash, root vegetables, bitter greens, and lentils, followed by pie or pastry and espresso with hot foamed milk. After dinner we reclined on the couch, dopey and stuffed, and passed around a joint. Then Arthur ran a bath for me while Paul cleaned up in the kitchen. Arthur liked to sit on the floor next to the tub and ease the bar of soap over my arms, legs, torso and feet, and then squeeze a sponge over my shoulders, stomach and back to rinse me off. When I stepped out dripping and cold, he toweled me down and rubbed olive oil into my skin, then sat on the toilet, smoked cigarettes, and flipped through porn mags while I brushed my teeth, tweezed my eyebrows and stared at my distorted reflection in the cracked mirror, which had splintered during a fistfight between Arthur and Paul. Arthur said Paul pushed his head into it. Paul said Arthur punched the glass surface in a fit of frustration.

Paul transformed the tiny side bedroom into a haven for me; he covered the single bed with an ivory damask bedcloth etched with a rosebud pattern, littered frangipani blooms and rose petals on the pillow, and lit a cut tin-can lantern that hung from the middle of the room and skittered star-shaped shadows down the walls and across the ceiling. After he kissed me good-night, he lit a stick of incense and stuck it in the wood paneling near the door. Only a blanket hung in the doorway between their room and mine, and I always brought along a Walkman to drown out the raucous noises of their prolonged lovemaking. Usually I was so high, relaxed and well-fed that I fell asleep immediately, but sometimes Arthur's garbled cries would wake me up.

When they weren't fucking, they were fighting, and sometimes I couldn't tell which act was provoking the banging thumps against the wall and the floor. Arthur emerged with black eyes and bloody noses, Paul with bruises and swollen scratches on his face. Paul fumed

over Arthur's lack of initiative around the house when he stayed with him; he said Arthur made messes, wasted resources, and made no effort to pitch in with chores. He called Arthur a disgusting drunk who couldn't get it up, and he accused him of cheating when he stayed overnight in the city. Arthur said Paul was overbearing, that he used his mind, his mouth, and his cock as conquering weapons, that he sucked Puerto Rican day laborer dick down at the train station, and that he was forced to fight to stay present in the relationship.

Did Arthur ask me for Dexedrine, or did I offer it to him? I can't remember. He started to use it regularly; he said it helped him concentrate on his studies. After that he was hooked, and I made extra money by selling him part of my prescription. I could no longer afford sessions with my psychiatrist, but the kind doctor continued to write me prescriptions and leave them with her secretary for me to pick up. I reasoned that Arthur was a grown man in control of his faculties

and capable of making his own choices about substance use, and that my doctor was an absolute saint who was willing to do something illegal to make sure I got my meds.

The Wild Torment persisted whether I got my meds or not, however. Indignant at being forgotten or ignored, the Wild Torment was likely to deposit a swell of rage into my head, which was deafening, quick-at-the-ready to roar into recognition as I went about my daily tasks, or else it blanketed me with Radical Depression, which nibbled at my vitality until I was laid out flat and deflated, rendered immobile for days at a time. The hot bites were the worst part of the RDs, tiny needle teeth behind the ears and at the base of the neck. The Wild Torment would work its way into my skull, presumably using my ears as a point of access, although perhaps it was the nostrils, I'm not exactly sure, because the Wild Torment is ethereal, it has never been seen by any living being endowed with the capacity for sight, and it has to lodge itself into the fleshy structure of an animal being

in order to have form. But it is not enough to have Form, the Wild Torment must, as any organic being is wont to do, make the necessary alterations to its space to ensure its survival and comfort after it has moved in. So while it didn't really surprise me to feel the Monster pressing at the surface of my skin from the interior depths of my being, it was truly a dismay each time it occurred, because it meant that all human functioning must cease until, for reasons unknown to me, the Monster relaxed, and went to sleep deep within the code of my DNA.

Arthur and I sought reprieve in intoxication. One night, after picking up my prescription and buying a case of Milwaukee's Best to take home and enjoy on my front stoop, Arthur and I sat parked in front of the 7-11 with our friend Josh in the backseat. There were two bandanas in my lap as I counted out the pills: two for me, one for Arthur, two for me, one for Arthur, who sat beside me in the passenger seat and rolled a blunt. Josh, on probation for cocaine possession, complained from the backseat that we were being stupid and obvious,

and did we realize a cop had just pulled into the lot and was parked a few spots away. We were just like spoiled little children, he muttered, with all the arrogance of amateurs.

I worked in a coffee shop for food and beer and pot money, of which there was never enough. One night after searching for change in the return slots of vending machines and payphones, I sat alone in the running car with Arthur. We hadn't found anything, and we didn't talk or look at each other as we waited for the car to warm up. Our breath was frosty as the engine sputtered and turned. There was a lone cigarette left, a stale Marlboro 100, which hung from my lips as I sifted through handfuls of empty matchbooks in the center console, searching for a lone match. My fingers fluttered and shook as I cursed and punched in the cigarette lighter. Arthur watched me with wide eyes. "Amazing," he said. "What a mess you are." He held out a yellow lighter and discharged it. As I held the cigarette over the flame, the engine sputtered again. It was then

Arthur told me that he was not alone in his mother's womb. "My twin was born dead," he said, "my sister. There would have been two of me." Frozen and fearful, I didn't reply; I drew off my cigarette and watched as the gas level sagged below the E and dangled well into the red zone. Then the dashboard lights blinked out and everything went dark.

May loomed heavy and warm as I lay in my bed and stared outside at the tops of nearby oak trees, longing for cessation, or at the least, a pause, a respite. There seemed no end to the black abyss of desire that opened up and demanded to be nourished, into which we continuously poured our dwindling resources in exchange for a mere moment or two of relaxation, no end to the stretched-out hours of the days that extended past the visibility line of the far-distant horizon. It was exhausting to contemplate. The perfumed scent of lilac drifted through the open window. It brought with it memories of my childhood bedroom, where I smelled lilac on the crest of late spring breezes before opening my eyes in

the morning. Now there were lilac bushes in front of my house, on the terrace at the coffee shop, and amassed near the west side of Paul's front porch. I took it as a sign and went looking for the mythical and historical lore of the lavender bloom. *Syringa vulgaris*, the Latin term for Lilac, means "belonging to the masses," but its common name derives from an Arabic word: Lilak, or "bluish." Lilac migrated from Western China to Persia in the 1200s, from Turkey to Europe in the 1500s, and from Europe to America with the settlers; Jefferson planted it and Washington transplanted it. Lilac, which indicated enchantment and the first emotions of love in a Victorian bouquet, is also a symbol of remembrance: when Lincoln was killed, Whitman broke a sprig of lilac with its flower and offered it to the passing coffin in the funeral procession, and "lilac and star and bird" became "Twined with the chant of (his) mind." The next year a May day was designated "for the purpose of strewing with flowers" the graves of Civil War soldiers, a tradition reflected in the Memorial Day Boy Scout

ritual of placing lilacs on local monuments.

Arthur's grandmother died in mid-May, and a few days later I arrived at Paul's apartment at 7 a.m. to give them a ride to the funeral. I rang the bell three times before Paul answered the door, and I could see that the Monster had gotten to him as well: his foul mood was apparent in his stooped posture, furrowed brow, and bitter complaints. Arthur was mostly silent on the ride down. When I asked how he felt, he screwed up his face and said he dreaded seeing his mother. As we neared the funeral home, twenty minutes late, Arthur waffled about which way to go. I slowed down, took turns at his direction, ambled across roads that ended in T-intersections, and turned around in more than one parking lot before he blurted out that we were lost.

"Guys, listen, can we just chill out here for a minute?" he mumbled as I threw the car in reverse and cut the wheel. I braked and exhaled, then looked at Arthur hard in the rearview mirror. His head hung low and he chewed his bottom lip.

"Can we just go home, have a nice breakfast and a walk in the woods? We're already late, and I don't -"

The back door slammed and Arthur was out of the car, gone.

I found Arthur's disappearing acts to be insulting and infuriating, while Paul maintained that Arthur would return once he had exhausted himself and needed shelter, which often didn't take very long. I focused instead on the overhead cloud cover that was heavy gray in spots and pierced through with sunlight and blue sky in others. It seemed to move quickly, sweeping from west to east across the panorama of the windshield. Within moments I saw Arthur emerge from the alleyway across the parking lot. He was backlit by late morning sun and his creamy skin glowed ivory, his hair blanched and golden. In his left hand he held a black Hefty garbage bag that looked almost full, and in his right he clutched a pair of pruning shears. I couldn't see his hands in detail, but I imagined them as I had seen them before, his skin toughened and cracked, encrusted

with the remains of wet soil and dried blood.

“Lilacs!” he said when he got into the car, a sloppy, malicious smile taking over his face. “There were like five full bushes in front of the funeral home!”

“You knew exactly where we were the whole time,” Paul said.

“You razed a funeral home?” I said.

“Oh, relax,” Arthur said. “Do you know how much I can get for these? It’s the end of the season for them anyway. Just drive home, will you?”

Back in Brewster, Arthur and I sat barefoot on the porch while Paul cooked breakfast. The sky had cleared and Paul’s multi-colored prayer flags fluttered crisply in the breeze. The brisk air contained traces of lingering chill, and wind chimes skittered and rang out overhead. Arthur sat next to me on the top porch step, smiled sadly, wrapped his arm around my waist, and drew me into his chest. For the moment the RDs were silent and unmenacing, and I shivered and tingled as I relaxed into Arthur’s warmth, the way a frosty limb will throb

with pins and needles when plunged into a pool of hot water.

Inside we sat cross-legged on the floor, held our plates up to our mouths, and ate eggs, sunny side up, bacon, wheat toast, and potatoes that were browned with rosemary, thyme and chives from the garden. There was orange juice that Paul squeezed out with a juicer, with fleshy pieces of floating pulp, hot sauce he pickled and saved from last winter, and warm frothed cream for the coffee that he whipped up in a round steel bowl. After we ate we took bong hits and fell asleep on Paul’s queen-sized bed, our bodies tangled up in each other, our breathing slowed and laborious, while early afternoon sun sifted through the blinds and streamed across our skin, and traffic groaned and rattled on the outside roadways.

In the next two days, we weren’t so lucky. I spent the time laid up in bed in my apartment, my swollen tongue covered in speed bumps, my head laid siege by the march of the Wild Torment. I remember I heard

the phone ring, several times, and ignored it. I heard Paul on the machine. He and Arthur got into a fight. No big surprise. I limped out of bed and turned the volume down, then got back under the covers. The phone rang again a few minutes later. Again – and again. I heard the machine click on, click off, back on, then off again. My heart rate quickened. My skin tingled and flushed. Why didn't they know when to leave me alone? I threw back the covers and moved toward the phone. "I'm allowed to be unavailable!" I shouted at the answering machine. The low scream in my ears amplified in volume and density. Another message clicked on the machine. 8 messages, then 9, 10. I leaned over and pulled the plug out of the wall, then picked up the receiver and dropped it back down in the cradle. It bounced out and dangled off the side of the table. The Monster roared. I hooked the cord with my foot and pulled it back until it crashed to the floor.

13 messages when I got up to use the bathroom a few hours later. My roommate must have hooked the phone

back up when I came in. 16 messages when I cooked ramen noodles at 2 a.m. 19 messages when I flew out of the house on my way to work the next morning.

Josh called me almost as soon as I'd arrived. "Where have you been?" he asked. "Do you know how long we've been trying to reach you?" The shift was busy and I balanced the phone against my ear as I heated soy milk for a latte. I couldn't hear him over the hiss of the steam, and when I finally turned the knob and cut the pressure off, he was shouting: "I said, Arthur's in jail! Where have you been?"

19 messages, some from Josh, but most were from Paul, most of which he left from a payphone at the hospital, in which he begged me to come pick him up. "I don't know anyone else with a car," he said, his voice scratchy and low. "And Arthur's in jail, I have to get out of here, and get to him, he'll never make it in there."

Their fight started over twenty bucks and a bag of weed, Paul said. That Arthur owed him money and wouldn't share his pot. That he stood behind Arthur,

who was crouched over his backpack on the floor, acting as if he were retrieving the money from his wallet, when suddenly he stood, whirled around, grabbed a nearby standup halogen lamp, and swung it like a baseball bat to land flush against Paul's face, which split open as the cheekbone collapsed. Blood splattered against the brown paneled walls and drip-dropped in smatters on the shag olive carpet. It was Arthur who started to scream, as Paul stood still and held his hand to his face. "You fucking idiot," Paul reputedly said. "Shut up and call an ambulance."

He didn't want to press charges, Paul said, he yelled at the police to leave Arthur alone as they handcuffed him and searched his pockets and came up with two 20 bags of weed and a handful of Dexedrine, which he was on at the time of the fight. Arthur was arrested, charged with felony assault, and held on \$3000 bail, which his mother refused to pay. Paul's face was sewn up with 24 tight neat stitches, and he took a bus home from the hospital to an apartment still littered with the debris of

their fight.

Thereafter my own apartment was deeply silent in Arthur's absence. Later Arthur would access the money his grandmother left him to bail himself out, and disappear into Manhattan to hustle for a living; later Paul's scar would pus and swell as he sat cross-legged on my carpet and wept over a Polaroid photo of Arthur. The rainbow fern finally wilted, its outer foliage browned and crisp. The thick sagging smell of dead lilac permeated the atmosphere and clung to my hair. In the poem "Piss Factory," Patti Smith watches schoolboys flap their legs under their desks and imagines the way their "dicks droop like lilacs, with all the odor and ammonia rising." To me the impotent clusters of blooms looked more like horse cocks as they sagged over the edges of their containers, and twisted and strained to kiss the countertops.



## *Hands Off*

August Roulaux

Harold had loved and lived a long life. He was older now and decided to marry. Not that old, thirty-five. But he felt old. And that is all that matters. Watching his friends march down the aisle one after the other over the years (he always in the wedding party, never the best man), the long shadow of his bachelorhood growing and growing, he began to feel a kind of panic and dread. It was a typical case. Man gets older, less attractive, the cheeks

begin to sag oh so slightly; the hair recoils backward in full retreat, the forehead devours all. In the face of this, man begins to wonder: getting less action at the bars, fewer and fewer women seem interested and even when they are it is an eye-darting impatient interest, not the consuming fire-loined interest of old. Fear sets in. There he finds himself in the middle of the night, looking into the darkness of his empty bedroom. Oh no.

The wedding was in spring and outside, in a modest little green grove. There was a makeshift chapel, really a small wooden pavilion (painted white for the occasion). His parents showed and told everywhere, so relieved, how they never thought this day would come. She was an accountant, worked for a construction company. Nice girl, pretty and very polite. On that wedding day, everyone commented in whispers and even to her about her most elegant hands. They were already before that day the envy of all. Attention was drawn to them all the more so as a result of the ring ceremony, when Harold carefully and rehearsedly placed the large diamond

ring on her long, tanned fingers. So lengthy and lean, they were hand-soap-commercial kind of fingers. With milky soft skin, and the nails stretching out over the fingers and manicured. Think of the perfectly feminine hands and there you have hers.

People were by and large excited about the wedding. Harold's friends liked Susan a lot. She was likeable. The best man dropped the ring and so there was a bit of a bustle at that moment but other than that it was a pretty uneventful event. All of the usual rituals were present but nothing out of the ordinary. And everyone gathered in their groups at the reception, gathering round to see Harold put the cake in Susan's mouth and then to see Susan, with her well-admired hands, put the cake into Harold's mouth. And then they gathered round to see Harold find his way up Susan's dress, grope and grapple and come out with the lace garter, then toss it over his shoulder, to the poor saps.

He got to know a lot of the people in that group, the garter-catching group. Every wedding there they would

be. And then of course one would be married off, and the group would wave *bon voyage* to another of its own. Now finally it was his turn to say "Sorry to leave you, guys; it was fun." Lewis Grange caught the lace. He was a banker, in love with his secretary, a young dark-haired hunk from Newark. Lewis never wanted to go up but his mother always made him, hoping that one day he would snap out of it. Harold, when he was a bachelor, felt a sense of comfort knowing that even if he never married he could always count on Lewis Grange to be there, waiting to catch the garter with him. It was a bit of a surprise when Harold saw Lewis with the garter. Everyone murmured to themselves about how that was a waste of lace. Uncle Rick told Lewis on his way back to the table that hey, they are doing amazing things in Massachusetts these days.

That was the wedding. The people all left and on the way home in their cars they talked about how nice of a couple they were and how well they thought the marriage would work out.

Things went on nicely from there. Harold and Susan bought a house. Susan did some gardening when she wasn't working and Harold set himself to some repairs. They lived in a nice neighborhood with nice lawns and snooty women. Harold was a scientist of sorts and got a job with a prestigious drug company a year or so into the marriage. Even though they both worked long hours, Harold and Susan still had time to be intimate with each other. It was enjoyable for the both of them. Harold loved Susan's hands roving over his back and chest, her pants and gasps. Harold loved it when she moaned, feeling quite proud of his part in the matter. He was like a boy blowing soap bubbles, triumphantly watching them float along, in awe of his work, as if to say, "I did that. Look what I did."

It was interesting to some extent as well for the snooty women next door who, usually during a rousing game of bridge, could sometimes hear them in their newly-wed love and, when that was the case, would think, oh that must be a nice couple.

Harold would go into work with a firm step. Everyone at work thought of him as a young vibrant man. Women even seemed to be interested again. The old looks came back. Of course he would have none of it. He had a woman and didn't need another.

Seeing this, the friends at work were in agreement: "She must be good, Harry." You couldn't imagine, he would say. When you can satisfy a woman, Harry would lean over and whisper, like an old man imparting his wisdom to unenlightened souls, I mean really give a woman complete satisfaction, to the point of near death, then at that point you don't need to be going around, searching all the world for all the women in the world. It's right there and you know it . . . They nodded in awe.

Guys at work with woman problems were now coming to him. Even calling him at home. "What do I do, Harry?" He was calm and measured with them. Here is what you need to do, he would say, and then he would give them a few precious stones of advice. "Thanks so

much, Harry," they would say. Happy to help, he would say.

A spring afternoon Harold came home early—he knew Susan had the day off—and he found her in the garden. Soon, predictably, they made their way into the bedroom. At the end of it, they both growled and moaned and yelped and squealed and all seemed just as it always was. But for Harold things were very different.

During the act, the prelude to the act really, while Harold was performing his preparatory magic on Susan, she reached down and with her long admired hands began to rub herself. At first he thought she was just going to scratch her leg or something, and then he wasn't sure for a moment what she was doing. Her hand gyrated in a grotesque way, of which Harold was never before privy. He thought of a dog that had narcolepsy he saw once on a television show.

Harold was internally beside himself. He stopped for a moment. Then she stopped. He started again.

She started. He stopped. She stopped. He started. She started. Things were spinning in Harold's head. Susan's crinkled brow and pursed lips, her eyes closed in a careful kind of meditation, were to him like something out of a horrid snuff film. He felt ill afterwards, thinking about it.

"What is it, Harry?" she asked, caressing his fuzzy chest.

She doesn't even know, Harold thought to himself. She is just going on like nothing happened. As if we could just go on.

Later, Harold was convinced, and evermore so, that she did know. If only deep, deep down inside. Harold swore, and he was willing to bet a lot of himself on it, that if she were put in a situation where knowing it would mean something to her, as it meant something to him, then she would find a way, then she would summon herself up and face it. It was only her laxity, her lack of care for others, her selfishness, that made it so she couldn't, or wouldn't, know.

Harold now saw Susan in a much different light. She was still the center of his universe, whereas before it was a centrality based on something that made Harold smile and hold his head up high and run red lights, thinking nothing could hurt him, now it was a centrality that made his stomach burn and churn and toss over itself, that made his teeth grind down to a fine powder. He knew he had been wronged. And in the worst sort of way. He meditated on that wrong, like a monk in the desert. He dipped himself in that wrong, covered himself with it, and bled all over it in agony.

At work, things changed. No longer did the guys come to him for help. From the women, nary a look.

Harold wondered if he might not have been better off with Lewis Grange and the wedding-garter men's club. The more he thought about it, the more he couldn't believe that Susan would do such a thing. And the more he couldn't believe it, the more he wanted to do something about it.

Although he had been avoiding it, staying up later

regularly watching infomercials, one night when Susan was not tired from her work, they ended up in bed together, awake. Harold tried to get out of it, but it was just too awkward to say no. She just kept saying, “Come on, where’s my big boy.” But this seemed to him nothing but mockery.

Susan again did a very good job of keeping her hand to herself. There before him, her long elegant fingers jostled for position, wiggled like an experienced violinist’s on a trilled note. It was like a sleight of hand trick, where they flaunt the fact that they are taking your money and there isn’t anything you can do about it but just sit there and watch like a buffoon. Harold thought it icing on the cake that, getting herself all worked up, she had the audacity to yell “Oh, Harold!” when it was quite obvious that “Oh, Susan!” would have been much more fitting.

One time and perhaps you could overlook it. And there was probably something—way down—in Harold that tried to say: “It was an accident. She got caught

up in the moment. She didn’t understand what she was doing.” Now that too was out the window. It was unequivocal.

His fate sealed, Harold lay awake in bed. He thought about who this woman was, who it seemed she was turning out to be. It was amazing to him that you could meet someone and think you know them and then—wammo!—one day they reveal themselves to be something totally the opposite of what they had been presenting themselves to be up to that point. To see her, doing that, it brought out a whole other context to bear on Susan.

No matter how much he tried not to think about it, there was in some sense no escaping it. It would hit him at various moments—mowing the lawn (he then took out Susan’s prized cucumbers), watching television, in the shower—the kicker was when, trying to be the better person, he bought Susan a laptop that would be useful for her at work and home. She loved the gift, no problem there, and promised to pay him back that

night (he tried to be happy about that). The keyboard had on it a built-in mouse pad, the kind where you drag your finger across a square and it registers as the cursor. Harold watched as Susan perused the various technological features of the state-of-the-art wholly up-to-date model. He was happy that she was happy and perhaps even forgetting about what had been bugging him so. But then of course he caught sight of her fingers, at work on the mouse pad, moving swiftly in a manner all too familiar to him.

She asked him why he was so irritable. “I love the gift, Harry.” She said, kissing his ear.

“I know you do.” He said. He knew all too well.

That night, the inevitable. She was waiting for him in her finest nightwear. Lace and light perfume. Again, she yelled—more loudly than he could ever remember (the snooty women could not hear themselves bid)—“Oh Harold!” when it would have been just as, if not more, appropriate to yell “Oh Susan!”

He wanted to yell too—“Oh slut!” “Oh whore!”

“Oh cunt!”

No matter how much time he devoted to considering it, and he was devoting more and more to it each day, he still could not understand how she could do such a thing. What kind of a person would do such a thing.

The fact that she was apparently unaware, at least superficially, was the worst part. What kind of a person could do such a thing and pretend as though it was not even happening. That’s what got him the most. She was making a fool of him twice over. The act itself was betrayal enough, but then to betray the betrayal he couldn’t stomach it.

Finally, one night she had nearly shattered the mirrors and opened the electronic garage door with her “Oh Harold!”’s that should have been “Oh Susan!”’s. She was laughing with joy afterwards. But Harold knew what she was really laughing at. He could do nothing but glare at her. Her hands covering her face. Laughing at him.

He went to the kitchen. He had bought her a Japanese

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stainless steel butcher knife—from an infomercial one night up late trying to avoid her—she loved it and used it to slice up her prized cucumbers (what was left of them). He came back into the bedroom. Susan asked him if Bigboy was ready to go again. “Give me that hand,” he said in the same kind of wild, paroxysmal voice with which she had called his name mockingly so many times. All five perfect-for-hand-soap-commercial fingers had to go. As the blade dropped each time, Harold screamed in ecstasy, “Oh Susan!”

The snooty women next door heard it while in their kitchen playing bridge, and they wished they could have that kind of sex life.

*Roulaux 62*





## *Canned Vegetables*

Kristin Blacker

“We’ve become ghosts of something greater tonight, you know. We’ll haunt these rooms, each other, for the rest of our lives.” The door shut behind him with the same delicate sadness of a book being placed back upon the shelf once it had been finished. I hadn’t spoken or moved an inch in the past hour and now all I wondered was where I should put my hands. There is nothing more disarming in this world than removing someone from

your life. Everything on my body felt alien, as if my soul had been transported to a place outside of me and I was looking in on this fragile girl with her back curved against the wall; unaware whether she could move or speak, but entirely lost in her being. The intricately marked boxes of my former roommate needed to be moved and were blocking all of the light that typically saturated the cracks in the wooden floorboards where my bare feet swept back and forth. The light would come back, incongruously enough, once his possessions were gone.

I am counting the minutes until the neighbors fall into their bed, touching the wall I'm facing from the other side and drinking in each other's scents and tastes like they've never spent a goddamn night in bed before. "It's always something new for us," the girl tells me when I see her in the grocery store. "He's a brilliant surprise that I keep unwrapping and discovering." I grab the canned vegetables and stare at her as if she's speaking German. Her face is absurd and shaped like a bedpan

that's been used by every patient in the psychiatric ward where she works. I touch her arm and tell her I have to get going, but that it was a pleasure seeing her. It's her routine to shout down the aisle something about meeting for a drink soon and mine to pretend I never heard a thing. At least we've got that in common.

I hear the clamor of the locks and know he's back to grab the rest of his things. The boxes are moving and the waves are swelling in my eyes, but I don't know how to move again. The ghosts are all around me, just like he said. He's in the other room and in this bed at the same time, brushing my hair out of my eyes and wiping away the tears while the boxes keep moving back and forth from the door. I know my ghost is in the room with him, sitting on the floor in his flannel shirt and sipping coffee while he tries to pretend she's not watching his departure. She'll weave her fingers into his and pull him down next to her, telling him all about the colors she's found to paint the mural in the bedroom. He's dealing with his own waves.



*Notes Toward an Analysis  
of the Late Works  
of Bob Dylan and  
Jean-Luc Godard*

Joshua Land

I.

Origins: b. 1941 (as Robert Allen Zimmerman), Duluth, Minnesota; b. 1930, Paris, France

Period under study: 1997- ; 1988-

Key works from period under study: *Love and Theft* (2001), *Modern Times* (2006); *Nouvelle Vague* (1990), *Histoire(s) du Cinéma* (1988-98), *Eloge de l'Amour* (2001)

Other major works from period under study: Time out of Mind (1997), Masked and Anonymous (2003) [film, dir. Larry Charles], Chronicles: Volume One (2004) [book], Together Through Life (2009) [unheard];

Germany Year 90 Nine Zero (1991) [unseen], Hélas Pour Moi (1993) [unseen], JLG/JLG (1995), For Ever Mozart (1996), Notre Musique (2004)

Historical fixation: the American Civil War; the Holocaust

Musicians/Filmmakers/Writers/Artists alluded to in work (incomplete):

Lewis Carroll, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Merle Haggard, Billie Holiday (unconfirmed), Robert Johnson, Kansas Joe, Memphis Minnie, Ovid, Charlie Patton, Junichi Saga, Shakespeare, Frank Sinatra (unconfirmed),

the Stanley Brothers, Henry Timrod, Muddy Waters, Tennessee Williams;

Georges Bataille, Charles Baudelaire, Robert Bresson, Jean Cocteau, Sergei Eisenstein, William Faulkner, John Ford, Alfred Hitchcock, James Joyce, Fritz Lang, Edouard Manet, F.W. Murnau, Pier Paolo Pasolini, Marcel Proust, Jean Renoir, Roberto Rossellini, Shakespeare, Orson Welles

Random convergence: motorcycle accident

Converging characteristics of work under study: keen attention to forms, penchant for quotation, reverence for old masters

## II.

and appropriating lyrics from Memphis Minnie's "Ma Rainey" for the song's second verse, substituting the name and birthplace of the young R&B musician Alicia Keys for those of the titular blueswoman. Such borrowings can be found all over *Modern Times*: two songs, "Rollin' and Tumblin'" and "Someday Baby," are adaptations of traditional blues numbers popularized by Muddy Waters; two others, "When the Deal Goes Down" and "Beyond the Horizon" borrow melodic fragments from a pair of 1930s pop standards—respectively, "When the Blue of the Night" (sung most famously by Bing Crosby) and "Red Sails in the Sunset." And "The Levee's Gonna Break" is an update of the 1929 blues classic "When the Levee Breaks" by Kansas Joe and Memphis Minnie, a song previously reworked by the English rock band Led Zeppelin. The album also features lyrics traceable to the Civil War-

era lyricist Henry Timrod and the classical Roman poet Ovid, among other sources. Narrowly speaking, *Modern Times* could be deemed the least "original" Bob Dylan album since his self-titled debut. And, perhaps inevitably, there were complaints about plagiarism from certain elements in the popular press, apparently ignorant of the fact that such borrowings and adaptations have been commonplace through the histories of blues and folk music. The controversies elicited no response from either Dylan or Sony BMG.

Godard has made similar use of unattributed quotations from literary and other artistic sources, which have formed the substance of most of his screenplays since *Nouvelle Vague*. But in seeking to release *Histoire(s) du Cinéma* on DVD, Godard faced difficulties of another order. The eight-part, 265-minute video work consists mostly of hundreds of film clips, culled from throughout the historical and geographical range of film history, none of which

are identified onscreen. The soundtrack takes a form typical of Godard's late-period work, featuring snippets of music and copious narration, including philosophical and historical digressions as well as gnomic commentary on a wide range of subjects. The relationship between the images and soundtrack is one of constant flux, with the voiceover only occasionally commenting directly on the images onscreen.

Gaumont's four-disc set was finally released in April 2007, following numerous delays reportedly prompted by copyright issues related to Godard's usage of

III.

All these stories, now mine, how can I tell them? Show them, maybe.

Don't show every side of things. Allow yourself a margin of indefiniteness. Forms making their way toward speech. Precisely: a form which thinks. *Entre la real et la fiction.*

All I am is a song-and-dance man; I practice a faith that's been long abandoned. The party's over and there's less and less to say.

I wanna establish my rule through civil war. Poetry is resistance; cinema must exist for words stuck in the throat.

The world of research has gone berserk. Neither an art

nor a technique. A mystery. Man's true condition is to think with his hands.

The living dead of this world are constructed on the former world. Their reflections and sensations are from before. They got a prayer permit and a police escort.

Governments ignore what humanity knows. I'm drowning in the poison, got no future, got no past. The dead send the plague to the living who sent them to slaughter.

They suspected they were in a history. They wanted to know what it was.

The flame went out for good at Auschwitz. Death, old admiral, up anchor now, this country wearies us.

The earth came out of the sun. We came out of the

earth. The writing on the wall come read it, come see what it say.

I'm not quite as cool or forgiving as I sound; in anger I am torn by insurmountable irony.

Light falls where it must, neglects what it must. I've already confessed, no need to confess again.

Forms tell us what is at the bottom of things.

## IV.

Most of the tracks employ musical forms dating from the 1930s and '40s. And although I initially missed the astounding stylistic range of *Love and Theft*, the relative lack of musical variety on *Modern Times* arguably helps make it the aesthetically purer work.

*Modern Times* shares with *Love and Theft* a penchant for allusion and quotation. The many references to folk, blues, and traditional pop sources in Dylan's late work simultaneously locate it within old-school folkie tradition and place him in the company of much younger postmodernists like Beck and M.I.A. But what those artists have done with musical styles and genres, Dylan does with whole folk discourses. In "Workingman's Blues," for instance, the title's reference to Merle Haggard's classic evocation of hardworking white Americans puts an ironic spin on the song's more dominant Woody Guthrie-ish elements.

*Land 78*

In *Histoire(s) du Cinéma*, Godard's borrowings are both more literal and more diffuse in their overall effect. As with Dylan, Godard declines to reveal his sources, leaving it to his audience to do the legwork required to disentangle the myriad threads of this exceedingly dense series, which represents the purest illustration of Godard's career-long belief that the best way to critique a film is to make another film. Organized around the principle of collage, *Histoire(s) du Cinéma* is the perfect late Godard work, just as the perfect late Dylan album would consist of nothing but quotations, musical and lyrical. And who's to say that he hasn't already made it?

The density of the *Histories(s)* can be daunting for even the hardiest of first-time viewers. Consider a remarkable, if by no means exceptional, two-minute sequence in Episode 3a that encompasses Roberto Rossellini's *Rome, Open City*, documentary

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footage of dead bodies, bird attacks from Hitchcock's *The Birds* superimposed against black-and-white footage of bomber planes, a shot of Godard reading Wittgenstein's *On Certitude*, and a Goya painting. The whirlwind of allusions is typical of the film's method: Godard collects a range of artistic and cinematic representations of war and its consequences in the service of a meditation on the role of art in historical memory and the epistemology of history in general, blurring traditional demarcations between fiction and documentary, imagination and fact. An onscreen title asks Andre Bazin's venerable question *Quest'que-ce le cinéma?* (What is cinema?) Godard's answer: *rien* (nothing).

*Land 80*



**here.<sup>1</sup>**

Karl Parker

5 entries found for **here**.

To select an entry, click on it.

here[1,adverb] here[2,adjective] here[3,noun] here and now here and there	Go
---	----

Main Entry: **here** 

Pronunciation: `hɪr

Function: *adverb*

Etymology: Middle English, from Old English *hEr*; akin to Old High German *hier* here, Old English *hE* he

**1 a** : in or at this place <turn *here*> -- often used interjectionally especially in answering a roll call **b** : **NOW** <*here* it's morning already> **c** : in an arbitrary location <a book *here*, a paper there>

**2** : at or in this point, particular, or case <*here* we agree>

**3** : in the present life or state

**4** : **HITHER** <come *here*>

**5** -- used interjectionally in rebuke or encouragement

- **here goes** -- used interjectionally to express resolution or resignation especially at the beginning of a difficult or unpleasant undertaking

- **neither here nor there** : having no interest or relevance : of no consequence <comfort is *neither here nor there* to a real sailor>

**ENGUIDANOS. Many thanks. But as usual, you keep avoiding my question. Tell me something about the essays. Why do you say that you don't wish to write essays and then go on writing them? What is the essay for you?**

**BORGES. I know that an essay requires a great deal of preparation. For example, if I write about an author, I have to refer to the author. I have to read something about him, I must be certain of my opinions, I must distinguish between my personal preferences and critical arguments for and against. Now that I am blind, now that in my idleness I can resort to blindness, I can believe that there is no reason to yield to this work.<sup>2</sup>**

<sup>2</sup> see Barnstone, W. "A Conversation with Jorge Luis Borges," from a previously unpublished colloquium at Indiana University, April 1, 1976.

IN THIS CONTEXT PAGE-BORDERS MUST BE CONSIDERED PLEASE AS EDGES OF A FRAME, OR RATHER, THE ORIGINAL, ACTUAL, FOR WHAT IT'S WORTH ETC. VERSION OF THIS THE FOLLOWING TEXT EXISTS AS MORE OR LESS A SMALL WALL OF FRAMED PAGES: SAY, WHATEVER THE THING FINALLY TURNS OUT TO BE DIVIDED BY THREE IN THREE ROWS OF EIGHT, SAY, WE'LL SEE. LITERALLY. IN OTHER WORDS, YOU'RE READING A TRANSCRIPTION OF VISUAL EVENTS, OR MORE PRECISELY, SINCE READING MUST BE SO TEMPORALLY ARRANGED YOU UNFORTUNATELY PHYSICALLY MISS BUT THEREFORE MUST PLEASE PROJECT<sup>3</sup> THE EFFECT OF EACH OF THESE PAGES SIMULTANEOUSLY FROM VARIOUS DISTANCES AS SIGNS, LEGIBLE AND NOT, SINCE OF COURSE THEY CAN BE READ FROM FAR AWAY, SO PEOPLE COULD HAVE NOT ONLY A DIFFERENT TEMPORAL BUT A DIFFERENT SPATIOPHYSICAL RELATION TO IT AS WELL, IF NOT EACH OTHER<sup>4</sup>, TO BOOT.

<sup>3</sup> "To continue: future reception, past genesis." —*not now, in a moment.*

<sup>4</sup> "BORGES. [. . .] There is an expression that may or may not be used in Spain and which is no longer used in Buenos Aires. It is 'remember' me for 'wake me.' 'Tomorrow remember me early.' I thought of the metaphysical sense of that psychological phrase, 'Tomorrow remember me early.' That is, 'I will be sleeping, I will be nobody, I will be everybody. And then they will wake me and I will remember who I am: somebody or other, who was born in such and such a period, who lived in such and such a place, who has such and such a past, who was afraid of such and such a person, who has read such and such books, all that is there in 'Remember me tomorrow,' as opposed to 'Wake me tomorrow.' The word 'to remember' is significant here. Of course when it's used, no one thinks of its psychological import. But of course it has such an import. [. . .] **I have been a hoodlum in fragments**, and if you read this story you can see what I was before I was born. *The genesis of this story is before my birth, and the protagonist dies before my birth. So if the translation is certain, I am another hoodlum.*"

Little by little one becomes interested in the nature of thought. The thing attempts to think the thing itself.<sup>5</sup> Easy at times to be paralyzed in the face of the fact of the thought that there is literally everywhere to go with that. Of course one place to go is art. Some are words but these are thoughts except thoughts that everyone can take part in and that simply don't change don't go away don't wither in time and so on. The ape, the miracle, the miraculous language and so on. Since poetry is the most plastic practice of the most plastic of media in other words language it is among the arts the most habitable to thought.<sup>6</sup> The yes brought home somehow. The thing touches itself knows itself a moment or moments, series upon series of repeatable moments again for all it needs is room to move *most habitable to thought*.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> "The thing 'in itself' is only the sum total of the graspings to which it lends itself, a set of angles of potential intervention by outside bodies. All thought and perception are therefore partial, in the double sense that they are never all-encompassing, and that they follow upon a constitutional affinity, or mutual openness, of two bodies for one another. Partiality does not preclude objectivity. Thought-perception is always *real* and always *of the outside*." (Massumi, *A User's Guide to Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, 36)

<sup>6</sup> "To continue: *future reception, past genesis*. The fractal proper is in-between [here Alice Fulton's sense of a fractal poetics seems relevant—eds.]. To pass into its future as a plane it must cease to be itself. But to remain in its dynamic present it must continue to divide, rushing impossibly into the void of its own past. Two thresholds, two ways of passing: a relative limit above which a thing ceases to be itself but gets a new lease on life in a different mode; and an absolute limit below which no thing can go but upon which all things tread. A threshold leading across the synapses toward a new being, and a foundation of nonbeing." (Massumi 36)

<sup>7</sup> "To drive it home that actuality is dynamic they use the word 'becoming' in place of 'being.' A thing's actuality is its duration as a process—of genesis and annihilation, of movement across thresholds and toward the limit . . . The element of immanence—thought-matter—could be called eternal, but not without introducing an unwelcome religious or Platonic tinge. Nietzsche's term, 'untimely,' suits it best." (Massumi 37) *Yes, but can and do these structural integuments speak for themselves? How does something speak?*

“Life,” let alone “eternity,” would be “hell,” sheer endurance of duration, without play of a most complex kind.<sup>8</sup> This negotiates us momentarily in facts from truth. From the tyranny the idea of the truth or meaning has over material existence itself: uncontrollable mysteries on everywhere’s bestial floors.

Art says itself<sup>9</sup> as it wishes to say itself, no? Let me introduce myself: *it is what it means*. Poetry means the everythings it says,<sup>10</sup> potentially endless proliferations of meanings to many different people

<sup>8</sup> “It is assumed here that the task of reality-acceptance is never completed, that no human being is free from the strain of relating inner and outer reality, and that relief from this strain is provided by an intermediate area of experience (cf. Riviere, 1936) which is not challenged (arts, religion, etc.). This intermediate area is in direct continuity with the play area of the small child who is ‘lost’ in play.

[ . . . ] Milner (1952) relates children’s playing to concentration in adults: ‘When I began to see . . . that this use of me might be not only a defensive regression, but an essential recurrent phase of a creative relation to the world . . .’ Milner was referring to a ‘*prelogical fusion of subject and object*.’ I am trying to distinguish between this fusion and the fusion or defusion of the subjective object and the object objectively perceived. I believe that what I am attempting to do is also inherent in the material of Milner’s contribution. Here is another of her statements: ‘Moments when the original poet in each of us created the outside world for us, by finding the familiar in the unfamiliar, are perhaps forgotten by most people; or else they are guarded in some secret place of memory because they were too much like visitations of the gods to be mixed with everyday thinking’ (Milner, 1957).

[ . . . ] Whatever I say about children playing really applies to adults as well, only the matter is more difficult to describe when the [person]’s material appears mainly in terms of verbal communication. I suggest that we must expect to find playing just as evident in the analyses of adults as it is in the case of our work with children. It manifests itself, for instance, in the choice of words, in the inflections of the voice, and indeed in the sense of humour. [ . . . ] I make my idea of play concrete by claiming that *playing has a place* [context] and a time [process of experiential unfolding]. It is not *inside* by any use of the word . . . Nor is it *outside*, that is to say, it is not a part of the repudiated world, the not-me, that which the individual has decided to recognize (with whatever difficulty and even pain) as truly external, which is outside magical control. To control what is outside one has to *do* things, not simply to think or to wish, and *doing things takes time*. Playing is doing.” (D.W. Winnicott, from *Playing and Reality*, pp. 13, 40-41)

<sup>9</sup> *The temptation to put a footnote here is too much at this moment not to indulge. It occurred to us spontaneously, of course—eds.*

<sup>10</sup> “There is a prose that dances, sings and recites to itself. There are verbal rhythms with a sinuous choreography, in which the idea being expressed strips off its clothing with veritable and exemplary sensuality. [*Ouch—eds., or Yum*] And there are also, in prose, gestural subtleties carried out by a great actor, the Word, which rhythmically transforms into its bodily substance the impalpable mystery of the universe.” (Fernando Pessoa, from *A Factless Autobiography*, in *The Book of Disquiet*)

in many different contexts as you know you know you know, you know. It's this interradiance through and between lives in language that adds palpably to the world to the seen and unseen to the real and the unknown the same

I found more way to begin to go like this. In the end there's only more writing more and more writing and therein lies the "joy."<sup>11</sup>

This is what I made it. It once began One becomes interested in the nature of thought but now begins *Little by little one* becomes interested in the nature of thought, as perhaps a kind of human comedy only possible in poetry only fully finding its habitation (*habitus, gründ, etc. on through the languages and before them through those sings those signs too.*) in poetry. Most alive flexible fully human, such a mobile fluid impermanent permanence of words in so many human works. That the thing

<sup>11</sup> "Everything is interconnected. My readings of classical authors, who never speak of sunsets, have made many sunsets intelligible to me, in all the colours. There is a relationship between syntactical competence [*structural, situational, contextual dexterity with language and affect, with audience—eds.*] *the comic* }, by which we distinguish the values of beings, sounds, and shapes, and the capacity to perceive when the blue of the sky is actually green, and how much yellow is in the blue green of the sky.

It comes down to the same thing—the capacity to distinguish and to discriminate. There is no enduring emotion without syntax [*orchestrated succession of linguistic or semiotic events in time, in context*]. Immortality depends on the grammarians." (Pessoa 198-199)

works to know itself in time is all we can hope.  
Thus “my” or any work in  
and as language-thought, whatever the materiality  
of the signs, *essay, poem, short story, fiction,*  
*framed things, thoughts, canvas,*

*a nightmare history*  
*and so on*  
*toward what*

*at least to keep alive to thought to dignity and*  
*delight of being somehow, even or perhaps*  
*especially without metaphysical or any logical*  
*reasons whatsoever.*

***continue, rehumanize***

What is the purpose and the point of the frame  
pressed upon the instance of this writing. We play  
a serious game.

*Touché.*  
[insert thumbprint **here.**]

In order to talk about the word joke, to talk about

what is, I mean what a joke is could come to make a joke out of the very idea of a—not to mention the word—*joke*.<sup>12</sup>

See there I've XXXXX<sup>13</sup> it. In order to do it you have to do it.

“I'm beginning to like this essay,” and *trust* I<sup>14</sup> have readers (ah now the frame is becoming clearer—you can see it in my voice altering and more punctuation needing more space<sup>15</sup> needing more means to me I mean to move no<sup>16,17</sup>

<sup>12</sup> *no, that's not quite it, but what happens here is a sign of it—eds.*

<sup>13</sup> *something missing here—eds.* CENSORSHIP

<sup>14</sup> “In order to *know*, Dante requires the timeless perspective of the author and a metaphysical structure: in other words, the principle of intelligibility which is his *word*, the plot of the dramatic representation which made of the poem an exemplum instantly recognizable to his contemporaries. By itself, however, this *logos* is not enough, for intelligibility runs the risk of abstraction, the static and transparent allegory of ‘this for that’ or, in contemporary terms, the risk of the hack novel, where the outcome is blatantly [apparent] to the reader as it is to the writer because neither is involved in the characters who move like puppets following an inexorable destiny. On the other hand, pure experience cannot be recorded in words. When an attempt is made to convey a flesh and blood reality without perspective, without plot, one runs the risk of unintelligibility, the ‘private world’ of the nouveau roman, signifying nothing. Dante as pilgrim cannot see the objective designated for him by the author except in retrospect, when his pilgrimage, his evolution, is over. At that final moment, however, the Incarnation of Christ reveals his own timeless form to him and is joined by the here-and-now reality of his flesh—‘*la nostra effigie*’ (Par. XXXIII, 131). The author, who has for us heretofore been an abstract voice, takes upon himself the humanity of his former self. . . . The poem’s ending is therefore, as György Lukács would have it, the transcendent made immanent, but for [the author], not for us.

<sup>15</sup> *in time and form and*

<sup>16</sup> All this is straight from today’s *Times*.

<sup>17</sup> This work attempts to dramatize (through a variety of means, at times burlesque at times strictly formal—i.e., collage, pastiche, internal rhyme, latent content, etc.) a situation—at once physical, institutional, theoretical, practical, personal, impersonal, tragicomical, etc.—in which formal freedom, for instance as in some of these inter-views, would reign in the attempt to explore, in however a crude and sometimes smiling way, the nature of thought, the marvel of language, the position of the human vis-à-vis these, the simultaneous absurdity and utility of expository writing, alternate structural models of perception, both physical and poetic, language as gesture and event, the joke serious, “the lake a lilac cube.” Reference itself as part of these events, this assemblage of events which is designed to produce thought—not delimit or describe it—in other words, to enact or perform it. As a doctor is said to *perform* an operation. In this case, a performance prepared to stand squarely in real space too.

I meant to say I trust I have readers who are familiar with (this voice is fake, but I'm really beginning to enjoy this) the "New Essay" etc. Lauterbach, Bernstein, Hejinian, etc. God I hate this tone.

This is my performance for you. I mean this is my performance, for you. I mean this *thing* is my performance for you. There are at least seven ways to take that sentence. I'm kidding, but this is no joke<sup>18</sup>. Hey look, *you're over here*.

*I am to be judged on my performance. I was allowed to be intelligent on all fronts. To allow for instance the blurring of the creative and the critical to occur for instance because the difference between them is mythical, historical, a fiction, sometimes useful, sometimes as in this case an obstruction, what have you*<sup>19</sup>. I am what I am because of writing that calls to other writing and mine is part of it therein I am. Therein "I am" is my terrain, part of some landscape, but the metaphor

<sup>18</sup> "Here is a very similar example:

"The doctor, who had been asked to look after the Baroness at her confinement, pronounced that the moment had not come, and suggested to the Baron that in the meantime they should have a game of cards in the next room. After a while a cry of pain from the Baroness struck the ears of the two men: '*Ah, mon Dieu, que je souffre!*' Her husband sprang up, but the doctor signed to him to sit down: 'It's nothing. Let's go on with the game!' A little later there were again sounds from the pregnant woman: '*Mein Gott, mein Gott, what terrible pains!*' — 'Aren't you going in, Professor?' asked the Baron. — 'No, no. It's not time yet.' — At last there came from next door an unmistakable cry of '*Aa-ee, aa-ee, aa-ee!*' The doctor threw down his cards and exclaimed: '*Now it's time.*'

This successful joke demonstrates two things from the example of the way in which the cries of pain uttered by an aristocratic lady in child-birth changed their character little by little. It shows how pain causes primitive nature to break through all the layers of education, and how an important decision can be properly made to depend on an apparently trivial phenomenon." (Freud 80-81)

<sup>19</sup> PLEASE MIND THE GLAS

misses. There is only writing calling to other<sup>20</sup> writing in various forms I say by all *means necessary*

I decided the most valuable response to this situation would be to use it evidently as an occasion to write *and therefore think and therefore write*<sup>21</sup> and so on in ways I never have before. To explore the space of writing in an open form. To forgive myself because there is no beginning and no end to thought. *I didn't mean to write that*. I'm glad it happened<sup>22</sup>

***And thanks***, 'cause I evidently feel this is a public performance in front of some kind of audience or committee luckily not composed of anyone I really know all that well<sup>23</sup>

<sup>20</sup> "One could bring this movement more sharply into focus—but not explain it—by evoking those forms and those crises called 'complexes.' Their essence is that at the moment they come about they have already done so: they only ever return. This is their characteristic feature. They are the experience of beginning again. 'Again, again!' is the cry of anguish struggling with the irremediable, with being. Again, again, such is the closed wound of the complex. It takes place again, it recurs, yet another time. The basis of failure lies not in the fact that an experience meets with no success, but in its beginning all over again [*see Sisyphus run!*]. Everything begins again always—yes, one more time, again, again.

Some time ago now, Freud, surprised by the tendency to repeat, the powerful call of the anterior, recognized in it the call of death itself. But perhaps what must finally come out is this: he who seeks in death the meaning of repetition is also led to ruin death as possibility—to bind it in repetition's spell. Yes, we are tied to disaster, but when failure returns, it must be understood as nothing but the return. The power that begins everything over again is older than the beginning: this is the error of our death." (Blanchot, *The Space of Literature* 243-244)

<sup>21</sup> and make and [*poesis versus techné*]

<sup>22</sup> "Let us decide, then, to adopt the hypothesis that this is the way in which jokes are formed in the first person: *a preconscious thought is given over for a moment to unconscious revision and the outcome of this is at once grasped by conscious perception.*" (Freud, *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*, 165)

<sup>23</sup> "Jokes possess yet another characteristic which fits satisfactorily into the view of the joke-work which we have derived from dreams. We speak, it is true, of 'making a joke' but we are aware that when we do so our behaviour is different from what it is when we make a judgement or make an objection. A joke has quite outstandingly the characteristic of being a notion that has occurred to us 'involuntarily.' What happens is not that we know a moment beforehand what joke we are going to make, and that all it then needs is to be clothed in words [*note the sartorial metaphor. When viewed historically, theatrically: Costumes!*]. We have an indefinable feeling, rather, which I can best compare with an 'absence,' [Freud uses French here], a sudden release of intellectual tension, and then all at once the joke is there—as a rule

I'm sure these tonal shifts are lost. This writing is garbage. Thanks, Archie. I am glad.<sup>24</sup> Anyhow,

Aaron<sup>25</sup> said Robert<sup>26</sup> said be as creative as you'd like, and I remember that night.<sup>27</sup> Or should I be directing my comments to Fanny.<sup>28</sup> I'd write this differently then.

Who is exactly is my audience hearing here, though Fanny I know you're reading this, you see *I'd like to see the institutional frame better*, investigate the edges of what passes for thought critical and creative  
and *cockle-doodle-doo*

I know this is all meaning and find the thatness of that activity most clearly revealed not only in the sort of probably potentially infinitely trajectoried games

ready-clothed in words. Some of the techniques of jokes can be employed apart from them in the expression of a thought—for instance, the techniques of analogy or allusion. . . . Jokes show a special way of behaving, too, in regard to association. Often they are not at the disposal of our memory when we want them; but at other times, to make up for this, they appear involuntarily, as it were, and at points in our train of thought where we cannot see their relevance. These, again, are only small features, but nevertheless indicate their origin from the unconscious.“ (Freud, *ibis* [sic.]

<sup>24</sup> “The pleasure in *jokes* has seemed to us to arise from an economy in expenditure upon inhibition, the pleasure in the *comic* from an economy in expenditure upon ideation (upon cathexis) and the pleasure in *humour* from an economy in expenditure upon feeling. In all three modes of working of our mental apparatus the pleasure is derived from an economy. *All three are agreed in representing methods of regaining from mental activity a pleasure which has in fact been lost through the development of that activity.* For the euphoria which we endeavour to reach by these means is nothing other than the mood of a period of life in which we were accustomed to deal with our psychical work in general with a small expenditure of energy—the mood of our childhood, when we were ignorant of the comic, when we were incapable of jokes and when we had no need of humour to make us feel happy in our life.” (Freud 236; *italics ours*—eds.)

<sup>25</sup> Raymond.

<sup>26</sup> Polito, Director of the Writing Program, New School University, 66 W 12<sup>th</sup> St., NYC.

<sup>27</sup> *way too defensive here*—eds.

<sup>28</sup> Howe. *To whom this work in frames is inscribed. Just look on the back.*

or nongames being played here but also—**the freedom of the space of art**—think of it—in writing we most live there that infinite<sup>29</sup> participation in the thinkable, in life, the palpable passing of things, again, uncontrollable mysteries on bestial floors,<sup>30</sup> being-in-time, moments in which moments themselves may be known and us in them, with them, as them part of all things including our own small scratchings on the surface of the event itself. It is our world yah yah the list goes on<sup>31</sup>

<sup>29</sup> “As the body is to a person, so language is to the world; to speak of a ‘soul’ is then to speak of a projection cast by the body. In this sense, to discount the pervasiveness of language—to be so accustomed to its presence that its constituting power over the values and objects of the world is disregarded—is to avoid the body and with it the materiality of time and space.

He is gone now  
Taking his body with him  
When all the time  
I thought it was  
The beauty of his mind

I loved [—from a poem by Ted Greenwald, “Off the Hook”]

In talking about language and thinking, I want to establish the material, the stuff, of writing, in order, to turn, to base a discussion of writing on its medium rather than on preconceived literary ideas of subject matter or form. And I want to propose ‘thinking’ as a concept that can help to materially ground that discussion. ‘Thinking’ as the conceptual basis of literary production suggests the possibilities for leaps, jumps, fissures, repetition, bridges, schisms, colloquialisms, trains of associations, and memory; as a literary mode it would rely on concepts related to spontaneity, free association, and improvisation.” (Bernstein, *Content’s Dream*, from “Thought’s Measure,” 63)

<sup>30</sup> a reference to Yeats’ “The Magi”: horrific image of the pious and ossified

<sup>31</sup> and on throughout the night. *These are sutures.*

### **This is a piece of stitches, a tattered coat upon a stick**

[A reference to Yeats’ “Sailing to Byzantium”: “An aged man is but a paltry thing, / A tattered coat upon a stick . . .”—eds.], not to mention *Frankenstein* (woven [textual] body animated, living pastiche nonetheless sentient, and the author’s early obsession with horror movies) + **Childhood** (sutures, stitches, Dad was a doctor, his name was Frank [to be honest], sutures, also from the Sanskrit ‘sutra,’ connection / prayer / joining; more near though is the reference to or indeliberate but nonetheless loving echo of Whitman, “My signs are a rain-proof coat and good shoes and a staff cut from the woods . . .,” more near true father, in any case. Echoes call across other echoes in time. Any piece is a complex of voices, intersections. I wanted to be more tender to the center, here, in leaving it open, only perhaps a *hazy, gladiolated foreglimpse.*

*God I love these frames*

So I wanted an example of what I wanted to talk about that would be both the thing I wanted to say said<sup>32</sup> true to what I would be and now am saying. This is it.<sup>33</sup> ***Everyw***

***here.***

<sup>32</sup> *ha ha*, or, radically affirmative laughter

<sup>33</sup> “One of the soul’s great tragedies is to execute a work and then realize, once it’s finished, that it’s not any good. The tragedy is especially great when one realizes that the work is the best he could have done. But to write a work, knowing beforehand that it’s bound to be flawed and imperfect; to see while writing it that it’s flawed and imperfect—this is the height of spiritual torture and humiliation. Not only am I dissatisfied with [what] I write now; I also know that I’ll be dissatisfied with [what] I write in the future. I know it philosophically and in my flesh, through a hazy, gladiolated foreglimpse. [. . .]”

I wrote my first poems when I was still a child. Though dreadful, they seemed perfect to me. I’ll never again be able to have the illusory pleasure of producing perfect work. What I write today is much better. It’s even better than what some of the best writers write. But it’s infinitely inferior to what I for some reason feel I could—or perhaps should—write. I weep over those first dreadful poems as over a dead child, a dead son, a last hope that has vanished.” (Pessoa 200)



## *You and You*

Keala Francis

*After thinking about it very hard indeed, Zeus said, "I believe I've got a device by which men may continue to exist and yet stop their intemperance, namely, by becoming weaker. I'll now cut each of them in two," he said, "and they'll be weaker and at the same time more useful to us by having increased in number, and they'll walk upright on two legs. But if they still seem to act so outrageously and are unwilling to keep quiet," he said, "I'll cut them in two again, so that they'll have to get around on one leg, hopping.*

—Plato's *Symposium*, The Speech of Aristophanes

**The Gods**

You.

With your long yellow hair. You're a man.

You.

With your gray eyes. You're a woman.

You are: two sexes, four arms, four legs, four eyes,  
two minds in one head. You are a match for the gods.  
You are you-and-you.

You-and-you are: welded bodies, two-in-one, backs  
joined, soul mates melded back-to-back. Zeus feared  
you. Hephaestus, he said, split twos into ones. Halve them.

Except for you and you.

You-and-you cartwheeled back-to-back out of the  
blacksmith's shop and away from the slaughter.  
You-and-you found a shallow cave and saved your  
wholeness.

$1 + 1 = 1$ . You are a mathematical impossibility  
because you beat the gods.

You-and-you watched as Apollo sewed sundered  
halves into half-wholes. He pulled the skin, stanching  
the wounds, and hid the scars. The half-wholes wailed,  
and pressed their bloody half-selves back-to-back,  
then front-to-front. This orgy of lost love produced  
half-children, half-children's children, years of half  
generations.

You-and-you still have nightmares, fear the gods  
have found you: Hephaestus strikes the dreaded blow.  
You push your backs against each other, tie ropes  
around your waists, weave your arms and legs together,  
intertwine.

But you cannot: dream the same dreams, feel the  
same pain, breathe the same breath, know entire  
thoughts, love selfishly. For, to your horror, your halves  
are selves. You-and-you are, for one moment, just you.  
You-and-you are, for one moment, halves.

That is your nightmare.

**You and You: One**

You-and-you are cautious living in this modern land of halves. You-and-you only show one face in public: either you or you. It is not as difficult as expected, not so hard to hide after all. You-and-you learned over the centuries to accessorize, to coif and comb and fuss until one of you coughed from all the hair in your face. You-and-you learned to sew, and designed custom-fitted costumes to suit the fashion, loving gloves, which let you-and-you hold hands. Without gloves, one of you has to tuck arms flush against ribs and hips. You piano-tap you on the thighs with hidden finger tips when you're bored on the job. You-and-you find work deathly dull.

But at home, in your one-bedroom apartment, you-and-you are fully you-and-you. Hello, you say to you, and giggle. Hello back, you say to you. You-and-you are circular fullness, moving through life with your hoop-like gait. Together, accord and discord, hot and cold, wet and dry. You-and-you are opposite, yet not.

*Francis 112*

You-and-you lie on your side in the twilight and tell stories to each other, knowing when to be silent and when to chatter. You-and-you get drunk together: completely, fully, equally drunk.

You-and-you dream of a whole population of you-and-yous: a salon in your apartment, a book club, a dinner party – table for six with a dozen side-saddle settings! You-and-you imagine a pancake stack of multiplied bodies writhing in a train of waves. Like watching sex in mirrors.

You-and-you climb the steps to your apartment. After you, you say to you, then wander in, eat dinner, and pull out your handheld mirrors: one is plastic green, the other plastic gray. You-and-you look each other in the eye and wink, multiplying winks like flipped flashcards. A beautiful hall of mirrored winks.

You and you are a wink at the gods.

You-and-you believe in the singularity of your oneness,

*Francis 113*

a oneness so spectacular that the gods still want to tear you apart. Perhaps the halves will, too. But you-and-you have survived unscathed throughout the chaos of history, and now grow careless.

You-and-you cartwheel in Union Square. Everyone is crazy there. You-and-you allow sunlight to bathe your hair, and play cloud games, taking turns looking at the sky, choosing shapes, and telling tales. You-and-you are so happy that you-and-you forget to keep hidden in this land of halves and the gods who would halve you.

### **Humans**

You-and-you watch them, the halves, as they search for their soul mates, finding or failing, but never again truly perfectly whole.

They kiss, lip-to-lip, sharing spit, tongues lashing. Their hands fumble with buttons and breasts and blue-jean-stuck zippers. Sometimes they look at each other, eye-to-eye, wink at one another, laugh.

They come together and push against one another, arching backs and thrusting. You-and-you watch them through your telescope, taking turns to peer from each set of eyes. They use separate arms to encircle one another. Some find a fleeting unity. Some don't. They struggle for that former oneness that is you-and-you, you-and-you think.

You-and-you pull out your mirrors and look into each other's eyes. You see the same look: Curiosity. Jealousy?

Then, just for a moment, you-and-you wish to kiss like the halves, wind your tongues tightly together: tight, together, like your body. You-and-you could feel the smoothness of each other's teeth, and the light, soft hairs on each other's cheeks. Butterfly eyelashes. You-and-you pull out your mirrors and pucker lips at each other. Echoing kisses.

You-and-you wander into a flower shop. A man uses a credit card to buy a dozen red roses. He has them wrapped in white crepe paper, and smiles as he leaves

the shop. You-and-you follow him, skipping sideways on the gray sidewalk. He walks into a restaurant with a red-and-white awning. He hands the flowers to a woman in a black, pin-striped skirt suit. Her hair is prettily pasted back into a ponytail. You-and-you never wear ponytails; you-and-you have to cover your extra set of ears. The man hands the woman the bouquet of roses, and she kisses him. As if flowers were love.

You-and-you begin to follow people from the flower shop to see what happens when they buy gardenias, or lilies, or tulips, to watch how these flowers create a shared, singular emotion. But you-and-you don't understand. You-and-you are dual emotion, a full circle. Do flowers create a circle for halves, create a way back to you-and-you?

You-and-you take a field trip to The New York Botanical Garden in the Bronx – purchase only one ticket! You-and-you sit in different flower sections, wondering which flower personifies you-and-you.

You-and-you pull out your mirrors and present flowers to each other. I'm sorry you say to you. What for? you say back. For there is: no sorry, no sympathy, no friendship, no love. Not in the singular sense.

You-and-you dig your twenty fingers into the dirt, tasting the earth, trying to understand what is missing. What do they have that you-and-you don't have? Why envy humans?

Eventually, you-and-you were kicked out of a garden for lying in the dandelions. The humans looked bewildered, unsure what exactly to think. You-and-you had dressed in an oversized business suit, and looked silly with a yellow flower behind one ear.

You and you feel alone together.

One day, at the Bethesda Terrace with its fountain and view of the boat pond, a wedding ceremony takes place. You-and-you watch as the he-half and she-half place circles on their fingers. Rings are you-and-you in gold

or platinum, they say.

You-and-you follow this couple through the years, and watch in dismay as kisses become confused with love. They are wrenched apart a second time, fighting in court over houses and children. They tear each other apart. They cleave one another into quarters. You-and-you half expect to see them hopping on one foot, with one eye, one arm, one leg. They are more destructive than Hephaestus ever was with his anvil and his blade. Lips that kissed say fuck you, you bastard, you bitch, you ass hole, you goddamn piece of shit.

You-and-you have never said a harsh word to you. You-and-you have never made up.

You-and-you watch television, taking turns with your mirrors. A live birth, an expulsion from the she-half. The mother screams as if she knows she is pushing out her chance at wholeness. This is violence. This is oneness ruptured. The small half-child, goopy and bright violet, opens its mouth in a wide cracking O to scream.

As you-and-you would scream.

Afterwards, you-and-you go for a walk around the reservoir, then sit in a favorite spot, watching the halves: hold hands, walk alone, talk face-to-face on a park bench, explain what they are thinking. You-and-you think, no one can tear you-and-you apart. Even the gods have failed.

### **You and You: Alone**

You-and-you have grown isolated over the centuries, watching humans multiply as you-and-you remain singular. You-and-you become reckless.

You-and-you want their envy, so begin to play games with your building superintendent. He thinks you-and-you are a transvestite.

Some days, you-and-you walk out in a deep black trench coat and tie your hair back, covering the gray eyes and two of your ears. The He of you carries a briefcase. You give the superintendent your card: Mr. Bennett Rose.

The next day, you-and-you wear a bright pink boa, white fur coat, fancy gloves. The She of you curls your hair, paints your eyelids blue, flutters eyelashes. You say, Hello Mr. Superintendent, in an alto voice. You say, Could you please tell anyone asking for me that I'll be right back? You tell him your name: Rose Bennett. You wink at him.

The superintendent always runs to the bottom of the stairs when he hears your footsteps. You-and-you wallow in his curiosity, teasing him, but fearing him, too. For one day, he shows Zeus's icy eyes of blue. Some days, his hair is curled in locks, and he looks gray and carved in stone. But that's just silly, you-and-you think.

Then, one day, your superintendent winks back.

You-and-you run from the building to the park, and sit, licking a lollipop thoughtfully. Children fall off swings and skin their knees. They hit other half-children over a blue pail in the sand. But one of these half children sees you-and-you. He is not yet aware that

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there can be no you-and-you. This is dangerous.

You-and-you will never have children. You-and-you decided never to let your seeds grow in the ground. You-and-you have seen what children do to love. They take oneness away. They create selflessness and anger.

Kids would not understand anyway. As they grew up, they would call you-and-you a freak. They would go to college and refuse to write. Your teenage daughter would run off with the wrong guy. And when she came back and asked you-and-you to give her away, you-and-you would not be able to. You-and-you would never give a part of you away.

No, you-and-you are better alone. Powerful alone, living exponential half lives.

Whereas humans die. At different times. He dead on the surgical table of a quadruple bypass gone wrong. She hit by a bus. You-and-you go to a funeral to see what it would mean to die, and watch as the living half, dressed in black, lays a white flower on the coffin.

You-and-you follow this widow, wondering at how

*Francis 121*

she was still alive. How she could go on. She plants fresh flowers at the gravesite, digging with a small trowel and gently brushing dirt with her finger tips. A few years later, there is an unbelievable transformation: She meets someone else. There is another. For you and you, there is no other.

You-and-you are happy, you-and-you think. One day, an old woman sees you-and-you cartwheeling in the park. This old woman screams, stretches her wrinkled lips into a wide cracking O, a toothless, gapped mouth. You-and-you thought only children could see you-and-you.

She grabs onto you-and-you. You, with your gray eyes, stroke her thin pallid arm and speak in soft tones. The old woman claws at your hair, searching for your other set of ears, searching for the man in you. She spits in your face and stares at you through Hera's big, brown eyes. You grip her scrawny shoulders tightly, and she screams until her eyes turn pale blue, vacuous. You

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smell her stale sweat and run away.

### **He : You and You : She**

Not long after this day, you-and-you wake up half-drenched in sweat, feel a pain, and find a lump. The She of you is afraid. The She of you grows weaker. There is an imbalance that you-and-you cannot comprehend. The He of you asks what is wrong. The She of you does not know what to say.

Can you not feel me? She asks.

No, He answers. What is happening? He asks.

You-and-you think of the gods, for who else could separate you-and-you? You whisper to you in your mirrors. What are you thinking? You ask at the same time. It is all so foreign.

You-and-you begin to understand the halves. The nightmares grow more ferocious. The He of you dreams: He is at your funeral. He dreams He is a you without a you. He dreams you-and-you are human, halves.

*Francis 123*

The She of you is too tired to dream.

You-and-you know empathy for the first time because, for once, you-and-you feel curiously separate. You-and-you feel like two. You-and-you cannot make the lump multiply and mirror onto your He side. There is separateness in your emotions. But both of you feel despair.

You-and-you are afraid of yourself for you want more than ever to: rub noses, see face-to-face, touch lip-to-lip, have a moment half alone so you can't hear you cry. You-and-you want for just one second to be halves, to be human.

You no longer understand you. You-and-you watch a television special on Mother Theresa and, for the first time, are moved. The He of you uses a mirror because the She of you will not give. The She of you will not play fair, will not let the He of you watch TV.

You-and-you desperately want to find that old woman who saw you-and-you. To see if her eyes are brown or blue. To convince yourself your fear of the

gods is unfounded.

You-and-you want to show this dust-covered old woman all of you-and-you, fully let her see a smile from ear-to-ear-to-ear-to-ear. You-and-you look for her in the park, handing out bread to the park bums, plying them with cigarettes.

But the She of you grows too weak to search, so you-and-you spend days in bed, telling stories and humming harmonies.

You-and-you are you or you.

Fear makes you-and-you brave the world of halves. The admitting nurse stares. The scientists are called, and interview you-and-you. You-and-you have the same thing to say: You are sick. You are made to stand on a platform. Pictures are taken from every angle. You are pressed against cold-plated glass and x-rayed. The She of you is diagnosed with breast cancer.

You-and-you are now internally separate. That

is what will kill you-and-you. The doctor discusses a splitting operation. He has a long, regal Greek nose. He has tight black curls and an aged face. His skin is flint. He wants to completely separate you-and-you. How can you explain to him? There is no separation. You and you are you-and-you.

How do you tell a god no?

You are burdened with your sick self. You-and-you know the She of you is dying. The He of you sometimes pulls the plastic green mirror out of the drawer to see if He can see how the She of you is. The She of you will not look in the mirror.

Can I be you? He asks.

Any envy of humans is gone. You-and-you want your circular fullness back. But your She arms are too tired to cartwheel. Your She body is too thin.

The doctor decides to put you-and-you in hospice care.

Are you sure you won't go through with the operation?

The doctor asks the He of you.

No, you-and-you both say. No. No.

But alone the She of you asks: Why not?

Because I am you, the He of you says.

But if you weren't me, She says, you could hold me.

But I am you, He answers, I am always fully completely you.

A young man feeds the She of you pain pills and morphine. He makes the He of you beg for the pills, too. I have pain, too, the He of you says.

You-and-you have never said "I".

The young man sneaks his friends into the hospice room and makes them pay \$20 to see you-and-you. Time Magazine publishes a story about you-and-you, citing scientists and psychologists: You-and-you are an unusual case of Siamese twins, some of them say. The tabloids call you Princess Diana's alien baby. Neither you nor you care. You-and-you are only interested in you-and-you.

**Dead You**

One day, you wake up and you are He and she. The she of you does not chatter. Her arms weigh you down. Her legs are leaden. She does not talk because you need her to. You wiggle your half body, and she sways with you. But she sways with you because she is attached, not because she is you.

You sneak out of the hospital, the back of your robe partially open, revealing your dead half. It makes you sick to your stomach, this half death. Your death in half is always with you. You can't even go grocery shopping without her.

You cartwheel only right-handed now. There is no playful tug against you. You do not debate which side of your body to sleep on at night. You feel her half dragging behind you. You cannot escape her.

You are given nothing, no one to mourn. You cannot weep at your gravesite or put your ashes on the mantel. You cannot search for another like a he-half or she-half

would do. You do not want to.

You go to bars, order a double Scotch. You order one for the dead you. You pay a fat prostitute to lie next to you, but you scream when she touches the dead you. You call her a bitch. She calls you a freak. You beg the she of you to come back, not to leave you, but she hangs limply, quietly tied. No longer you-and-you. Your hair has grown matted, and you no longer care if her dead gray eyes show through the strands.

You begin to believe in the power of the gods, but you cannot believe they were so patient. These gods who you-and-you had so easily defied. These gods who had thundered around the world in search of you-and-you. So fruitlessly, you-and-you thought, because of your double strength, your unity.

You do not care if they see you now. You are filled with a consuming hate: for halves, for gods, for anything unwhole and unyou.

*E&F VIV*

### **The Gods**

In the end, you drag yourself to the gods. You climb and kneel in the doorway of the blacksmith's shop and beg Hephaestus to halve you. He asks if you're sure.

No. Yes. You are so sad.

Yes, you say.

Yes.

His blade falls, and you feel your dead self peel away. You see her, wrinkled and scrawny with a bloodless wound down her back. But your blood flows freely. You and you are two. There is no Apollo to sew you up. Your back bleeds.

*Francis 130*





## *The Talking Cure*

David Pollock

Their house was in the neighborhood of Tokenville that used to be inhabited by the families who got work in the quarries. Now most of the houses were divided into apartments rented to students at the liberal arts college. Theirs was the same house where they had grown up. Their father had been the only man on their block who went to work in a suit. He sold real estate. The house was two-floored. It was silent most of the

time, smelled of Lysol and potpourri and was decorated with ornamental plates and inoperative lamps and flowery wall hangings that the sister thought made it less depressing. The brother liked her taste because it gave him the impression that she was always hiding somewhere.

On the night before the anniversary of their father's stroke, Julie announced to her brother that she was going to the store. Normally, she would have showered and spread on the sofa with a *Birds and Blooms*, the pink bath towel wrapped around her head. Her slender, bony feet would have dangled over the armrest. Now, she stood before him in white jeans and a blouse top with poofy shoulders. She was dressed casually, but she looked pretty. She had combed down her summer-red hair.

When Eckman asked her why, she rolled her eyes and patted the lavender handbag at her waist. He wasn't sure what to make of this gesture. She was annoyed, though.

He was in light, silky pajamas and admiring a long

sheet of paper that was curled inward on either end. He balanced the paper atop a centerpiece Julie put together last winter: a miniature barrow of wooden apples and straw.

Tell me what store you're going to, said Eckman, and I'll guess what you're going to buy.

Is that so?

Sure. Like a game.

She adjusted the handbag on her shoulder and saluted him goodbye. She slammed the front door hard enough to make the aluminum star spin on the doornail.

She's not angry, Eckman thought. She only wants me to believe that she's angry. Regardless, she left him in a bad frame of mind. He had been going over a blueprint for the newest edition to the strip mall on 13, Linens 'n' Things. He had sold that space and was proud of himself. He was a community rejuvenator; he was bringing in profitable business. Now the blueprint struck him as cold and senseless, so he rolled it up

and pretended it was a musical instrument. He put it to his mouth and flatulated with his lips. Then he said: *Julie has a boyfriend* though the tube, in a deep, demonstrative voice.

He was a sturdy fellow, not particularly tall, but compact. He did some pacing which made the walls rattle. He slapped a sloppy drum roll on his belly and talked to himself. What is the big deal, he said. I have known Julie for thirty-two years (he was thirty-three) and I had never made her feel she was asking for too much. We have suffered together and healed one another. I just wanted to know where she was going. Even if she was honest – even if she said that she had a date – I would have congratulated her. I am not the kind of man who dates – I’m so focused, my life has already been outlined, there are very few ways to get what I want – but I can understand how others might want some company. Doesn’t she deserve to be happy? Of course. Of course Julie deserves to be happy.

She didn’t return home until well after midnight.

Eckman had lain awake in bed for several hours with a magazine beneath his pillow. Once every several minutes, his eyes flickered nervously because of a great light that must have exploded inside of his head and he lifted the pillow, pressed the cool, slippery paper to his dry lips then hid it beneath his pillow again. He mumbled to himself. I can’t believe it, he said. I must have some problem. Julie would never sneak into the house and surprise him by opening his door, yet he imagined the scenario with such detail he felt it must be a premonition, that she was going to surprise him anytime now and catch him with the magazine.

This wasn’t a premonition for tonight. She was loud about opening and closing the front door. He listened to her kick off her shoes, go into the kitchen and get a glass of water from the sink. She moped up the stairs, her steps were heavy and flat. Eckman pretended to be asleep. Once she closed her bedroom door, he got out of bed and took the magazine from beneath his pillow and hid it in an old moving box in his closet. Then he put on

his robe and stood in the hallway with his ear to the still air, like a man woken from sleep with a terrible urge, which, upon his getting out of bed, has escaped him.

Thursday was the anniversary. Eckman woke up early, at six-thirty, so he could fry the eggs and brew the coffee before Julie got out of bed. It was important that he prepared the kitchen before she was conscious. By the time he had set the table and flipped the eggs, he was exhausted. It was barely seven o'clock, yet he felt dizzy. He touched his neck, he was cool, no fever. It was going to be a low-energy day at work. Sanderson was out of the office.

He kept the photograph hidden from Julie, in his closet, behind the moving box. Now he set the photograph on the breakfast table. Father would eat with them for one more year. She had asked him on the last anniversary to no longer display the picture. Eckman understood, one must be forward thinking. He had meant to respect her request, until today, when

he could no longer resist the urge. Lately, his head had been so clear. Now his memories bubbled.

The photograph was not spectacular, which is why it was respectful. It didn't feature their father on his birthday or during a moment of brilliance, shaking hands with sturdy men in beige suits (he also sold corporate office and retail space); the photograph was of father being father, before Eckman was old enough to remember. Father is in the backyard. He wears blue athletic shorts and high socks and sits cross-legged on the grass with a football between his knees. He wears his glasses, which were now dated, and his bushy, masculine mustache, which was also now dated, and half-smiles at the camera, as if he has been saying that he doesn't want his picture taken then realizes that he has no choice. Mother must take his picture because she wants what she wants. There is a sly smile on his face that foreshadows naughtiness. The smile says: *Alright, I'm ready for the picture, but I'm not happy. And also: You will get it later.*

Julie was moving around upstairs with the same heavy, flat footsteps from the dark early morning. When the shower began to run, he spooned eggs onto their plates and stacked four halves of toast for each of them and disappeared into his bedroom, where he changed out of his robe and into his button-down, tie and sand-colored khakis. Eckman didn't want to be in the dining room when Julie came down because he couldn't handle a fight over the photograph this morning. He was done dressing before she came out of the bathroom, but he wanted to hear her reaction first.

He knew she saw the photograph when a door slammed. Perhaps it was the bathroom behind the kitchen. Then she paced. She opened and closed cabinets, more cabinets than they had in their house. After a while, he wondered if she was not being musical in her anger. She was only showing off. It was at times like this, he thought, kneeling with his ear pressed to the door, that Julie behaved so much like their mother. Being a woman, Julie took mother's madness in so

largely and quietly that she didn't recognize it.

She came stomping up the stairs. Eckman felt confident in facing her because he was dressed for work. He opened the bedroom door before she could get to it. Julie was also dressed for work. She was a clerk at a locally owned flower shop. She wore a garden-patterned skirt and white blouse with poofy shoulders. Her hair was long and straight and strawberry. Their uncles, their father's brothers, used to call her summer girl because of her hair. She was pretty, but since she was his sister, Eckman thought of her as being as plain as him; except she was not round like mother, nor was she compact like Eckman and his father. She was the opposite. Julie was a long woman, stretched, a clear, vaporous image that had arisen from a magic bottle.

Now she was ugly, due to the scowl on her face and her folded arms. As long, as stretched as she was, Julie was still a woman like her mother. Eckman couldn't remember the dead woman anymore, all of her maddening actions, they belonged to an invisible head that rolled across

plains, down and up the dips of his past.

Julie said: Go downstairs and take the picture off the table.

Today is the day, he said.

We've talked about this, she said. You know I don't think it's right.

He asked her why. He tugged at his tie then lifted his hands. Tell me why, he said, when only once a year we should remember this day. This day could be more important than when he died. This is the day he began to die, after all. This is the day he was humiliated. We couldn't understand him anymore. Don't you feel humiliated by the way we treated him?

Follow me. Watch me take the picture off the table.

I won't do it, he said. I don't agree with you.

Julie went back into her bedroom. She slammed the door, of course.

If Eckman dilly-dallied much longer, he was going to be late for work. He cracked his knuckles and gave himself a last close look in the mirror. Today was going

to be low energy, but it was important that he appeared polished, cool, ready for Sanderson to make a surprise entrance. Father used to tell him, *Boss's vacation is an excuse for him to surprise you, Eckman. Never be caught looking like a monkey.*

At the breakfast table he squeezed ketchup onto his eggs, buttered his toast. The tone of his sister's voice made lines in his head. He was doing alright not hearing the words, but her voice, he knew it so well, it affected him like a haunting music. The key of the music trailed through his soft brain mud. Julie has a boyfriend, he thought. He imagined her saying it to him while unwrapping the towel from around her head: *I have a boyfriend now.* He tried to concentrate on the photograph. I'm sorry father, he said. She doesn't mean it. She is like your wife. She suffers the same exact pain. The same exact pain that is caused by no one, that has existed inside of her since the day she was born.

I didn't go to the store last night, said Julie. She had come back to the kitchen and pulled out her chair. She

brushed a few crumbs off the seat.

Eckman pretended to be so involved with the photograph that he couldn't be interrupted.

Julie repeated herself. I didn't go to the store last night. Do you want to know where I went?

I know you didn't go to the store. You were out past midnight. You have a boyfriend. Do you think I'm not perceptive enough to see that?

She laughed, not because she was amused. It was deliberate and meant to punch him. I have a boyfriend, she said. Okay, sure. If you want to bring it to that, then go ahead.

Eckman asked what she meant by *bring it to that*. Wasn't that the truth? Where else could she have been? Are you going to tell me you were really at the store now? You're going to say you were out shopping for some mysterious object past midnight?

She laughed again. Eckman flinched. This laughter said that he had gotten too close to her, that he had touched her in the wrong way. It said that he was being

intrusive. So you were up waiting for me, she said. Alright, that's fine if you want to do that. But I have to tell you. I think it's pathetic.

He spooned up the last of his eggs and spattered some ketchup on his tie. He normally didn't eat breakfast in his work clothes for this reason. One time, he had gotten some mayo on his tie, and Julie had reached across the table and dabbed the spot with a napkin.

Well, I worry about you. I guess that's pathetic. To worry about you. Julie's the big girl. She doesn't need to be cared for. He pointed to the picture of father. That's why you don't like it here, he said. All of this feeling, it's the expression of emotion that bothers you. I won't tell you who you take after. You already know.

I don't have a boyfriend, she said. I don't have a boyfriend. I have friends. I have friends, and I'm moving out of this house. I'm moving away from you, brother, and I'm moving in with them. I'm going to be an adult. I'm moving in with other adults.

Eckman frantically wiped his tie, but there remained

a black, amoeba-shaped stain. He would have to put on another tie. Okay, he said. That's fine. You can leave this house. I still live here, though. I live here. I'll have to get a roommate, you understand.

Next month, she said. We have a place. We were out celebrating last night. Me and Katie. We have a great place in Tokenville. It's two floors. Just like this one. And she's a friend. I don't get angry at her. I don't feel any pain with her. I feel healthy. Do you understand what it means to be feel healthy?

Of course he understood what it meant to feel healthy. To prove to her that he knew, he held up the photograph that he imagined caused all of this trouble. He said: It's healthy to be respectful. There is nothing wrong with pain. You're like our mother. She couldn't stand pain.

No, she said. That's where you're wrong. You deny yourself happiness. Happiness is moving on without pain. That's healthy. You are not healthy.

Eckman was thirteen when his father collapsed in this same kitchen. His earliest memories were from this time. Sometimes his head felt flooded with them. Sometimes at work, out on a sale, he would suddenly lose his confidence – the sensation was of being yelled at. He told himself that he had been a child, he could not have been responsible, he was being violated by his own thoughts. But the memories had their own musculature, they exercised to prove to him that they existed. They were stronger than him. Why couldn't he be indifferent?

There was Julie on the floor in a pair of corduroy trousers, chewing on the kinky hair of a Diaper Baby. He lay upside down on the stairs with his arms spread at his sides. For one reason or another, perhaps he had been inspired by a popular movie, he imagined he was a missionary for Christ, and that he had been tied to a wooden crucifix and was floating downstream, into death, though at the time he was unfamiliar with death. So he imagined he was floating into the great nothing

of purple sky, populated with yellow trees and hairy, long-armed animals that cawed in the night because they had forsaken the Lord. (Their parents used to often speak about the Lord. Eckman still heard their voices, not always the words, only vague messages.) The hairy animals were actually the merchants of death, ashamed and fallen creatures, who populated this space between the living and the dead, he thought. Father was in the recliner. Eckman wasn't old enough to understand that he was no longer the same. So he let himself fall all of the way down the stairs, which was a way of floating downstream. And his father, who had taught him to splay his fingers in the curveball position, and to get assistance from clerks at the service desks by being forceful and present, was sticking out his tongue. Eckman thought this was funny. He said: *Father is pretending to be retarded.* Julie heard. She sat beside her brother on his lap. They bounced on him, since he wouldn't bounce them himself. Julie and Eckman chanted: *Daddy is retarded, daddy is retarded.* Then

their mother appeared from the kitchen. He couldn't imagine how she must have moved, but she was quick, a round, fleshy ball, a human head, tumbling from the linoleum to the carpet. She said that they were evil children and swatted something at them: a magazine? A newspaper? A blueprint? But what could that woman have done with a blueprint?

Julie knew Katie from the flower shop. They were both clerks and had overlapping shifts. Eckman had met Katie twice before.

The first occasion was a month and a half earlier when she stopped by the house. Eckman was on the sofa, paging through an early draft of the plans for Linens 'n' Things, when Julie came down the stairs, having just changed out of her work clothes. She wore a long flowery skirt and white tank-top that showed her long freckled arms. She was already on edge then, but she could still be sweet. There was still remnant of the sister who used to cower in the closet with him when

mother used a frying pan to beat the walls. She sat on the armrest and looked over his shoulder.

You bring your work home, she said. I think that's depressing.

Maybe I'll develop a magazine habit.

She thought this was funny. One of her preoccupations was garden magazines. She didn't even read the articles, only looked at the pictures of the flowers and pointed them out to him. She named the different species and described how they smelled, what kinds of gifts they made, how hard they were to cultivate. *A sprinkling beauty, she once said. It looks dead at first. It's very hard to grow. If it gets just the right amount of sun and water, and no vermin tries to eat it, it has a three day bloom when it turns beautiful and yellow and the petals fall off. Back in the old days, the women would carry the petals around with them to sprinkle at the feet of the men who tried to court them.*

Just so you know, I have a friend coming over tonight, she said. We're going to hang out. A fair warning.

The first thought to occur to Eckman was that her friend would be a man. He wanted Julie to have a boyfriend. A partner was not the best thing for him, his life had already been outlined. He wanted Julie to be healthy, but he was nervous because of who this man could be, how he might behave once he was inside of their house. So he asked her for the friend's name.

Why should I tell you my friend's name?

Because I asked.

What if I don't want to say?

I'll find out sooner or later. Isn't that right?

He understood that she was having fun with him. They liked to play guessing games. Eckman went back to the ground plans, except he couldn't comprehend. He began to suffer wildly in his head as the doorbell rang when the house was silent. He saw Julie go to the door when she was still on the arm rest at his side. He imagined she let in a professional man, like him, except he was barrel-chested and wore the cocky grin and called Eckman buddy. *So this is big brother,* said the mouth.

*How are you, buddy? You can rest now that I'm taking some of this weight off your shoulders. Your Julie here, she's my responsibility now. How's that sound, buddy? I bet you like that idea.*

Except when the doorbell rang, and Julie jumped off the sofa and skipped to the door, it was not a man she let in. There was a woman. Brother, she said. I want you to meet Katie.

Eckman was relieved. He set his paperwork on the centerpiece and stood up to greet Katie, a little taken aback. Not only because she was noticeably overweight, or what we call obese, but because she was a warped version of his sister. They had the same kind of hair. It was straight and thin summer girl hair. And they each wore garden-patterned skirts. For a moment, they stood side by side, each with her arms crossed, waiting for Eckman to introduce himself.

It's very nice to meet you, he said. He shook her hand. Her palm was warm and sweaty. When they were done shaking, he rubbed his hand on the side of his pants.

The large woman noticed; she put her pinky in her mouth and nibbled on her fingernail. Eckman worried that Julie also noticed, because she tugged back her hair and announced that she and her friend should go to her room and talk for a while.

It was very nice to meet you, said Katie. Her voice was high-pitched and sweet. Her cheeks were pink with blush, which may or may not have been make-up. Eckman placed her as a particular kind of overweight woman, who made up for her appearance with a saccharine, childlike personality.

As the girls moved up the stairs, the friend looked at him one last time and offered a smile and blinked her eyes. He concluded that she was an alright friend for his sister to have. She meant well. And since Julie was so much prettier, they would not grow competitive with one another.

His second encounter with Katie happened a week later. He had stopped after work at a convenience store that was attached to a gas station, for some band-aids;

Eckman had recently sliced his finger on the hand-blender while scrubbing the dishes. He bought some cough syrup, because he'd been experiencing brief spells of dizziness and chills and could not afford to be ill. He also wanted to pick up a magazine. He did this once a week after work, one magazine at a time. He never felt good about it. His body left him when he bought the magazine, he felt like a man wandering a black stage where all of the scenery had been taken away.

He had not seen a woman without her clothing since he was twenty-five and had picked up a doughy, freckle-faced college student in a sports bar. The experience had been a terrible mistake, and the next morning he was so ashamed of himself that he wouldn't even leave his house for lunch when the refrigerator was empty. He had spent the afternoon in bed, listening to his stomach gurgle.

As a child, Eckman had found a magazine in his father's drawer while looking for a pair of socks. The magazine was called *She's So Normal*, and featured

pictures of normal naked women. When he asked father to explain what it was for, father said that it wasn't his. And when Eckman asked him whose magazine it was and why it was in their house, he gave the boy's mouth a slap. His lip bled. He realized then that even the lightest curiosities come with sharp momentary pains. He couldn't help himself.

Eckman bought two other magazines to cover up the special one: *Newsweek* and *National Review*. He was going to the register when he heard that sweet voice say his name, though at the time he couldn't place it. He saw himself moving across the black stage with his magazine. All was darkness. Surely, there could be no woman hiding behind the cut-out of a pine, waiting to catch him. There was no scenery, yet he was so conscious of himself.

When Eckman turned around, Julie's friend Katie was there with twelve rolls of plastic-wrapped toilet paper covering most of her upper half. Only her nose and eyes peeked out from above.

They said hello to one another. Eckman asked what she was doing when it was obvious. She was so sweet that she went out of her way to not make him feel like an idiot. She had been at the flower shop late, she said, closing up, counting the drawers and all of that. He had been at work too. He was just stopping to get some things.

The cashier began ringing up his purchase, and he told himself not to get nervous. An enormous light exploded in his head. His eyes blinked. Julie would find out about the magazines. Don't worry, he told himself. Katie said how neat it was that he kept up with the issues. She was one who always wished she could be more engaged, but her life was scattered enough without all the world's problems mixed in.

I love to read, said Eckman.

The cashier, a high school girl in an orange smock, picked up the *Newsweek* and scanned it. Then the *National Review*.

Julie and I both, he said, we love magazines.

When Katie saw the special magazine, she didn't laugh and she didn't look at him accusingly. At first Eckman stared at the floor, but he realized that he must look guilty. Something he learned selling real estate was that even when lying, and especially if you're lying, it's best to make eye contact. He looked Katie in the eyes as the cashier rung up the magazine. It was called *Lolita Heaven* and featured pretty young girls in white dresses, swinging on swings and the like, except they didn't wear tops, and sometimes they didn't wear anything at all. Mostly, the magazine was tasteful and the girls wore some clothing. What Katie did, she blinked her eyes and offered Eckman a naughty smile. She set her twelve rolls of toilet paper on the counter and said to the cashier: He has good taste, doesn't he?

The cashier was a high school student. She snorted and glared at Eckman as if she couldn't believe he existed.

I'll see you around, said Katie.

Eckman would see her around, too. He felt her gaze

swallow him up as he left the store.

On the way back home, he stopped at Feinstein Park. A wet haze laced the air, and he held himself as he ran from his car to the garbage can. He threw out the *Lolita Heaven*. Let some kids find it, he thought. If Katie ever told his sister about his taste for certain magazines, and she wanted to check his bedroom for them when he was gone, she would find nothing. Eckman threw out an issue every week, right before he bought another. Even if Julie found one, she would understand that it was not a habit, but an experience, maybe even an experiment.

While looking through a magazine, Julie once pointed out a rare flower called the Ink Stain. This was its nickname, of course, American slang. She wasn't even sure if that flower could still grow, if the heirloom seeds could produce the original. It's so neat, she said, because it's ugly. It looks like a weed. Except if you were to kill it, to pull it out of the soil and crush its green stem between your fingers, you'd be left with a beautiful, exotic, bright

purple ink that does not look natural. And it wasn't really an ink, you couldn't write with it. If you put it to paper, it would spread and smear and look like a spill of some watery liquid. Though its history is that back in the old days, you might give it to an enemy with whom you wanted to make amends. The thinking was that it looked like a weed. Out of anger that enemy would crush it in his hands and would be left with the bright purple ink that was not an ink all over his skin. And since it was not an ink, it washed out so easily. You gave your enemy a momentary spell of beauty, a brilliant color.

Eckman would have liked to give this flower to Julie. She could move out of the house. He would find a roommate. He imagined the roommate, a guy like himself, except he would hang out in the living room with a laptop. *Hey, Eckman, would you mind beer-ing me here. I've got a drought in my throat. Thanks, bud. Just working on this spreadsheet.*

Since the morning of the anniversary, she was always

downstairs, opening and closing cabinets. She was only looking for a snack. But she had begun slamming the cabinet doors harder. Early one evening, he had attempted to talk to her. He asked about work and how Katie was doing. She was sorry, but she couldn't answer. She was like mother, after all, so she wouldn't slap him, even though she wanted to. She was going to punish him passive-aggressively. Eckman, on the other hand, took after father and hit her hard.

You're a liar, he said. I would never dream of hitting you.

No. You have. You hit me so hard. I can still feel it.

She said that Eckman made her afraid to move out of the house. His eyes blinked wildly. No, he told her. You have it all wrong. I want you to move out of the house. You should be an adult.

But it wasn't true. He was a liar. When Julie told him she was moving and that she couldn't look at the picture of father any longer, he boiled over. He couldn't

concentrate on work and ended up flubbing a sale to a small jewelry chain that he shouldn't have lost. He found himself praying at night because he no longer purchased the magazines and needed to empty his mind. He imagined himself as a child, strapped to a wooden crucifix, floating downstream, a missionary. He experienced pain for the Lord. But praying became difficult because he couldn't understand the use. He wanted to hear a voice in return for his prayers, but there was only silence and a series of dancing white lights. His eyes blinked. He was frustrated.

Eckman had not premeditated meeting Katie again. It became a habit that after work he would drive into the parking lot of the same convenience store where they had met and look through the windows to see if she was there. Julie was to move in with her in less than a month. He told himself that he did not want to make his sister unhappy. She deserved her happiness. He wanted to speak to Katie. She had to be warned, after all. After

several weeknights of driving by the convenience store, what he had not premeditated finally happened. He saw her through a window, bending over the toilet paper so she could pick up a pack of twelve rolls. He parked his car, remembering to turn off the lights. His hands went numb. There were tingles all throughout his body. Nevertheless, Eckman got out of the car and went inside.

Katie was checking out. He pretended not to see her. He hoped that she would see him first and say his name, but no such luck. She was busy digging through her purse. So Eckman went to the newsstand and picked out a *Newsweek*. The cover story was about women and the church. The picture was a row of several women, all of different races, kneeling with their hands folded. This embarrassed him. He brought the magazine up to the register and stood right behind her. He stood closer than he would have to a perfect stranger and could smell her perfume. It was overly sweet and cheap. She must have purchased it, he thought, at one of the low-end

department stores. These were the companies that were concerned with space, and not so much the location, as long as they were located on a strip with heavy car traffic.

Then Eckman said her name. His voice was weak and came out accidentally. He wasn't accustomed to speaking to women. Katie, he said. Is that you?

She turned around and, after a moment of recognition, made the naughty smile. Her cheeks were rosy, she used make-up. So, she said, we meet again. She looked down at the magazine. Only one this time, she said.

Only one, he assured her and held it up so she could see.

The cashier tonight was not the high school girl. It was an older gentleman who wore the orange smock and did not pay attention to the people coming through his line. His approach, it seemed, was the ostrich approach, to hide his face and assume no one could see him.

I don't like those things so much, he said. That magazine I bought before. That's only for now and

then.

Sure, she said. I understand that. Say, now. You're not embarrassed.

A little. If it were anyone else, then no, I wouldn't be. But I wouldn't want you to think I was one of these dirty old men.

She listened to this closely, as if she wasn't sure about the meaning. Her mouth, too small for the fleshiness of her face, morphed into an *O*. She seemed to want to ask what was so different about her, but the question never came out.

The cashier handed her the receipt and began to open a plastic bag for the rolls of toilet paper. Oh, no, she said. No thank you. I can just carry these. Thanks.

The old man in the smock nodded without looking up. Katie smiled. She blinked and said that she would see him around.

Eckman threw the magazine on the counter. He said thanks to the cashier, and the sound of his own voice frightened him. It was his voice on the stage now,

his body was nowhere in sight. There was his voice trailing a grand space of black. A light exploded. The moment was happening, the moment was about to pass. Excuse me, he said to the old clerk and dashed out of the store.

He had no idea what kind of car Katie drove; perhaps she had already driven away. No, there had not been enough time for that. So he stood on the blacktop, illuminated by the buzzing yellow lamps above. He looked like a nervous child who had suddenly realized he'd been left. His eyes blinked uncontrollably. Katie must have seen him and realized that something was wrong, because she called his name. She was parked around the corner of the building, half-hidden by a few tire pumps. She lifted herself up out of her car, a dark-colored sedan. Hey there, she said. Is everything alright?

No. It's not. I'm fine. Do you have a few minutes? Do you want to get a couple of drinks?

She looked at him silently, waiting for him to admit

he'd been mistaken. She wanted him to say never mind, smile and go back to his own car.

Eckman approached her and asked if they could travel in her car, since he was too shaken to drive. She fixed her hair, a gesture of discomfort, and said okay, sure. The odor of her perfume was strong. Eckman cracked the window. He was going to get a headache.

Where do you want to go, she said. I don't normally drink. On some occasions, but not normally. If you want to get a cup of tea some place, I can do that. Does tea sound alright to you?

Yes. Tea sounds wonderful. I don't normally drink either. Let's go to where you like to get tea. I'd like that.

Katie was not comfortable. Eckman was also uncomfortable. He asked himself why he did this. He knew, but he could not say it to himself. He wanted to ask her: *Are you Julie's boyfriend?* But this question did not make sense. It was not the correct one.

She didn't say anything as she drove. She looked at him a few times. She believed he was suicidal. Eckman

was sure. He had attached himself to her because she happened to be there at the right moment.

I'm taking us to a place called Cindy's, she said. Have you ever been there?

No. I don't go out very much. I work a lot. That's what Julie says. That I should go out more often. I should read more magazines. Get a hobby.

She clicked her tongue. Had he said something to offend her? He went over the words and couldn't find the culprit. Her car smelled so strongly of that perfume, he didn't know how she could stand it. She was obviously a messy woman. Julie was so neat. If flowers were her first interest, then keeping their house clean was her second. Even when she was angry at him she did his laundry and vacuumed the carpet in his bedroom. The toilet paper was in the back seat, along with some stuffed animals that were beaten and stained and brightly colored. They were from one of those claw machines, he thought. You put a quarter in the machine and see if you can't rescue one of those Diaper Babies.

He kept looking into her backseat, using the passing lights to take in as much as possible. She saw what he was doing, that he was trying to make out her character, perhaps, and she apologized for her car being so messy. I'm just so busy, she said.

There's no reason to be sorry. I only get curious about my surroundings. I need to know what kind of space I'm in at all times.

Sure. I know what that's like. I'm the same exact way.

Eckman didn't believe her. She was lying to relax him. He didn't really seem so nervous. He didn't feel as nervous, now that they were moving. He resented her kindness.

Then he saw it taped to her glove compartment. It wasn't there before, he thought, but it had to have been. He would have known had she reached over and put it there. A cross made of palm. Palm Sunday had passed some time ago, yet she had hung onto this sign.

You're a believer, he said.

I am. Yes. I don't talk so much about it. I don't know.

I'm not a holy-roller. I go to church. She stopped herself. She was about to speak, but didn't.

Go on.

I'm sorry.

Go on, he repeated. You were going to say something just then and you stopped.

No, I really wasn't.

Yes. I saw you. Julie does the same thing to me. She pretends that I don't see, that I'm not observant.

He stopped himself. He was being aggressive. He was talking to her like she was his sister when he had no right. This sweet woman was doing him a favor, he thought, and here he was talking angrily at her. I'm sorry, he said. I've been on edge.

No, she said. You're right. I was going to say something. I didn't feel that it was right. I really don't know you. But – I'm sorry. I'm being rude. It's just that Julie talks to me about you. Not a lot. I don't want to make you paranoid or anything. She nervously snorted and giggled. She tells me that you're a believer too, but

that you never go to church. Do you mind if I ask you why that is?

Julie thought he was a believer. But he was. He did suffer, after all. Do I suffer more than most people, he wondered, enough to be a believer? A wooden crucifix. Because I'm busy, he said.

Cindy's was a little diner with pink drapes in the windows and a picture of steaming pie on the *Open* sign. He had passed this place a thousand times and thought it was poorly used space. These privately owned businesses, they made such little money. The patrons came here for purely sentimental reasons. He had always thought a Perkins, which Tokenville did not have, would have fared much better. It would be larger, for one. A Perkins would bring more money into the community.

Eckman didn't make a move to get out of the car. For one reason or another, it struck him as distasteful, the idea of going into this place, of giving it his money. You and Julie come here all of the time, don't you?

As a matter of fact, we do.

I don't think it's right. I don't think I can do it. What I wanted to talk to you about, it's my sister. Is it alright if we just sit here and talk?

She reached into her purse that was in the space between the seats and pulled out some chewing gum. She offered him a stick. Eckman declined. Chewing gum was obnoxious. It was loud and an obvious sign of discomfort. There was no way he could tell her what he wanted to tell her and chew gum at the same time. He didn't know what, only that it was urgent. Sitting in her car, once the dome light faded, he had the feeling that a phrase had been building up inside. There were ideas he needed to express. If she was going to take Julie away then she needed to hear the truth of their situation.

He was stalling for too long. Katie was getting antsy, snapping her gum, adjusting her hair. He did not premeditate, not in the least. He talked. There had to be a reason. He would make one up. The lights danced, they swirled and danced and echoed, just like a sound,

a musical siren.

There are some things I'm sure Julie didn't tell you. They're all coming to the surface now. That's why we need to talk. Because when I saw you it occurred to me that you're making a great mistake, Katie. Do you understand what I'm saying?

No, she said as plainly as if he had asked her if she would ever consider wearing another perfume.

You can't move in with Julie. She's not ready. She's a sweet girl, she's too sweet. She doesn't understand. My God. I'm sorry to bring you into this. I can't help it, though. These things ... the Lord seems to orchestrate our lives so that what needs to be acknowledged is acknowledged in due time. I'm sorry. You don't want to hear this. But our mother used to beat us, Katie. I can't go into detail. It hurts to say. She beat us every day after our father passed. Did you know that our father passed away when we were very young?

No.

Julie still doesn't know this. I mean, she knows.

But she pretends like it's not true. Whenever I speak of dad, she says that she has just spoken to him, like he lives down the street and still calls our house. She's traumatized, I think. She never got over it. She's just like our mother. She's delicate. I'm sorry. I wasn't expecting this to happen.

Eckman doubled over and rested his head on the dash. His head exploded with all of its liquids, they all went running down his face, the saltiness tingled on his lips and tongue. He sobbed and snorted. It was amazing, terrific. Never before had he acted this way. He was finally delivering the sadness he deserved. He was unclear as to if he would have gone home and cried, or if this was for Katie's benefit. It didn't matter.

I'm so sorry. I don't know what this is. But I can feel her. I can feel her hitting me, I can feel her hitting Julie, too. I know you care about her. I know you do, that's why I'm telling you. She's not fit, Katie. She shouldn't have pretended. She didn't pretend, she didn't know.

Katie was still. He felt all of her weight in the seat

beside him. She was folding her hands, and though he couldn't understand her words, he understood that she was praying. She whispered Julie's name, she whispered Eckman. Then aloud, so that he could know she was speaking to him and God at the same time, she said: We have to embrace our pain. To embrace our pain, to carry it, is to bear the cross and wear the crown. This is the only way we can walk with the Lord.

Thank you.

It may not be my place to say this, but this weekend you should go to His house. I know you're a good person. I can feel it. You have shame, you carry so much weight. For your own good. Please. Let Him help you to carry that weight. You and the Lord can carry the weight together.

Eckman looked up, suddenly aware of himself. He was walking the black stage, but there was scenery. A cut-out pine. Julie hid behind it. She jumped out from behind the prop to surprise him. *Oogadaboogada, brother. Oogadabooda. I scared you, didn't I?* He

reached across to Katie in the darkness and touched her face that was warm, powdered with make-up and specked with cool perspiration.

You too, he said. You help me to carry it. You're too good of a person.

We all have duties, she said, when we're called upon.

When Eckman got home that night, it was well after ten. Julie was already in her bedroom and the light was out. He could tell from looking under the door. He dressed into his silky pajamas and closed his eyes. He was exhausted and shaky, but he felt good. He had done something wrong and he wasn't going to get in trouble.

Sometime during the night, Julie's bedroom door opened. She stood in the hallway for a moment. Eckman imagined that his conversation with Katie had traveled on the air, like pollen. It blew through her window and sprinkled across her face, leaving a trail, a long echo like a siren that pulled her from sleep. She stood in the

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hallway, he thought, wondering what she heard, why she still felt it ringing on her skin. She decided it was a figment of her imagination, went back into her room, and softly closed the door behind her.





*Travels in New York:  
Pier Paolo Pasolini's  
"Guerra Civile"*

Anthony Cavaluzzi

As A. Owen Aldridge has written in "Literature and Study of Man," modern anthropologists and ethnographers use the empirical perspective to delineate the particulars of a society. In a series of essays and interviews on his American experiences, filmmaker and author Pier Paolo Pasolini assumed the roles of historian, philosopher, and anthropologist in order to develop both a symbolic and cognitive comprehension of the United States

and by extension of his own persona. Through these examinations of American culture and politics, Pasolini was able to dissect and conceptualize his own views on how to construct a viable resistance to the destructive consequences of bourgeois values.

In 1966, Pasolini visited the United States for the first time. The occasion was a screening of his film *Hawks and Sparrows* at the New York Film Festival. He arrived in New York at a time of “discontent and exaltation, desperation and hope.” The 1960s was indeed a decade of upheaval throughout America and Europe, and Pasolini, who seemed always to be on the edge of some turmoil, found himself quite at home in the midst of antiwar protests and rising black consciousness. For some time, he had been particularly troubled by the inefficacy of the political Left and its artistic attendant, the avant-garde, in Europe and especially in Italy. He had often railed against the failures of the Left to remain an active and viable force in the lives of what he called the *sottoproletariato*. The vibrancy of the old resistance

movement that had been so crucial during the Second World War had disappeared. A malaise had settled among the radical Left—a “spiritual crisis” was how Pasolini typically termed it. The economic and political changes that had been sweeping through Italy—the so-called “miracle”—convinced him that the existing radical movements in Europe were no longer legitimate alternatives to the increasing onslaught of neocapitalist consumerism. Many of his essays during the '60s focused on this issue and were collected in *Heretical Empiricism*. In “Guerra Civile” from that work and in other pieces, Pasolini recounted his American visits and revealed that his few weeks in America were powerfully stimulating and reinvigorated his commitment to radical political change.

When citing the virtues of two ideologists, Tom Hayden of the SDS (Students for a Democratic Society) and Jimmy Garrett of the SNCC (Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee), Pasolini was pleased to point out that each believed communism to be a bankrupt

ideology, an observation he shared after having visited Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and Romania. The language he used is certainly Marxist, though it does reflect some reordering of the traditional polemics. With reference to the need for a decentralized state, workers' control, and the elimination of the dominant bureaucratic elite, he certified his displeasure with the failure of the revolutionary movements to continue their march toward those goals. This failure was largely due to an inability to actualize the language of the struggle; that is, these movements were primarily ideological structures encased in a ponderous and unresponsive bureaucracy that did not satisfy the needs of the very people it sought to liberate. What excited Pasolini about America was that while the potential for revolutionary change was present, it was not mired in any linguistic muddle, but was rather in the hands of those who saw the problems purely in "democratic terms." This retreat from ideology in favor of humanity was especially appealing to Pasolini, who had seen the European Left

steadily recede from its commitment to the poor during the postwar period. The chaotic student movements were not staid organizations, lost in the tired clichés of their own jargon, but almost non-entities, ideas, pure and free from some ossified historical cell; in short, human and alive. As Pasolini wrote, "Those who belong to the New Left are recognizable immediately, and among them is born that kind of love that tied the partisans together."

One area that touched Pasolini deeply was the disastrous effects of capitalism on the Italian immigrant condition. This proved to be particularly disheartening for him since it was the prospect of financial reward that had enticed so many of his countrymen to immigrate to the United States. He took note of the decades of Italian migration, marveling at how the psychology of the immigrants remained unaffected by the myriad difficulties they encountered. Pasolini visited the more centralized areas of Italian settlement in New York and discovered a total "veneration" for the United States and

its institutions: “They’re still children. Children who are too obedient or too desperate.”

However, the uniqueness of America, exhibited in its ethnic variance, was not lost on Pasolini, who cited the humble origins of most Americans as contributory to the country’s diversity. But the traditional European path to Marxism had never materialized in the United States. The American masses maintained a strong aversion to communism, fearing it would reduce everyone to some ignoble base denominator. In such a world, the power of ethnicity would be eliminated and individualism would count for nothing. What was especially ironic for Pasolini was that this “leveling” was precisely what the American people sought. So while economic disparity had certainly created class divisions, divisions that the sottoproletariato found unacceptable, all other elements of classical class warfare were rejected as a threat to personal identity.

But while Pasolini bore witness to the uncompromising acceptance of institutional America

by the immigrants, he was hard-pressed to identify an “average” American. Certainly the retention of Old World culturalisms made visible the average German or Italian, but no such American equivalent could be found. “This is the thing which perhaps filled me with amazement in America....This ‘average American’—physically, materially, visually—doesn’t exist! How can one summarize in one ‘type’ all the extraordinary types who wander around Manhattan?”

It was this inability to synthesize all America into something generic that was the core of what Pasolini found troubling with the United States. Since there did not seem to be any common denominator by which to characterize the American psyche, he believed Americans were incapable of attaining any measure of the self-awareness so necessary for a successful revolutionary consciousness. How else, he thought, could one explain his being unable to find anyone in New York City to define racism? These Americans, unlike their European counterparts, had succumbed

completely to a self-perception that was at best illusory and at worst destructive. As long as the American masses continued to cling to illusions about their societal status, they would be prevented from confronting the same forces that had relegated them to their powerless positions. Pasolini believed that such a confrontation was essential for developing a radical consciousness that could result in economic reordering.

This did not mean that Americans were incapable of conceptualizing their situation, however. In truth, Pasolini believed they already had an understanding of democracy and that there had been a history of strong unionism for some time among the working class. Nonetheless, it still required what he termed a cathartic immersion through “a Calvary of the blacks” and of Vietnam. It was these contradictions inherent in the American sentience that both confused and intrigued Pasolini. In order to initiate the requisite class consciousness, Americans needed to draw upon what the Europeans called idealism or what he identified

in America as “spiritualism.” More precisely, Pasolini described it as an Anglo-Saxon moralism, quite middle-class and very pervasive.

Therefore, traditional class consciousness emanated in the United States not from the conventional European genesis, such as workers’ strikes or trade unionism, but “in pacifist and nonviolent manifestations which are dominated...by an intelligent spiritualism.” While spiritualism may seem out of place in Marxist dogma, for Pasolini it defined precisely the paradox of his philosophy. While generally extolling the virtues of communism and affirming his own atheism, Pasolini never abandoned the fundamental roots of his Catholic childhood. His was what biographer Enzo Siciliano called a “twentieth-century religiosity, from which all relations with a personalized God are absent.”

Indeed, at this point in his life, Pasolini believed that only Marxism and Christianity posed a viable threat to the onslaught of capitalist consumerism. As Ben Lawton has noted, “His pronouncements often suggest the Old

Testament prophet, passionate defender of a hard moral code, and fearless castigator of its betrayer.”

Pasolini’s spiritualism was actually an extension of the humanity he had seen in his visits to Harlem and Greenwich Village. In an interview with Pasolini in New York, in 1966, Oriana Fallaci revealed that the artist had been wandering the dangerous streets of the city, “looking for the sordid, unhappy, violent America that suits his own problems and tastes.” The city, however, had enlivened Pasolini. “New York...is a commitment....It fills you with a desire to do, to deal with, to change things.” Here was the America he had sought, quite unlike the European society he described as stupid, cowardly, and petty. This America offered the brotherhood he so desperately desired. “I cannot not fall in love with American culture and not have perceived in it a literary rationale full of novelty, a new period of the resistance...completely devoid of that certain risorgimental and...pseudo-classical spirit,” Pasolini wrote in “Guerra Civile.”

Such a society necessitated a particular type of revolutionary, one imbued with a sincerity born of the race and student struggles. He saw genuineness to the American Left that was reflected not in any empty ideology or text but in a physical and intellectual commitment to the struggle. Culturally it evidenced itself for Pasolini during a “brotherly reading” given by the poet Allen Ginsberg, which reminded him of that other American beat writer, Jack Kerouac, whose visit to Italy had so upset the staid Italian literati. “Here is the new motto....Throw one’s body into the fight....Who is there in Italy, in Europe, who writes pushed by such a great, such a desperate force of confrontation?” asked Pasolini.

While Pasolini’s more concerted tributes to third-world history and culture would emerge later, most notably in his cinema, his commitment to their causes had long been established. He believed that the problems of the third world and the tragically failed responses of capitalism and Marxism to those problems were

symbolized most ardently in the American black man. Pasolini saw black Americans preparing themselves for armed conflict. He sought and found the fellowship of the sottoproletariato in the black community of Harlem. When he visited a mason in his tiny slum apartment who had been injured working, Pasolini noted that “lying on his poor bed, [he] welcomed us with the smile of a friend, of an accomplice, overcome by our forgotten partisan love.”

This connection to the resistance, so critical to Pasolini, marked much of what he had to say about race relations in America. Solidarity was best illustrated by the linkage of the student movement to the civil rights struggle, a linkage that assumed a numerical importance when Pasolini pointed out that the students who had joined the struggles in the Black Belt South made up approximately the same portion of their country’s population as the Italian partisans of the 1940s. Surely the progressive Left in America must then be a force to reckon with, he surmised, affording him

yet another opportunity to blast the Europeans when he saw “the protest, the pure and simple confrontation, the rebellion against consumerism” in the beatniks, a group attacked in Italy by “the old Stalinist moralism and Italian provincialism.”

There was indeed a civil war in America, and for Pier Paolo Pasolini, the battleground was racism. It was no different than the wars in Algeria or in Cuba or elsewhere in the third world. And it would be a mistake, he argued, to attribute the racism of poor whites to merely an ignorance of the Marxist dictum of class warfare. In fact, as members of the sottoproletariato, they were actually part of the same third-world problem.

Yet, the American working class would never embrace solidarity with the struggles of the world’s poor. Only three years later, Pasolini would return to New York City to find his enthusiasm and hope diminished. At a performance of the Living Theatre at the Brooklyn Academy of Music, he noted being among the very people to whom he had felt so emotionally drawn.

These New Yorkers were “generous, naïve, seemingly devoid of ambition and yet at the same time embittered by failure.” The city’s denizens, more specifically its youth, still held their attraction but now he sensed a moderation in their revolutionary zeal. Lamenting the absence of Ginsberg, Bob Dylan, and the ubiquitous antiwar protesters, Pasolini asked, in *Poet of Ashes*, “Where’s the real-life theatre, the real-life tragedy, acted out on the streets and...so very involving, alive, exhilarating? It’s all finished...leaving Nixon’s America to the burnt-out hippies, the smalltime gangsters and the throngs of desperate people.”

Still, this disillusionment with America did not mark the end of Pasolini’s emotional connection to New York City. It remained for him the poetic representation that Italy had ceased to be. Unlike his deep affection for Africa, an affection more rooted in viewing Africa as the modern equivalent to ancient Greece, New York was “a commitment, a war.” He likened his arrival at Grand Central Station to crusaders coming upon Jerusalem,

not as invaders but as pilgrims. He even contemplated setting his yet unrealized film on St. Paul here. This responsiveness was no facile déjà vu; rather, Pasolini immediately grasped the parallels to ancient Rome in the great urban expanse. The perceptible class divisions so common elsewhere were absent in New York. The underclass had been assimilated into a “monstrous and fascinating mixture of subproletariat and petit bourgeoisie.” Pasolini acknowledged that this morphing of the working class into the larger mass was anathema to the development of a viable workers’ consciousness; nonetheless, it could not be easily dismissed. “Obviously, my heart lies with the poor Negro or the poor Calabrian immigrant, and at the same time I feel respect for the establishment of the American system.” In his exuberance Pasolini would write, “I wish I was eighteen and could live my whole life here!” However, this quasi-acceptance of capitalist America did not translate into an abandonment of the essential core of his beliefs.

Certainly a case could be made that Pasolini’s

essay “Guerra Civile” fits well within the paradigm of traditional travel literature. A writer journeys to a foreign land, recording his impressions and providing commentary on and analysis of his experiences. But this work is no mere travelogue. The experience was turned inward and became not only an artistic motivation but also a psychological reordering. In *New World Journeys*, Angela Jeannet and Louise Barnett write, “America offers the Italian writer a chance to breathe freely, to feel relieved of an overbearing atmosphere, cast off from a closed society, unburdened in a way that is vaguely threatening for some, exhilarating for others.”

For Pier Paolo Pasolini, the need to recapture the spirit and renewal of radical reform that had been lost or surrendered by the Europeans had been satisfied by this encounter with America. According to Ben Lawton and Louise Barnett, in the student mobilizations and civil rights struggles he discovered a “locus of revolutionary hope and energy” that convinced him the resistance was

still alive, though manifest in quite new forms.

But there was also a deeply personal void that he needed to fill. His life, which had become so public, and his art, which seemed stalled at a crossroads, had been seeking some direction, some purpose. In “The Poet as Anthropologist,” Celia A. Daniels notes, “As the poet breaks the barriers of his traditional perceptions of his world, he opens himself up to new possibilities. He allows his life to be changed by what he discovers.” In the end, the poet in Pasolini trumped the anthropologist’s rational stance. Daniels concludes that for a brief time, he was “drawn to the subjective and the emotional ... As the poet draws nearer to another culture, he begins to separate himself from his own culture and his own traditional conceptual framework. The poet begins to feel like an outsider, emotionally distant and experientially distinct from his own culture.” The trip to America provided a good deal of that direction and purpose for Pasolini. He would indeed “throw his body into the struggle.”

## *Resurrection of the Dead*

Karl Parker

“An apple would lose its weight. They could weigh it and prove that a bug had eaten it. This bug made me get lost—that was three thousand years ago—and made the words get lost when *I must remind you of the gospel that I preached to you; the gospel which you received, on which you have taken your stand, and which is now bringing you salvation. Remember the terms since they came from my teeth. I was full of bugs, and the bugs ate all the food. A big one was cut out of my stomach, and another one was taken out of my spinal column. The bug put its teeth into my teeth and ate my food. Another bug that looked like a wasp flew up against my jaw and knocked my teeth out. There was a second tiny bug in human shape—it was riding on the wasp bug. This is the resurrection and the life. But, you may ask, how are the dead raised? In what kind of body*

*was another bug that looked like a ship. As I stood on the dock, looking around, the keel of a ship knocked against my jaw. What stupid questions! The seed you sow is not the body that shall be, but a bare grain, of wheat perhaps, or something else; and God gives it the body of his choice, each seed its own particular body. All flesh is not the same, which is why the words got lost. I was also lost. That was three hundred years ago. And then the bug made me lose myself again. But the bug was also lost. I used to have a bug like a lion and one like a monkey so there is human flesh, flesh of beasts, of birds, and of fishes—all different. There are heavenly bodies who took the bug away from me because there was no room for it and earthly bodies; and the splendour of the heavenly bodies is one thing, the splendour of the earthly another. Once there was a bug like a gorilla. It stood in my way, and I almost had a fight with it. The sun has a splendour of its own, the moon another splendour, and the stars yet another, which is why I am afraid to offend the bug. If I did*

*that, I might not be reborn. Some people are not reborn because the bug that governs rebirth is the one that has a head like mine and eats the food when it differs from another in brightness. So it is with the resurrection of the dead: what is sown as a perishable thing gets in my insides. Then becomes a physical body; it is raised a spiritual body. I called it mine, the food sown in me. This happened after I went home after someone else's death. If there is such a thing as a physical body, there is also a spiritual body. It is in this sense that 'The first man became a living creature,' whereas the last man has become a life-giving spirit in service of the struggle with teeth, of whether other people have the right to put their teeth into mine. The two sets of teeth are apt to knock against each other. I went to the dentist once, because I felt so uncomfortable. Observe, the spiritual does not come first; the *physical body* comes first, and then the *spiritual body*. The first man is from earth, but I do not like to talk about these things because I might use the wrong words and hurt somebody—you, for*

*instance. No-one takes me home for so much trouble. If my teeth eat food before it turns to dust, the second man can be from heaven. The man made of dust in the right way does not make mistakes. We have worn the likeness of the man made of dust, so we shall wear the likeness of the heavenly man. What I mean, friends, is this: when I had the bad dream I thought I must have eaten green apples and that made the trouble inside me. Listen! I will unfold a mystery: we shall not die, but all shall be changed in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye."*

## Contributors Notes

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**Anthony Cavaluzzi** has been a professor of English for over 35 years, teaching world literature and cinema studies. He has published articles in several areas, including ethnic literature, cinema, and 20th century American culture.

**Jeffre Dene** is the signature artist of *Essays & Fictions*. He received his BFA from SUNY Purchase and his MFA from Hunter College. Among other places, his work has been exhibited at Montserrat Gallery in Soho, SUNY Purchase, Tompkins Square Arts Festival, One Station Plaza in Peekskill, New York, Mount Kisco Borders Books and Music Cafe Gallery, and The Funding Center in Alexandria, Virginia. Most recently, his print "Corners Without Exits" was printed as the cover art for LIT 13. He lives in the East Village. [www.myspace.com/denescene](http://www.myspace.com/denescene)

**Keala Francis** is a PhD candidate in creative writing at the University of Hawaii, where she works for the literary journal *Mānoa*. She helped edit the anthology *A Stranger Among Us: Stories of Cross Cultural Collision and Connection* (University of Illinois Press/OV Books, Spring 2008) and has published short stories, feature articles, and book reviews.

**Joshua Land** is a freelance film critic and co-founding editor of *Essays & Fictions*. His work has appeared in *The Village Voice*, *LIT*, and *Moving Image Source*. He lives in New York. He has had enough.

**"Karl Parker"** presently teaches literature and creative writing at Hobart & William Smith Colleges in Geneva, NY, after doing graduate work at Cornell (MA 2001) and the New School (MFA 2004). A nominee for the Pushcart prize and the recipient of the 2004 Poetry Award from the National Arts Club, NYC, he is the author of two chapbooks—the most recent of which is *HARMSTORM* (Lame House Press 2007)—and a forthcoming book of poems (Notell Press 2009), *PERSONATIONSKIN*.

**David Pollock** has sinned, God help him. He is co-founding editor of *Essays & Fictions*.

**August Roulaux's** poetry and prose have appeared in *Dappled Things* and *Word Riot*. He currently lives in northern Virginia.

**Veronica Vela** was raised in south Texas and has been writing short stories since she was eight years old. She left home at 17 to pursue her BA at The New School for Social Research. Shortly after graduating she moved to Rhode Island to work on her MFA at Brown University. She currently spends her time writing creatively in North Carolina and also composes reading comprehension passages for statewide exit exams. She loves her dog, Ignacio, who happens to have weight issues.

**Danielle Winterton** is co-founding editor of *Essays & Fictions*. Her essays, fictions, and criticism have appeared in several publications, including *The Village Voice*, *The Literary Review*, and *Chronogram*. In 2007, her critique of postmodern sculpture was awarded first place by SNA for best Arts and Entertainment Criticism in North America. She has been in bridal bardo for the last several months and is looking forward to living on scraps of baguette and cheap Rhone wine come June.