

OPUS IGNOTUM

A THESIS IN  
Creative Writing & Media Arts

Presented to the Faculty of the University  
of Missouri-Kansas City in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the degree

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

by  
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University of Missouri-Kansas City, 2022

### ABSTRACT

“Vocibus concide,” Ennius commanded, in the single line of an otherwise lost work preserved in Varro’s *De lingua latina*: “With words destroy him.” Not even Ennius’ context did Varro record, only the imperative that an unknown man be crushed *by language*. But for the transgressive, derogatory, or slanderous speech which might incite destructive or violent action, seldom do we conceptualize language as somatically harmful. Yet, automatically and often carelessly we daily shoulder language’s immeasurable heft, oblivious to its disastrous potentiality, to paraphrase Chuck McGill, like chimps with machine guns. Language scares. Language intimidates. It stokes our most flammable insecurities, enforces self-exclusion, delimits thought, expression, and communication. Its very fumes intoxicate; a sprawling diatribe might be as incendiary as the utterance of a single word—harmless phonemes, sounds joined together like beads on a string. Language is, of course, also beautiful, constructive, and inspiriting beyond all sense imaginable. But language’s boon is not, for now, the object of what follows. No, what follows is two-thirds of a story answering Ennius’ solemn command, its target one Solomon T. Faolainn. The following eight chapters amount

to a keelhauling, dragging Solomon's troubled mind through the abyss of language, where against the jagged inner matrices of myth, religion, and history it is pulverized and reduced to its rawest elements—made ready, effectively, to be reforged. Such matters need not be all seriousness, though; where in the guidebooks of literature does it say that witnessing destruction cannot, on occasion, be fun?

## APPROVAL

The faculty listed below, appointed by the Dean of the School of Humanities and Social Sciences, have examined a thesis titled "Opus Ignotum," presented by D. E. Hynes, candidate for the Master of Fine Arts degree, and certify that in their opinion it is worthy of acceptance.

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## CRITICAL INTRODUCTION

Where in a world consumed by streamlining at a molecular level does one begin to apologize the convoluted 500+ page half-novel? How to a primarily English-speaking demographic does one justify the deployment of plurilingualism, and of ancient, archaic, and minoritized language, in telling the story of primarily English-speaking characters? How does one present scriptural pastiche to an increasingly agnostic public; or pastiche of epic verse to staunch realists; or a morality play in Middle English set on a train to presumably solitary commuters, many at best grappling with its modern descendant? How does one discuss Old World knowledge in a New World, one preoccupied with dismissing, undermining, or invalidating old truths with newer, better, *more* indestructible ones? How does anyone, in a world where email services and word processors police (however wittingly) not only our grammar, but our very word choice, a world complacently realizing George Orwell's nightmarish dystopia of newspeak, for art's sake—in defense of human expression—how does anyone arm themselves with heterography, catachresis, or cacography, effectively and defiantly shouting *I refuse*? And, lastly: how might anyone be convinced that all of the above, every piece in the smallest, is connected, purposive, that for its seeming randomness it forms an unbroken continuum spiraling down and around a universal yet vulnerable humanity?

Five pages, let alone fifty, cannot contain every justification underlying the ostensibly esoteric and frequently strange choices the reader will encounter in this half-novel. Lacunae appear and go seemingly unresolved; plotstrings are left untied (that will assuredly find resolution in the sequel); narratives are inconsistent; formatting, dialogue, narrative tone, and

speaker are fluid from mense to mense (La. ‘from the month’); forms intrude upon one another metanarratively, like consciousnesses grappling for scenic control (in III and IV explicitly). No concrete setting exists, nor does an obvious, central action played out within, nor a Time by which to contain it all; rather, the entire project (including the second, forthcoming half-novel) represents a concerted subversion of the Aristotelian unities. Place, action, and time, like Siddhartha’s river or Anna Liva Plurabelle, into themselves and one another flow. Is it all lunacy? Or one final, overwhelming dream in the Son of Man’s entropic mind? Such, decidedly, is for the reader to choose.

Numerous interrelated themes weave throughout this half-novel, obvious ones, such as religion, love, sex, promiscuity, and infidelity rippling atop the surface, hiding undercurrents of existentialism, *destrudo/libido* drives, *les appels du vide*, psychological decay, and filial jealousy, all coursing over a bedrock of fraught multiculturalism, the distress of individuality, language’s deafening pressure, and the “irreliquidity of the tangible”—to pan the stream conservatively. An open-textured experience was the forefront object of this project from its inception: it was written to be dissected, to be understood under a diversity of lenses, that the reader’s interpretation might be equivocal to the author’s. Why else would over one hundred song lyrics be folded near-unnoticeably into the prose? Why else would a litany of puns and wordplay pepper its pages, ranging from the playful to the sophomoric to the macabre, the protagonist’s name amongst them? “S’all failin’,” the “faol-sun?” For all the darkness into which Solomon’s tale, uh, *tailspins*, and its accompanying thematic gravitas, could the reader perceive that this project has been a joy to write, enriching, stimulating—at times even *fun*? Not infrequently the prose may read as circuitious or vexing. It may even



frustrate; but its intention is to challenge literary tropes and preconceptions, to encourage thought and meaning-making. Studious readers will even stumble across interspersed pockets of humor from time to time—*la joie de vivre locomotive*, of sorts, surprising and sufficiently disarming enough (hopefully) to relax, amuse, and entice.

Before continuing on to a brief explanation of each mense below, three readings not impertinent to the text need first be suggested, i.e. the Hermeneutic, the Psycholinguistic, and the Metanarrative/-perspective.

**Hermeneutic:** Are the events as described literal? Allegorical? Typological?

Anticipatory? How many meanings might a single story element perform?

**Psycholinguistic:** What languages do the characters speak and why? How do particular language acquisitions affect speech, thought, and behavior? Why and when do certain characters code-switch? What constative meaning does a switch enact?

**Metanarrative/-perspective:** What *persona* does each narrator perform? Why have they chosen the manner of speech peculiar to their mense? How do their narratives and subnarratives of choice feed into the grander story and meaning?

All manner of readings are invited. It should be stated that the above three are primarily mentioned for their disciplinary fundamentality during the outlining and writing processes, and do not represent the extents to which this story might be mined.

**Mense I, ‘L’Admission de Dol:** Our first pun. Those not unfamiliar with Greek mythology might recognize a structural similarity between the names of the ectopic protagonist and a certain trickster god. ‘Ectopic’ as the story begins at a third-person so psychically distant

from its true protagonist that the first chapter isn't about him. Bookending Dolon's trip across an unnamed nation are the two halves of the *kalend* (La. 'first of the month') scene which spurs Sol toward the spotlight. *L'admission de dol*, "the admission of fraud" here is only attempted; deception and insecurity drive the two friends apart. The narrator refers to Sol impersonally as 'Faolainn' throughout.

**Mense II, 'Peregrinations Commence Hitherward:'** Or, 'The Seven Satyrs.' As he strikes out alone, we descend into Sol's history via six songs narratively past and present, sung respectively by six characters embodying the notes of the *sofège*—minus 'sol.' Narrated similarly to **I**, but fixating its sensory-surgical third-person limited omniscience on Sol, while still referring to him coldly as 'Faolainn.' Sol arrives at a cliff, having answered its unstated *appel*.

**Mense III, 'Deirdy:'** The first in a pair of third-person menses narrated by an exterior consciousness seemingly partial to Sol (hereon referred to by that moniker): an appeal to Sol's classical sensibilities painting him as both hero and romantic object in his own love-lay alongside governess Deirdre O'Floinne. This is not a true pastiche of classical verse, but rather of its semi-modern literal English translations—and an intentionally shakey one at best. An inconclusive anecdote about Sol's mother, Mónica, initiates the story. A foreign consciousness, hoisting dialogue similar to that of **I** and **II**, swells into and out of the narrative.

**Mense IV, ‘Dorothy:’ III’s** complementary mense, a pastiche of biblical verse surrounding Sol’s professional forays and his resulting romantic entanglement with Italophile Dorothy ‘Polly’ Damm. A nearly section-for-section adaptation of *Song of Songs*, the eight ‘chapters’ herein rendered as ‘cantas’ (It. ‘he/she/it sings’). Metaphysical dialogues appear involving an unknown character ‘R.’ The foreign consciousness also reappears, though now unopposed by the narrator’s choice of form. Astute readers may notice unspoken overlaps with the prior mense, as well as an ongoing Saul-Solomon-Sol-Apollo conflation. Mónica’s tale unexpectedly concludes Mense IV by uncovering the novel’s heart.

**Mense V, ‘Mære, Dome, or The Choral Beach:’** Into the second-person, and the first of three menses to treat Sol anonymously. The interior monologues of eight analogous characters perform voyeuristic judgments on Sol, him performing the role of an objectified ‘you’ to their subjectified ‘he/shes.’ This honest revelation about Sol’s religious attractions, and acerbic satire concerning the interconnectedness of psychology, epistemology, and faith systems, concludes with Sol’s departure from the beach.

**Mense VI, ‘O rains!:**’ The story so far from Dorothy/Polly’s second-person point of view as she obsessively trails Sol while attempting to command the reins of her self-imposed Renaissance-Italophile *persona*. Here, ‘you’ is Polly’s object and subject, two halves of one mind wrestling for dominance amidst the destabilization (caused by Sol’s unexpected appearance) of her perilously-wracked equilibrium. Obsession, compensation, and

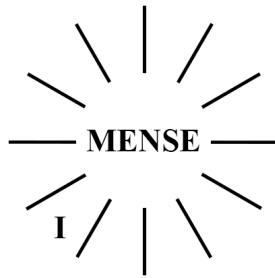
superimposition are the guiding spirits of this mense. Polly leaves Sol at the train station and returns to her day unseen and restabilized—for the time being.

**Mense VII, ‘Thee Sybylle Unkende:’** Two fourth-wall breaks rendered in Middle English: the first, the *kalend*, a Medieval treatise on gender inequality; the second, a morality play, wherein the *kalend*’s nameless author (represented as ‘W.R.’) lectures ‘somme charle’ for neglecting to give up his seat at the station, subtly alluding to dramaturgy’s unacknowledged, audiential ‘you.’ Through its pastiche and an extracorporeal event experienced by W.R. mid-play, this mense communicates vitally with **III** and **IV**. The ‘charle,’ Sol, learns W.R.’s name while the reader does not.

**Mense VIII, ‘The Mission and Phaolothainn:’** A liminal second-person framing within Sol’s tempestuous mind which blurs also the lines of first-person and stream of consciousness. Arrival at his final destination, a literal Mission, sets off Sol’s erratic yet measured descent into drunken madness. His history, mythology, religion, reality, language, lust, and guilt all compound into one highly pressurized, combustive force, ignited, at its climax, by a single word—the *kalend*, ultimately, to Sol’s self-confession, unmaking, and apotheosis. This mense was structured, and written, mimicking the internally spiraling corolla of a rose.

for my mother and father  
without whom none of this might be





He cupped a shivering hand about the timepiece face, precluding the rising rays casting a glare across its cheap printsmearred glass surface, a bump on the wrist from his tumid little finger producing a twinge: seven A.M., two minutes shy an half hour past. Solomon Faolainn rose from his depression in the sand and, parting his legs, threw his fingers to his toes, lunging three, then four times forward until an abrupt pop in his spine assured him the prolonged discomfort induced from previous nights' stays on several indurate and assuredly filthy mattresses had been, apropos of the near future, allayed. A celebratory grunt divined its way through his lips as he straightened, then formed equilateral the flexion of his right leg, right foot on left knee, and gazed in Alexandrian fashion past the morningtide nibbling away upon wan shoreline, over the waters of the Pacific Ocean before him, and into the glaucous depths abounding. It was this pose Faolainn assumed, that of a tempered dancer awaiting queue or draped marble *kouros*, until Dolon, spread out on the sand several yards away, rolled over on his side and glared through sleep powdered eyes (vision slightly obstructed by a small brown sack teemed with *conchas* pink, yellow, white, and brown) with bemused mien upon his friend.

— Pining for the return of your gallant lover, lost ever-so-long at sea? Hold that pose too long and you'll be stuck there until the ocean swallows you whole, stone, barnacles and all.

— And that’s what you, in the end, portend? It’ll be the seas devouring land, Faolainn retorted haughtily, not *vice versa*?

Dolon up-righted himself from his supine bent, dusting the granules of sand and tendrils of sundried seaweed from his bare back, burrowing simultaneously his feet into a dampened patch at his toes.

— The water has already claimed most of the Earth, has it not?

— Yes.

— And there doesn’t seem to be any less of it—well, any less of the saline variety, no?

— Ehr... well, no.

— Then I believe it not so unfair an assumption, my friend, that when the clocks cease ticking, with our home—heh—*raptured*, and the Earth deprived of all life and care, birds no longer perched on their branches, wind no longer carrying through the trees, there will be a great wave that arises from—well, you’re looking right where it surely will come from, there being no greater body of water—*the ocean*, that will swell up and sweep out across the land, occupying as it does every square inch of what we once, in our brief time here, thought to be ours. Yes, that’s how I’m sure it will end, Dolon finished, rising from a shallow dint in the beach and proceeding to the water’s edge to clean his feet in a gathering pool.

Faolainn’s foot dropped beside its partner, its operator actuating a leisured tread over the miniscule dunes and divaricated clods of dried seaweed to join his diminutive comrade at the water’s nip. Dolon Corvo’s was an etiolated physique, he some eight inches shorter and nearly four-stone inferior to Faolainn who, though gaunt of late himself, still with taut



shoulders and elongated back towered over his friend even at the several-yards distance maintained between the two.

— I don't agree, Faolainn eventually responded, as if with some longdrawn rumination. It'll be, I think, the other way around: the earth will swallow the sea.

Dolon squatted down to the advancing water, he accepting the arriving sluice not merely with his feet, but his hands as well, which, cupped beneath quibbling surface, suddenly sank fast and heaved a peck's worth of water at his chest and face. Dolon's spastic salving continued under Faaolainn's impatient watch, he soaking rolled black denims and thin brown hair with brine until the water retreated. Bereft, he lifted himself from his knees and stood again at his distance, the beads of water collected on his shoulders quickly evanescent under the lowlooming postsolstice Sun.

— Damn, there it goes again. And look—still feel the grains between my fingers.

— It'll return. You've also got the option to chase after it—if, of course, the 'doctor' would so deign.

— *Hah*. You're a smart man, think you're terribly funny? Well, the water in its house and me in mine. Besides, I've the spare precious minutes to wait. Nature changes for no man, and I'm no no-man; if I chase after the tide and sooner cleanse myself, well, what did I accomplish but a bath more hastened? An effort counterintuitive to the mode, I might add...

And so the absconded tide in minutes' time returned, Dolon with alacrity resuming his lather.

— So, Sol—you still there, man? Good—humor me, you damned contrarian, propound to me this theory of yours, that in variance with mine, 'wherein the Earth shall swallow its waters.'

— Well, Faolainn began, holding hesitant his unwhetted opinion, the Earth, as I recall, was formed through the slow accretion of cosmic dust over the span of millions—or billions—of years, right?

— As far as man can tell, and you believe what he says, yes.

— And so—and so, in the beginning of the world, there was no water. At its inception, the Earth was, in basest matters, just earth—a rocken crust surrounding a molten core that heated the entire planet to temperatures uninhabitable. The, ehr... *primordial* requirements for water may not have even been present.

— A white coal suspended in the aether, yes, and?

— So where did the water come from? How was it introduced, how did it come to dominate the globe if alien to the Earth?

The tide again fell back, Dolon arising to ponder the question.

— Meteors, Faolainn pertly answered. Fiery missiles pregnant with crystals of ice. Over millions of years and millions of collisions, meteors brought enough water or its ingredients to the Earth, water that evaporated in the heat, formed the clouds and atmosphere of the sky and eventually rained back down, cooling, clarifying, evaporating, falling, sempiternally, again and again.

— Good God—come around to the point?

— Earth first formed; the rock was here, the cosmic dust that eventually composed it; all of it existed before the water, said Faolainn, digging his toes into the sand. Look at the tide: see the water, how it comes in goes? That vicissitude—nature, she pulls *and* grabs. It tells me I cannot believe the constancy of one winning force, or its, ehr... insuperable triumph.

Empires, as much as humans, are mortal, as is the rock—and the water. And so when the Sun finally fulminates, when the human race for millions or billions of years has ceased, the waters will have either been reclaimed by the land or will boil in the heat preceding our planet's Red Giant consumption. It's all ephemera, passing. And ephemerality being *ius summum*, what else can one claim but this: that all things, as once they were, shall in the end be.

— And what's that?

— ...nothing. So, even if I were to entertain the notion—were I even to be frozen here in stone and consumed by the sea—that would not be the end. I, statuesque, and the ground I am fixed to, will long outlive the water about me.

— God, you're more pessimistic than an undertaker.

— 'Pessimistic?' I'd think an undertaker an optimist: always employed—long as he's not fiddling the *reliquias*. Everyone dies, after all...

— If we're so lucky—and whether we're ready or not. What's that little Latinate again—

— *Mors certa, hora incerta*.

— Yes, yes. Morbid matter—unless, of course, as is for you, that whole—oh, what is it—*mori lucrum*, right? theory is more your cup. I say, though, Dolon locking onto Sol's face his irresistibly pert eye, how can you wonder anything to be eternal, Sol, if you find most things are not?

The air of pedantry which Faolainn possessed departed supplanted, on Dolon's account, by an air of reticence. He watched as Faolainn eventually let one hand slip from his hip, then its counterpart and his attention slipping likewise, away from Dolon and the shore

and beyond the beach, to the highway running adjacent to their coastal pocket. Faolainn altogether fell away, turning his back to the ocean and returning to his spot in the sand, a footstep here and there deliberately empowered to disperse the minute dunes rising between him and his destination. Resuming his depression, he rested his elbows on his knees, glaring momentarily upon the ocean before removing his eyes to the sand at his heels.

— It's so damned frigid, he trembled.

The waves had again retreated from the shore, Dolon noticed, turning from Faolainn after a moment's observation.

— Why *not* give in to chase after waves, Dolon muttered amusedly, if that's all it is in the end, just that?

He pursued the water down the shore's declivity, his friend at his back, perseverating, eyes saturnine and sunken in sand.

\* \* \*

It was three cycles prior, on the venerative day of Peregrinus Auxerre, that Dolon Corvo awoke, realizing, as an actor dreading a role life-long, and in vein with the day's patronage, he desiderated an immediate alteration of his everyday backdrop. Sending word to Faolainn, the two convened at a small café, mutually equidistant by foot to both parties, and, stationing themselves beneath the patio pergola with a *café au lait* each in hand, their speech perambulated pointlessly for a time:

— And Fano, yes?

— The boy's alright, Faolainn replied. Although I'd be damned to see them lasting through the summer. One week within her leaving and the poor fool's already leaking his langour all about the floor. Be easier to manipulate him with a bit and reins.

— Wasn't quite built for that, eh?

— Which: Fano, reins, or the, ehr... well, the flooring?

— The first and the third. And, speaking of which—

— If you're about to inquire into the sleeping situation, yes, that's—for the time being— what it has come to.

— You're more than welcome to lodge with me again—however, the living room couch and a spot in the corner are all I've to offer, especially after you broke—

— Bringing it up again will not replace your cot any sooner, Dolon. Now, I have apologized on several occasions. I'm embarrassed enough to be sleeping on friends' floors and, ehr... *furnishings*.

— Seeing as you'd bent the thing backwards the first night, a persistent helping of embarrassment I'd think appropriate at the least, jeered Dolon behind the base of his mug, downing his dregs and producing a tissue from his pocket. Until then, I shall on paitient knees await your restitution or cheque through the post. Meanwhile, I thought Fano had in his possession a couch suitable to your... bearing?

— That couch is hardly suitable to bear anyone, I swear, even the Indo-Chinaman who must have designed it...

— So it's all horizontality, eh? From one floor to the next, to the next.

— Bank to bar, life’s whittled itself down to one indefinite ferry-ride indeed—ha! Charon’s tide here affecting the form of Fano’s, ehr... codependent wallow—of which I’ve too often found myself either mingled with or afloat upon. Proud, very proud of myself there; supernal metaphor, that!

— Hm...

— Acheron’s ferryman? *Cogitesne?*

— The mythology I abide. Your flaunting, however—

On the cusp of Faolainn’s reply, twenty young woman appeared where the two gentlemen had twenty-three minutes previous sat down, ascending the steps from the narrow city pavement and trotting in martial fashion inside the humble café, each bearing the crest of ΓΦΒ, each facsimile adorned in a raiment of carnation-pink sweaters and brown headbands (a moon cut from sallow cardstock each atop), each clenching pocket books, wallets, and purses. The pair broke their palaver to observe the passing of these crescent luminaries and their conveyors, Dolon, his seat facing the traffic, sidetracked first, Faolainn gradually signaled only by his interlocutor’s sudden abeyance of interest. Following the briefest of pauses, Dolon resumed his plaint, words to Faolainn, eyes on the delicate parade:

— What I’m prodding at is that I understand your allusion—your classicism is so more plebeian than, well, I think *you* think—but I find it, personally, somewhat uncouth.

Faolainn’s askance eyes returned to his partner, minute tremors of vexation portrayed by a glare Dolon would have seen were his attentions not prepossessed.

— ‘Uncouth?’

— Yes, well, illustrating a dearth in good manner. Would've thought you'd be savvy to the word.

— Savvier than others, it seems. It wouldn't be my word of choice, 'uncouth'...

— 'Flaunting,' as I said. You're just flaunting intelligence, waving a cudgel over my head and those of anyone you can. And before you embark your defence, he continued, finally addressing Faolainn deliberately *tête-à-tête*, I'll add to my point that, were Fano, and Deirdy, and whatever other member lurking among your social circle present, they would likely, and quite readily, agree. 'Yes, yes, we're all very aware of the illustrious Mr. Faolainn, with his hundred-dollar locutions, his truths, aphorisms and *lingua mortuas*.' 'Oh, did you hear of the young prodigy, who at the age of seven vaulted clear over his classmates, who excelled in every curriculum, and oh, did you hear he was in the finals of state championships his final year, skipped a year of university and graduated a tender youth of twenty?' 'Why, no, I've forgotten—but thank God I need only wait several lines into a fab with him before he reminds me.' 'And I say! Where is the precocious chap now?'

Dolon leaned himself back in a huff, as a perched kite prevising the game's next move; Faolainn simultanesouly secreted his mouth behind entwined fingers, his nose upon his indexes rested, his chin upon his thumbs shelved.

— Well? What'll he say to that? Dolon remarked, again withdrawing his tissue. A silence swept up in the gust of a bypassing lorrie hovered in the air and plummeted upon the duo.

Through the doorpanes the line of young women traipsed on, each ordering the antecedent's order, requesting at almost metrical (though random) frequency miniscule alterations, succeeded by another doing the same, and on and on. Each defrayed the cost by

credit, Faolainn feeling the plastic cut across the register like a switch across his calf. For these young (and certainly young they were, their painted and plucked and contoured faces failing to bely their true ages, the most junior of which being no older than eighteen and one-hundred forty days, the eldest hardly beyond two decades) women lived inveterate the fashion most abundantly pervasive amongst their coevals (pecuniarily and socially): that is, upon the largesse of their parents. Taken *par exemple*, each young woman in the years of her secondary education was daily reminded of those steps leading to the procurement of success ('success' here being a blanket obfuscation of the term 'financial stability,' which elders, progenitors, instructors, *et cetera*, had achieved decades prior), videlicet: obtaining university education and securing some profitable employment. So concurrently each applied to universities, and concurrently were each accepted. Each laid an unstained foot upon the collegiate acreage in hesitancy, freed for the first time and guerdoned with opportunities to bloom, to grow and metamorphose, to spread out and diversify. And though unyoked as they were, each found herself piteously aimless.

What refuge were they to find? What was their recourse? They followed the advice of their mothers, initiates themselves, or likewise figures offering guidance along their paths to self-determinism; they cleaved to friends, women fastened to a leading lash, with whetted inklings and capacious purses; in other words, they hunted down and toed the sororal line. Demanding sovereignty, influence and option, and seeking their freedom of their foremothers, they alighted before the chapter torches of these ostentatious Grecian manours. And there they pledged, under the auspices of sisterhood, of probity, entelechy, and equality, to accept an underling role; to subscribe to the edicts and commands; to toil without



remuneration in inpregnable pertness; to subject themselves to flail and paddle and in desperate timorousness implored to solicit ‘more, more;’ to debase themselves and prostitute their morals. And at the end, having broken through the gambit, cleansed of their inchoate reservations, they were finally free, free to wrap their backs in their sisters’ crests, to live beneath their roofs and regulations, and pay the twelvemonth fee for their disenthralment—or otherwise face excommunication. So was their liberation.

Faolainn’s focus frolicked to a dissecting halt on one such familiar, Dolon meanwhile having tired for a response and turned indoors to refill his mug. She was a petite, lissome ingénue, Faolainn’s junior one or two years, with a pair of nimble, black-stockinged legs sprouting up from snowy leather Oxfords. The hang of her corduroy skirt in umber ribbing ran half the length of her thigh and, though presenting its wearer in perfect conservative etiquette, proudly declared the girl at last in the curvaceous flourish of womanhood. Her jumper complied with the rosie hue of her confederates’, as did the brown canvas band holding back her corkscrew wheatblonde tresses. Had she been lost to the crowd of sweaters and headbands, few upon prompt might have been able to select her from amidst the collective—Faolainn, having thus studied her, being an exception. His eyes held warmly upon her and nowhere else, absorbing as much the defined sculpture of her square jaw as her virescent eyes and freckled complexion, all as if in intimation with the stranger. His glance, it seemed, commended her above the others, they whom by Faolainn’s account were but feeble simulacra. His thumb brushed his bottom lip; his lids sunk across his eyes, and his soul sailed out of time and space, aloft on the airs of his admiration.

— Well?

His conversant once again sat across from him, Faolainn discovered, raising his eyelids in disappointment.

— Manage to forge some scathing retort a-yet? Dolon jabbed.

Faolainn leant back in his chair, glaring at Dolon indignantly. He turned his attention momentarily back indoors, into the indiscernable throng of pink, and frowned.

— History unspoken, Faolainn groused, is history lost. Let's move away from this. You asked me here to some end, yes?

— Evaluative provokations aside, I suppose you're right. I've asked you here to inform you that in three months' time I intend to leave the city and relocate west. Along the coast—not far from your late testing grounds, I think.

— But you'll be gone, you say? Faolainn smirked. *Deo gratias*. Sure you can't leave *níos luaithe*?

— 'Sooner,' I'm assuming... no, though it is my every intention to continue antagonizing you across the wire. It... well, I've grown lethargic—or, oh, dormant, I feel. I don't believe this place has anything more for me, not anymore, not now. It's my intention to restart altogether, to cast a new foundation, and establish 'Dolon'—rapping his fists against his chest—'man anew!'

— A man's limitations, Sol brusquely retorted, wrought their work within his own mind, Corvo; everywhere you go, every city you leave behind, and to each new one you advance, the roots of your foibles will regenerate—that is, Faolainn swallowed, barring, ehr... *extirpation*.

— And in *your* mind may such limiting philosophies remain. Man is a nomadic, gregarious creature, his state of mind the direct result of purlieu and milleu. Look, I've made my mind to leave come August, and, whether you find the mind agreeing with you or not, I'm requesting your accompaniment.

— In August?

— First week. I haven't very well yet bothered with the particulars, but I imagine four days by car—to soak in the country and what-have-you. I'll have sold my tenement by then—I've already received several offer, you know—and will pay for all our lodging. Well?

Before Faolainn could offer any response, two of the shop's ports swung open, and onto and across the porch the pink sea outflowed, their bourn the university grounds.

Faolainn rose abruptly at their reappearance.

— I'll have to, ehr... mull it over, I suppose—Dolon, I've just recalled I have to be going.

— Hm... and where to?

— Bank to bar: Fano agreed to help me pack at onethirty. And it is now, Sol wavered, glancing at his wrist, one thirtyseven.

— And relocating? To the summer place? Already?

— Yes, yes—and about time; hardly room enough to breathe for one in that boy's nest. I, honestly, yes, I feel I've been drowning...

Faolainn seized his pocketbook up from the table, slipped a five-dollar note beneath his mug, lilted out an *addio*, and immediately jumped down to the pavement. Dolon wrenched the tissue out of his pocket once more to conceal a sudden sequence of

sternutations, hearing in the intervals between each the quick and dampening beat of soles against concrete.

Rising from his charcoal aluminum chair, Dolon could make the ends of three separate streets, two forming the intersection at which the café promulgated. The slogging final days of the vernal semester appeared to execute only inverse effects on the students of the local university, scurrying masses of youthful bodies, naïve masters all, some advantaging the felicities of education, bustling to lectures, exams, or lucubrations, others in one hand balancing revelries and dissipations while in another clutching the bell curve lip at the eleventh hour's knell. Amongst this swarm Dolon espied the pink sweaters sauntering toward the university, confabulating pairs whispering amongst themselves in inaudible tones, an occasional resistant crescent whirling about or cresting above the crowd, only to sink back down and follow the current as it wrapped around a cornerstore and fell altogether out of sight. As they did, a wholesome young man nipping at their tail accelerated toward their point of obstruction and, handling the brick corner, momentarily glimpsed around. Having assured the coast, he leaned apart from the wall and gazed down the obscured road.

An amused huff issued from under Dolon's moustache as he donned his boater and stowed his own pocketbook away. Descending the Twenty-fourth street steps, he strolled at an equable pace homeward, Faolainn shrinking, abandoning his surveillance, at his back. He tepidly conquered the cross, peeking over his shoulder not once, but twice, before too greeting his eclipse on the opposite streetside.

Upon crossing his homely threshold, Dolon commenced a punctilious inventory of his entire tenement. He estimated the value, *vis-à-vis* retail potentiality, of his intact estate at a worth in no excess of fifteen-hundred dollars.

Dolon was an assiduously niggard dandy who preferred the aseptic citron aroma of secondhand boutiques and the warmed sleeves of those habillements procured within over any costlier alternative posing the slightest hazard upon his monetary convenience. He affected the same pair of derbies purchased in his first year of secondary ('having not grown in nine years, why bother?' he would respond to any bemused inquirers—the tired soles beneath him as of then being reduced to tatters, little more than); he engaged in forty-five minute strolls to avoid even an eighth liter's expenditure on petrol; when a sale on greetings at a local department store aroused his parsimonious eye, his mother and all close relatives cognizant of his birthday received the same card three years consecutively on theirs; and when his drouths flared during the summer months, repurposed milk cartons served as receptacles for his beverages.

Indeed, the fruglaity by which Dolon doled out his existence composed and paved not only the foundations, but framework, portals, covering, and cosmetics of his subsistence, his uncompromisingly scheduled and adamantly adhered-to *à-la-mode-as-of-then* wardrobe above all the paramount example of his pervasive fastidiousness:

*Sunnandæg:* oversized rufous flannel, untucked

bleached canvas shorts\*

*Monandæg:* crisp-collared white cotton *chemise*

	navy blue denims
<i>Tiwesdæg:</i>	grey broadcloth polo
	pleated khakis, polyester blend
<i>Wodensdæg:</i>	sky blue Oxford, long-sleeve
	slate flat-fronts, cuffed
<i>Þurresdæg:</i>	olive linen polo
	chinos, briar patch
<i>Frigedæg:</i>	grey plaid melange, rolled sleeves
	sable dress denims, fitted
<i>Sæterdæg:</i>	a potpourri of the week's
	commended togs

(\*substitute briar patch chinos *après* prefatory rosinings of winterfylleth)

Extrapolating his dress code schematic across the various provinces of his life—his material life—Dolon commenced an organized diminution of his physical belongings, giving meticulous deliberation individually to the probing of each item, and of each inquiring: ‘what is it,’ ‘what purpose does it serve,’ and ‘to what end?’ It was following these lines that Dolon consolidated the entire contents of his third-story single bedroom tenement down to the volume of two-thirds one single compact automobile.

By reason of convenient propinquity, Dolon on that first day made an about left approach for the kitchen, rolled up his white cotton sleeves while reconnoitering, and set to

work on the grand purge. Of the divers appliances, utensils, of forks and knives and whisks and ladles and spoons and spatulas, of cooking moulds, cupcake tins, bread pans, biscuit sheets, of the platters, of the cups, of the mugs, the tumblers, the glasses, the glasses, the flutes and goblets—of even schooners and one snifter (but curiously no stemware)—drying racks, spice racks, sauce pans, baking pans, *sautoirs*, *sauteuses*, stock pots, stew pots, sieves and collanders, of these multitudinous fillings and many others Dolon took stock. Amidst piles of culinary appurtenances, Dolon two weeks following finalized a comprehensive, but conservative, list of absolute necessities, including: four sets of utensils (forks, knives, spoons, aluminum), one spatula (silicone), one serving spoon (silicone), four platters (ceramic), two cups (polystyrene), one mug (ceramic), one baking sheet (aluminum, nonstick), one baking pan (aluminum), two dish towels (polyester blend), three storage containers of ascending volume (polystyrene), and one can opener (silver); all other items inhabiting cupboard space Dolon denominated dross, superfluous and redundant. For, as Dolon explained to Fano one month following his proposal:

— What spectacle is a mincer capable of which a simple knife cannot likewise achieve? And the same of a whisk? Does not a fork accomplish the same ends as that of a masher—or even a flower cutter—with negligible adjustments to form and functionality? No, he said, shifting with his foot a nearby cardboard box, rejected cookingware laden, it's all excess; too much, too much.

Fano Morin with frustrated sedulity and eventual failure sculpted the black wires of his oleaginous coif back into mold, scanning insouciantly about him the disheveled incohesion.

— It's all kind of stupid. What happens when you're out there realizing you wish you'd kept a potholder or three?

— Oh—what do you know? To what zeniths have you been striving of late?

Fano sleeved his sandalwood comb into a rectangle of tan leather, rolled his kalamata eyes, and frowned impatiently.

— Are you done talking? I can only keep them so late.

Dolon sucked his teeth, then bent down to knot his skuffed bluchers. In a pindrop's time the two gentlemen issued themselves hitherward into the Junonian night, the muggy air enveloping them and soon condensing as the coalescent beads moistening their brows. Their apparel, trousers and dress shirts both, defied the sartorial practicalities of such a humid evening; but as they proceeded it would become apparent to any inquisitive onlooker that their habilement, defiant to season and unconducive to their comfort as it was, was not defiant to the *status quo* of the hundreds of fledgling adults populating the street that night, reveling carnivalesque as they did each week's end. Said impartial onlooker could peer about and see no fewer than a dozen young women, painted and rouged, correcting themselves in pocketglasses, or a dozen young men wiping the sweat off their brows as Dolon and Fano repeatedly did in the course of their traversion. These incongruencies with reality were most easily denied when disregarded communally; yes, one will find it far easier to comport one's self to discomfort than face unfashionableness.

A passing drove of larrikins wound down and acknowledged the pair, bidding them good evening, their vanguard loosening his cravat and remarking to they and company anent the heat and, temporary denizens as they were, soliciting the location of a closeby pub.



Though initially hesitant to acquiesce to the requests of interlopers, xeniality prevailed, Dolon and Fano concurring the best destination one Arachne's Lair or the other three blocks east and a quarter mile north along the university drag. The two parties departed amicably, and be it the spirited discussion or the unanticipated bonhomie of a external party's interrogation, the frigid quietude heretofore encasing Fano washed away, inviting within him a loquacity until then absent. The young man, much to Dolon's cryptic disconcertment, had mumbled only a few words since their embarkment—despite conversely playing instigator of the outing. But now the two engaged in a light dialogue, one as illuminary to their persons as the dim lamposts beneath which they strolled, lobbing and receiving and lobbing back trifling matters, films recently viewed, music recently heard, shows recently seen, and so on, all along and exceeding their arrival at the Mediterranean spot. No talk of love affairs, of wants or fears, of moves or movements, of longings and lusts and the revolutions of life.

The conversation carried on as it began, for Fano's ambivalence or Dolon's unwillingness to startle the boy—superficial. But had the curious onlooker tailed them on their journey, had they positioned themselves at the very same table, or spectated from a secluded corner across the restaurant, from a foot's distance or across a clamorous chamber, they would have seen the same: one of these hapless fellows yearned for more. Emptinesses punctuated his responses. Dolon would advance on new subjects and Fano would either nod, or shrug, or sputter perfunctorily before beginning a new line of thought which he himself would in turn quickly lose interest in and desert. There was a wakeful reticence in Dolon's speech, not a discomfort, but a niggling aversion, one to some anonymous or androgynous dread dwelling deeply within his *soule*, restraining him by the scruff, condescending him

merely the lead by which to scrape on in Fano's company. To the observant onlooker there hovered between the two a dissonant cloud, one forever divaricating men of such incompatible, yet strangely magnetic humors. In due course discussion eroded into monosyllabation, shifting the experience from one of interaction to consumption. Seventy per cent of their meals they ate in their last five minutes together. And when they parted, the gentlemen shook hands, pitched their goodnights to the ground, flashed their backs to one another, and followed their disparate orientations home.

A bell pealed its twelfth time as Dolon loosened the bolt of his front door. Groping his way to the nearest lightswitch, the recollection that he had failed to complete his earlier packing manifested itself as the weighty cardboard box impeding his bedroom footpath. He sighed, glaring from the package to a horologue on the wall whose slender red hands reeled inexorably to the melody of a mechanical tick, one which by the early morning's yearned-for taciturnity would undoubtedly reverberate across the bounds of Dolon's mind. Shedding his bulchers, he disappeared into his personal chambers, returning shortly after in a maroon bathrobe. And kneeling down before the box, packing scrupulously old pans and utensils wrapped in newsprint, taking great mind to ensure not a manor's square inch of wasted volume, Dolon resumed his work.

Having last tucked a pair of matching tuape Siamese spice mills beside the handle of an iron fry pan, he interwove the flaps and pinned a scrap of blue parchment atop. He slid the package amongst a grouping of four others. Dolon surveyed around him, the early morning light peeking blearily through the blinds, his back stiff from the hours repetitively ground adjusting, wrapping, packing, removing, and repacking. His glance, one drugged in

somnolence, nevertheless disclosed no nuance of mirth more patent than when in his scan of the room it caught the gleam of the little yellow slip and its lone possessor, an austere, smaller box lying beyond the detritus in the otherwise vacant corner behind. He arose, steadying as he did a fatigued sway, his eyes affixed to the box like to a bollard moored, and stepped toward the bedroom's void. Yet, during the closing shut of his door, his attention snapped from his torpor to the stack of blue-marked boxes. Repugnance crept across his face at their sight, a curdling, irrepressible scowl; he tongued the sloughing skin draping the walls of his cheeks.

— You are not me. You *will not* be me. Not even *I am me*.

There on the precipice of rest Dolon would have couched himself had not his monomania been propitiously overpowered by mammalian reflex: a yawn, embracing and enervating. The severance in concentration allowed him to peer backward, where amongst the shapelessness lay a mattress and covers, both by the aegis of thick burlap curtains freed from the irksome brilliance of dayspring. He abandoned his station, delivered himself to respite, and locking his bedroom door did not reemerge until vespers.

In like manner his consolidations thereafter carried forth. Next: the living room; few items of import dwelling there, the requisite clearing time tallied fifteen days. His chesterfield, bergère (Arabesque), coffee table (cherrywood), torchière (electric), vinyl boxes (milkcarts), sisal (tan, twelve by ten), his television—branded by Dolon as naught but another extrinsic distraction and, besides, a model at the time admittedly quite *passé*—and the credenza (cherrywood) upon which it presided, proved all too unwieldy and inessential. Placing an advert in the university classifieds, Dolon apace sold every item too cumbersome

for travel within a week, excluding the torchière, which Faolainn prearranged be held aside. In whole, the young purveyor's perspicacity profited him an estimated eight-hundred dollars aggregate.

Concerning his books, reels, vinyls, art, tchotchkes and the like, Dolon was near induced into an existential spiral. Of books, there were novels, novellas, pulp, poems, and pornography; there were stocky etruscan tomes and esoteric theosophical manuals; there were compilations of jokes and jabs and hackneyed English reproductions; treatises, anthologies, journals; the greatest dramas and comedies recorded, tragedies and histories, farces and satires and parodies—all rested on his bookshelves, many of them protected by a fine, grey coating. Sitting down amidst towers of books (those that once lived in the credenza, which itself now lived in a Paki's drawing room), Dolon, sieving through the titles, slid himself back to scrutinize his library, his vision marching sterilely along not simply the hard- and paperbacks, but his reels, his thirty-threes, seventy-eights, and forty-fives, and compacts and tapes, and the plastic and metal baubles skirting the rejected stacks like vendors and industrialists scurrying between skyscrapers.

He slapped a blue slip to another box before indiscriminately depositing as many of the items as possible within. When he had filled that box to the brim, he entwined its flaps and constructed another from the arm's length pile. For in applying his rhetoric to the diversionary helter-skelter, Dolon realized the myriad articles before him were, just as in Faolainn's Latin, *media*, incomplete *objets de divertissement* and, being such, had fulfilled their respective functions: entertainment and, ultimately, diversion. 'To what end?' Dolon's response to the query was best gleaned by through his fervency: there was no end, none in

which a quotidian presence should bely their fleeting contribution to his physical existence. There were few places Dolon could travel to or become stranded in (within reason) where visual, auditory, or interactively edifying stimulation would be deprived. He had availed himself of their uses, multiple times and in many occasions, and the only threat which served to dispossess him of their memory was the ravenous gullet of Time, whose insatiate proboscis Dolon well knew preyed prejudicially upon the superannuated. And even if he could forget the stories, wordings of the postulates and theorem, characters minor and epic, quotations and alterations, nothing but that gullet could gouge him of their significance. Dolon recognized that recycled paper and rubber figurines were not the components of man; *he* had in fact constructed *himself*, a conglomeration of experiences and sensational assimilations—autonomous, if sometimes unaware. No; there was no end, none but of their counterfeit. Dolon sealed its flaps, then heaved the onerous box, hauling it to its companions across the room where it and they may aggregate dust until the final evacuation.

By gloaming of the fifteenth day, approximately four-fifths of Dolon's tenement lay packaged and stacked in the corner of his barren living room. To state that the neo-austere had not witnessed pangs of temptation, a desire to renege his declaration, disembowel all an capitulate to the life of a company man, would fail his earnest representation. There were times at night, in the small hours of the morn, when he would lie awake gazing at his bedroom door. On several occasions, footsteps may have been detected beyond the door, a stealthily delicate shuffling of cardboard, then the flicker of a torch seen at the crack beneath. A flutter of pages would surely follow, then, excepting the wallclock's tick, an interim of silence, often minutes, sometimes hours, then a hasty, as if discombobulated, reshuffling of

cardboard, then the torch's dousing, a creaking hinge, and Dolon compressing his mattress springs, the leveled palliation of sleep relaxing the anxious folds in his brow. On the fifteenth night, however, Dolon gazed down at the novel blockade with spartan detachment; minutes previous, as he resumed his homely, unprofessional deportment, a calendar hanging from his kitchen wall had informed him exactly six weeks had passed. But five weeks stood between he and exodus, and he had yet heard affirmation from Faolainn, nor concluded his purge, nor disposed of the repudiated chattels. The days were fleeing in spates while Dolon persistently fueled his inertia, fingers clinging to relics past.

Derbies restored, he plucked one of the toplying boxes off and, one by one, transferred them to the trunk of his automobile; and when the trunk was crammed to the verge of overflow, into the cabin's empty seats as well. No future awaited staidness; Time barreled intangibly onward.

The remaining five weeks found Dolon whisking through them in impressive efficacy. Again turning to the university classifieds, Dolon commissioned a square advertising sale of kitchen appliances at unprecedented prices, though caveating these prices a 'in bulk,' or 'by the twenty-four-by-twelve inch box,' each box costing, contingent to contents, five to twenty dollars. Six of the eleven contained the extraneous refuse of his kitchen, the last of which Dolon sold exactly nineteen days before *sortent*, yielding him ninety dollars. Contemporaneously, the entrepreneur delivered his remaining five, containing the *objets*, to a local used book shop. It was in fact the ensuing morning that Dolon awoke and drove to said establishment, and discharged the *objets* to a clerk there with whom he was acquainted, maundering with her the terms of his withdrawal, *qui, que, où, quand, et pourquoi*. The clerk

assured him she would begin appraisal posthaste and posthaste apprise him of the valuation, beseeching at least three days' assessment. Two days following, Dolon received his consignment's dollar worth: a sum suspiciously exceeding customary market quota. Deciding to brush off the irregularity as miscalculation, a lower-level user error ('Note the proficiency of the hymen, her frangibility; failure is integral! Humans are no stranger thereof.'), Dolon collected the two-hundred thirty dollar remittance, placed upon his accomplice's cheek three pecks, and returned home to a message from his solicitor informing him his tenement had sold seventeen percent above.

As Dolon had in the years prior done away with excessive accessories and attires undesired, there was minimal clutter in his closet that a good sweeping and studious dusting could not efface. He was quite contented with his current dress, and his sleeping chambers presented like provident embellishments and appointments for the encroaching disruption; he need only part with an escritoire (cherrywood), bergère (Arabesque), bedframe (birch, queen, self-constructed), boxspring (queen), and mattress (spring). Selling these outstanding furnishings would prove near-effortless, as the incoming students whiling away their parents' labors on vanity, revelry, and other paramount frivalities cast Dolon in the fortunate setting of a merchant's market; he would sell the remaining pieces in the closing two weeks, leaving for rest and liesure purposes a shabby damaged cot (Faolainn's doing) and a roll of coverlets (lambswool and dyed cotton). Photographs and daguerotypes (framed and unframed) would see the journey with him, souvenirs Dolon included less out of sentimental gravity and more out of inbred devotion.

Tacked to his washroom mirror, a sheet of bleached parchment enumerated the tasks necessitated by Dolon's impending move, the preponderance of which having been completed and consequently stricken out anterior to the closing two weeks. One task, which lay at the list's very crown—a *sine qua non* whose salience had superseded even its assembly—had yet to have been stricken that tenth-to-last morning, when Dolon's rheumy orbs lit upon the unsundered words scribbled down ten weeks before: preoccupied with the thrills of amateur merchandising, the backaching days drained away covering manuscripts, proofreading copy, and the endless other monotony tasked to a publisher's assistant, and the nights frivelled amidst desultory companions, in the ten-and-one-half weeks since he enquired, he had hardly seen, nor had he so much as heard a word from, or a whisper of, Faolainn. Epiphanically startling to Dolon, taken into consideration their associate status at the publisher's, albeit Faolainn in a different department, Classics, and building.

Dolon scurried to the kitchen in alarm and dialed Faolainn, who after several stridently laborsome trills connected the call. Dolon, sparing neither propitiation nor prattle, enjoined his assistance in a preliminary loading of the car which might secure invariable weight distribution, occupational efficiency, visual safety and suchlike (efforts conveniently also incomplete on Dolon's list). A long pause, to Dolon torturous, bore itself on when he finished, until an arid murmuration slogged his way to Dolon's side: Faolainn began captiously, but apathetically, excusing himself for this and that and here and other reasons. But as Dolon bit down on his cheek in frustration—condign punishment for his lapse in scruple—however, Faolainn surprisingly acceded; in thirty-seven minutes the bronze knocker tapped



submissively once on the bronze strikeplate. Dolon rushed to the door, stuffing shirttail into unfastened denims—a suspicious happenstance, given the day.

They set to transferring the kitchen boxes, cushionwrapped framing, cot, stowed toilette and washroom contents, coverings, and all, down two flights to the complex's car park. On their third and final transfer, Dolon watched curiously from the door as Faolainn struggled with his load, for it appeared as though his right fist could not grip—or his little finger at least refused to close, its appearance tumid and red. Faolainn fumbled with his load, the cot which he held swinging out of his hand and scraping against the concrete deck. — Seeking to finish what you started, then? You'd better get your money from that thing, ere you put him down, Dolon blithely jived.

Faolainn lobbed back a pithless dagger, shuffling the roll of coverlets in his left hand, pinning it to his side and freeing the left to reliably clench the cot's frame. He descended to the second story without so little as a slur, leaving Dolon in a nonplussed dither as he locked and lifted and followed Faolainn's suit.

Faolainn spoke little during the first trial, listening remote, actuating nods or nays as response, or grunting monosyllabic only when discussion demanded. Poking in and out of the backseat and trunk, Dolon through the windows or peering around the hood spied Faolainn's haggard dress and prickled mien; Faolainn, who usually took effort to trim and shave his whiskers that he might display his handsome, though marginally canted, jawline had conceded in the lapsed time since their meeting a spotty beard to secrete his pale olive skin; his dark brown eyes had inexplicably receded below his brow, their supporting lids flogged swollen and purple; and his modest crop had grown untamed and unctuous. His friend,

wanted to aggrandize his careful health and criticize others, offering unbidden advice or even instruction in the culinary and grooming arts, looked now as though he had spent the last two months confined to an oubliette, scratching his nails against limestone and slaking himself off rainwater trickling through an overhead grill: a prisoner. Of some recondite whim or *force majeure*, Faolainn had since that morning at the café become a prisoner.

A second trial, with slight variations to the cot's placement, followed, an attempt which entailed consuming the compact's entire backseat. Faolainn was occupied with the hoisting of a dense box, transferring it to the ground beside, when forcefully and without expectation he banged his swollen finger. The shock of pain, paired with the taste of sulphrus meltoff, caused Faolainn to release an agonized groan, his load plummeting tarmac-to and ejecting its contents in a spray. Pulling his mind together amidst, he swayed to the ground, hastily peeling up the settled photographs.

— Quite alright over there? Dolon asking cater-corner.

— Yes, yes—damned door, Faolainn muttered, passing photographs through the torn lid. You've kept these stowed away for years, by looks of the dust. Why not send them back, I don't know, to your mother—or incinerate this, ehr... albatross, better yet.

— She requested they remain in my keeping—though, in earnest, I'll admit they're not of terrible consequence to me. Pictures and memories fade alike. 'Time to ember everything turns,' as I see it.

— And without the photographs, who'll know your face when every human you've met has died? Wax to that: what good are the intangible memories of the dead? Better to leave something physical than dissolve entirely. 'Leave to amber, not to ember.' Better, mine.

— Look, I'm not too terribly concerned with what's left, Dolon's brow furrowing. I'd have expected more support from the likes of you. What manner of christened man derides that ideal, you know, life *beyond* material burden, window boxes in the sky?

— A realist. Faolainn stepped around the box, throbbing hand succored above his heart. At the time of Christ, the world hadn't gotten itself into such a... an, ehr, well, *imbroglio*. Here: I imagine there's some strain of commensuration, a proportional exchange for the completely impoverished and rich, 'last shall be first' and all. But *you*, Mr. Corvo, who boasts a thirtyfold-article *penderie*, you've more to cover your back than the average Roman *provinciale*. Lesser made is lesser missed, I say, and Time, which establishes price, is out of grasp. Well... for Men.

— Hold there, Dolon scoffed, quality of make or quantity, which do we contest?

— A cheap sheet is less given regardless. What would you miss more: six shirts or one?

— And yet, if it totalled your entire worldly possession?

— There's only so much the civilized world will allow. And, hang it, who are you to adduce to faith? As I recall, your belongings were *sold*—not, ehr... *benevolently booned*. What, ha!, you mean to tell me you've seen the light?

— If that is the light, then may I remain forever blind! Heavens no, Dolon chortled, keen to the irony of such an ejaculation, no, I mention it merely to back your refutation; I haven't now, nor shant I ever, any interest in your mythologies—beyond the pleasurable desire to pillory you in your pulpit for the hypocrite you are.

A mottled pigeon soared through the entrance, hovering upon a discarded crust of bread several grimy yellow lines past the two. Faolainn advantaged himself of the obtrusion, turning his back on Dolon.

— You haven't a clue in the faintest.

— Hm? And your meaning there?

— Hollandaise, and biscuits, scones, and cream, and other lacey, cottons dream...

Faolainn shuddered, expelling a soothing breath along the length of his swollen finger. He peeked his nose over his shoulder.

— Tut—anamneses. Forget that. You were saying?

— 'Take heed, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions,' he recited, elocution ruffled. Stowed that away for some time now, a bit of wisdom amidst Primary indoctrinating... care to impart your thoughts?

— *Inculcating*. And, my thoughts? I think an atheist has as much right quoting the Evangelists as an astrologist lecturing on the stars.

— I never stated I was an atheist; I merely disdain the being counted a part of your troupe. Dogmatic, so dogmatic and perniciously so. Too inviting of criticism, and too contradictory in defense.

— 'Too contradictory?' Did your eyes even wander past that sentence, I wonder...

— What?

— ‘Sell your possessions and give to the poor.’ Thirty-four next goes, ‘where your treasure is, there your heart will be also,’ those—and yours—both in twelve. Tell me now, in what way shall you spend your profits here that would put the giving man to shame?

— I’m a man dispossessed now, one of the needy, am I not? Is not a man without possession, the pauper, ‘impoverished?’ And how else can an impoverished man—a *poor* man—subsist without some purse? No need to wait; I’ve saved you and your brothers the time and endeavor. I’m the alms-eater, the pauper—your voucher for paradise.

A vexed titter sneaked its way through Faolainn’s teeth. His friend produced and hid his nose beneath a tissue.

— Well then, what do you call yourself?

— A realist, said Dolon emphatically situating a forceful blow beforehand. How many teeth would you say line the shaft of Peter’s keys? And what quality lock do you suppose guards the gates? And for that matter, the walls? Parapets and ramparts? Crenellations? Yes, if it’ll soothe your fatalist agitations, I believe there’s some reason to it. But, if this is it, if nothing lies beyond the shores, then fine. If not? Better so. I’ll maintain my records. And if they should flutter away? Well, *que sera*. There, a little of your Latin to suit. Every tedious second of existence is a balancing routine between life and death. Is there an undercurrent of contradiction? Yes, of course; we’d damned boring creations without it, if created we were. Divinity or not, spectators demand entertainment. Allow me my fallibility and I shall you yours.

— You’ve no desire whatsoever, to strive toward perfection, to pursue a flawless existence?

Dolon pocketed his tissue.

— Man is imperfect; perfection is, then by his nature, idyllic. If he were contrived by an omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent being with that prescription in mind—imperfection—then wouldn't the ultimate realization of his existence be a flawed one, per his programming?

Faolainn turned slowly about-face, a sententious glare upon Dolon's unflappable azure escutcheons.

— *'Melius est parum cum timore Domini quam thesauri magni et insatiabiles'*...

— Your arguments would likely gain more favor if they weren't veiled beneath dying tongues. You'd take more water with a dragnet.

The ratty avifauna pecked its last leavened morsels of crust and strutted about the empty dining space, traveling in three concentric circles, its peripheries each time passing the taller hominid at altered stances: first facing the smaller; second continuing the second evacuation of the trunk; and third and last, afore winging off to perch on a closeby oakbranch, sidling the smaller's backside, performing or imitating his directives. As she squatted upon her oakbranch, signaling to local mates with intermittent cooos and luxuriating in the assimilation of her meal, the calico, on cue of an abrupt tromping, blanched and inflated her breast. She cocked her head mechanically, eying through the sere leaves and brittle twigs the two hominids, lugging paraphernalia through a third story portal across the courtyard's airspace. They conducted their service five minutes under her study before the taller entered the darkness beyond the portal and anon returned, the shorter tailing him, thumbing several viridescent cotton slips, the former grasping in his left paw a lengthy, thin metal pole with what to her appeared a large half-eggshell crowning, a tail and flat foot at the

bottom. The taller halted, pivoting just beyond the portal, floored the pole on its foot and gradually extended his left paw to the smaller, who likewise supplied his own, seized the taller's, then weakly caught and wrung it. The scent of new provender, a virulent amnesic, wafted through the air: a heady redolence of berries, straw, black, and rasp, arising across the street from an uncapped trashbin. The fickle avian preened, lurched forward, stretched out her wings, thrice beat the wind, then coasted down an adjacent back lane, noting instinctively as she leapt the accoutered taller turn from the stair flight, calling out to the embattling smaller:

— You really will see it through then?

— Yes.

— Even if you're to do it alone?

— Yes.

— I—well, what day are you leaving?

Shortly thereafter the deal was struck. Delighted by Faolainn's assent, though lateminate being, Dolon loosed his strings and set to finalizing the arrangements for his escort's return home, arriving upon the scenic—and frugal—transit of a three days' locomotive conveyance (standard seating, non-sleeper, viands noninclusive). At such late notice, a *billet de train* would prove his chauffeur's least costly mode of transportation: an unattractive but equitable onefifth his hitherto profit. Though initially scolding himself for the preventable oversight and its concomitant *l'inflation du prix*, he submitted his unease to the mollifications of procedure, and to the reassurance that his final estate sale would more than counteract this unpredicted omission. That night, when the first of his nine final

twilights had whiled itself down into balmy singularity, Dolon lay awake in bed, his fingers scratching at the coarse linens (a meager temporary self-allowance) swaddling him. A new restlessness had descended with this dusk, one that directed his vision not toward the door or curtains, to the world beyond his hovel or the paper adumbrations traversing its lamps, but overhead, into a hanging obscurity, rhythmically exposed and sentineled by the leisurely probing blades of a pendent fan.

The sequent seven nights were summoned and dismissed. Another advert in the university papers, concerning the *escritoire*, *bergère*, bedframe, boxspring, and mattress, was commissioned the next morning and published the morning ensuing, the latter being the conclusion of his apprenticeship at the firm. As that day passed, and perpetuated his spirit's liberation, however, to Dolon's chagrin, the third and fourth sunfalls transpired with no retail advancements. And though the fifth day arrived with Dolon's nascent anxieties rallying into genuine alarums, such apprehensions, as well as remaining appointments, departed with it; for the sight of the rotund beldame puttering away, chauffeured by her equally shapen, depilating son and their shrinking trailer in tow, matched with the four-hundred fifty dollars sweating in his palm, quashed the residuum of Dolon's proprietary worry. Upon the twelve foot square cot he slept no worse than he had on his mattress; in fact, the pressure of the bedding, its size and daily maintenance, had often before swelled beneath him, prolonged his restless squirms and wetted his sheets. His physique knew its restraints and was content to abide within them. Yet that fifth night he lay awake as long as he had the previous—if not longer—watching nothing, hearing only pulsating sweeps distant of six feet or six miles. The sixth day Dolon spent acquiring the refreshments and treats, stores of water and bread



(purchased from day-old shops whose reduced fares promised unimpeachable savings, especially when observed with the exorbitant prices that might encounter the esurient traveller), and the various other supplies, maps, gauges, and sunshades, travel necessitates. While out he advised utilities, the gasworks, water, and power, of his departure and closing dates, discontinuing all services the night imminent to his departure, and reconciled the prorated bills for each. He later enjoyed dinner with a friend mutual to Fano, Faolainn, and he: lapsed ideologue and *femme rousse*, Deirdre O'Floinn. They converged upon a gastropub, the notorious Arachne's five blocks northeast, and sitting down on irregular chairs (Dolon's a lawnchaise, Deirdy's an uprooted parkbench), they commenced a light, if prevaricating dialogue which launched at the meeting of the forerunning three male classfellows and ran along the imprecise course of their friendship: their collaborations scholastic, personal, and intrapersonal, the search for mates and the acts of mating, the long midnight walks and longer discussions, the explorations of selves, the months traveled apart, the fallings-out and reconciliations; of Deirdy's introduction, their nights ravaged at the pub, of attending shows and traducing their worth, of loss of love and comfort in the other, and others and another, of late nights and early days; of the dressing of gowns and wrapping of stoles, of commencement speeches and the mislaying of caps, of the settling of employment, of the subjugation of the self and the commencement of a tireless race anew. In these memories and seemingly less they waxed nostalgic, Dolon the two hour meet-up picking at a tin of chips and drinking delight's requisite single pint, Deirdy slaking three times the ale and holding it faster, sans a crumb of food, their momentum stumbling only once when Dolon, showing impairment, queried whether she had recently or not heard from Faolainn. She paused,

swirled her dregs and huffed. Then, professing her memory somewhat locked, she threw back the pint and pulled at the sleeve of a bypassing *garçon* for a third. At ten thirty-two Deirdy arose, citing her charges' early morning rise sadly reason too great to stay, and paid. Outside the two embraced, the feminine party giving the inebriated a cursory osculation on the cheek before hurriedly bouncing away, wishing him good luck and fulfillment and demanding he telephone and write her bimonthly, to which by his crapulence he agreed. He doddered home, by mischance twice eluding his street, tripped up the stairs to his tenement, stumbled in, crossed to his room without once falling (but for the room's vacancy), and sobered into Saturday upon his cot, strapped with Friday's ensemble, mesmerized to sedation by the importunate vanes above. The light of his seventh day was squandered in his blackened chamber, a cold rag sopping his forehead and a pail of water in his hand, the redundancy of *veisalgia*'s appellation (Nor. *kveis*, 'discomfort following intemperance;' Gre. *ἄλγος*, 'pain') never a second lost on Dolon as he spent the breadth of his penultimate day doubled over, his dried, quivering lips execrating his alcoholic indiscretion, his liver's stymied metabolic performance, and the paternal connection which made him heritor to such a condition. Had Fano not rapped his door as the two red hands of Dolon's kitchen clock overlapped southward, Dolon would have very well passed that final of the seven nights in such postconvalescent malaise.

Dolon wrung out his facecloth, draped its moist mass across his pillow, and wrapped himself in the two first articles struck: a blue long-sleeve and pale shorts. Cinctured up and styled, he stepped into the living room, where Fano applied his attentions not to the habitual molding of his unruly thicket of hair, but to thumbing his right third digit—specifically a

light band of flesh, one wreathed about the proximal phalanx. Dolon sighed, extending a cocked hand. With several impatient snaps of the finger Fano demisted, and the two awayed to a familiar haunt upon which Fano, ever the circumspect being, insisted; once there, Fano to little objection proffered to defray Dolon's meal, and, taking their seats amidst the sonority of an overstuffed room, Dolon essayed an invalid's final stand.

— Name one thing you'd like me to send you once we arrive.

Fano's eyes leapt up from their perseveration on his hand. He inhaled acutely.

— A mason's jar of sand, three-quarters full.

— And you'll be wanting nothing else?

— I don't really know what you'd send back, he said, his focus rapidly dwindling.

— Well, Dolon noticed, you'll have more than a day to get back to me if you think of anything before we leave. If you do, inform Sol. He's back on your davenport again, yes, 'dwelling on the threshold' as it were?

— Well, yes, when he's there...

Reticence caught their tongues. Dolon availed himself to a scoop of baba ghanouj while Fano stared at the pale band encircling his finger.

— I dare say I might actually miss you, Fano, Dolon admitted.

— I'll miss you as well, responded Fano, his attention still held the band, returning Dolon's admission in redirection: do you mind if I—well, I just wanted to voice something. Is that alright?

Dolon's brows slackened.

— Go on.

— Well, it's that... we haven't spoken now in almost a week. We've gone days before, maybe four or, actually three, at the most but never a week before. Something feels changed, is all—but I know she's working, like everyone else, and everyone needs their time away.

— I understand the feeling... when did you last speak, in person, over the telephone, letters, *et cetera*?

— ...Monday?

— That's five days, Fano.

— Yes, and if you had heard me I did say 'almost a week.' The rounding principle.

— 'Five days,' one-hundred twenty hours, is closer by-hour to half a week, eighty-four, than it is to the one-hundred sixty-eight grand sum. Surely a *restaurateur* still needs his maths.

The hackles on Fano's neck stiffened, rotating his head out of line with Dolon's.

— You sound paranoid.

— I think Ily means to end it, sputtered Fano. When we spoke on Monday, her voice... there was something in it, some disconnect, some resignation... she wasn't speaking her thoughts, and said little.

— We're entitled to our privacy. And, as I recall, she never was the garrulous type.

— I don't understand them, women. We've had good nights before, you know. I plumbed her one night, for two hours alongside the river, and four months on I can't get ten utterances from her in half the time. It's as though they're all open books at the start; but it seems the pages stick more you read...

— Aren't we all...

Fano tapped a carton of fags, lit and planted one between his lips, then leant back and rested his arm atop the stall. Nicotine wisps twisted up through the air and about Dolon, who nauseously inched out of their flight path. Gazing askance, he asked:

— Tell me, what did you tell *her* about Amila?

— Why should she know about Amila?

— How can one demand transparency if they are unwilling to deliver the very same?

— Amila came before Ily. If there are specific aspects of a man's history he wishes to sweep under the rug, then I say 'fair.' And did you not just say 'we are entitled to our privacy?'

— 'Before?' Dolon reiterated, his reproving sneer aligning with Fano's, Fano, I think your memory is failing.

The pair glared between themselves, Fano interrupting their bitter communion with a protracted draw. He contained its plume until two mantles began leaking their way out and streaming up his nose. Dropping his head, he blew a jet of smoke from the corner of his lips out the open window at his rear.

— Are you done?

Dolon rolled his eyes and drew from his plate again, Fano meanwhile employing the ceramic ashtray nailed to the windowsill in extinguishing his fag.

— Honestly, I'm afraid she'll break things off before Sol and I move into the new apartment. It'll be the first time I've had my own private quarters and I'd like to make use of that long awaited intimacy.

— My doubts as to whether that will happen in the next five days. The place will, however, be yours to conduct as you see fit for a week before I send him back. Have at it.

— And then when the Puritan does return...

— There was no edict, no binding legislature coercing you into living with the man. You had options. I always—

— Not many. And when he does return, what happens when he moves in? How long until the despot chases her off, with his rules on guests and callers? I made no agreements to live in a monastery.

— Seems fair he should have a say on who's passing through his door.

— There's no harm in the pursuits of pleasure; it's more or less why we were plucked from the ground. I'll posit that there's even something holy to it, a sacrifice of the self to another, a... *martyrdom*, if you will.

— My pardon, sir! Dolon lurched, clutching his breast. I was not aware I was graced by the presence of Signor Giacomo Girolamo Casanova, pride of the Venetian ascendancy, renowned voluptuary and vanquisher of connubial unrest! Soft, have you come to cuckold the caddish innkeep, purvey your sybarite wisdom, and to taste all things youthful and tantalizing?

— Have you seen his hand? Fano interrupted, eyes wheeling frustration about his skull.

— Yes, actually, Dolon's flippant grin in turn relaxing. How'd the fool break it?

— I don't know; though... he's quiet these days, slow to open his mouth—and saying little when he does. He'll leave late at night and won't return for hours, days at times And I haven't seen him eat. He's... changed.

— Leave homeostasis to the unsightly; humans change. You're not so ignorant as to ignore that. If only the body were too a pageant of the soul—if such a thing exists—our inner revolutions might more patently show—

— Oh, I never like these things, talking like this, Fano abruptly flared. It puts me in such a damned rut! Here—are you finished?

Dolon peered down to his cleaned plate, which at the moment was held by Fano's hand. Following Fano's arm across the table, he noticed that Fano's plate, upon which had been piled rice and gyro, had as by prestidigitation been cleaned as well. Dolon consented apprehensively and Fano rising stacked the platters one atop the other, then passed unchallenged through the kitchen's swing doors. Moments later, as Dolon distraitly stuffed a ball of tissue away, he appeared

— Let's leave. I've settled the bill.

Much resembling one night less than two cycles previous, Dolon and Fano set out into the current, retreating homeward in speechless enmity. When beforehand they had in blooming amity embarked, shoulder-to-shoulder, Dolon dragging his feet now maneuvered Fano's slipstream. Waves of students washing down the streets passed by the two with little resistance, chaffing of dreck and ribaldry, sidestepping, or in several cases colliding with them, but more often disregarding the two alum as similarly inconsequential particles lost also within the gradient. Whether the crowds offered any vicariousness to Fano, who erewhile gazed longingly on every group, pining after the carelessness and ease of university nights, the structure and negligibility of course, autonomy's rule saddled with the absence of culpability, Dolon was not apprised: where before with undeviating ineludibility Fano voiced

his evocations of the past, he now in a quiet, urgent despondence looked on, Dolon hearing naught from the usual nostalgic but his soft polyurethane heels drudging.

A bell pealed nine times as Dolon loosened the bolt to his front door, Fano bent over the balustrade behind tracing the pale band's underside, cognizant of the elfin Dolon, the sterling sapphire of his censorious gaze and the barren *domus* which he guarded. Fano's lip slouched briefly before muttering a suppressed string of syllables that Dolon eventually rectified as:

— I wish the night had gone differently.

Dolon's eked out response droned in accord with his. Their consonance, however, failed in belying the vilification lurking in their recitations, umbrage flaring even as Dolon thrust his hand out in conciliatory effort. Fano straightened up and shrugged, wringing Dolon's hand and patting him once, begrudgingly, in a half-conceived attempt at embrace. Again, though tintured by truculence, they muttered goodbye, assuring one to the other letters and calls exchanged, visits made, and birthdays remembered, then soon broke apart, Fano tottering backward for the stairwell, Dolon leaning on his doorpost, anticipating his friend's disappearance with a deteriorating smirk. Abruptly, Dolon exclaimed:

— A mason jar of sand, right? Nothing else?

— Three-quarters full, yes. But it must be sand you've stood on with your own feet. I'll accept nothing else.

— Ah, but of course... Now, pretend me the fool and explain: why is that?

— Oh, preservation, I suppose: that I have a reminder of your stepping on me.



They both awaited a resulting snigger, one which both shortly sussed undestined. A breeze of cool air floated up through the stairshaft, beckoning Fano's casual oppugnance downward. He flickered to Dolon. Then, finally:

— Best of luck to you, friend.

— And to you as well, in all my most unusual sincerity.

— 'Unusual.' Indeed. *Au revoir*.

A spill of light glanced handsomely across his sheening locks and he was gone, each reverberating step weakening with his descent, submitting itself to the night's ambiance, the rustling of branches, the ferrying voices, the flouting motors—all enveloping, assimilating Fano fluidly into their roar. Having heard a rasp on the ground floor and believing momentarily something stirred below, Dolon stayed outside awaiting its sequel; nothing, however, and no one, accompanied the rustle. He quitted indoors and made fast the bolt, kicking off his derbies and retiring straight to his chamber, unguided by the effulgence of any flame, candle, or light. Disarrayed he stretched across his cot and lay awake, his three-bladed ventilator playing the voyeur, stooping down over him a drouthy poleaxe. By and by the somnolent effect of his fidgeting, as the unflagging tug of tide upon a brittle shore, eroded his unrest. And when Dolon burrowed into his pillow, satiated, exposing his perspiring traps to the soothing downdraft above, such was his apotheosis, and seventh and final of the solitary nights in his quondam home.

The vanes inched to a halt in their orbiting song around the motor, resting at a vulnerable yet ready stance and affording the particles of dust glinting in the wan morning

spray purchase to slyly settle themselves *incogniti*. Dolon's thumb tarried on the switch— then relinquished it, reassured.

Dolon prepared breakfast, withdrawing from its cardboard accommodation of the last two-and-some-half months the baking pan, a bowl and spoon. Steel cut oats were snatched out of another, one populated by dry stow remains, portioned out to two and one-thirds fluid ounces, boiled with eight fluid ounces of water for three minutes, salted, sweetened with maple syrup, and served with a fried egg. He enjoyed his meal, ingesting the course over thirty-three minutes (by kitchen clock's count), then washed and dried bowl, spoon, and pan, and returned them to their domicile, while the oats saw deposit in a new box amidst canned vegetables, soups, and other nonperishables. Thereafter he rummaged about the dry ingredients receptacle, confirming its remaining contents undesired, then arrayed himself in rufous flannel, canvas shorts, cincture, and shoes, folded the box beneath his arm, and departed.

The food pantry to his nearest convenience took the form of an *église* five city blocks east of Dolon, a fifteen minute walk by his narrow stride. The previous night's dissipations had become just that, the streets and shops Dolon strolled upon, and by a paucity of human presence inversely proportional to their saturations of yester, fashioning his walk one taciturn and meditative, quite in congruence to (by destination's ordinance) the morning's intents. He landed upon the block as the eight-thirty congregation spilled out, inundating the surrounding roads with scrambling taxa of three, four, five, six, and even seven, and shambling septua- and octo- genarians, each claiming their conveyances amidst the tempestuous flurry of righteous souls. Dolon sat himself beneath an elm fifty yards back where he awaited the

flock's dissolution, humoring himself on the irony of their discord and impatience. He had just observed a family of four prevent a senescent, rouged widow from decamping when he judged the river's scope downgraded to rivulet and, gripping his repository prodigiously underarm, decamped himself for the paneled oak doors of the instigating structure. Who should he alight upon, lumbering through the doors not five seconds before he, inelegantly garbed in a saksuit three-piece, *sans* cravat, brown pupils beset by erubescant vines and left hook craftily pocketed, but his longere friend and erelong travel companion, Solomon Faolainn.

— Finally giving in, eh? Those seeking the heathens' and apostates' section need only follow the burning, ehr, bouquet.

— No, unfortunately. See, I've always wondered what life with my prepuce intact would have been like; suffice it to say I'll still be about my rankles for some time over that unconsented deprivation.

— *Unordained*, might've been more apropos. And it was a, ehr... derisory divestment, nonetheless—on your part; no man emerges clean. Aye, what's this? Throwing some poor creature a bone at last? Tell me, what good do you think your, Faolainn rifled Dolon's donation, opened coriander and pickled beets will do?

— Remarkably more than had they been rubbish, I'd say!

— *Ut quod ali cibus*. There's no shew of arsenic lace to these spices, correct?

— Think we'd have the time to see if your God would allow? Never, no, never. And the Church would never cover up such a controversy. No, never, never, never.

— You should essay funneling those blasphemies down your tank and see if *they'll* take you to the coast—and alone, I might add...

— All in good jest—you are ready though, yes? You managed to wrest that week's furlough from Crawley's mitts?

— That being an understatement of the endeavor; but, yes, in wresting to rest I've put it. I'll be ready and loitering on your doorstep at... eight ay-em sharp tomorrow?

— And not a second later—say, care to join me on a few last chores?

— Cannot, unfortunately; I've matters to attend to myself. Until to-morrow—

Faolainn patted Dolon's shoulder, brushing past him and down the pavement in the thew, hue, and stability of a worn strip of cardstock westerly blown, rising and falling through no intervention of its own doing. Dolon eventually ducked inside, vouchsafing his box to a kindly old darkskinned man unbuttoning his surplice near the vestry threshold. *In nomine Patris* offered in exchange, Dolon amusedly bowed his head in acceptance, then, left alone, idled briefly about the nave, glazing from the alter, crucifix, and opulent festoonery of the apse, over to the stonecarved stations fixed to cement walls and the handtied roods punctuating their interstices. His vision held particularly long on the fourteenth, whereupon the deposition and its messianic sepulcher by the aid of three bewhiskered men was depicted. Dolon focused specifically—even intently approaching so as to confirm his suspicion—on whomever it was carved supporting the messiah's torso; for, in the execution of his office, that man appeared to have effectively torn further the unending perforation between the deceased's ribs. There Dolon dwelt, fixed, three minutes, before pivoting about-right and striding down the center aisle, through the narthex, and out the front door—incognizant he

had mechanically dipped his fingers in a stoup and begun the *signum crucis* until midway through his parapraxis.

The water dribbled down his fingers, little missiles of droplets raining upon his shoes from where his wetted hand before his heart halted. He smirked, then set upon his journey home, hand dessicated with three flicks of the wrist.

It was of no premonitory anticipation to Dolon, upon returning home and performing an extensive supplementary clean of the tenement, namely the dusting of cobwebs and polishing of their dwellings, the cornices and shoe mouldings, the relocating of all belongings to the entryway, the ammonia sanitation of the privy, the absentminded scouring of the countertop surfaces, the sweeping and swabbing of the floors wooded and tiled, the polishing of all glass and mirrored fixtures, the preparation of sandwiches for the following day's travel, the repeated and begrudged scouring of the kitchen countertop surfaces, the cleaning and stowing of sandwich assembling supplies, the dawning realization whilst filling drinking receptacles that the discontinuance of all utilities services was requested for that day, the cessation of all water, electric, and gas operations within the five o'clock hour, the lighting of a candle, the loading of the car in accordance with predetermined stratagem, the removal of all items after two failed attempts, the aggravated remembering of said stratagem, the providential extemporization of new stratagem, the returning indoors, the upending of the candle, the fleet effort to dab up—then scrape—the spilled—then congealed—candlewax before the depletion of sunlight, the respite, the repast, and all other extraneous activities leading up to a day's well-earned night, never once foreboded Dolon before, that is to say, it was of no great anticipation to him that, as he was lying himself down to his tenement's

terminating rest he should, at the indefensible hour of quarter to midnight—which was only known to him as its red grasp caught his eye stamping to answer the din—an incessant metallic clangor erupted from his entryway, startling him into tipping over his cot and plunging it and himself directly to his hardplank floor, wealing his heel and altogether making the traverse to his front door a rather arduous and discomforting one in no way remedied or nullified by the discovery upon furiously wrenching open the door, of Faolainn, looking by some means more dismal than ever, fingers sustained on the knocker even as Dolon opened, and a tattered valise swaying from hi shoulder.

— Christ, what are you doing here? Somebody knick your timepiece? Elsewise, only explanation is you've gone deaf and blind.

Faolainn's fingers slid the bronze hoop, by process brandishing his timepiece three inches from Dolon's Trinacrian nose.

— And how, beg you, might I have found your door? Figured it more effective camping here. Acceptable? he said, eyes listing down the kitchen wall where once a calendar hung.

Dolon assented curtly and shuttled Faolainn in, lighting a candle and touring him through the near-vacant cells. To each discovered emptiness Faolainn grunted ambivalently, Dolon discerned, his companion drifting through the doorways in the weariness of fugue. He attempted to discuss tomorrow's route, though himself tired from the day's drudgery, but likewise found his listener remote, responding shortly if at all, and eventually surrendered, forgoing any involved interaction until the morning. He rested the candle at a distance and concocted a pallet of blankets and a pillow to serve as Faolainn's bed, whistling a ditty during which, on completion reminding his guest for reliefment's sake that water services

had been cancelled. The two stripped off their outer layers and laid themselves down to their beds, Dolon beforehand forgetfully throwing the switch on his ceiling fan several times before realizing—

— Oh. Right.

He wet his fingers, then with a careful twist extinguished the flame, leaving the bedroom lit by merely what streetlight could soak through the aluminum blinds, a perfidious lucency glowing but at its source, and decorating naught else. Dolon gazed ahead, or upward, to the dormant fan, his skin creeping at the lack of breeze.

— I forgot, spoke Dolon, crumpling coverlet to his waist.

— Hm? Faolainn, twisting to hear. Forgot about?

— The fan: it was electric.

— Yes. Only one night.

Eyes squinting, all their might trained above, upon adjusting to the dark Dolon made out a single blade reaching toward the glow of the blinds.

— Now that I've someone else here to ask, I'd like to—ask, that is to say. Sol?

— What? You'd like to ask...?

— Do you ever dizzy yourself, trying to keep track?

— What? Say again?

— Of the blades. When it's in full swing, the blades blowing up a cyclone, do you ever try to catch one? To hold your eye to it, to follow it round and round, even if it sickens you?

A culex touched upon Faolainn's shoulder, thrusting her stylet through his skin. He winced, but remained still, allowing the parasite her meal.

— No. Can't say I have.

— Do you think... do you think it'd be possible, timed right, having tracked them along their compass, and pinning down the precise interval—and if you could muster speed enough—do you think, Sol, if they were moving as we speak, it'd be possible in one motion to pass between the vanes?

Blood meal sloshing about her stomach, the culex flitted into the dark, leaving Faolainn motionless as she found him. Dolon cocked down and spoke unawares again at Faolainn's back:

— Sol?

— Excuse me—

Dolon listened as who he presumed to be Faolainn slid out of his pallet and fitted himself with breeches and loafers, then walked carefully up to and through the chamber door, through the living room, and up to and out of the front door, a brief smear of light stroking the hardwood to confirm the latter. He waited what to his insensibility felt an hour before the former in reverse order of events occurred, and Faolainn in relief settled back beneath his covers. He called Dolon's name out, asking whether he was or was not asleep once, then twice, then hearing no response, and queerer yet no inhalations nor exhalations, rolled away on his side, palpitating small digit coddled. And in that state, the pretense of sleep, laid the two men, awake.

Dawn sliced through the blinds, trouncing uncontested the defenseless chamber, falling heavytoed and heavytoed prowling the space until each square foot fell to it, leaving for last the slumberous lids of its subjugated, clawing and kneading them into consciousness.



Dolon first roused, then seized the pillow from beneath his pate and slung it Solward, hitting the mark and waking the corpse, who groused and grumbled and griped, anathemizing the shootist and spouting comminations, until he unfolded his chest to the day and agreed it was in all best interests to splay the tarmac. Clothing themselves (Faolainn equipped to see the ride in far more leisured dress), they packed their strewn equipage and, taking turns, slipped surreptitious into and out of the courtyard, in their respective absences performing auxiliary surveys of the tenement, Dolon first, Faolainn succeeding. Faolainn's inspective comportment left much desired, he dawdling through each successive room with minimal consideration paid, in gait and glance performing at the most copacetic a desultory examination of the apartment. Dolon cinching stepped in upon Faolainn inspecting the kitchen cupboards. The two exchanged a nod and traded roles, Faolainn adjourning outside and Dolon adorning a scrupulous eye, occupying himself during Faolainn's elongated alleviation by casing each surface and wall, running his fingers over both and scoring out every bump and blemish previously neglected.

Excepting their luggage, the cot, food, and sleeping accouterment, the apartment had by Dolon's diligence been wiped clean, excepting a single item ( either fiscally or magnanimously) unevacuated. This item, a donation by his mother, had occupied its place on the kitchen wall since the premier of his very own occupation; it had passed him by, acknowledged at times, sometimes loved, sometimes detested, extolled and cursed alike, though most frequently overlooked—but tallying ever. Yet, *au fait* he was not until he found himself arrested by its red hands whilst his own disposed a spot of Muenster down the kitchen sink. Squaring a-front, he placed his hands about its round face and slid it from its

anchorage, ticking sounding orotund the closer its face was held, which morphed and distended his in its own, the horologue's curved countenance bloating him nearbeyond recognition. The clock wore its age, he saw, for Dolon had not but twice dusted it, his thumbs burrowing small twin ovals through a thick layer of powder to the polished bronze plating beneath; the face was sallow and blotted, yellowed by sunlight and peppered with mold. Its age and ruin would fester, and hasten, with time, its fading tock a sardonic admission of its own paradoxical actuality: it counted, and existed only to count, the every moment prefacing its destruction.

Faolainn entered, striding past Dolon and into the bedroom, there shouldering cautiously the enfolded cot after his valise, inquiring through the walls in simultaneity if all was in order. Dolon appeared in the doorway shortly following, rolled up the blankets and pillows, then snatched up his suitcase and briskly exited behind Faolainn, who once by the kitchen took up the paper bags in which were loaded their viands and marched out the front door, Dolon subject to the procedure of a cursory glimpse aback before doing the same. All resolved clear, the door shut. The bolt's tightening echoed across the unpeopled zone, colliding and resounding across every surface, floors, walls, ceiling, fireplace, and fan, bounding off each, decelerating and decaying exponentially into the past, overpowered by the resonant traipsing of the decrepit clock.

Boarded and launched, they divested the key at the firm and adjoined themselves to the highway northwest flowing, Dolon at the helm and Faolainn first-mate. Faolainn on that maiden day devoted most of the voyage to sleep, sporadically awaking to check time and progress or cavil Dolon's supererogatively heedful navigation, but most consistently stirring

to protest the sultry climate and snap at the inconsistent currents of air. Their vessel shadowed the currents of their route eleven hours, appearing, whitewashed as it was, as an egg floating uphill, one that, though resting once at a major port midway to jettison effluent and refuel, abided otherwise their course amongst the schools of variegated ova tumbling with, against, or indifferent to their directive. Fertile soil and verdure in time gave way to a dustier, pebblier *mélange*, the ascendant earth beneath eschewing the imposing burs, cedar elms, and cypresses dominating its early flanks for the persimmons, mountain laurels, and mesquite shrubs accidentally native, as though the greenery imperceptibly sank unto the mounting land, stretches of nourished grass and waving groves relegated to fields of bent hollow stalks and fallowed tilth.

By noons, when plains of blue grama wavered up from leagues of sedimentary or orange soil, and monument copses of wiry oak trunks punctuated the topographical divots where streams once flowed along these monotonous tracts of land, be it product of the subconscious association of sand with water, or Dolon's niggling antipathies for repetitious scenery, the pair decided during one of Faolainn's wakeful spells to visit a lake advertised roadside several hours ahead. They diverged from their path as the Sun slipped into its final descent and by vespers were carried by Dolon's steerage over the pitiful inlet constituting the lake's southern reach, the majority of whose body deceptively laid itself beyond roadbound vision, tucked back behind jagged peninsulas like a clutched grape. In all, they were deigned a mere thirteen seconds before jutting crags invaded, and a retaining wall masked the vista. They sighed collectively, the brief flash of teal marred by its transience and opacity, and hied

themselves on, bearing north with the highway. In ten minutes Faolainn would again succumb to sleep, unaware to the journey's drastic alteration by the impulsive detour.

The vehicle slowed to a creaking stop at the southern perimeter of a township, mooring specifically at a junction where the highway narrowly entered an architectural bricolage, featuring shingling varying from Spanish clay to slate, to cedar, and fences of wattle, linked chains, and stone. Dolon disembarked and, examining prudishly his tawdry environs, settled sights on the least objectionable house in his vicinity. Thither he paced. Faolainn simultaneously stepped out, though with his vision ported oppositely. He had awoken as the car stopped, his initial reconstitution training his attention to what lie directly in the world beyond, which, in that particular moment, at that particular locus, stood a ruin. The derelict structure, whose gabled roof had decades, or centuries, earlier either rotted or caved in—but had since nonetheless been cleared and gone unreplaced—was comprised of stone and cast in waterstained plaster, and sat at the nucleus of a two-acre grass plot. A barbed wire fence encircled the property, commencing and terminating at a gate shaded by twin tripartites of Juniper, and through the generous space separating each trunk Faolainn descried, underscoring the desuetude's *façade*, a modest potter's field. A paved footpath led straight from the chipping white wire gate, through the inhumed, and up to the *façade*'s unhinged gullet, a tongue coaxing passersby into the overgrowth of its hull. Finding himself no exception to the sirencall of eeriness and pregnant decrepitude, Faolainn unlatched the hasp and wandered inland.

Dolon returned to the conveyance, nescient of Faolainn's exit until the moment he was fastening his buckle. He gazed from the empty seat and along every reach of the road

until, at last turning a full three-hundred sixty degrees about, his vision tilted up from the padding to its surmounting glass, and through which his flustered sights spotted Faolainn—or his shadow—listing static between the quavering blades of wild long grass teeming the ruin. Dolon signaled the tocsin in musical rhythm until on queue Faolainn emerged from the overgrowth and reluctantly backtraced to the gate. The potter's field held Faolainn's eyes as he went, conducting them about the headstones and tablets so entrenched in sand or covered by crabgrass one could hardly make out the names engraved upon them—a enchantment Faolainn regularly succumbed to whenever strolling around the deceased—when his loafers scraped the walk and froze. By the reckoning of Dolon, who then busied himself with a tissue, Faolainn had been caught by a particularly intoxicating or hexing engravement, one whose entrancements the salmon plastered posts on which hung the gate suppressed. Ever the valiant gentleman, Dolon, in hopes of countervailing Faolainn's ensnarement, laid pertinaciously on the tocsin, eventually nullifying the charm and luring an ungrateful Faolainn away from the rune.

— See someone you know? Dolon chaffed

Faolainn focused his glance out the window, disregarding the comment.

— It was a mission—'Santa, ehr... *Rosa*,' it seems. Where did you run off?

— Canvassing for an inn—the *abuela* I spoke with informed me of several suitable to our 'tastes'—her verbiage—not two miles north, and along the ancient highway, no less. We'll slide in like a couple of brigands in the morning and let it carry us virtually all the way. What a bit of your synchronicity, no? Riding into your Hell on the Devil's thoroughfare itself—well, shy a numeral.

— *Long is the way and hard* back down. Steer on, then, steer on...

Loth to lose another second of daylight—and indeed by that time were they quite strapped for it—Dolon weighed ahead, pushing any reservations aside, and steered through a town appropriately presaged by its vagrant outlying scenery. In five minutes, they berthed at an equally emblematic inn, one that sprouted from the sand along a row of identical recuperative establishments on the town's northeasterly bourn.

Dolon exited management convivially twirling a key about his little finger, aiming for and impacting sidelong with the entire ring Faolainn's shaded occiput, shattering again his recrudesced trance and pulling the thrall distempered and amiffed from the engrossing sink of a lethargic Sun underneath shrub-stippled hillocks faroff. Valises, valuables, and victuals were transferred into the one-bed-room, the men ascending the stairs as the ground level cells cast wide their doors to allow in the rushes of cool nocturnal air, their habitants, male, female, and childish *plebeians* (among them two juvenile *mesdames*, each hardly a halved dime beyond nonage themselves) indulging in their share of night's liberal aliment.

Where concerned the outdoors the men surfeited, and thusly spent the remaining night reading or dozing, or attempting radio actuations. As Dolon had driven the full day, and seeing as Faolainn had over the day's course slept his night's rest, Dolon would sleep in the room's only bed—management's most economical option. And as Faolainn was too large to succeed in any restorative sleep on Dolon's cot ('I would question how someone of *your* stature slept on it—if your dreadful posture were not explanation enough'), Faolainn submitted, electively utilizing his benefactor's Afghans to craft a pallet. Sleep instantly fell across Dolon as he finished his sandwich, a bag of opened crisps left staling atop the heavy

polyester cover under which he burrowed, disporting himself in that overtrafficked mattress to a first early repose in months, lookspace uninhabited, a pendant burdening no longer over. There seemingly whatever restless *ergreifer* had recent possessed Dolon sloughed his skin, scuttled out from under his sheets and dropped to the carpet, whereupon a new *ergriffener* was in Faolainn found, who in his apparent *ergriffenheit* tossed so violently about that insentience would prove uncooperative. Though his unrest could have been ascribed simply to a day's majority spent extensively asleep, a primal, formless shade, one that shook his limbs and pained tumescence, seemed more immanently apposite, as it was quite against Faolainn's volitions both that he should behold consciously the saturnine advent of newday's first hour, or that he should dispatch himself from pallet's support and lumber mordantly beyond their peeling door.

Cordial and Pneuma sat at a their makeshift card table a peek out their bedroom window, fanning their tarots and passing between them a whalebone poker, fulsome hoyden Pneuma flicking an ember from her corset, chattering scortatory and chortling vociferous, while reserved Cordial toked and coughed and returned acquisitioned poker, tightening her bodice, and tucking a strawberry blonde tress back behind her ear. Contrary to her bosomed friend, Cordial's winsome visage featured little alteration: strokes of pencil underscored her eyes and blushing dollops accentuated her natural complexion, but otherwise hers was an inherent, if only blossoming beauty; and though Pneuema's was not a homely aspect—she was in contrary a rather handsome damsel—she did in her callowness see necessary the exaggeration, or buoying, of her more supple features. And as was their stopgap avocation bereft of a third, they slid trumps across the table in an improvised variation of *jeu de*,

juggling bawdries between and after guests, adjusting stockings, sneaking swigs of chary brandy, and answering queries *vulgaris* in cheeky retort—until, at length, a third unveiled himself, his toe tapping across the staircase’s bottom tread. Shrilly and suddenly a colical scream awoke within the depths of the girls’ chamber, invoking some maternal graze.

Carmine glimmer and mawkish curtsy, Cordial fed herself through the beaded drape, leaving to make their introductions, quite to her jejune indifference and his dissatisfaction, Pnuema and Faolainn

Dolon arose late in a swing of complete rejuvenation, discovering Faolainn wound tightly in his blanket, he enumerating, once Dolon wakened and Faolainn unraveled, every possible disinclination to piloting: insomnia, excruciating ulnar spasm, thoracic grinding, temporomandibular aching *et alii*. But no whinging would arrogate Dolon’s just passengership; coffee and pastries at a neighboring diner, then boarding and shoving off, after, of course empty-pocketed Dolon might dash inside with intent of purloining a tabletop dispenser’s *serviettes en papier*. Pockets laden and buckled in, it occurred to him how motionless and silent was Faolainn, ignorant to his presence, his hazy eyes glaring across the lot toward the inn. He snapped his fingers a rice grain from Faolainn’s eye, rousing him gradually away from fathomless focus and nasalizing at him the matter and bearing at hand. Faolainn grouched, shifting gear, and the craft launched and sped down the street, mixing into the trickling antediluvian current. The wall of a northwestern front caught the wave of dust their craft threw up, this last remnant of their furlough erased and cast at the inn, powdering



windows, panels, and doors in a fine brown dirt, which clung also to the flora of a nylon stocking which draped a groundfloor doorknob, syncopating in the breeze.

The day's hours sat on them silently, their craft hurling upward by geographical inclination, with pleasant climate, welcome viridescence, rising *mesas* and distant satellite escarpments gradually hoisting up along their path as well, ushering them unto an indomitable western range. They wound over and about its shoulders and in gliding down the declivity came upon a vast and undulating metropolis—by which they flew without heed, Faolainn's phlegmatic eyes cutting past the windshield, Dolon fending stultification and a skipper indisposed to commerce by extracting from rearside storage the fumbled case of photographs through which he had been presently sifting for the better part of two hours.

Copious photographs piled the receptacle, a concatenation of unfamiliar or unaffecting lives and illustrations thereof, emulsifying for Dolon into scant more than unconcern. His genitor in one gazed stoically onward in a suit and porkpie hat; a handcrafted homestead rested upon an empty field in another; another of equine sporting, men with Dolon's chin froze in state of cheer; another of a man and a woman, she supplied with Dolon's eyes, he his chin, leaning against a factory wall, a bicycle underpinning the male; and Dolon; and Dolon; and Dolon. Dolon was himself a Stoic, past the ambits of jocularly or disappointment divulging emotions hesitantly ever. Acquaintances postulated either, that he felt not, insensate of neither warmth nor cold; or that his feeling suffered in a state of such delicate, perpetual constancy he would rather altogether ignore it. Of this was he privy, but never decidedly ambivalent. No, little can be said whether he felt more or less attached to either the sterling frames or the smooth glossy paper, or the patrilineal stew from which they

emerged. Only this: where before the receptacle was a *pêle-mêle* of human existence, now a newly rectified *menagerie* it resembled, capped by a final image of Dolon's grandmother compartmentalized by type, vintage, and framing—that is, before a muted thump, and Faolainn stomping his toe against the brake, forcing the craft, habitants, contents, indeed the entire zoo, to lurch forward in their retainers in strident arrest.

Dolon sharpened up for an exasperated, irregular shot at Faolainn—but instantly withdrew, discerning through the jungle of locks canopying Faolainn's face a noticeable saturation about his cheek, his fingers—engorged right quintus included—white with force gripping the wheel, breath soughing through his hair. He spoke, faltering:

— They flew down from nowhere... sucked into the grill... mating... they were mating.

In inspecting the grill, Dolon detected no observable damage; three fine grey plumules were indeed caught in the grate. At a distance some thirty yards orient, the humps of two small fowl swelled up inert from the bitumen, by Dolon's discerning assessment grey themselves. Past them another vehicle was motoring their direction. Dolon rapped the hood twice and signaled Faolainn off the road.

As with all matters regarding travel the oncoming helmsman paid due diligence to her proximities, descrying the sided vessel and reducing her speed to allow the stopped motorists ample mobility's space, heedless, however, to the two corpses she overran. No impending traffic precluding an exiguous infringement of margin into the parallel lane, she sized her headings and executed an impeccably cautious passage, first bow, then port, next starboard, and lastly stern, seeing in her rearview the two gentleman trade pilotage and veer roadwise.

Dolon pulled into the petrol station of the nearest town and stepped out to wrangle the pump, when Faolainn cradling his hand inquired softly if they might camp there tonight. An irrepressible guffaw rang from Dolon's lips, for they had at that time put no more than four hours of a seven-hour itinerary past them; Dolon would, inequitably, complete the day's plan, as it appeared Faolainn was in fettle deficient to the task. Dolon was right on flinging the door shut when Faolainn in solemn astuteness added, that he would defray the sojourn's costs. Dolon leant through the porthole, sizing his suppliant with sacerdotal probation, then ducked out, cogitating seriously the matter. He withdrew a napkin and cleared his nose, unfurling his eyes on a maroon pylon, and the nondescript billboard advert prevailing it. On their descent into the city, one such billboard had garnered his notice, publicizing an historic inn at the city's heart whereat stayed in decades monochromic famed actors and actresses the like. Dolon on seeing the endorsement, being himself a fantasizer and nostalgic of *souvenirs impersonnels*, had enacted designs to patronize the establishment regardless; but now the opportunity to breathe their air, to bathe in the ripples of Thespis' esteemed, and share in their sights, sounds, and delights, expressed itself—and offered *gratis*? He poked his costard back through the porthole:

— Fine—but it will be at a lodging of my choice. Agreed?

Faolainn nodded. Tank leveled they sailed on, landing shortly after upon the advertised inn, Dolon avidly seizing his baggage—and photographs—and proceeding inside, boater shaking about his cap. Gaining on Dolon at concierge, Faolainn arrived precisely in time to settle their room's expense—an extortionate rate, though picayune consideration made by Dolon stipulated two beds be supplied. Whereas Dolon's darted about the lavish

(bordering on the garish) antique lobby, luxuriating in indigenous and old world décor, wagonwheel and stained chandeliers, the vampish crimson carpet carrying them up the bifurcated staircase, and randomly autographed portraits hanging the walls, Faolainn's eyes were assigned but to the floor, his valise wagging in and out of sight, gripped by three trembling fingers. Faolainn dropped his bag by the door and staggered over to a bed, that most proximate the fixed window, then slid out of his loafers and laid himself undercover. Appropriating the remaining bed, Dolon sat down to reorganizing his photographs on the blanket spread, tossing comments apropos of the endeavor, blithe remarks of his trivial efforts, playful entreaties against future retribution, at Faolainn. Yet, bereaved was his friend of any volleying humor, Dolon gleaned. He reapplied his strengths to the reorganizing; in under an hour the collection was categorized, secured, and stowed.

Still no response returned when Dolon, feeling more restless than peckish, inquired if Faolainn might like to get something to eat and, 'oh, possibly explore the building.' Suffering no disheartenment, he and nonchalance crossed to the door, where his fingers but levitated a millimeter above the doorknob, mind tossing, extemporizing aphoristically about. He turned to Faolainn, gaze percipient, ajar mouth anticipating issuance.

— We all feel some guilt for living, don't we?

As Dolon dawdled about the lobby, preoccupying the stun of his confusion by fawning over the portraits' fading lineaments which beamed cloyingly back and in earnest avoiding his room and bed at all cost, Faolainn wakeful laid in bed, the sound of coursing souls tumbling out of the encased darkness and against his impassable tempest of thought.

Faolainn's temperament and his volubility of speech the next morning validated the dictum that time and rest are, perhaps, most tonic to man's distress; for strutting from the steaming washroom the next morning he snapped like a bullwhip a damp towel across Dolon's passively placid periphery, firing off a buckshot crack that very nearly startled the pusillanimity beneath his bed.

— Up then: the hen that stays its roost is eaten first! Or have you settled upon this, ehr—weir as your new nest?

— Good God, Dolon remarked, lids frenetically sifting sleep, have you gone lunatic? Or have you finally come around now. Haven't so much as heard a bleat since the last I said yesterday.

— What you said? Dear, I've never felt a single word of yours: they only sting as hard as they're throw, and last I accounted you had only the fitness of your own girdle, you wiry cuss! Up! Up!

Betaking them to the refectory, they seated and sated themselves both on running eggs and scones and clotted cream and blackberry jam and country potatoes and pork sausages (Faolainn, though, never much one for sow) and baked beans and dyad mugs of coffee each, Faolainn black, Dolon suprasaccharine, then settled the check, tipped (Faolainn's bolstering his partner's modesty), and exited their room before the eleven A.M. prerequisite. They trekked along the highway, Faolainn volunteering for the helm, following its dip in elevation and surrendering any and all notion of greenery foliating the two days prior for a stretch of desert so unwelcoming it boasted a forest calcified by its own aridity. The dreary plunge became drearier and drearier, until of a sudden a storm was encountered, a

cataract brief as could be, scudded on no doubt by the wind which rushed upon them directly the clouds broke away. This wind twisted and danced about a mountain at the horizon, it seemed, and looked to them as if it swept down the mountain's heights, repelling the basal wasteland's injuries and propagating with it a sea of coniferous sentinels fencing evergreen that lifeless terrain. Replete at a township on this sea's shore, they stuck to the path as it meandering rode up to and around the mountain's base, whereat they happened upon, as Faolainn perceived it, 'the quaintest of burgs.' Much about the place seemed tailored to his favor, lush greenery, salubrious mountain air, cycloramic resplendence, and an equilibrical population likely all factoring Faolainn's decision, fingering the stubble of his chin, to opine:

— You would probably call me mad to suggest it, but I say we camp here tonight.

— You're already manic; what's the addition of madness to overstate it. Why?

— My reasoning is not so much as to the 'why' as it is the 'why not?' Hear this: you had planned and allotted for a four-day trip, three nights inn. One of those aforementioned days— or nights, rather—was squared free of charge—

— While losing me an half day's travel, Dolon interjected.

— Thus leaving you sufficient funds surplus for an additional night. And, forgive me, I was not aware your deadline for arrival was of the utmost saliency. Remind me, what was it, some job—or a beginning lease, perhaps, that demands your punctuality, your, ehr... unhampered expediency?

Dolon's teeth sank into his cheek; some force enchained aback clenching his skull.

— Are you done talking?

— Pardon? I think you spent much too much time around our dear friend, Mr. Morin.

What'll the sequel be, eh? Doublehanding fags behind a Phoenician café on Daddy's dime or the, ehr, what's a third labiodental... *philandering, bene, go maith!* Ha! And, speaking of—ha! Serendipity!—let's make a wager. Today is, he murmured at first, right, Fano's moving into our new tenement today, recall? Keeping in mind the time as of now is... precisely three-oh-two.

— Yes...

— Then my wager's this: we telephone him. He answers, at his former unit, having completed no moving as of yet, and we repose in this lovely town tonight—at your expense—as we might have anyway, or; he does not answer, assuming he is out in the midst of the move, we carry onward, I, ehr... helmsman the trip's remainder. Do we have a deal?

— You really underestimate your friends, don't you?

— *Over-estimation, my friend, breeds but mongols and broken thrones. There, I see a phonebox. Et tu?*

Faolainn locked the bi-fold as Dolon slotted the coins and dialed the operator. Awaiting their connection, they uncovered, wedged in behind the receiver and in several cases adhered to the glass above it, little rectangles of cardstock paper, featuring numbers and photocopies of young women in states of various nudity, announcing a diversity of services and companions to any a clandestine enquirer with the obligatory time and compensatory means.

— And so shines the light of your intent...

— Dear, if I had any interest in the matter, payment would not be a worry. Here, Faolainn paused, plucking one, portraying a petite *mesdame* in a looseneck taffeta robe, after a cursory scan, what do you think of her, this impudent strumpet, this gall-moll?

— I personally prefer a, uhm, *heartier* tart—

A ringing wailed from the earpiece. Faolainn shoved his ear up beside Dolon's at the handset anticipating anxiously, toll after successful toll both sinking their feet deeper and deeper in place and transporting them farther and farther on, banishing and buttressing their fates.

The ringing ceased. They held their breath.

A sullen 'hello;' Faolainn tapped his heels.

— Hello there, *bonjour, monsieur!* How are you doing this day, this victorious day, *señior, monsieur, a chara, mo anim chara?* We were driving us along here and we came us upon a phonebox, we did, and your acquaintance Mr. Corvo, here, Faolainn, burrowing his elbow into Dolon's rib, suggested that we should give you a ring, enquire after the scuttlebutt about town and how been you these past several days—

— Yes, how have you been, Fano? Dolon interceded, then, prying: What have you been up to of late? Oh—like a seasoned liar he feigned—oh, are the new quarters to your liking? It was my understanding it was your moving day, this'n. You sound spent—moving's got you quite tired, then, eh?

A sigh in response. An interminable pause. A perverse smile wrapped itself around Faolainn's teeth, one so queer and anomalous there could have been nary a shadow of a doubt in Faolainn's mind: he had won, and Fano's confirmation of the fact a moment later



compounded its devastation with Faolainn's elbow ramming with increasing weight into Dolon's side; he massaged his tear ducts. 'He had not, no,' Fano admitted.

— Why, why not? Dolon stuttered, withholding poorly his vexation.

— Yes, I thought this was the move-in date, today. Faolainn added gaily, tucking his hands into his pockets in such delights so rapturous as to overlook the incessant hypersensitivities of a swollen finger. Something troubling you?

Faolainn seized the phone from Dolon's effete grip, leaning his back to him whilst adopting a posture that the backreaching broadcast of his leer might continue upbraiding his debtor.

— *Quoi?* Forgive me—Dolon choked on a sour grape. You said?

Faolainn's leer gradually receded, in like time Dolon's observance changing from one of indignation to curiosity.

— I'm sorry to hear that. Did she—no? Oh. Oh. well, my condolences are with you, friend. It's a bastard of a patch to weed through, but you'll see your way. I—yes, well, halfway, thereso or more. We'll give you a ring when we've—on Sunday, yes. And leave it for another day, the move; just give yourself a spell to calm down and—no, not in your place, no, I wouldn't. She likely—well, I'm unsure what exactly she'd offer, but, I think you should, yes. Speak with your mother; I imagine it won't be much easier, sending the news her way, but—of course, as I said, we'll call you when we've arrived. Yes. Yes. *Salve*.

Faolainn hung the handset on the receiver, his obverse hand rippling his pocket, his now-joyless lips dropping below an obstructive shoulder, before twisting around to Dolon:

— It would seem our Fano's been made a bachelor; Ily's broken the engagement.

— Hm. I had said... oh, now that it's happened... Dolon's words trailed, oh. I suppose I feel bad for the—

— That inn across the street will suffice—and with none of the gawd of last night. Let's on.

Faolainn had while speaking, and in vitiating any potential response, folded the door back and squeezed outside, and begun strolling curbside to their conveyance, Dolon's eyes moving blankly with their wooden subject to the destination of an adequate and unostentatious inn. They hired a room, Dolon bitterly yielding to the Hindi *hostelier* the fee, and happened themselves upon their accommodations which, judging by the humid, musty bouquet, were thematically congruous to the structure's unstately *qualité d'allure*.

— More congruous indeed: *neque mittatis margaritas vestras ante porcos*.

Dolon submitted to his fortune and swigged such a draught of the timeworn tonic that not two hours passed before he sat up on the coarse saffron damask and admitted to his dozing opposite he would, yes, be most pleased to advantage himself of an explorational stretch of the leg. They pressed their outfits with a supplied iron, Dolon his slates and Oxford, Faolainn a blazer, bedecked themselves, and stepped out—before Dolon, having earlier read a forecast of dew, ran inside after a topcoat. Equipped, they vaulted northeast over a railway until chancing obliquely upon an assortment of taverns, taprooms, and eateries. Ever the nationalist, Faolainn resolved unswervingly upon the first Goidellic alehouse in sight, dashing across the street with no notice to his companion and querulously berating him once over for stalling ('Go! *Go brách!*'). Therein they boothed themselves apart from the inhabitant breadth, mountaineers their combined ages or more in ascots and bowlers and thick tweed and wool, and ordered a pint each: Faolainn, a seasonal craft; Dolon,

whatever was cheapest. Fano's efforts and miseries were toasted—then favorable travels, auspicious arrivals, and profitable endeavors—then the glasses upended, a recent gambol with the devil halting Dolon's intake halfway short, Faolainn's pint meanwhile refusing to part his lips until it clanged hollow off the stained oak. Bills, tips, and dregs accounted for, they made hastily again for the night, but not before Faolainn stopped at the door, lending to the coda of the pub's chorale his baritenor—

*Put away with your pills, it'll cure all ills*

*Be ye Pagan, Christian, or Jew*

*So take off your coat and grease your throat*

*With the rare auld mountain dew!*

—and out they avaunted, Faolainn caroling down the street *hi di-diddly-idle-um, diddly-doodle-idle-um, diddly-doo-ri-diddlum-deh...*

On against traffic they carried, the taverns and frontages shrinking at their backs, flimsy saplings lining the downtown walk proliferating, growing themselves imposing and burly—even so that a leafy battalion rose on a hill behind the structures for a stretch of the heroes' journey, glowering ominously over the toddling gentlemen—only to impishly retreat behind a suburban belt and kneel beneath its overseeing mountain's hauteur. By that stage the streetlamps had been lit, and, saving the erratic lantern of a quickened oncomer, supplied their only beacons against the churning cosmic tenebrousness. Faolainn and Dolon, famished and dizzy, rested in the exterior seating of a makeshift German *lokal, die Hundenhütte*,

circumambulating around and conclusively affirming the Dolon's perspicuous suggestion to dine there. The fair young woman who took their requests at the booth was courteous to both; to Dolon's incohesive temperament, though, she seemed certainly more interested in refining her eyes to the more impressive specimen even as he prated his order.

— 'hear your accents. You two visiting, yeah?

— An excellent ear you have, a marvelous ear, yes. We've come east, we're headed west, and we've stopped here to rest, Faolainn gougling, she giggling, Dolon gagging.

— Ooh! And what's taking you west then?

— An excellent question, a marvelous question. What *was* it again, sir, that takes us west?

— Um, well—

— Ehr, well—Faolainn hesitated, positioning himself unnoticeably closer—we're headed to the coast. See you this man beside me? Wouldn't say it himself—too modest, *trés modeste*, *permodestus* indeed—but this man is one of the youngest—and, not to boast, but also the most talented—marine biologists in the commonwealth (if ever it could be called), and we're on our way deliver him to his residency at the Dakkar Institute, on the meridian, ehr, western shore. Have you heard of it?

— Is that so? Haven't myself—but, quite impressive, sir! C'ngratulations to ye.

— Doctor—actually, interspliced Faolainn, he does prefer the prefix, toiled for as it was.

— Doctor! My apologies, the barwench courteously bowed, to the doctor!

— Don't worry; I'd forget it myself if he weren't here to remind me... Dolon grumbled, departing the booth and resuming his spot on the concrete bench.

— And so that's what brings me here...

Faolainn and the wench continued their intercourse out of Dolon's earshot, he hearing only the occasional titter from one of the two, or seeing Faolainn glance slyly his direction. Some restocking duty eventually called her away from the booth, Faolainn however maintaining his lean on the counter, watching and connecting eyes with her, exchanging smiles, as she worked. Anon the order was served and Faolainn forced to leave, but not before granting her an unorthodox gratuity.

They picked at their meals, bratwurst and sauerkraut, in the quiet afforded them between newcoming patrons, puttering conveyances, and culinary clatter, until Dolon, complaining of dyspepsia, requested they return to their room. Frowning, Faolainn peered over his shoulder at the booth, whereat in fleet he caught the wench's momentary glance. — For your service and hospitality, we thank you dearly, spoke Faolainn to wench, inclining his head now before the booth, Dolon leaning at his side, shifting unconsciously his weight from sole to sole. — Oh, you're off already? an infusion of surprise disappointment about her cadence. Well, thank you, and for your... Well, safe travels—and good luck with your new appointment, Doctor! Stop by again!

Strutting with wide, quick strides, Faolainn put the *lokal* and its entrapments behind, not a sound produced between he and Dolon until shoving his hands truculently into his breeches he uttered an inquisitive grunt, prepared to withdraw—then relaxed his hands, concealed. The staccato of Dolon's steps, Faolainn arresting realized, had of a sudden broke. He turned about face to find Dolon several dozen yards back, sitting curbside. He backtracked, landing on Dolon muttering unintelligibly, rhyming cyclically muddled epithets.

At first Faolainn believed him putting on a performance, and arighting him forced him to stumbled on; when that failed, he resorted to stooping down and supporting the featherweight below the arm; and when that suboptimal resort proved most inefficacious of all, Faolainn deferred, straddled Dolon across his back, and bore the bloviate child on.

— *Two-air ay-go, do-where hay-go*—no, no... mmm, creamy complexion she had, no? Flaxen, too, nice wheaty hair... what better to your appetites...

— Indolent machine, your liver—yes, and full lips, too, he added, jostling Dolon securely.

— You always had better luck with ‘em—better than me, anyway, you and Fano... Dolon trailed, massaging the duct of a dampened eye. ‘Dr. Dolon Corvo,’ lids clamped shut he declared, ‘scientist to the Sea and all life therein encompassed;’ does have a chertain ring to it, now I’m saying it mehshelf... wonder if ever I could...?

— There’s never a one said you couldn’t. You’ll have plenty of time there, considering all things, occupations, prospects, *et alii*; copious time to figure what you’re to do there, if, ehr... well, if you haven’t a-yet.

— And what about you, eh? What... what are you doing there—here! Here? Where’d you hide yourshelf all thoshe weeks... you and tha’ hand of yoursh...

Faolainn’s response conserved itself, trapped in his mouth, chin pinned against chest. He felt Dolon’s cheekbone stab into his shoulder, bristles scratch his neck, hopsack by wet nose bedewed.

— We’re obsholete now, you know, some o’ush, sho many there being. Men and women... sh’t there any point? Makesh one wonder, wha’s the reasoning there—why sho many—when one and five work the same? Shtinks of... mishmanaged delegation to me... bleary lids

wincing—then decisively collapsing under their own strain, he drawling with a gob lolled wide, *we can knit no, do wair way-go, go, go...* before relaxing into a snore.

Dolon out, Faolainn trogged mutely inward, improving his grip once or twice by jolting up his cargo—but doing his payload no disturbance in the process. Having forgotten to check his timepiece as they left, and as such returning and deferring instinctively to it, Faolainn had no honest clue how long the ordeal took. He discharged his load gently by their door, and stood up to search himself for the key. In doing so his fingers reached into his front right pocket and therein felt the stiff cardstock rectangle he had absentmindedly tucked away. Withdrawing and studying the card, and the portrait impressed thereon, several similarities, in constitution, hair color, and skin, likened the tart thereon and the wench theretofore, so much so that one might have believed them cousins, or distant cognates. A blush pervaded Faolainn's cheeks, he pinching the card tightly; surely other men, other hungry, had the like flocked to that phonebox (and countless others phoneboxes as well), scanned a like facial collage, dialed a like hidden code, and found the similar and the seeming cognates of their desires, and the like at last felt their fantasies vicariously satisfied. He pinched another corner of the card, twisting them slowly in opposite directions.

Dolon experienced one brief, final instant of consciousness that night: an eye sagged, and peered afore it across the street, alighting upon a tall, dark shade entering a prism there which he vaguely discerned to be the phonebox. The shade appeared to have stuck its hand against the wall, then exited and crossed the street, where it approached him and preternaturally manifested itself as his erstwhile saddle horse.

— What were you doing over... there?

— Even echoes make their waves; come, let's put a splash of water in you, Doctor...

To the north by northwest strand of the coniferous sea they waded, breaking upon a tremendous airy plain tended by the beatitudes of an everclear sky, or so Faolainn may have thought marveling the pastoral panorama behind the helm, loath though renouncing his halcyon burg. Although he not of driving fettle ('You're a tot for tolerance, you know'), it was Dolon's insistence they depart as planned. A hub of gambling awaited them off the plotted path, and as Dolon had intended they visit a geographical abnormality along the way (some yawning Herculean fissure to which early religious indigenous—then millions global, pilgrimaged and balked and forfeited wages and lives and time and refuse into), their departure was of salient propriety. The rankle overhanging Faolainn, pertaining ostensibly to the foisting of helmsmanship from the veisalgic party, observable in his laconicism and occasioned huffs, did in fact allay itself as he absorbed the serene clearing, but slowly festered as he beheld the valiant foliage again recoil into shrubbery, needle grama, nineawn, and wheatgrass. And despite a formal *redivivus* near the fissure (re: Dolon and flora), his discontent was transparent and his delectation at the massive pit, and the clustering assemblage flocking about it, vitiated. Entry toll paid by Dolon, they navigated their way through the eddying tourists and their inattentive or unattended scions up to the guardrails, neglected their affections and engrossed the magnitude for a quarter hour, lingered about the rim feinting fascination for another three quarters, then dined on a fried luncheon and left.

— Waste of good money, that, Dolon admitted, reassuming the helm.

They retraced, then out west again struck, and again commenced another descent through perpetual desert. By luck the earth would distend, and on rare hillsides or mounds



sagebrush, or a yucca, or flowering herbage might upset the dropping valley's ubiquitous thistle, beardtongue, catseye, combleaf, and greasewood. These instances thinned with the soil, the vegetation growing with the domineering heat brittle and dry, sparse not, however, and diminutive as it was, endowing the traveler a view hampered only by the horizon and the serrated ridges projecting from its crust, the most that could grow in that godforsaken earth. Had man preserved the sense with which he was created, he would have inferred from that place that where there is not life, there life should not be; and in those regions of earth so inhospitable, so uncondusive and unforgiving of life, if man should disregard nature and favor his wiles instead, what he siphons from the earth, from scarcity, from lack thereof, is only so much order as chaos will allow. Passing over a dam long ago constructed simply to enable population, and winding around the city erected simply to house those who built it (to which over one-hundred lives were sacrificed), they bedded down for the night in another such city founded where it should not have been that subsisted on what good-of-nothing it established therein.

But yet unripe as they were, the two men at their most temerarious were not foolish. Opting away from the allures of smoking gambling halls and opulent clubs, they sufficed themselves on vicarious scrutinies of the ruined, the vacant, or the besotted passersby along the main street. And when they had their fill, when satisfactory delusion and venality had seeped through their tempered screen and begun to suffocate their air, they transported themselves to an inn outwardly shielded from the municipal miasma, and ate the imminently perishing share of Dolon's food store. Mulling the events of the day, of the fissure and their

proximate habitat, Dolon, adamantly asserting no interest in gambling's trifles and losses prospective, proclaimed his stance:

— However, given the hole and chance, it's my opinion I'd have fain lost those funds to chance before I did them to those parks sector cozeners.

The struggle for sleep that night was internecine. The turpitudes of the outside city, as if the hovering collective moan of some bloated ghoul, had skyward coalesced, and bursting drenched the city, perfusing its every space with floodwaters of tenacious dissent, and piercing the physical securities of the travellers' room. Despite having earned the room's sole mattress, the unremitting crash of dissonance reduced Faolainn's resting place to a slab in a concrete tomb, its viscous surges curling over and tugging him with his each restless turn. He shed his covers in a sweat, toed past Dolon's cot, and retreated to the restroom, valise in hand.

With the sun arose the bustle of automobiles, merchant confabulation, fatigued gasps of halting metros, skirling tocsins, squalling children, vociferating mothers, and innumerable other cacophonous additions overpowering and subduing underneath them the collective moan for what at most made another day. Going to scrub his hands, Dolon discovered dusting the washbasin a layer of sharp brown and red hairs. Rinsing them down the drain, a followup inspection of Faolainn's face—what portion of it was not embedded loathfully in his pillow—confirmed his suspicions that Faolainn had, oddly enough, depilated sometime overnight.

— You needn't shave for me, but you're a sweet man, a tender man, Solomon, to put in the effort every now and then, said Dolon, yanking off the weary man's defense.

An ugly expression consumed Faolainn, eyes and forehead wrinkling, scowling murderous, tensing his facial skin as if it were twisted in a ball. A deep inhalation, then a sigh, then all relaxed, he flashing his eyes and straddling the bed's edge.

— What time is it?

— You're the watch-man; you tell me.

— *Sed... quis custodiet ipsos custodes?*

— Pardon?

— It is, Faolainn disregarding for his timepiece, ten twentyseven—damn it all, really? Ten twentyseven? Why didn't you wake me earlier? You gensch, we'll never make a breakfast at this time.

— And need to we shall not, as I took upon myself to supply our breakfast.

— You? Pecuniarily providing procured, ehr... wait, yes—provender? I *pro-test*—

Dolon plucked a brown paper sack off the rearward chiffonier and shoved it at Faolainn, who unfurled the tucked lips and exposed himself to the faint wafts of cinnamon and vanilla housed within. Being it a relatively full bag, he needed not to reach far before selecting and retrieving a sweet roll, fragile-saccharine-shell-topped.

— It appears I spoke too soon. I imagine this cost whatever coinage lined your pocket at the time, yes?

— Ah-ha! And a second time! Remarkably less, the baker, or—well, the translation misses me at the moment—the baker, anyway, Giancarlo, dragged this howling lad into the store by his ear, chastising him incomprehensibly—my ear for that language is dreadful, just dreadful—and plopped him down where he started clearing rolls and pastries into a bin. I

asked the man, Giancarlo, I said, ‘Why are you throwing those away?’ Responded he, ‘Stale, no good. *Pendejo* didn’t tro’ (can never roll those *rrrrs*) dem’out last night.’ I asked him if I might have them, he said he wouldn’t sell them—but that I could have them in exchange for a tip. So I dipped two notes in his jar and left with our breakfast.

— Astonishing munificence on your part, even given the circumstance...

Faolainn sank his teeth into the roll, freeing a durable chunk on which to ruminate askew. He rubbed the forming stubble below his cheek, then tested a small cut about his left mandibular angle, bone pistoning out and under his finger as he exerted mastication.

Swallowing, he glanced sinisterly over to Dolon, whom he realized had worn a jester’s nobbin toward him all the while, a sweet roll propped up closely at his ear.

— *Custodia ipsos custodes?* What’s that for? Trying to hear—

— Listening, sh sh sh. Listening, for the call. She calls us, Sol: the Sea.

Out they on their final leg leant, meridional, oppilation along a juncture perpendicular to their familiar byway tacking two hours on the day as they withered behind columned travelers rubbernecking a burning wreckage (‘By Jove, did I not say we should avail the crossway? Let you and every sentimentalist burn with it’). The ancient highway joined them up, creeping all the way through the last stages of desert until it unexpectedly terminated some three and onehalf hours from their destination, in a sunbeat and windworn husk of a railstop Faolainn there commandeered the helm, authority promptly abnegated by Dolon, whose dampened plaid *mélange* clung to the synthetics as he quitted himself of the captain’s quarters, they patronizing a roadside diner (Faolainn: roast beef, potatoes *au gratin*, and lemon zest asparagus; Dolon: sneaking bites from a pastry secreted undertable) before

rounding out the trip. It seemed a suspect thing too, Faolainn so bent on making the final descent, suspect more when, with the desert at last to their backs, they finding themselves breaching upon, then by surrounded, a thunderous mass of reckless commuters, coasting on roads and highways lined by topiary and vacillations of sere or luscious imported grass, Faolainn proved himself incredulously adept in his maneuvering of what was, ostensibly to Dolon, a foreign soil.

The incongruities limited themselves not merely to his driving: Faolainn appeared to have a working knowledge of the territory, Dolon gleaned, as he produced several shorefront suggestions when Dolon permitted no hitherward rest until they had seen the ocean; he was privy to the most efficient route to the chosen littoral, one encountering minimal congestion (congestion, though, inevitably there would be) as it footed the northern ridge of mountains holding back the sprawling morass, climbed through a billowing gap in their range, then diving south caught themselves in the reticulation of the city's western valley; and when having borne right at the valley's southern marge, a fortunate causeway carried them east until Faolainn knew to persist their southern deviation, plunging them into an enlivening circumnavigatory patch of wildlife; but what perhaps must have been most suspicious to Dolon, when during the last hour of sunlight, after occidental hills had occluded the red orb and the caliginous lands surrounding should have likewise been to him enigmatic, Faolainn, plumb midway through the pastoral escort, implored Dolon gaze out the window to an elapsing prominence and inform him was there a storage tower still nestled at its summit amidst the trees.

— It's rather hard to see in the dusk, but—wait, yes; I believe there it is, surrounded by chaparral and oak, said Dolon bewilderedly, giving his boater a suspicious lean. I'm beginning to think, he flashing an interrogative eye, you weren't so forthcoming with your dealings out here...

— We'll be there soon, Faolainn shifted, unsealing a grin, in time to see the Sun fly *under* the ocean, too. You've never seen such a sight from where you hail, have you? Ever cursed to the opposite, *inversion*, eh?

— No, I can't say I have, no...

But at sea's first sight, when streaming down a narrow hillside corridor, the bylining foliage suddenly bowed before the eternal blue, whereabove a fatigued sun dallied, forestalling its bath in anticipation of their arrival, golden beams frolicking along the gentle tides. Diaphanous the ambivalences and inquisitions building about Dolon's mind turned beholding that vision, and in its incumbent waters dissolved. There from the surf but yards detached, Faolainn with woodcutter's ease met a coastal road sloping west with the shore, wrapping over and beneath the homes established on the sand and hills, past fish markets and transient parks, knolls, telephone wire, and canyons, stopping, at length, at an ingress across from one such gorge so densely verdurous, one might have called it hidden.

Alongside a cement barricade Faolainn moored, the engine hardly inanimate as Dolon exited, clenching firmly in one fist the brown sack of rolls, and, hurdling the barrier, hurried to the shore. Faolainn's gait heaved with each step, every successive pace sticking tenaciously to the ground beneath it. Hours passed in the several minutes before he too legged over the barrier, removed his loafers, and dug his feet into the cooling grains, the

horizon having performed a solar bisection *par excellence* by the time he finally sidled up to Dolon. Lingered abreast, Faolainn lazily unhinged his glance, sailing it upward from cloud to polychromatically lightdipped cloud, each one he caught upon increasingly Stygian, his eyes ascending the monarch, lavender, and navy aura of their tableau to the vacancy of a harried welkin's heights, save, he knew, one celestial sigil above.

— Well then, said Faolainn, was this all you hoped?

Faolainn turned his eyes to the sand, whereupon they sighted Dolon, fast asleep. He drew his vision from the syncopite the moment the sun fell beneath the tides, witnessing, a split moment later, the sprout of a dull green light shoot out from the upper rim, and as quickly into unthundered nothingness burn. A whisper soared over the waters; Faolainn held himself up as a zephyr lashed out from the sea and struck him with a chill that soaked his skin through. Waves oscillated across the shore, compounding the stolid ebullience of the risen curtain of night.

\* \* \*

Dolon marched back from the waves, and genuflecting seized up the wrinkled sack of conchiferous pastries, dried his hands on his shirt, withdrew one and, freeing a labored chunk, reached the jiggling receptacle out to Faolainn. Faolainn divorced his eyes from the sand, shaking their osseous case.

— I take it you'll be wanting to break fast more extensively, Dolon belched, lowering himself beside.

— Can't. I've used up most of my coin. I'll have to begin eating like yourself: a pauper—or a madman—should I desire to make the, ehr... *journey* home...

— I could, I suppose, Dolon tearing another dry clod of bread, cover a meal or two for you—on loan, of course.

— Rather lose my neck than be in Shylock's debt: the latter given, the former'd happen anyway.

— And I would take it posthaste, were it worth a damn.

— I've just thought—the flood. It's happened before.

— Sorry, Dolon swallowed, and—?

— Well, there was always a, ehr... man, and with he a woman, and a new covenant—and life after. See, man's always dwelt in the shadow of sin, but the waters always came to absolve his transgressions. It was never a deluge, nor the ends of days, but a harbinger, a promise, of... absolution. You're wrong, tragically, wrong. There's no finality in a bath, or revolting against place. The only finality is evisceration, a fiery tongue.

— And what's your proof? That storybook of yours? Hate to bear you a bit of shocking news, but your people aren't the only ones who've had their breeches wet—

— Sumeria, Faolainn listed. Greece. India. China. Judeo-Christians, Orientals, Ethiopians—yes, I'm well aware. I don't believe you're hearing me.

— I don't believe *you're* hearing *you*. Tell me now: exactly how do you stick to your faith? Do you repeat your white lies in the looking glass like clockwork each morning, or does keeping you in line require a more effective measure, like a seventails, or cilice? No gas to



that theory, though, seeing as along our journey I've not seen you kneeling once. And not even before a meal? Tsk tsk, what would your mother say?

Stifled blood coursed his legs, erecting Faolainn hotly from the spot and motivating him toward the water's lap. A strip of foam for a moment conducted his lour as it was sucked beneath the sand, then rolled over by another spill of water, leaving behind it a foam crown of its own. His head tilted beneath his shoulders, Dolon from the ground observed, then leveled itself back up, he afterward turning about to face his traducer, lips quavering, a frigid sincerity in his stare. His face was stern, though pleading, standing centerfield of a hoarse scream and a whimper. Genuinely, he spoke:

— Don't you ever tire of this?

— Me? I've never slept so well as I have these past days. And this? Dolon cackled, raising a leaky fisthold of sand. This is a Mediterranean climate, Sol. You could have slept on the road, so mild it is.

A snap of the wrist and sand coated the air. Dusted and spitscrubbed, Dolon's hand seized up the sack and plunged in, Faolainn meanwhile lurching forward.

— I, ehr... tell me... are we *ever* to stop this, this—antagonizing one another? Dolon, I've so much I needed to—so much I've wished I could say, like I'm rave-spiraling ma—

— Sh sh sh, Dolon interjected, again holding a *concha* up to his ear. Do you hear that?

Faolainn's chest, theretofore shored, sank, as did his hands from his waist, his eyes listing over his footscattered dunes.

— I think it's—yes! he barked, I think I can hear the sea! Oh, relax yourself, Dolon pandered, sinking his teeth. There, there; don't get yourself in a tizz about it. Here, if syntax

makes the difference—come—seat yourself beside me, rest your ‘spirit,’ your *psyche* as you would.

His aloof glare tautened, Faolainn’s, and on Dolon his every ramifying sense bore down. By the suddenness of his lunge, and the instantaneous expectation of one in his exposed position, Dolon was certain Faolainn intended to attack, and as such reacted by capsizing and burying his face in the sand.

When no striking or punting followed, he harvested his face and casting it about what else should he discern, wincing grains of sands from his eyes, but Faolainn, loafers from fingers hung, hoofing raptly away along the westernreaching shore. For a moment, whether he had never before noticed, or he had not chanced to see (as Faolainn had until that morning worn his pants uncuffed) (or plausibly his dirtied eyes were giving him visions), or that it had not until recently there existed, Dolon believed he saw, stuck to or struck into Faolainn’s left ankle, by scarlet stroke, a *P*.

His right hand hoisted him up as his left anxiously tilled his eyes. He shouted:  
— Oh, have I snapped a chord, so harshly I’ve struck it? Here, take this penance; permit me to calm the rampant beast, soothe that seething breast of yours by dulcet serenade:

*Oh, down (oh down), by the stre-e-eam,*

*Ho-ow swe-e-eet it will se-e-e-em,*

*A world more to dre-eam in the moon-light—*

*And though (and though) by the da-a-awn,*

*You’ll be go-o-one;*

*But tonight (to-night), you be-lo-ong to me!*

Thirty yards on Faolainn slowed, twisting around, his feet, however, continually driving him back, back, slowly to start but eventually regaining speed as another wave shot up the shore, engulfing his toes and dampening his pantlegs. He elevated his loafers to safety and spinning corrected his forward impetus. Dolon straightened up and cupped his mouth: — Where do you think you're off to, then? Gone to find your God? Well, just remember, if you see only one set of prints behind you—yes, *remember*: it's *you* who's been carrying *him* the entire time! Ah, hey-now! You've reminded me, while you're at it—a lovely poem I composed—do you want to hear it? Been working on it few days now!

Faolainn continued on, resembling at the distance little more than a splinter; Dolon snarled, kneaded his nose, then plucked up and shook out his shirt from the sand before folding it into a pad and, laying himself across his plot, cushioning it beneath his head. He glanced once more athwart to the diminishing sliver and, closing his eyes again, belted orotund:

— No? Well, have it anyway, ha-ha!:

*To where we go,*

*We cannot know,*

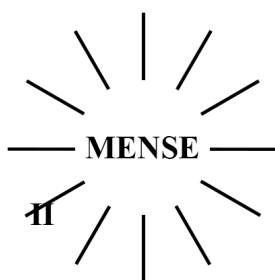
*But where-to our stride brings us so!*

He laid in the sand deadly immobile, counterfeiting the paralysis of sleep until breaking the act and sneaking a furtive glance down the shore at Faolainn, who, by his remove, Dolon could not incontrovertibly distinguish. He scoffed, sitting up midaction, then reclined himself back down, resolved to allow the lulling waves to at last reward him with inviolable reprieve.

But despite his thorough cleansings, there seemed an nettling bounty of sand in his eye; the chilly seaborne air that Faolainn protested, the same palliative breeze which Dolon parried laudable, he now too found positively gelid; and the intuitive sensation, that something there indeed loomed over him, despite the sky aloft a spotlessly pale blue of robin's egg, left him intractably restive. He stood up, swatted the sand from his back, and trudged to his vehicle.

When reassured there were no prying eyes, and no approaching rolls were to be heard, he stripped himself of Friday's panoply, his car door a makeshift screen while his denims for canvas breeches were ditched. As he was next sorting about his valise for an estimable shirt, mentally categorizing those in need of wash from those that, in functionality, could survive another week, his granular nails tapped upon a small glass object. He withdrew the jar from the bottom of the bag and stepped from the shaded cabin to study it in the clarity of day. Forgetting his enterprise altogether, he clambered the barrier and reentered the sand, unintentionally halting upon his exact previous location, tossing the jar between hands. A grin curled his lip, and he began marching softly in place. The sand beneath him sufficiently trampled, he stooped down to fill the jar, ensuring with three measured pours the jar's contents a relative three-quarters capacity.

It was at that second that a great heaviness fell across Dolon's bare shoulders, one overturning the ocean's chill. A nervous sweat formed along his disinclined neck, as though some imposing, disparaging cloud had cowed him into its veins. His grin faded; the paranoia of being observed terrified him. But when he straightened up and twirled around, expecting some phantom or demon materialized for a retributive smiting-down, now, a sardonical reward for his every effort and sacrifice, he alighted upon nothing but the climbing Sun; and its presence struck him as tremendously worse—stupeficient, suppressively, as there were few places to where he could drive, or walk, or soar, or sail, where lord over him it would not, where he might escape its scrutinizing flare.



— Voices down, little banshees, voices down; shortly though you shall be using them, yet are they untame, undeveloped, and as such unfit to arise to their current decibel; in two instances only should quite a din be heard beneath these vaults and coincidentally do they both occur during service: in prayer and response the first, choral the second. But before we exact our seconds from our firsts, it is most pressing to know who we are and with what *aur* we are smithing. For those unfortunate of you who've not witnessed the jubilation of my instruction before (the majority, if not entirety, if correct I am), and those either too young, blind, or illiterate to decipher those queer scrapings on the chalkboard to my immediate right—that's stage right, students, stage right—hm, before we advance, is there any of you here whom did not turn in their permission forms bearing their parents' or a parent's or guardian's signature? Show of hands now, on my signal *one-two-three*. Four. Very good. You *four* may stay for this one meeting just now. However, if your forms are not presented start of the next rehearsal or submitted to the music office before, you will be barred—yes, *barred*, a little musical pun for those of you with your attentions trained *forward*—yes, I'm referring to you, you, young man—from partaking in school choir until such a date as you can present said form in complete and endorsed order. That matter off the agenda, we may now proceed to confirm that those documented to be here are here in fact. Raise your fingers to the rafters high as you might as I call your name—you four keeping again in mind why your names will

not be heard as heard they are not: Addams? Yes, good. Andrews? There we are. Bauer? Mr. Bauer, please, arm straight up in the future. Barber? Ms. Barber, hello. Douhet? *Bonjour, Mme. Douhet. Comment est l'eau?* Dower? Ms. Dower. Evanston? Yes. Faolainn? Faolainn? Mr. Faolainn? Mr. *Failing-to-provide-even-his-partial-attention*, I presume? Let's see a hand there, Mr. Faolainn. *Thank you*—and while you've so captivated them, was there anything you wished to tell your classmates? No? Ms. Barber, was there anything at all our acquaintance Mr. Faolainn needed to address with you? On your own time, Faolainn, not mine. Moving on... Jarlsson? Mhm. Caps off, Mr. Jarlsson; peradventure in your house, but not in the Lord's. Kemner? Splendid. Nguyen? Oh—Anh, that is? Yes. Nguyen, Ashley? Yes. Nguyen, Thoa? Yes. And Nguyen, Tran? And yes. Relatives, by chance? Oh. Truly? Pederson? What's that? PEHD-erson, you pronounce it? Yes, I shall make a note of that... Now, you did not raise your hand, Mr. PEHD-erson; are you in fact PEH-resent? There we are, thank you. Steinam? Miss, did you hear my adjustments regarding Mr. Bauer? And Weiß? Weiß indeed. All names accounted for and their respective owners. As for myself, I am—wait, haven't I...? Well, my name is written on the board there for those of you tuned to forget. Those that do may simply address their inquiries and concerns in lettering or diction bold to 'Choirmaster.'

— Where next to go? Let us see...

*Frère Jacques, Frère Jacques,*

*Dormez-vous? Dormez-vous?*

*Sonnez les matines! Sonnez les matines!*

*Ding, Dang, Dong. Ding, Dang, Dong.*

Yes, so we are all familiar with that tune? Excellent. You could all very well stand up here on the dais and sing it just as well. However, if I were to step here gagged and... yes, can any of you read there or solemnize the notes I have written there on the staves? Those lines there, yes, the *staves*, singular ‘staff.’ Anyone? Anyone? Correct, Mr. Bauer: G-A-B-G-G-A-B-G in a twoquarters time signature. You are under Mrs. Canter’s instruction in piano, correct? Very good—though, for the sake of this lesson, I’ll request you keep those lucubrations to yourself. Now, seeing as no one else raised their hands, would any of you wish to hazard a guess at what these eight notes mean? Exactly, Ms. Barber: *Frère Jac-ques, Frère Jac-ques*. Now that we’ve had a go at that, let us try an exercise a trifle more challenging... — Right then. Feel permitted to allow yourselves time here, it’s quite alright; rehearsal will not end until fourthirty (though some of you appear to have been off gallivanting in the posies before you arrived...). Any one of you yet? Anyone? Mr. Barber? Ms. Bauer? Barber and Bauer: two iambs there; poetic as it is promising. Mr. Bauer, would you mind attempting, as it seems you’ve some comprehension, solemnizing the notes there? No, no, that’s quite enough, Mr. Bauer, thank you. Students, the tune plays, beginning on tonic C of C-major scale:

*Ut queant laxis, resonare fibris,*

*Mira gestorum, famuli tuorum,*

*Solve polluti, labii reatum,*



*Sancte Iohanes*

Ah, are those failing eyes' fancies fixed? A flash of old Alcuin and you're all ears. Remarkable... But now, in the Queen's English, that you may understand: 'So that your servants may, with loosened voices, resound the wonders of your deeds, clean the guilt from our stained lips, O, Saint John.' 'Resound the wonders of your deeds...' mind you that we will be committing to heart that hymn, students. It is "The Hymn to Saint John the Baptist," and it is the basis, the fundamental apparatus upon which yours and every singers' and musicians' education, whether consciously or not, itself is anchored. The vehicle of our introduction, Ecclesiastical Latin, the originator of the hymn, I've selected as the most intuitive, Romance of course being the origin of a great many of our language and custom—our very church, in fact. But should you turn your noses up to this method of sight-singing (*solfège* to the French, *solfeggio* to their southeast), I should in turn warn you keep in your mind that what you are to learn is but *variété Romantique* of what will soon be revealed as a concept resiliently eternal: Pythagoras and the Greeks; the Chinese; indeed, even our Hindi friends in India carried their own understanding, *sargam*, utilizing seven *svara*, or syllables, as we beyond the Ganges and Indus would say. The Vedic realized a millennia ago; the Greeks close before them; the Chinese some thousand years afterward; and the Italians pulling up the rear some fourhundred years late. The most prodigious creatures, though, do tend to gestate the longest, nature will tell you... But this is not a course in natural biology, anthropology, or even musical phylogeny—and I can tell some of you are quite beginning to lose interest again (if ever you possessed any to start)—eyes forward, Failing; this is my final

request—so what is the prerogative? Isolated civilizations spanning the globe intoned all the same, then carved their own initials on the wind and proclaimed it theirs. Yes, very fine, but what does it all mean? And what might its meaning imply?

— Ever the spiritual sort—though I must confess, they are a people given to perverse aetiologies—I believe the Vedic knew it best: ‘Through *svara* is *Isvara* realized.’ There’s that word again, *svara*. ‘To shine,’ ‘to resound,’ its roots. And *Isvara*, students? God. Brahma, or Allah, or Jehovah; Yahweh, God—Christ. Can you hear them, students, the Veds calling out to us, muffled under the aeons of Time? Only through an understanding of song, of music, of but seven notes, our most rudimentary materials, the cooper’s steel and the tiller’s earth, only if we can begin to grasp but the finest, the infinitesimal, the *trivia*, can we begin to comprehend our own existence, to sew, to reap bounty, to build, to rise above ourselves. Ask yourselves, students: when last did you live an entire day when you did not, even in the quiet chambers of your thought, feel the urge to sing? I cannot say I have ever, students, and I hope never to live a day I might; is that even a life, children, one bereft of song? It is integral to our nature to sing, to play, to tune, to glory in the breadth of our voice, as might the warbler or the wolf alike. Yes, it may border on the narcissistic, reveling in your own ability, singing for the sheer reason but to hear one’s own voice. But in totality *and* construction do we divine the works of our creator; as there are in our beings basic elements, *molecules* you may call them, comprising our complete matter, so opera has acts, and acts have scenes, and scenes songs, and songs built from? Notes! Yes, notes, students, one of seven notes or their variations, across all music and each of multitudinous fashion and tongue, one of but seven arranged, rearranged, repeated, flat, sharp, minor, major, halved,

doubled, higher, lower, in chords, in semibreves, stacked, as diverse as the races and as singularly magnificent a creation as the makeup of one lone man. To know music, students... is indeed to know God, to 'resound the wonder of his deeds.'

— That all being said, 'Ye shall hear indeed, but ye shall not understand.' Music, much like the Godhead, has suffered the misinterpretations of an ignorant past, and as such we will be learning the fixed method, students. So if it is that in the processes of your instruction you find the system disagrees with you, I would suggest relaxing to the tonic *sol-fa*—though you will unfortunately be doing so elsewhere and under misinformed guidance. I intend to instruct my every student properly; the Celtic kings mated with horses, Gaius Caligula laid waste to empty beaches, and some heretics teach a *moveable-do*. Now, students, you will notice these seven aforementioned syllables, called 'notes,' also 'itches,' that I have written on the chalkboard here. I will sound them out and what I would like you to all to do in return is repeat them same as I have (or as closely as you might)—again, our familiar C-major—starting of course with tonic C. Are we ready? And—

\* \* \*

Faolainn's footsteps sank heavily into the sand's momentary broach beneath the burden of his uncustomarily light frame; swifter might they have heightened above, beyond, and escorted him apart from the clockwork froth, had their operator otherwise desired. Yet, he trudged automatically through the muckish sand, in his sangfroid unaware: how the water fell and encompassed his ankles; that its retreat encircled and dismantled the banks of sludge grabbing at his heel; that the tides wrought a stiffening chill on the small dark hairs of his

legs; and how there was an imperceptible warmth radiating about his chest prepared to burst across his skin.

Several instances in the span of what he shortly discerned a lapse of less than three minutes, Faolainn held his pendulous unorthodox wrist steady to his waist, essaying to eye his timepiece. Each instance in that span, however, his rigorously straightened fingers tightened back into a fist and fell pendulating along his side. He did not properly halt and inspect the time until the last in the line of palatial properties crowding the oceanfront—those Dolon and he had the night previously, and illicitly, punctured—had passed him. Glancing from his clockface north his eyes caught the steep olive slope which westward climbed to a point obstructing or signifying the western coast's nadir, and bowing eastward fell to rest beneath the sands where Dolon possibly still lay. Faolainn instinctively panned his sight to the sea, pantomiming before a crowd of himself and any watching a perfunctorily intentional survey of his threehundred sixtyfold setting. Unable to commit dutifully a full scan, however, he found his eyes involuntarily turning on the ingress he had so shortly put behind him, and the friend and transport which remained there: Dolon was, either by lack of interest or by Faolainn's visibility, gone, where-to for Faolainn to guess. Dolon might have receded into his vehicle and trickled into the automotive floods, or turned to clay and dried in the sun for all Faolainn from his remove might sustain. Dolon's myriad fates were, in Faolainn's eyes, amongst the waves: powerless over him and uniform in shape. He did not reverse, and again toward destination unrevealed his intransigent heels dug on.

His gait, afore martial and fervid, relaxed, each step activated, performed, and recovered banking in its trough deposits of the unidentifiable stimulus hitherto driving

Faolainn across the shore, this feat accomplished with such poise, such enigmatic urbanity, in fact, that by the time he had begun to descry the form of a pier some hundredso yards on he with unkettled mind and lyrebird emulation recanted aloud an unblushing rendition of Dolon's parting guerdon.

— Was what he said, right? 'To where we go we cannot know but where our stride brings us so,' Faolainn mumbled. Insipid, horrendously delivered by him, but not dreadful—or, no, *where-to* it was, '*where-to* our stride brings us so.' *Go-know-so*. Hm... wonder if... he hesitated, preparing to investigate the shore, then scoffed. Oh—good riddance. Sure he'll be running along here beside in a moment. Best put some sand between us, make the gadfly earn his meal. Till then, might well enjoy the clear air, see where the, ehr... yes, follow where the coast leads... *Ut in quo imus*... no—meter; *ut quo imus*? Ehr... *quorsum imus*?

Mumbles gradually turned within themselves, and an excogitating silence overtook Faolainn. Such instances of his sudden serenity were unmistakable, yet indefinable to external eyes, kith, kin, and stranger alike, who, drawing from the well of popular interpretation, assumed he either adored the silence, and believed those dissenting either terrified by or at war with it; or feigned ascetic indignation, at a loss for contribution to the panoptic dialogue. His response when spotlighted—a blank stare and glib raise of the brow—offered meager refutation to either. What coursed throughout his mind on such occasions only he knew; perhaps withholding that twisting jibe or incapacitating counter, stepping softly with a nocked bow, gratified the archer more than the kill. Such being the case, he surely knew it profited his social self-preservation to choke his rebuttals from most, as few,

not his parents, nor his siblings, incredibly not even Dolon, had in truth heard the sharp twang, and felt the stinging smart of his shaft.

*Oh, down (oh down)... by the stre-e-eam...*

But one inexorable deviation might welcomely despoil Faolainn's communion with silence, one proving as immutable, as unassailable, as the arching path upon which his bare feet then trod. Be it designated a weakness or a love, and possessing only a pedestrian rhythm untranslatable to any instrument or skill, Faolainn had an animate keenness for song. An impressive lyrical catalogue and a perceptive ear accompanied this keenness and, incongruously enough, also an audacity to brazen through any known hymn, earworm, and ditty in his monotone baritenor. The invading, enervating forces of a recondite silence might frequently have proven Faolainn's captor, but Music was his mastery and hidden master; an emancipator against the muffling demons of the soul. Unconscious harmonizing behind his office desk, recitations of verse on the Sunday green, unpreempted *chansons* at morning's unfold—all proved inveteracy: for wherever graced sanity he had song. Apace he inhaled, chest swelled and mandible obtuse-angled, then in docility intimated:

*A world more to dre-eam in the moon-light—*

*And though (and though) by the da-a-awn,*

*You'll be go-o-one...*

A sanguine jouissance sourcing from the heart grated its way through Faolainn's veins, trickling grainy, spreading down and out of his capillaries, this shivering inundation beside his declamation terminating as one. Phosphoric euphoria blazed; yet song clung to Faolainn, as often will it cleave to any listener, like wax spots drying around fabric fibers in tablecloths and rugs, imbedding themselves for Time's darkening grime and spillage; barring thorough scrubbing, or chance introduction of miracle salve, song's unadulterated tincture might also be marred. The tallow of his utterance glossed again then mid-song, rebuffing the dust from another tune lieber greased-in. Faolainn's tracheal lining itched, pulsating in synch with the advancing twoshaped image upon which his unconcentrated vision hung.

His nails rubbed at his throat, granulating cylinders of dirt out of his skin, he arresting unconsciously to appraise the incident, irregularly bookended by such a spasm as it was. Nickel taste rushed to and from his tongue, while a familiar floral perfume, plausibly ventilated and possibly ideated but registered nonetheless, suffused his nostrils. Left foot pivoted perpendicular to right: conforming his sights again forward he cognized the impulse, had caught himself answering some watchful sirenic call. He dismissed the goading and grunted, cleared his throat, and intransigence and he pushed on.

Though indeed irregular such physiological, glandular or neural, events were, obduracy, and relational tergiversation, in Faolainn's life certainly were not. In days past, often directed by a capitulation to foreign, illicit powers, Faolainn had humoured, whether openly, in cognizance, or privately, beneath the heavy, soft-eyed exhalation of impairment, a vocal trepidation of human dispensability. Never was it certain to those who listened or heard, offchance, how truly grave was such a profession, as often topping such muddlings

were his quick chuckle and flash of teeth, or a slap on the knee and skillful redirection of subject floated by Vulgar citation. History would, faint suspicions of such a prudently prevaricating cocktail disregarded, prove an astute conservation on all fronts: few were the companions had, few were the companions, confederates, accomplices, allies, and lovers lost. Faolainn crept guardedly in most respects, his hand tickling feathervaned bolts, fingers ever anticipating the draw and pluck, crooning after worthy game in the muted foreshocks of destruction. For this sensation, by now subsiding into a curious, instinctive impulsion, towards suitable game, perhaps, or another liberating paean, did Faolainn abandon, and only glance back once upon, his friend.

Several winters prior—precisely three winters prior—on his journey homeward to while the holidays between semesters, Faolainn merited through his own importunity a brief sojourn in the house of Judge Irvan Morin, father of Fano, comrade newfound and travel companion part-time (as the Morin plantation lie along the railtrack unraveling eastbound out to the Faolainn home), whom he met three and onehalf cycles prior to *then* in the refectory hall and whose camaraderie he would not have instigated had Faolainn, in passing, neglected to notice Fano’s splitsecond crossing gesture. Such would have been the sole indicator of his and Faolainn’s potential ideological accord, as the gilded cruciform totem which Fano in his nonage granted purchase to tangle and slide over his shirted chest had, by matriculation, under no fewer than two layers of vestment been stowed. But Faolainn was in his years sharp to the act, conversant with it as with his own skin’s light patches and the accidents which left



them embossed. He situated his plate opposite Fano, inquiring, conceivably, if that seat might be unengaged.

The ritual remained unbroached even after Faolainn performed it himself, mumbled briskly, and performed it a second time, Fano tucking a shock of his thick dark hair behind his ear and proceeding to request a furnishing of his interlocutor's circumstances: 'Solomon T. Faolainn, first-year, an easterly town overlooked by tourists and cartographers alike, the last week or, ehr... ten days, to cultivate skill or wealth (whichever comes first), and by foottrainfootcabfoot, how else?' Sucking slick a fishbone, Fano at last placed the chap as the fellow sat several rows ahead in his Tuesday tenthirty Rhetoric prerequisite, wrung his hand dry and talked his ear wet. Confabulation from that point flowed effortlessly, first from the basic modes and ambling eventually through the discussion of reading foci and prospective study meetings. They quit their seats and the refectory altogether to pass the pipe over domestic situations, prospective sweethearts, professional aspirations, pursuits of athletic fitness, oblivious to their unintended relocation outside down and through the Green of their fortyacred institution to follow mindlessly a trapezoidal gravel path around the likewise fashioned lawn five times before breaking themselves of the heat in the mottled shade of a wiring mesquite. There Fano soon suggested they adjourn to their homes to dress for an evening at the theatre, some lads he had met having invited him to tag along to whomightguesswhat, but an event he might relish regardless of quality if in convivial accompaniment. They departed, they rejoined, legs stalking, shoulders bumping (or shoulder-and-brachium, per Faolainn's towersome build) amidst an obstreperous crowd of coeval males, ruffians and rougher students, Parises and Priapuses, crowding the auditorium floor,

all rushing to the candlelight of an invisible stage, so dark were the walls and dusty ornamental curtains which overhung it. Before the night had ended, they would introduce themselves both, Fano at first and Faolainn in embarrassment, to the young man at their right, a fellow student, a first-year, who throughout the exhibition would disclose and conceal tissues from his pocket.

Their flourishing kinship and its catechizations in the ensuing weeks notwithstanding, the subject of their blind introduction, and the observation that initiated it, remained untouched upon for some time, a lapse in development surely absent amongst Faolainn's interpersonal anticipations. What in part buffeted Faolainn's desire to fraternize Fano was a curiosity faintly akin to that of his attraction to the placid sex: Fano's being exuded the allure of exoticism, a screen of foreign intrigue affixed not to a somatic, but an ideocultural fortune begging espial. Indeed the naturally pale brown pigmentation of Fano's flesh (brownier it seemed was his morningly chai as well), shades darker than Faolainn might ever accomplish, the granite stoutness of his physique, and wheatgrass shocks of his hair all stoked Faolainn's fascinations; and though Fano and many others milling about the campus provided not Faolainn's introductory exposure to pigmented personage, he in fact had yet beheld—was ignorant to the existence of—such peoples until half his present age, so homogenous was his upbringing. But what cast and multiplied Faolainn's queries most was the potential understanding of such alienness, of hoisting the screen and collating against what dwelt behind. The cipher to his code, however, Faolainn slowly gleaned unobtainable through his sole exposure with it: Fano betokened both key and lock. Faolainn stoked the coals by divulging his household was one Gaelhellegermantic: its every member spoke no less than

three languages, understanding four. There was the Germanic tongue, that of the Anglo-Saxons, and there were the Francophonic and Hispanic branches of the Romantic tree amongst the Morins, Fano disinterestedly returned, and no one member spoke, nor understood, more than two, the least of which he, who spoke simply one, and understood but necessary phrases, penuries, of the others.

Only after probing the extent of Fano's explicatory capabilities, having learned the names of sibling and parents, the prodigious size of their land holdings, a vague approximation of their immigration and the customs imported with (not far dissimilar, to chagrin he discovered, from his own), was Faolainn forced, dissatisfactorily, to return so soon to the essence and implications of their common sign, which they had begun at meals to enact synchronously, despite discoursing openly never. When at last he did, fork elevating at his supper plate's edge, eyes tunneling through and past the greens and venison placed at its center, Faolainn looked across the table to Fano, lowered his utensil, clicked his tongue and queried if he might teach him to recite the variation in his native tongue. Quiet and indistinguishable was Fano's voice each meal thanks were offered, so hushed and abrupt Faolainn increasingly muffled his own ilk at the chance of apprehending any stray recognizable article or preposition. Fano at last swallowed, and nodded his head in eventual compliance. He cleared his mouth and conveyed the invocation aloud.

The words were strange, as indistinguishable then as ever. Faolainn supplicated Fano to repeat the words, slowly, and as tonelessly as he might. Fano complied again, Faolainn echoing each syllable as his instructor put it forward, but the words remained confoundedly

abstruse, tangled, corrupted, like an infant drawling unacquainted terms. Loose phonetic semblances; patois of patois.

— Yes, he chuckled, well, I suppose it may be some time before I have it down plumb.

Fano resumed eating, transporting a large square of veal to his exposed teeth.

— Can't say I knew it until first or second year of primary myself. Why? What's your interest in it?

— Well, perhaps—say, have you ever had anyone, a friend, visit your family's, ehr... land?

Two cycles were come and past by the proposition's time. In the weeks antecedent and proceeding, Fano's responses to Faolainn's intimate queries grew terser and vaguer, he either having tapped dry the fount of his grasp or his interest thereof, but in either case apathetic to Faolainn's persistent interrogations—even with letter posted home and expedition date appointed. But in all facets notwithstanding, fast was Fano to offer stance and interpretation, and there to speak with Faolainn whenever should the need or desire arise. He was, for all his flaws, Faolainn admitted, a mettlesome young man, an excellent, if obsessive student ever leaden with textbooks by the sunlight, while under the silvering moonlight amicable and progressively venturesome. There were those close to him, queer, aloof cadres, the rambunctious *satyrs* in the theatre such as, that premiere night of camaraderie; but his and Fano's was a deportment all the same alike, and he could scarce adjudge a man's virtues according to company kept, for, as Faolainn one evening shouted in a homebound *bonsoir*, 'who was to say what righteous impression he might imprint?' They shared between them the grooves and nobs of a mind complete, the empiricist and the blind bard, the four chambers of

a single pulsing heart; yet Fano could not achieve (and wholly unconscious to it he was) the satisfaction of Faolainn's curiosities.

Just so did the weeks elapse, for Faolainn seasoned by the stove of expectation, for Fano, unwittingly, even as they navigated the swarming station and waited atop the platform edge, Fano serenely glaring eastward, a portmanteau clutched in his gloved hand, Faolainn abreast, a valise hanging from his thumb, eagerly fingering extempore melodies against his handle, incisors combing his new underlip hair. Though boarding without pause, a lack of hardsoled footsteps at his rear frustrated Faolainn's purposive advance, and spun him around. Fano, he glanced, crowded the nearest fogged window, taming meticulously his few greased locks of hair dislodged when the eastward train arrived.

And so, with a halfday's travel closing in the town of Gaudenzia, they detrained.

Steadily and vacant Fano's eyes fixated, now beyond the cabin window on the expansive earth, fields, and groves upon which his name sat, as it were cynosure of an ocean, changeless and omnipresent. Frequently Fano had answered Faolainn's askings, the scope of the land and what resources it produced, how the Judge upheld his judicial duties whilst working the sugarcane, and all manner of fatuous trivia, with indetermination or unfigured estimation. At the time, Faolainn might have huffed perplexedly, presuming a deficiency in his friend's knowledge, or a bold indifference to his pestering. But as if adrift in an ocean, Fano had spent the predominance of his years encompassed there, wherein the horizon was championed in every which direction by the sway of one invulnerable force. Scarcely could Faolainn grasp such a pressure, as scarcely could Fano transfer in language, the plunge necessitated to even begin fathoming his world.

The Morin house must have risen straight up from the earth, so dark were the bricks walling its immemorially rigid structure, quivering candleflames silhouetting a wreath at every window like pupils surveilling all imaginable corners. A man in a deep maroon smoking jacket Faolainn encountered as first of the Morins, the *jeune* Irvan, ‘Jean’ monikered, with a face not unlike Fano’s, yet, as if experiencing an early stage of anaphylaxis, broader and swollen. In his threeday sojourn Faolainn would see Jean on no more than four occasions, pipe fuming in a hand angled at his waist. Greetings exchanged, the returning son’s and his guest’s baggage were removed to their rooms while their owners were removed to the parlor where two women, one rocking a child at her breast, the other rocking barefoot in a fireside glider, sat in, excepting stray hisses and pops and a feeble mumbling, impenetrable silence.

Their announcement on Jean’s behalf had the women hardly stirred. Jean first made introductions between Faolainn, his son, and Maribel, seated in nightdress at the arm of an empty couch, who raised pliantly a small crème hand that Faolainn in the observance of etiquette kissed before automatically retracting it to her infant, Irvan III, and hiding quickly a face sylphlike and small. In that moment the mumbling ceased, and Faolainn’s eyes jumped to the infant, whom he observed enveloped in a state of heavy slumber. His eyes followed the sound up to the hearth. Fano knelt holding his mother’s hand, having eluded somehow Faolainn’s detections—transported, seemingly. Mrs. Morin Jean introduced from across the room as just that and nothing more: matriarch, birthgiver to Fano and he. In the measure that passed while Faolainn padded to her side his eyes caught the lavish red carpet hushing his steps, like a giant, soft wound, then darted to a shadowy ikon’s glinting aureole, then a humid

sylvan scene hung past it on the wall, landing at last on a bookcase, whose shelved spines' golden lettering winked urgently as he bent beside Mrs. Morin and turned. He extended his hand, feeling as he did the fire's calefaction across his face endued.

The face which looked up to him in the fraughtful light was blank, and confused, like that of a child's, younger, it seemed, than Maribel's, and as fat as her infant's, the ballooning mask of a once enviable face. She wore her nightgown and robe, the greying skeins of her dark hair flowing over her collar, ornamenting her shoulders like a shawl. She withdrew a hand out from under a woolen coverlet; he held the frail hand aloft and kissed it, thanking her for her hospitality. She flashed a smile of sparse, dull teeth, received her hand, and grinned past her bloated, vascular feet into the fire. Jean cleared his throat, and suggested that the hungry travelers help themselves to dinner's leavings, which to one another the travelers nodded in measured consensus and arose. Following Jean and Fano into the kitchen, Faolainn having reached the parlor's threshold halted, detecting the simmering-up of a distinctive noise. Recommencing with a careful step so as to inhibit all resonance, he hearkened to the susurrus at his back: loose and infantile were its sounds, but not irreconcilable; the same obscure jumble he had been struggling to picture in memory—not the very words, if they might be called, but the same language, incontrovertibly, shuffling slurred into madness. Fano's patois being fed to the fire.

Darkness blinded the house—save for the lamppost guarding the entrance amid its circular drive—its every eye extinguished, when Faolainn rose to the skipping of a conveyance below his windowpane. The image of an older man appeared below him as the sheer was fingered back, a man broad and stout, but not portly, as if the derma of a larger

specimen clung about his skeleton, neck wrinkling over the cerise on the starchwhite collar of his tuxedo, the crown of his tophat weighing down the whole of a countenance unseen in the lightning moment he dismounted and strode at the front door. The deadbolt locked and silence reclaimed the air, the lowhung nebula billowing in the fissures dissipated by the Judge's march. Faolainn acquiesced to his bed, repressing slumber, that he might discern some stray sound. But none came, as if the reconstituted occulence churning below enshrouded all things sensorial. A moth flittered from underneath his bedframe, and with it unconsciousness soon alighted.

Had Faolainn in his dwindling moments of wakefulness attempted to picture the brimhidden face that eluded him, the morning's sequel would have contradicted his likely assumption that the man owning it resembled in any way his either son. True, the scions did resemble their mother only fairly, but such greater a semblance it appeared when sat beside their father. Only in the grey morning light could Faolainn first observe the tonal heterogeneity about them: the Judge and his wife, who flanked either end of the dining table, carried both the same brown-butter complexion, yet their sons were fair. While what few words Mrs. Morin spoke came slurred and rolling, the Judge's emitted short and nasal, interspersed with Francophonic locutions. Perhaps in the forgotten days of his youth, before the months toiled under the sun, nights of roots and cold earth, and eventually the boneaching hours of litigation and the festering censures of the courtroom, he might in appearance have once resembled his two children. There was a decay emanating from him, it seemed, a voluntary disintegration originating from within, an aura ribbing his eyes crimson and thinning his moustache white, intent on distilling anything proximate into a dull utility



starkly impotent against the viperine sharpness of his tongue. Nothing would escape him. And while Faolainn joined Fano, Jean with his pipe, and Mrs. Morin in the proingestive invocation, the Judge spoke another, short and nasal, while Maribel sat at Jean's side, eyelids weighted shut.

Shortly the brunch ended and a discussion ensued between the Judge and Jean, whom through their duologue and the wisps of smoke Faolainn understood managed the diurnal operations of the farm beneath, of course, the Judge's hawk-eyed scrutiny. Their dialogue concluded with the Judge emptying his crystal snifter, ice and all, then lifting himself and bidding good morning to his sons and no one else, least of all Faolainn, of whom he was as aware of as an ocean a length of driftwood. Into the foyer he strode, hands filling his pockets, and without even so much a glance over the shoulder, commanded:

— ...and remind those *foutu* Brünis again, *jeune*, they're to burn only from the elder groves and *nothing* else.

A maid entered through the kitchen portal to clear the table as Jean holstered his suspenders and disappeared down a corridor dragging his trail of smoke. Irvan III was handed to Mrs. Morin, Maribel directing her, last out, towards the parlor, leaving Fano and Faolainn the solitary inhabitants of an otherwise empty table, the former dabbing a toastedge in egg-yoke, the latter watching Jean through the lofty windows opposite, a cracked smokestack steaming across the yard and into the wall of trees at its back.

— 'The Brünis?' Faolainn said blankly.

— Farmhands. Locals shipped from some island somewhere overseas—I’m always forgetting the name, but it’s after some bird (or some bird after it?)—and, Fano added nonchalantly, soiling yellow a white napkin with his mouth, my mother’s family.

Marblesque collisions soon echoed through the corridors, about the spacious, vacant rooms of the house, drops of rain pelting vindictive as hail the home’s exterior. Faolainn’s jacket slid down his arms to be laid across the banister: the jaunt to Guadenzia downtown would be suspended but moments before either man could hook a finger about the doorknob. — Damn. Well, Fano insisted, inspecting his coif in a mirror, it’s only a drizzle. They’re random, but typical, I think, this time of year. Should be a matter of minutes—an hour at most.

Facing dispirited the mirror in use, Faolainn observed Fano working the molded ridges of his erstwhile unmanageably messy hair. Undoubtedly the peculiarities of the Morin *mode-de-vie*, in Faolainn’s mind, had begun to mount, Fano’s act of primping there representing a microcosmic taste of the nonplussing episode at large. Peculiar it might have seemed that Fano would tend diligently to his hair, considering the forestalled status of their plans; or peculiar that he would tend to it so fastidiously when so latterly having inspected it before. Odd, of no coincidence, it might have struck Faolainn, studying Fano under cornered eye, that his fashion had evolved, conforming now to the apparent predilections of the Judge and Jean. Or why Faolainn drank prolongedly of Fano’s reflection, was perhaps that he could not ascertain when the habit had overtaken his friend, had first sleeked back his disheveled tufts.

— Feel free to indulge yourself with our bookshelves until the rain's cleared. I can imagine you've been panting after them since you arrived. Go on—my father's collection is one of the biggest I've seen—outside of the university's.

The collection was expansive, no exaggeration attributable to Fano's claim, yet, as if instead of being assembled piecemeal it had been acquired at once for its enormity and subsequently left uninspected, thick with dust. Surveying indiscriminately from behind the pages of his novelette, Fano watched as, though gradually a stack of books began to grow at his feet, Faolainn in his rooting never paused to read more than a page of any one. He counterclockwiseways worked to each maple bookshelf anchored to the library's three walls (the fourth being the bay where Fano patiently flipped folios in a leather club chair, awaiting a break in the water clamoring at his back). After several hours' passage, Fano clamped his hardcover and rested it on the lampstand at his hand, inexplicably fluttered his eyes, and simulated sleep.

Fano in the next ten minutes of surreptitious obscurity was wot to the transpiration of a matter he otherwise would not have expected, and could not have predicted, had he not experienced the thing himself. Within the minute he feigned his nodding away, he heard footsteps, Faolainn's, exiting the library and traveling about the house, to a minimum of two other rooms. In the din of the rainfall he could not swear to the number of rooms visited, but heard undoubtedly a pacing down the central corridor for the parlor that several minutes later retraced itself toward the front room at the other end. The rain's stifling loudness, however, assured him of nothing else. A moderate grin, coy and amused, bent his lips, then shrank, as

the polecat in time smuggled himself back in, reassuming his stack of books. Fano masqueraded a chance awakening, gaped a yawn and ribbed:

— Apologies—dozed off. Hope I've not missed anything. The rain does make me drowsy...

Alright? Not finding something? Know what you're looking for?

— No—well, yes, perhaps, though I'm beginning to question why I'd thought I'd find it...

The rain would hold, intensity fluctuating and the barrage lessening exponentially until the skies were seen dimming behind the nimbed wall. Pursuant to Fano's insistence, that little recreation awaited two striplings such as themselves in the vicinity accessible—a threequarters hour voyage entailing—Faolainn after tenable dissension and a restless exhale yielded himself to another evening marooned. They confabbed hushtoned at the parlor's edge, Maribel and Mrs. Morin with them, though seated inaudibly apart, the maid drifting between the kitchen and the communicating dining room, transporting utensils, plates, napkins, *et cetera*. The men disconspired and Fano stretched back until he heard the maid again enter the kitchen, then solicited the room in suavity:

— Say, anyone know what's on the menu for supper? No? Sol, why don't we go find out...

In walked the pair to the cook basting roast chickens swimming in an ovenrack vegetable pot. The maid lengthened herself to grasp at the back of the cupboard the last of its six glasses and spun redfaced about to take cursory and curtsey notice of the two. Proceeding through the doublehinged door, she heard Faolainn inquire somethingortheother of the cook respecting the rolls, or the bowls, but at her locality in the dining room nothing unequivocal as she positioned each glass and ordered the proper utensils around each plate. She returned to the kitchen in a phlegmatic beeline for the water pitcher and decanter as Faolainn exited

with Fano half a step behind. She would ask the chef what it was they asked for, but he, mollycoddling his chickens, would not respond. What she had missed Maribel had seen looking up from across the parlor, yet suffered no concern to: that Faolainn issued himself straightaway from the room down the corridor, with Fano aback, folded hands bracing his abdomen.

Dinner elapsed as had brunch, subdued in its silence, disquieting, almost, barring its conclusion: the elder Morin men rose, cited an appointment in town, then ordered a conveyance prepared and departed uninterrogated in formal dress. Before quitting the house's supervision, Jean appeared in the library doorframe, smoldering, to address a skittery Fano and Faolainn one final time. He drew his pipe away from an overzealous drag and fumigated the room then expressed in a sigh the Judge's interest, as to whether they might themselves take interest in accompanying them. Though ripely enthusiastic himself, Fano detected the clandestine distaste in Faolainn's expression; he postured himself and replied: — No, thank you. Tomorrow night, maybe, if you're going out.  
— Yes, 'if,' 'if.' *Bonne nuit*, little *frère*. *Bonne nuit*, Solomon, *et au revoir*.

The smoke deposited behind hung in the doorframe well after Jean had quitted them; its scent, sweet and dewy, saturated the air longer still, until a fire blazed at the northern wall.

Faolainn poured a dram into his tumbler and tucked the brandy bottle back beneath the club chair's cushion. Fano elevated his evacuated tumbler absentmindedly off the ground and Faolainn dug the bottle back out. No one had registered, in their separation from the dinner table, the two glasses missing at their plates.

— *Sláinte*, Faolainn humoured. They bent aback their heads in unison, letting the liquor slide smoothly down. Always best toasting *i nGaeilge*, Faolainn distantly potted, again stowing the bottle away, the torn seal breaking off in his hand.

— Stop fretting; they won't be home anytime soon—they've never been back so soon.

The flames twisted slowly in Faolainn's glare, twisting rhythmically with the seal in his hand.

— You're positive?

— Very positive, Fano laughed, bathing his tongue in another sip. Nothing but from the motherland's still, his. Look: prized brandy doesn't collect dust at the back of the liquor case. And look, if you're worried still, remember: two nights and you're free, free of consequence. I bet you we'll be strolling under the colonnades both before he might discover the empty space—if he discovers it all! There are bottles missing from Jean's tenure he's still not privy to!

— How often?

— Hm? 'How often' what?

— How often does he leave like that, into town at night?

— I'm not sure. Not often, Fano reasonably surmised.

— Often enough, though, little shreds of the seal torn apart, dripping to the floor in Faolainn's solicitous hands, for you to have developed some, ehr... timely expectation of his arrival.

— I really can't say, Fano leaned forward, weighing the question, having been away this last half-year. Perhaps *papa's* grooming Jean for the law?

— Hm. Hm.

— What?

— What is it, have you wondered? What, ehr... ‘appointment’ does he have, this time of night, this time of year? What, he’s not a scoundrel—or worse yet, revolutionary—is he?

Fano’s thumb squeaked across the glass rim; the fire’s vivacity bored Faolainn, and he turned his attention to Fano.

— I—

— Does your brother always accompany him?

— Oh—well, yes. Though, for a short period he—oh, why? What does that matter? If grooming’s their business, why wouldn’t he be? Accompanying, I mean.

— Shouldn’t it raise the question of why he wasn’t with him last night?

— No.

— ‘No?’ And why is that?

— Who would have welcomed us?

— ‘Who?’ Faolainn repeated sardonically. Yes, ‘who’ indeed... he trailed, straightarm balancing his glass between the fire and him, watching through its globular distortion the inverted tongues, the thrashing, saffrony leviathan. He sipped, then muttered, who else afterall, in this house, is living...

— Hm? Fano glanced up from the floor. What?

— He woke me when he returned last night—this morning, yes, his timepiece in deference confirming the preterition, it was this morning, when he came home from wherever he, ehr—dwelt.

— What did you say?

— I said, I saw him as he returned home last—

— No, no, Fano badgered, straightening up. What did you say?

— Said what?

— Before. I asked who would have welcomed us, and you said you said...

— Hm. Said... No, I—well, what did I say? It was... damn it all; I can't recall.

A moment, tense and swollen, like agate vapor, hovered in the air. Fano emptied his glass, battering the coolness of Faolainn's defenses—before breaking his gravity to glisten the air with a spray of brandy. Faolainn smiled, produced the bottle and leant over to top off the mister, saying, as Fano choking settled down:

— Mind the fire, there! I honestly can't say I remember what it is I said; too much, ehr... No, but I saw him come home earlier, and I swore, I swear, I lay there, listening under the cover, and from the moment I heard him enter—and it was quiet then, no rain, no criquertry—he didn't make a sound. Not a step, as if he were a spirit, levitating over the floorboards.

— Perhaps there *was* no noise, Fano a contrarian finger upheld. He built the house himself, foundation to roof, when it was only him—and some Brünis. If there are any cracks, any creaks in the hardwood, he knows them, knows how to... circumspect? That the correct word?

— *Circumvent*. Those Brünis, they do sound... virile. Savvy how long they've been here?

— Before, some of them—distant relatives of my father, those ones—my mother's too.

— 'Before?'



— Before. Before me, Fano swirling a conductor’s finger slackly retailed, the begirt his glassware, before the house, the land, and swallowed his solatiary pour whole. Before *him*.

— Or, Faolainn stepped up to the hearth, *or*, and tossed a small green rectangle, what remained of the seal, into the flames. He warmed his back against the fire, his angled jaw hanging loose. *Or*, perhaps there wasn’t a noise simply because he willed there be none.

Faolainn would hear, and be awakened by, the Judge’s arrival several hours after, testing his hypothesis to promising, though empirically inconclusive, results. All events transpired as the night prior, the conveyance rolling in, the Judge disembarking for the beveled blue door—but the Judge only. Though freshly awake, Faolainn saw unmistakably the Judge and the Judge alone stalk longstrided away from the departing conveyance, before an unbolting, an opening and forceful closing, then refastening, and lastly: but two footsteps, reverberating hardsoled across the downstairs walls. Then at the junction of nowhere, somewhere, a door slammed shut.

Faolainn heard the maid knocking hastily at his door; it was brunchtime, and he sat at the windowsill in full garb. He insisted glibly he was yet in the final stages of dressing, and that they might expect him in no more than threeandaquarter minutes. Appointments scantily decorated the room, bed, nightstand, wardrobe; few items embellished the walls either, as if the room—like many of the rooms—was afterthought to the structure. In his soused state before the fire, Fano had fiddled his necklace out from its hideaway beneath his shirt and into his mouth, kneading the corners between his lips, clenching the serf with his teeth. Faolainn stared long at the same instrument, one magnified, ornate and inhabited, decorating his

headboard's wallspace like most of the house's inhabitants: arrayed in afterthought. In a moment he rose, disengaged the instrument, then preserved it gently in the drawer of his bedside table and left.

The dining room atmosphere was sharpened, unhazed, even harsh in the smokeless light. The entire room hung from tenterhooks as Faolainn apologized and stole into his seat, the bilingual invocation begun at the Judge's initiation before his trousers could contact their cushion. Faolainn performed the gesture and said shortly his own variation in one of his own tongues. The Judge commenced first with a draw from his snifter while pouring a viscous white gravy atop each foodstuff, eggs, sausages, potatoes, muffin and scone, and proceeded to consume each bite methodically; Mrs. Morin moved steadily, cutting and cutting again her bites to thumbnail size before ruminating amply; Fano ate with the rapt voracity of a reprobate slated for the scaffolds; Irvan III ham-handing his eggs with slightly less decorum than Fano; and Faolainn leant over his meal in a state of near-paralysis, prongs stabbing at a sausage, eyes wavering, drinking hard the colors and textures, oscillating from viand to viand as if following a goldfish floating in mindless circles atop his plate.

A scream lashed at the air. Faolainn's fork clattered against his china and rang under the table. Jouncing up, as all members of the table but the Judge (who must not have heard) did, Faolainn glimpsed before it was buried sobbing into her small hands a mien of abject desolation on Maribel's face. Her outburst surprised the infant Irvan most, who in the instant glowed hot red, then bawled alongside his mother.

— Maribel, the Judge buttering a muffin staunchly ordered.

Maribel did not discern the command amidst the collective sobs and vagitus. Faolainn had heard him only marginally, so calm and unperturbed was his speech.

Mrs. Morin teetered and instinctively rose, hesitantly supplicating the Judge's clemency as she shuffled toward Maribel. She had reached halfway—  
— *Tais-toi, you fille inutile! Mon Dieu*—be so decent as to *excuse* yourself! he barked, glaring up at last to his wife. What, are you waiting for her to stop?—take her away, give her something—*et ton bâtard aussi!*  
— Sh, sh, sh, fondling the child's blazing cheek. *Niño, n'yores...*

The infant Irvan in one arm shouldered, Mrs. Morin assisted Maribel out of her seat and guided her around the dinner table and down the corridor. She removed them upstairs, the resonance of their cries in time breaking behind the closure of a heavy door. In climbing out from under the table, for Faolainn had momentarily ducked below to retrieve his dropped utensil (where he found it opposite him in the shards of Maribel's plate and food, the spill and breakage of which had gone unregistered), Faolainn peeked unnoticeably past Fano, toward the Judge, to confirm what he had heard during Maribel's escort: the Judge, who had been manducating it concurrently, had finished his muffin. At Faolainn's right, more chewing: Fano had recommenced his meal.

Faolainn's brunch remained in most part unmolested, what little victual comestible evidently sufficient to his needs. While the remaining Morins worked on their plates, Fano apportioning himself seconds, Faolainn proffered gratitude for the meal and excused himself. He unshod, slipped up the stairs, in his room coated himself, and slipped back down, along

the circumvention perceiving the thick cries penetrating Maribel's door. He knotted his laces, by miracle levered the front door undetected, and dented the turf in a sprint.

Two hundred yards Faolainn ran down to reserve himself to the shelter of the closest grove, a salience of the forest encircling the house as it were the nucleus of a malformed cell. He supported his frame against a trunk momentarily in catching his breath, then struck further into the woods. By his estimation, his getaway had been visible no more than a minute; yet, the longer he abided near the house, the quicker it might reel him in. He had wandered in the wood at least two hours, he figured, by the time he deferred to his timepiece, when he was aware of the daylight's unobstruction, and the thinning of maples and mosshung oaks. At the opening a dirt road ran north beneath the shade of the wood's bourn, the road which carried him there, he saw, the totality of his vision atop the hummock over which it stretched composed of empty fields and impenetrably overgrown woods. South was much the same, though by him unexplored, so he held to the road a quarterhour until stumbling upon another ostensibly unfamiliar track which he followed, until, precisely half-spanned, it became apparent in placing the site of a fallen tree that the road was, in fact, the Morin central drive.

Faolainn sighed, and bore into the southernwood. Another halfhour of ambling over knotted roots and prickling brambles, of brushing wet leaves clung to his legs, had elapsed when a clearing presented itself to him in the form of furrows, sight-consuming and fallowing for the winter. Light drops of water suddenly struck his coat. He withdrew arboreal to shield himself in the bower of an ancient oak, where in its grooved base he observed the fall of water densify through heavying lids eventually too ponderous to maintain ajar.

Faolainn awoke, the Sun wincing erratically through the latticed overcast and leaking canopy. The rain had stopped. Near on five hours had passed since his departure, and the unprecedented peripateticism and insustenance had begun to manifest themselves as a tenacious drouthiness in his throat. A low sougning entered his ears as he stood, one distinct in that it was more rapid than that the soft roar funneling through the trees. The loudening rush delivered him to a stream, tumultuously aroused in breadth and crest by the recent weather. He lowered himself to the current and shoveled water into his mouth, dousing his coatarm and nearly submerging himself. After near on a minute he retracted his gasping costard and leant back—at which exact moment Fano sauntered out from the trees at his back.

— That’s all I was told.

Faolainn leapt to his left, off the stream’s bank that he and Fano were some halfhour walking upon. They had been shouting over the roar, but a trail of trampled reeds and abraded earth emerged perpendicular to a makeshift bridge built of boards nailed across fallen cypresses. There they unhindered heard one another, continuing:

— He’ll have to return soon, Faolainn innocently observed.

— She’ll lock herself in their room until then, and for several days after as well. But he’ll have brought her something and in a week the matter will have subsided. My mother will care for The Third until that point.

— And The First? Your father?

— My father? He said—well, it seemed as though he'd only wished he'd been given notice—and that Jean hadn't made such a spectacle when he'd left. He, Jean, has always been one for theatrics.

— ...*histrionics*, mumbled Faolainn. No—well, no collaterality, it seems...

— Oh, there never is. Look, he interjected, pointing to a bough overhanging the stream, used to be a swing there. Must have washed away in a flood...

The tightknit thickets of riparian greens crowding the path thinned, upstream giving way to a second bridge, one of enmossed stone predating the path that easterly became a channel through the woods to the main house, and westerly divided onedozen gimcrack shotguns clustered at the two sides of a dining hall overlooking another unsown expanse: *Brüinitonne*, Fano indicated.

Strange voices shot across the air, and the dining hall doors swung open. Fano tugged Faolainn toward him to conceal themselves behind a shotgun as twenty Brünis, men slouch and upright, women bearing infants by the hand or in their arms, spewed forth, weaving the shotguns for the streampath, all clothed formal, all immutably burnt.

— Where are they going, I wonder... rasped Fano from their improvised foxhole.

— I'm wagering it'll not be your home, Faolainn retorted, fixing finally on the mim insularity after which he had hoped. Without conference, or even facing Fano, he ordered, We're going to follow.

The footing of the assembly's last member upon the path coaxed Faolainn probing from his spot. He had stolen to the northern cluster's back, observing the Brünis' advance for the felled trunk of a tree severalhundred yards on, when he turned reflexively back to notice

Fano standing uncovered, his physical language suggesting address to a party by the shotgun eclipsed. He dashed to Faolainn, himself subject to the instinct of looking back.

— The oddest thing: a little girl. She pointed to me and said some word, like she was asking a question.

— A question?

— Yes. It was as though she wondered if *I* were the word she said...

— What was it?

— ‘Tornado,’ sounded like, Fano quietly laughed. Queerest folk...

Approaching the fallen trunk, Fano identified the path they took at the trunk’s end as one cutting across the forest past the Morin property line up to the Gaudenzia limits. But few smotes of light dimly illuminated the forest, the Sun languorously skimming the hedge line and cattle lowing at their backs. Their visibility quickly waned to near impassability by the time they ventured in, the path beneath them doubtlessly innegotiable had several torches not been ignited by the party ahead.

— There’s light there now, at the edge—do you see? Faolainn pointed, descrying in gaps of black bark a collective orange wanness yonder.

— They’ll be terribly angry with us for missing dinner—but it is a little amusing, this adventure! Perhaps we’ve been deceived, and we’re about to emerge at our own sacrifice!

— Yes, huffed Faolainn, slake the earthen spirits with the king’s filial blood, quite, ehr... it’s sure to be nothing. Though it surprises me you haven’t a clue in the first where we’re headed.

— Oh, how should it? I’ve hardly been around them.

— I recall you saying they're your blood, are they not?

— That's not to say we flock like birds! *Some!* Most of *them* are gone. They're farmhands—and I can rarely understand the lot. They don't speak our language, most of them.

— 'They don't speak our language' or 'you don't speak your own?'

— Don't pick at words. They could have come up to the house to visit whenever they'd have liked. They're not servants, or slaves. When we were children we could have mixed, could have played, but the children never came. My father pays them—well—and boards them and their families—and as for blood, beyond that we honestly don't look alike, all of them burnt under the Sun as they are. No, there's more running between family than blood. Peacocks and partridges.

— And your parents? Your father? He's dark, darker than most of them.

— My father created himself, practically, from the very dirt he worked. His work lifted him from the dirt to his bench—and work detestable to him, too, mind you. It's funny, though. The Sun, he's said, the Sun will never let him forget where he began: in the fields, the dirt. He's like them, but I think he's glad I'm not, glad I'm so much lighter, that I'd never have to know that work, that suffering. It was his greatest gift to me, I think, mused Fano, unsheathing his comb, and I can't help but feel in his debt.

— *Audi vocem eorum et constitue super eos regem...*

Fano anointed his comb and began remolding his hair, missing as he and the similarly-statured Brünis did the network of boliladen webbing the vertically-disadvantaged Faolainn became heir to. He spat and violently wiped his mouth.

— Damned things, Faolainn grouched, desilking his head. Lucky I keep mine crewed...



— What was that, that Latin you said?

— *Quid?* Oh, just said, Faolainn spat again, you hold him in rather lofty regards, it seems.

— Of course! Why shouldn't I? I wouldn't exist were it not for him! Fano laughed incredulously.

— He only? Faolainn's delivery ineludibly a scoff. And what about your mother?

Fano's eyes hovered temporarily, then dropped, his heretofore-mobile face resigning itself forward, his fingers stowing his comb.

— She isn't the woman who raised me. She *is* my mother, I mean, but, her mind... The woman you met—I love her still, I can't not—

— You say you love her, yet you sit quietly by as your father—I'm sorry; I don't follow, *per se*.

— She's not the woman he married, either. And, oh, well, I don't suppose they married for love, as you would. He did find her beautiful, once—you would too, had you seen her in her youth, our age—but their wedding was fundamentally contractual, a legal exchange.

— A whelping mare.

— Oh, don't be so savage, Sol! She assists with the baby and Maribel, she has run of the house when she can, she raised my brother and me—she ran the farm, even, until she couldn't.

— I see: she handled his family, in field and house, and now serves your brother's child and wife—

— They're not—well, not yet, at least, married...

A bolt struck Faolainn, his every sense and mobility inoperative, save the automatic faculty of his steps. His lip sagged, mouthing the words: *et ton bâtard aussi*.

— I suppose I must be honest with you, Sol. Your ideals of romantic, marital love, of traditional matrimony, monogamy, of virtue—in that sense of being—these ideals you hold to... my family doesn't subscribe to them. And... I don't believe they're much to my liking either.

Fano's words fell from his lips, unpracticed yet oddly not pithless.

— This class of love, your brand—it's unnatural, it seems—not abhorrent—is that the right word? Yes?—but unnatural in the sense that it doesn't exist in nature, not beyond ourselves. Take it for example that far fewer species in the world mate for life than don't. The virtuous existence, a smile working into his lips, as it was imparted, was a goal, an ideal, something to strive for—but an impossibility all the same, I've learned.

— I see. Intriguing... Might you, ehr, elucidate?

— Take baptism, for instance: *the first plunge*. We are told we are washed of an inherent sinful—

— *Postlapsarian*—

— Why not—nature, and made again new with the promises of eternal salvation. Yet, we sin. We sin again, and again. And again. We sin, and it is inevitable. For all that sinning, what was the purpose of the sacrament, a ritualistic ceremony at most, if we could neither understand it nor live by its intent? The act is obsolete, don't you think? our nature making us unable to subscribe to its prescribed standard. I'd struggled with this idea, you see, but only

recently, having taken the courses I have this last semester, do I feel as though I've begun to understand it all.

— And so mathematician turns philosopher.

— I've thought greatly on the matter, Sol! Listen, listen: this idea of love is only an idea, it's puffery of consideration that's at its basis entirely chemical—between families, kindred spirits, men and women—to care for and *consider* one another. It can't be touched, accessed, summoned. It's un-physical! and therefore its rules should remain separate from the body. As that stands, any pursuit of bodily desire, as long as it considers all others, is not physically or psychologically detrimental to one's self or another—a partner—if mentally in-the-know—and has no bearing, emotional or physical, on the individual's consideration or ability to consider, is and should be judged perfectly healthy, perfectly acceptable.

— And, you wouldn't call this 'lust?' Faolainn parried, grinning calm.

— What you call 'lust' is an inversion of virtue—something impossible—and therefore impossible itself. What you call 'lust' is natural attraction that all made creatures feel, and healthy for as long as it remains harmless. Attraction only became 'lust' when weaker men—the psychologically weak or ill—became unable to divorce natural habit from mortal conscience. Guilt only came about when these men feared climbing past it; they reproduced, and with them guilt multiplied. It was fear, of inadequacy, of the rough-and-tumble—that produced the *idea* of 'lust.'

— And so only by complying with 'lust' (well, I suppose, by that logic, that sin and offense don't exist either, Faolainn chuckled), and accepting sin, are we capable of eradicating it—or its misconception—and living theoretically harmoniously?

— You laugh, Sol, but you've never said a wiser thing! I know my father, my brother—I—we are not immaculate, but we have potential for good, we have consideration, and belief in something—and gratitude, all of which outweigh a need for ceremony, and aberrant—right? Yes?—temperance.

— So you *are* aware, then, of your brother's and father's activities?

— I have my speculations. But they're as we are: human, in need. As you said yourself: no collaterality, no harm done.

Unknowingly they had reached the path's end—and by no assistance of the torches, which were long since disappeared or snuffed in the midst of their discourse. The trees and air enveloping them half-glowed in orange light, as did their faces. Fano espied first in their traverse the inscrutable grin hanging on Faolainn's mouth and approximated himself one comparably jubilant. Advancing forth into lamplight, they beheld a small group of children darting about one other pacify as an advisory bell struck above, then issue into the structure from which it rung. Fano paused to comb his hair, and in the revelatory tilt of his head caught the spire and gasped:

— Of course!

— What is it?

— Oh, carols, hymns, Brüni songs—things like that! Of course! The congregation here is Brüni, mostly. My mother took us as children when she—I'll tell you after. Here, let's listen in for a moment; we'll escape with our scalps, unfortunately, but oh, what a surprise! It's been years since I've been!

— What a surprise indeed—but, hold it, tell me before, as I admit our discussion has me rather curious: correct me if I’m wrong—and if so allow me to apologize for my assumption in advance—but with your mother, and Maribel—

— Oh—later, later; let’s be done now! Besides, there’s no reasoning with a man to whom every thing and everyone is damnable—but himself! Fano squinted his eyes and grinned, feline.

The voices, sweet and guileless in their mellifluity, extended gently past the chapel door, which in creeping open Faolainn observed was awkwardly from rusting hinges hung. The interior was dingy, candlelit, but from his threshold stance he apprehended intimately the building’s erosive state of disrepair: blank spaces speckling the murals, wispy tendrils over the choir bowing and releasing with the gradient, stained glass cracked or missing.

— Seems as we are *here*, though, I should be honest, Fano leaning quietly toward Faolainn said. I pretended to sleep when you went looking around the house yesterday. I’m not angry—not in the least—but I would like to know: what were you looking for?

— A book, Faolainn a moment’s consideration after said, I couldn’t find. But it doesn’t matter anymore. It’s occurred to me it was likely never there to begin with.

Hitherto ambivalent of the chorale, Faolainn sighed and leant his ear toward the music blending throughout the room. It was the same language, though now enunciated lucidly, as that which flowed from Mrs. Morin and from her sons, the same corruption—regressed moderately, for now—the same ineluctable spiral into abstrusity. Faolainn’s pupils rolled to their right corners, where they viewed Fano, stuck in a mist, singing *sotto voce*:

*Zí kōtí, zí kōtí*

*Zí kōtí kōné zinté*

*Kōmé sí sí ho-ko ẹ anjelo-zmé*

Drawn and nocked a dart itched at his bow, yet remained unreleased; a green-eyed shade at his back crumbled from the wound once, and in a voice fierce, quiet, and feminal conceded:

— What do you enjoy? Is there anything, anyone else, really? No; you enjoy nothing, can love no one but yourself. Your love is watching-over—looking-down, waiting for the burn.

Laid bear, two figures they were, male, men untimely, in quality contradictory and complimentary: a woman to one, to his brother many or none; flesh wrapping one fair, the other dark, always darker, ever casualty to Time's ineradicable maculation; one gained his bread behind a honed metal point, the other defrayed in toil, song, or trade what he possessed no mind to pilfer; and under the guise of unwavering dissent one slips below the fecund waves propagated by his brother, establishing the ground on which his conqueror's seed is sown. Brothers, yes, strengthened at the breast selfsame, their concord attained all the same, generative, or psychal commanding deftly those facilities which aloft and onward bore them, the toolbearer and the songmeister; and, yes, did they their sovereignties by the allowance of nature, fortune, and valiance, found. Between two such men might exist no union, as never ere had there existed division; as was to Faolainn, as was to Fano, as was to Dolon. Their forces opposed, and attracted, galloped, eternal and indefatigable, wartime conquest and

consonance of peace, rage and serenity, malice and charity, servility and revolution, cacophony and harmony—apotheosized and supernal—they ran, bounded, collided, battered, spurred on, on, on, casting skyward the dust tailing their harmonic contrariety.

They staggered themselves to an arrest, an advancing dichotomy such as, in the sheets of light spilling through the pier to Faolainn yet distanced, heavybreathed and spent, one laying him down in the relief of covered sand as his partner to a pillar arighted his spine. Finer detail of the pair Faolainn could not far-removed appreciate, his sleepless eyes yet uncalibrated to the little-elapsed new morn. An invigorated yawn broke from his mouth; a shudder, pulsing frigidly to the tips of his fingers, throbbled his swollen little finger. The doublet approached him; or, he approached them, rubbing carefully his left bicep for warmth. Teeth clenched tongue; lips pursed:

— *Ut quo imus...* yes, that'll have to do, I suppose. But then... *scio? Percipio? Novi*—no, no—ehr, hang on... *No... Nosco? Noscimu*—no, no, too few. Hm...

If one were to theorize Faolainn detested even the slightest impromptu gregariousness, then the brief encounters of his adult history substantiated such an hypothesis. Evaluated results would disprove any presumed bias of sex, creed, race, nation, posture, measurements longitudinal or latitudinal, attire, etc.; it seemed, rendered plainly, in conformity with his every other interactional aptness: that he spoke, and would speak, as and when he wished unless prevailed upon by greater powers, avoidance and silence provisionally habitual. The young men in momentary repose appeared unbent on departure. Surely would they remain so by his proximity, a proximity itself further coarctated by the tide; disregard of their presence, or their regard of his passage, undetoured, proved

impossible. A footpath that climbed in elevation to the pier's streetside ingress existed, unoccupied and unblocked, and continued past the pier, descending a dune returning to the beachfront. Faolainn had been long at walk, too, reasonably long enough to warrant a few moment's stasis in the sand, or water, to rally his stamina. Yet with these several and conceivably numerous other evasions, Faolainn footed on toward the men in unshakeable trajectory.

— *Nosco... Ut quo imus, ehr... non noscemus?* Little difference, Faolainn's eyes vertiginously swung, between 'can' and 'do,' after all. Whether one *can* or *does* flee, import and consequence are contained in context. In cases of *doing* or *can do*-ing, ability, possibility, is inherent, implied either in the action or its potentiality. Distinction's irrelevant, irrelevant in the case. We arrive; positional transiency. Question: get at the root of it. What's the meaning? 'Don't know where we're going till we've arrived'—oh, insipid little ditty. Why bother with it? Nothing meaning from a flaneur. *In qua sumus nos venit*, might as well—*sumus quod sumus*. Are we, Dolon, not what we are? '*Ego sum qui sum.*' *Ego sum.* *Quis sum?* Who are they? *Quis sunt?* Friends? More, something more, more of comfort than friends—see how they look... Good God, Faolainn whispered tightly, are they nude?

They were not nude, Faolainn shortly the two divined—least, not extensively; both wore undergarments about their hips appealing to civility's barest antique definition, and those tan articles in dishabille singly. They were barefoot, in the lissome arena of their quasi-matured bodies each, beardless and thin as if climbing in adolescence from toe to head. But figure alone did they share, for—vasodilation, and perspiration's coalescent property provided—one, the supine, was in tone pallid and hair finely ashen ecru, while the erect



evinced a soupçon of olive and a crop wavy, if not curly, unvarying brown. Where the erect's physiognomy, eyes, nose, brow, lips were all hewn distinctly, the supine's were pervasively thin, neutral, his equilateral mandible the only feature geometrically superior to his compeer's. In trespassing the barrier of audibility even their words, lusty with youthful declaration by Faolainn's ear, engendered enunciative polyphony, the supine trilling nasally a burr, the erect intense, guttural and anapæstic. Faolainn pitched his attentions out toward the sea, the tide in its fledgling retreat thrusting minute gasps of foam over the toppling of its lilliputian swells. Previously surmounted by the orchestral tunings of the ocean water, their voices billowed, grew and overthrew the concert, proclaiming:

— *Xej*—five minute more and we go back to running, *ða?* spoke to the supine the erect.

— 'Five minutes?' rejoined the supine, digging with a palm the sand lazily from his eyes.

How long did we say? Ten? It doesn't feel like five minutes—your watch, what is the time?

— I did not bring my watch. You did not bring your watch?

— I have no watch. Remember what happened to my watch? Remember, I gave it to someone, the supine, revealing a mouth unevenly toothed, smiled, reeling his riddle's solution in by a twirling hand.

— Oh, the erect teetered, grinning to his raised toes, pressing his hands against the pillar, *ða*, *ða*. We have plenty of time before tonight, plenty of time! But—

— Time, time—we should practice: *Qu'est-ce que 'le temps?'*

— *Qu'est-ce que*—what, what is... the times? 'What is the time?'—*нет, нет!*... 'what is Time?'

— Time? Time is an opinion—

— It's an explosion! It's a fire: eats everything!—*mange tout!*—fire *innâretable*.

—‘Fire?’ *Hem!* It is...—place. Time is place!

— Time is a place? Explain—

— Does this a watch a map make? Faolainn to indeterminate end questioned.

— It is, hm—what is the word, queried erect, brushing his protuberant jaw—destination! *Da*, *ða!* Time is location, room—rooms with doors, doors that lock when you have made passing through. We enter rooms with doors we do not exit—that is Time. ‘Now’ is room, ‘then’ was room. ‘Tonight’... will be room.

— Two rooms, tonight—ah, think about it—let's ask him, we will see what room we are in—excuse me, do you have the time?

— Oh, hm—say again? two body lengths apart from the two Faolainn in absentminded air blurted, shaken, concentrated, cogitating compulsively matters infinite and infinitesimal. Oh, the time, it is... and with his timepiece eclipsing perfectly the sun, about seven after?

— *Merci*, thank you.

— *Da*, thank you—oh, excuse us—see? It is late already, and we will be still needing to run the beach one more time to make three. *Xej*, stand up, *ða?* and we will go.

— Oh, he yawned, his each limb languidly utmost extended, oh, but I'm enjoying this place—*cette pièce*. It is a nice room, *non?* So cool, *et avec un regard très beau*.

— It is nice room, has good, *uma je mo*—good view indeed, but there are other rooms, he cajoled, Miry, other places I want to be going.

— ‘Want to be going?’

— Oh! Lupe is what he means! Lupe, half-a-day-away, Lupe, the room he's headed for! The room *we* are heading for! *And he must be fit enough to fit through the door!* shouted Miry the supine.

— *Xej!* Shut your mouth—*tais toi!*

— *Fille inutile*—

— What? Oh, no, Miry beamed sadistic and addressed a withdrawn Faolainn, I do not think he minds. Do you mind? Do you know? Would you like to know?

Naught response elicited from Faolainn, withdrawn as he was. A fistful of sand peppered heavily Miry's face, to which he, from the beneficial vantage of recumbent pose, responded with the forthwith countervolley of like dispersive projectile trained at (and hitting exactly) the eyes of his attacker, who by dint of impact fell upon and beleaguered his malefactor with elbows, knees, clenched fingers and other blows. The ordeal after a minute's scuffle kicking sand ceased with the erect now become the dominant, and Miry the supine the stanchioned. The dominant chuckled imperious, tautening his arm:

— Are you to say are you sorry?

— You—Miry the stanchioned wheezed, clasping his dominator's arm—attacked first!

— Ah, *тацно, тацно*, but I won! So: I wait.

— Another door locked, another room lost, scarcely was Sol heard to say. *Ut quo imus.* But where, where...?

— Šime, I'm dying!—

— And as you die, the erect-become-dominant, Šime, spoke in casual indifference, I wait still...

— ...*Je suis désolé, vraiment! Vraiment!* I am sorry!

— *E, e*, I could kill you now—in my tongue!

— *Zhoe mee... yah? C'est ça!* Yes! Let me go—I said it!

— How long have we lived together? How long? How long? Since the beginning—baha!—since the beginning of Time! Before that place! Remember—*xez*, let me finish, I will let go—remember mother, ageful cow she was but smart, remember she said we teach one and other? I learn from you; now you learn from me. Repeat, repeat. *Zhou*—

— *Zhou*—

— *Mi*—

— *Mi*—

— *Yeh*.

— *Yeh*—!

— All together now: *Жао му је!* Say it, to the sky say it—Let us hear!

— *Жао му... је—Жао му је! Laisse-moi—maintenant!*

Uproarious laughter seized Šime's reerection, Miry meanwhile rolling limply to his back, drawing through phiz and chest glowing red his at-last-unrestricted breaths.

— I hope you have learned lesson, bending presumptuously at the waist Šime jeered. Little remembering would have freed you minute sooner.

— Deepest pardons, *monsieur*, Miry choked out, rubbing tenderly the circumferential skin of his neck, his sight cowering tempestuously aside Šime's, who quickly noticed Miry's dourness of face. He leant down, lifting a handful of sand from the ground, and sprinkled it slowly in Miry's hair until the young rogue swallowed the consequence of his impertinence,

dismissed the affront, wrung his hair, leered and said: Is there anything I can do for you—let me make you breakfast when we're home? Would you forgive me? What would you like?

How could I make it to you?

— Well, one can only know when they are arrived. They 'will learn'...

— *Да, да!* I will think, Šime pondered, back against his pillar... sausage and cheese—goat cheese, of course!—omelet! You will make omelet for me. Be free to feed yourself on the scraps when I finish, of course!

— Of course, *bien sûr, pas de problème*, twirling his pale hand again in courtly obeisance, anything my *suzerain* would command...

— 'Suse-rain?' What word is this? I do not know this one—

— And you will learn, you will!—but only by *striding* onward, to where you will *be*...

— *Ou*, but let us be going first! We will run and you will tell me.

— One minute more, Ši, Miry in doting candor begged, *s'il vous plait*, one minute more, gazing up to his victor, orbs spurned whelpish.

— We stay one more minute. For this, to stay you promise me one thing, *да?*

— *Peut-être*. What does *mon dominateur* desire?

— I ask, Šime following a remote mustering and a downward, candid glance, been meaning to ask, I ask... you let me have her last. You let me to her alone, at the end. Will you? Please?

— Lupe's boudoir, to her 'den,' it would seem. But what room is that? And what is the door locking in? Where, where are you going? *Ut quo imus, ut quo imus*...

For a lapse inscrutable to mortal observation, a droplet's ripple or the beat of a hummingbird's wing, a twisted face consumed Miry—briefly inasmuch as Šime sustained ignorance despite Miry's unobstructed persona—before Miry instantly donned exaggerated *machismo* and sneered:

— You may have her—but you must kill me first! he said, sounding as it were a Gallic drum his nubile chest.

— And I will! I should! I cannot lose her breast to other men! Šime postured stately. I should, for as much I love her! But, think, your death—you would not die for no reason. Your death is truly sacrifice!

— *Mon Dieu*—a 'sacrifice' how? Miry cackled.

— Your death would bring about great world—a great place!—with people, my children—our brood—great children of a great new race!

— Only a world with more of your stock would be better—great, *absolument!*

An amused laugh spilled from Šime's lips as he reached for his toes, straightened himself, and lunged under Miry's gaze.

— I run now. You may join me, if you like...

— *Un moment, un moment...*

— And, before I go, Šime caught himself, and with his every strength of earnestness penetrated their veneer to adjure, is it 'yes?' Can you—can you let me be with her alone?

— What's that?—oh, another time, another place...

— You have, *mon frère*, his lip tucked fleetingly back, my promise.

— Our children, Šime grinning a warmth enveloping even Miry within its radiation, they shall honor your memory. They will sing your song—your song, remember? I teach them, they teach theirs, forever and on, the song of the man who gave them life!

And, heel planted firmly, Šime swung about-right and, conjunctive to his first lightened stride, exclaimed until the syllables were awash with sea:

*Ну њрон плус о буа, лорие сон купе*

*Белл ки вула, ле лез'рон ну дансе*

*Ендре данс дансе, воије ком он данс*

*Come, дансе, имбразе...*

The notes of Šime’s song scattered omnidirectionally, entangling themselves in the palm fronds, dipping and drowning, shouts and hikes whittled down by the air to chirps and whispers by the strike of Faolainn’s bowed ear. Concurrently Miry’s smile relaxed into blankness, and he unblended his enervate fingers from the sand. He rose to an invirile slouch, as if the albatross of another’s judgment weighed imperturbably down upon him.

— *Oh, Lupe, quelle erreur tu as été!* he dashing a dune away grumbled. *À quoi je pensais?*

*Comment as-tu penser, imbécile...*

— ‘*Le Fou*’ and... *ut quo...* Faolainn shoeing his loafers tested.

— *Encore, tu peux essayer. Vous aurez des chances—*

— We will know, will know where we’ve come...

— *Ah, mais, vous voyez comment il la regarde, et les regardes, comment il nage dans leurs yeux—même cette sale fille facile, avec son enfant terrible!*

— Where we've come, where we are... but how? How else, than by... *Deo*, arriving!

— *Oh, mon Dieu, il va te tuer! Ah, il vous a déjà tué, peut-être ...*

— All avenues conclude, ehr... anagalogically—ha! We all greet the mortician in rather—ha!—poor spirits. Dissimilarities: bends, breaks, and burns...

— *Si on pouvait capter chaque heure, chaque instant de notre jeunesse, dans une bouteille, la présenter, et dit...*

— There is no 'not knowing,' no 'can knowing'—no, only 'knowing' and 'as of yet knowing,' i.e.: learning. We will learn... 'we will know'... what? Ehr...

—*Oh, non; nous ne serons plus rien. Sans plus... ah! Disparu, est-il presque! Hâter, hâter! Avec ses jambes, il sera difficilement attrapé! Allons-y!*

Had mobility enthralled Faolainn's shanks, he quitted their influence and halted; had he preliminarily halted, halted remained. Of either anterior modality heedless, he parked at the acclivity of revelation while, resolute to extrinsic course, Miry exacted several quickening paces in chase of the invisible Šime, thrum of his inception wavering threnodic, featherlike:

*Bhae bhae bhae-bea daeh dih-bho bah dea bea bah dho*

*Bho bho bho-bho bho dha bho-bah dha*

*Bhae bhae bhae-bea daeh dih-bho bah bhea bhea dah dho*

*Bho bho bho-bho bho bbho bbho bah bea bah bhea...*



Faolainn's fingers snapped:

— *Cognosco*—yes! *Ut quo imus, cognoscemus*—brilliant! Well—getting there, getting there... Yet... how does one know when 'there' they have arrived?

Impulse, whether it assumed form of the intravenous warmth surged by his sudden cognition, or the series of convective gusts pushing as it were a sail the hair on his head sternward, or appearance of an archetypal image subconsciously engaging an indeterminate object, impulse drove Faolainn to execute a turn about-face the moment following epiptaisma, a gesture that itself irritated his tumid little finger to whingeresulting effect, so that he stood succoring his hand in bent pose by his prolotion and fronting the pier, to grimace forward and note the pier's underside totally unpeopled. In applying scrutiny inversely deeper to his throbbing's abatement, Faolainn glaring through and past the pier's frame perceived not even their most nugatory trace in footprint, nor vague remote mirage. It was as though they had been subsumed into the atavistic and protean air about them, molecularly dismantled, become as discarnate and indestructible—yet ineludible—as Time itself.

— Odd, odd. Thought I heard... Faolainn mumbled, unwinding to full height. Tut—inconsequence, 'sol. Wonder... he whispered in a tone suspicious of the oxygen itself he ventilated, his loafers initiating mechanically forward again, wonder if they could have been... brothers? Night and day, a frog and—never been too familiar with the slavish myself, but, ehr... incontestably as much brothers as myself and my gadfly, who—Faolainn repositioned his skull midaction—no, not again; if he had been there, you'd see him. If he

comes petering along, begging lenience, he comes. If not: *sumus ubi sumus*. But, something about a cow, or a wolf... adopted? Brothers, surely, something more, as much siblings as the adopted—oh, *ecfututa est...*

Not far succeeding the pier there cropped up a hindrance to Faolainn's adherence to possibly hounding until its eventual termination, and aesthetically climactic was it to, the shoreline's aforethen-concinnity: a cliff, with no visible (unwittingly submersed in tide) circumvallating track at its base; the nadir, the final edge of shore masking behind it all the geographical and physical mystique imaginable which Faolainn had distantly descried in the early minutes of his absconsion. But one tactic existed to overcome the intractable obstruction, he gleaned, incarnate in a narrow furrow of sand straggling up through the verbena-sedge-and-saltbrush-clung hillside preserving behind it a road and neighborhood. He took to the furrow without hesitation, the brush, dense and rigid, slicking, biting at his ankles. He swallowed, summoning unintelligibly the initial verse of a framed song dressing the foyer wall of his family home:

— *Bhí an gealach gheal...*

Mónika Faolainn's three gravidities resulted predictably in three progeny: Solomon, the eldest, and Áine, the youngest, forming the lateral ends to Renton, their medial. It was of an importance most unimpeachable to the children's progenitors—their father, most vehemently—that they garner at the earliest age appreciable a devout pertinacity to no inferior than one of their parentage's three combined tongues (excluding, naturally, the language of commerce they might in the everyday society of their residence apprehend). The

months ensuing the eighth anniversary of Faolainn's ensoulement Fergal, the *paterfamilias*, after supptime and an unexpected desert afterwards requested his *chlann*'s attendance in his study to expatiate the security of their forthcoming linguistic inculcation. Given the Gaelhellegermantic amalgam foreordained by their parentage, three options solely prevailed upon to be appointed to the two children kicking disobediently—though attentively—their infantile legs beneath oversized chairs, and Faolainn, himself posted silently at the executive's corner. They were, Fergal concluded his lengthy perlocution, to each undertake and master in afterschool tutelage one of the three: *Gaeilge*, *Latinae*, or *Ελληνικά*. Two caveats, however, would regulate their elections: the first, that no two children may acquire a language preselected by another on the cause of, as Fergal mirthfully asserted:

— ...eliminating the devilish feasibility of some conspiracy against me, or your mother—or, *worser* even, each other;

and the second, that *Latinae* may in propriety be reserved to the eldest Faolainn offspring, who, though endowed with the tongue's preexisting intimacy, would inevitably experience prolonged retardation of vocal apprehension as impedimental byproduct of his recent plummet and resultant condylar fracture. Áine and Renton being tots submitted without protestation—rhapsodically, even—as did Faolainn, whose reaction, however, obligated a blushing, instinctive appraisal of the delicate bruised splotch right of his ear. Persisting in the interests of rectitude primacy of preference was deferred to the feminine party who, foreseeably, in the trend of emulating her mother (first in fashion, then peculiarity, now in speech), optioned *Ελληνικά*, leaving the tacitly predetermined *Gaeilge* to Renton.

Elections settled, Fergal and Mónica the sequel set about procuring suitable instructors. Over a week's course Fergal wrote inquiries, posted classifieds, and probed partnerial engineers, while Mónica received addresses, performed further inquiries, conducted the interview of tutors, and engaged their ideal applicants, these feats and more all achieved in the intervals by their respective industries unoccupied. A week's development since their conference culminated in each child's inceptive foreign bloviation about the suppertable—omitting Faolainn who, although not predisposed to prating, would not for another cycle possess the operative capacity.

The denomination of 'contravener' better suiting the 'created' since their first act of blind defiance, the proclivity to defy authority, schoolmaster, tutor, warden, and expressly progenitor induces all children. Or, such a claim would the three junior Faolainns corroborate when, upon the eldest's first unpracticed and tonally mercurial recalibrations of speech, they conspired immediately to challenge their father's precautions and instruct one another in their chosen tongue. Whether during their promenades home from tutoring, or their heavyshoed slogs from school thereto, or to and from the schoolhouse itself—all under sedulous governance of the eldest sibling—the trio would exchange daily between themselves their appraisals of lexica, grammar, idioms, phraseologies, and more for conspiracy's sole interdicted rapture; the lengthy walks chasing *σπίτι*, *domus*, or *baile* from *σχολείο*, *scholae*, or *scoil* became subversive, efforts of insurrection, the sight of a *κουνέλι* or a *cuniculus* or a *coinín* translating the timorous lagomorph beyond its neutral existence into the very prosperity of their exertions. Inexplicably they were discovered huddled beneath one another's sheets exchanging whispers—or, at times, left uncovered until morning rays

strewed dully through their linens—intruded upon to reactions of sudden darteyed taciturnity, or disappeared in tandem for hours, their bookbags mysteriously evanesced with them. Never were their children before, nor would they endure after, more clandestine and successful in their connivance, more deviously manipulative, and more suspicious—yet, perspicacious, inseperable, steadfast and supportive, than in the first three scholastic years of their linguistic inculcation. Matters progressed precisely as their parents might have hoped.

With but one cycle outstanding the closure of the third scholastic year, Fergal again enjoined on his *chlann*, sate of daily bread, for convocation in his study, where both parents salved their sibilations by asking: would any of the three, by chance, find any allure in contributing to a convivial tournament? Victorious recompense—and there would be one victor at least—in the sum amount of two sterling bezants, they announced, would be offered to the winner of a contest; should unanimous determination of a duumvirate occur, said bezants would be apportioned between the pair.

The trio's eyes illumined, each turning to one another in titillation until Áine in her irrepressible pertness tripped forward and entreated lispingly her parents please stop bedevilling them and disclose the contest's nature and how might they prevail upon the two bezants—or a half.

Mónika shone and stood her daughter up, dusting her knees and straightening her askew dress before aligning her with her brothers and expounding: it would be a competition of translation, the object of their translations being a song each of their choice, from common contrivance, into the vernaculars of their respective concentrations. They would be awarded exactly one cycle from the current date in which to choose, translate, and memorize their

selections. They would convene similarly in the parlor on the date of that cycle's lapse and recite before the household their translation, the victor adjudicated by they two. The stipulations for undivided victory were, however, more complex than the children might grasp.

On establishing the tournament with the children's sealed union in mind, the pair identified a significant hurdle to its realization: namely, that their proficiency in either's tongues never achieved their aspired heights of fluency. Both might equitably adjudicate the translation of their likespoken children, but neither might preside unfailingly over all three. Fergal at first proposed Áine's exclusion from competition, on the basis of intersexual rivalry's imprudence—that her delicate gender had no business vying in contest against her brutish counterparts—a proposition such that Mónica emphatically declined. In opposition, Mónica nominated a bipartite solution: that the evaluation encompass several qualitative criteria—translative fidelity, metrical accuracy, and performative vim—which might enable multifaceted adjudication for the nonfluent; and that the prize be considered not two whole bezants by committee bequeathed, but one bezant bequeathed in whole from each. Each parent would select their champion, no more than two, no fewer than one. Fergal, no doubt with the lispings demureness of his daughter in mind, advocated the conferment of a consolatory honor to the unlucky party(ies), to which Mónica concurred. Guidelines approved and recorded, they christened in clinch the pact that neither would endeavour to aid, favor, or prejudice against for aught reason beneath the sun any language.

The children ardently acquiesced and, exhibiting behavior quite uncharacteristic to their last three years, disunited instantaneously, and made them hastily to their individual

spaces. And though performing unhampered the offices of their fraternity in the subsequent cycle—even to transcending degree—their patent disunion, incited indisputably by promotion of the bezants, had been sown.

Whatever influence, be it external, subconscious, or internal, the paternal Faolainns found the inherence of bias inexpungible, and at many times, and in many subtleties, reneged on their concluding precept of their covenant. Fergal's halfhour daily recital from the Vulgate with his eldest protracted its lesson leisurely to near on an hour by the cycle's conclusion—with serendipitously mickle focus on *Canticum Moysis* and other hymns. Renton was curiously glimpsed a frequent attendant at Fergal's evenfall *búsúcaí* sessions, habitually erasing and correcting his father's scribbled lyrics to parchment in the library's waning jalousie glow—lyrics serendipitously set in *Gaeilge*—while Áine peeled vegetables at the kitchen table, regaled by Mónica's mariner-, giant-, and hoplite-inhabited ballads, circling the kitchen in the cook's assistance—ballads, serendipitously, mastered by Moinka in her father's tongue only.

Little want of lingual matter involved the children's meanwhile mingling. The two younger imitated their elder in this regard, whom they in juvenile ambivalence always aped when faced with situations of deportmental turbidity. Their inference, naturally, of his coolness apropos erewhile communal edification, dictated that all specifics of their tutelage be hung abeyant until event of the champion's or champions' bestowal. This reservation they independently assimilated and extrapolated to their translational enterprises in themselves, understanding implicitly that their brother's tepidity to sollicitation rightly receive integration as well—though want were they for his musical aptitude and vocabulary. Their afterschool

discourses were in topicality relegated to sweets, meals, classroom scuttlebutt, play, and all other matter of the prepubescent tedium to which they each displayed a visible discomfiture. Their evenings were suddenly spent apart, in the consortia of their parents, or hunching over their travails, often to the effect of strained slumber.

Renton in particular had selected a song that, in the course of his rendering, proved flummoxing to his capabilities on several accounts. Such agitation, exacerbated additionally by the solitariness from his elder brother—his sibling most endeared—he perchance decided too unbearable, insomuch as it drove him to sully their unspoken pact by imploring upon him for his superior guidance.

— Solly, Renton chirped, sidling midway through the crack in young Faolainn’s door. Solly, are you busy?

Faolainn rested his nose on the shoulder of his blue spring jacket, then swiveled partially to rest his elbow on his chairback. He signed, checking his timepiece.

— What is it, Ren? Faolainn inflated, crumpling the sketches on his desk. I’m very busy working, you know.

— Oh, forgive me, Solly, but, he said positioning with his wan fingers the door midway over his face, but—and I don’t wish to annoy you—but I need your help.

— Ah! Faolainn uppity remarked. And what is it you might need older brother’s help with?

— My song. I—

— Hup! I cannot help with that, Ren, Faolainn starting back to his desk.

— But Solly!—



— Let me ask: let us say I help you, the elder held his inquisitor’s stance, and you won— both coins. Now: do you think you would you remember me? Do you think you would remember my help with those bezants weighting down your pocket? Posh, I would not!

— Oh, but of course! Renton exclaimed, stepping fully into frame, I would give you as much as you would want—even half! Winning even one bezant would be wonderful!

— Oh, why should you need my help? Faolainn laughed. You’re all words already!

— Solly, please! I would help you if you needed it—and I wouldn’t tell a one of it!

— *Solum verbis, solum verbis...* he recited glibly, placing fully his back to Renton.

— Please!

Faolainn ignored Renton as long as he could before a tremble auditively overtook the sniffling boy. Faolainn sighed, nose again contacting his shoulder as tears ran rivulets down Renton’s face.

— Out with it, then! How shall I help?

Renton gasped, and the storm ceased. He raced to embrace his benefactor.

— Now, now—

— It wasn’t much—not even the words, no, but their definitions, for words I don’t have— see, liberating his hands to uncrumple a pocketed leaf, these ones: ‘tempest,’ ‘quivering,’ ‘lo-lore’—

— ‘Lour,’ Faolainn corrected, lending an officious eye to the leaf.

— ‘Lour,’ and ‘so-lace.’ What do they mean, Solly?

— ‘Tempest,’ oh, well that’s a storm—a fierce one, at that—‘quivering,’ you’re quivering when its cold—shivering—‘lour.’ Well, you were louring just now, weren’t you, crying as you were, *frowning*, I think... and, ehr... what was the last one?

— ‘So-lace.’

— ‘Solace,’ ehr... well, it’s when you’re made to feel bad and something makes your feeling better, a, ehr... Oh, I can’t think of it now. It’s a... damn! erupted Faolainn, hammering the desk.

— It’s a ‘comfort?’

— A comfort! Damn, yes! Why for Jove’s sake I couldn’t—

— You’re my ‘solace,’ Solly, Renton cut short his words in an embrace. Thank you, brother. You’re so bloody smart—smartest one of us all. You’ll win the bezants for sure—I know it!

— Oh, well, Faolainn patting the small of Renton’s sweated back, never you mind; all in a brother’s duties and all. But here, tell me—he said, pulling back—I’ll not tell anyone; it’ll be our secret. Tell me: what song have you picked?

— Ha! You would like to know, wouldn’t you, Solly? You’ll have to find out same as the others!

The tides of their resolution roused and retired disproportionately until tourney day, when the clepsydra of their passions brimmed with the overflow of callow worries—not the least of all the eldest, who filliped by an unconquerable impulse was driven to exhaust the uttermost bound of his ability in demonstrating himself. Aplomb, or credulity, dispossessed Renton and Áine that morning of any blatant doubtful aura as the family meandered the rooms, dining to parlor, Renton and Áine seating themselves neatly at the hearth’s clearing,

Faolainn in avuncular fidelity directing with clammed, shaking hands the limping, mute Giddy, then Mónica, whom not one of the contestants doubted would favor her feminine heir, and lastly Fergal, whom in the nonpartisan procedure of polishing his spectacles entered with nary a look at his any scion, presaging he irrefutably the more unsure Judge of the two. For the true trial, the children each deduced—and Áine obliged—had in earnest always lain between the two sons. For the first time that morning the brother's eyes met, in petrification.

Fergal panegyricized the event, interlarding his speech with no fewer than four languages, thanking his winsome and spousal collaborator, recognizing the diligence of his ingenious participants (and himself for partaking in their generation), and bidding thanks to his nodding brother for feeling hale enough to indulge his darling niece and nephews, then esteemed the two luminescent bezants on the hearth mantleshef before conferring ascendancy of performance upon his eldest. Faolainn, hissing cursorily and fearfully prickled, took his position before the hearth and, much to his alleviation, melodized without a hitch. He had begun, and in an eye's flicker time skipped and the men rose in applause. Mónica offered praise—but hunched down quickly to hearten her youngest against their imminent presentations.

As prevised, Áine played to her mother's affections, nominating a brief, modest nursery hymn known incontestably as Mónica's favorite. Hers received general approval from her father and uncle as well, and the room receded gently into quiet as Renton assumed her vacancy and Áine assumed an exempted vantage from her mother's lap.

He panted several times, his eyes reconnoitering the room, praying encouragement from the patient, stoic eyes sticking back on him, then furrowed his eyelids and began, off-

tempo, chittering and slow, a song sadly beyond the faculties of his musical ineptitude: his favorite turn, overheard at a traveling fair months not long before:

*Cibé áit shúil mé, soir ná siar, cé thosaigh cinniùit cur grainc*

*Ba sí sólás go fóill domsa i huair haigneach an bhróin*

*Nuair a lasc ainbhthí ár mbád haigneach agus bhrís a seol ag crith*

*Níor sheas foirm ach bhean amháin an stoirm: rós na Allendale*

He had only underway the second verse before Faolainn's perceptions dulled from constraint into insensation. Insensible Faolainn remained, even after Renton repeated the final chorus and resumed abashedly his seat aside, and yet still after the judges adjourned themselves to a closet and reappeared, after painful deliberation, to award to the eldest son and only daughter their bezants. It was a cloud insolubly coating Faolainn's senses, a stupefacient inspiring him about the room, as potent as he stood beside Áine at the hearth to receive his bezant as when Renton tore away from Giddy's unhandy condolences to honor his brother's success.

Faolainn felt naught: not the cuffs of his own shirt, heard not sounds of words, felt not the cloth on his brother's back. Somehow, the afore uninhabitable spectra of his sentience had amalgamated, or denatured, beneath some unfathomable impetus, which compounded the very essence of his being into one primordial abstraction, an actuality orbiting one thought, one action, one utterance: he had transformed during Renton's recital, temporarily as service to its end, into the vessel of one, monomaniacal impulse. And in this state young Faolainn

brooked coolly his brother's praise and offered, in return, his prize for private inspection later that evening in the backyard.

Renton's contusions and lacerations would require two weeks' convalescence, a period approximately onethird his brother's confined penalization. Providence permitted the drubbing occur at the start of school's midyear hiatus, thereby allaying the efforts of concealing Renton's recuperation and his brother's confinement into more manageable fictions. The bezant was in effect revoked from its victor the instant of Renton's discovery behind the well, after much intractable querying of a dull and disoriented Faolainn. In the hours confined to his chamber Faolainn performed a mandatory penance, and in the sparse respite beyond his cloister he reconciled his transgression through service and prayer. And though he at times felt the pardoning hand of his maker dispersing his shameful pall, the clemency of his brother proved wholly elusive; Faolainn was, in Renton's vitiated heart, irredeemable.

The morning the physician granted Renton leave of bedrest, Faolainn entered sullenly the foyer before sunrise with a brush and pail—floors being parceled from the maid's labors for his punishment—and in resting the supplies at his feet he stood facing the stairway wall to find a new addition to the welcoming decor, one hung as latterly as the night previous, reflecting back his lugubrious features: Renton's song, written in Mónica's stroke, elegantly framed beneath a sheet of polished glass.

Never would he forget its words, and never would Faolainn divulge the accident that hung them there. So often had the translation in passing through his family's threshold beguiled his eyes that, in years' matter, it impressed itself against his memory as twere it his own—better, even. By adulthood he could neither recount the words he had written that spring, nor the very title of his song itself, all vestige of his achievement revoked; Renton's tortured lines exacted an arbitrary ruling over his involutions to the day, springing forth in volatility from their skirted recesses, as they had in his mounting the uphill brushpath, untenable still in his removal streetside and arrival atop the seawall:

— *Ó, tá cinniúit ar ceangal mo ghrá léi, Rós na Allendale...* his voice trailed, captured and spirited-on by the blows of the censurable salutatory wind atop the seawall. He shivered, looping defensively the eyes of his unbuttoned shirt and, conscientious of his finger, buttressed himself with a cross of the arms. Tendrilous cracks of distended concrete flowed like fracturing veins below his feet. The shortleaf vegetation, the grass and arborescence, the houses, newformed and skeletal both, all entities advanced in permanence, waved seemingly in the gust where Faolainn despite his traveled fatigue upheld firm. A flatroofed glasspane shelter, he observed, shuddered down the road. Brothers, yes, he muttered, they must have been brothers, as he strove toward the shelter, casteyes reserved, only such injuries might be, *ehr... fraternal...*

The wooden bench housed within the shelter provided him a much-needed rest, an interruption against the gusts, though, by ear, inescapable in their entirety. He spied a black and white timetable tacked in its locked case on the wall and reviewed it, distraight, resting equilaterally left foot on right knee in reading. Four columns scaled the sheet, spacing,

kerning, and ligature tightly packed, evocative of striation, through which Faolainn pored several strenuous moments until pinpointing the cell: an affair of minutes, threeandtwenty, the next arrival of transport.

The panes were thick, their handblown make every square foot obscuring as it were bedaubed the breezy external world, gushing, intertwining, cascading expressively unto itself, against which they guarded; a cycloramic tapestry wavering green, blue, and grey, no element inextricable of itself, all strokes brushed in one eternal, deliberate essay. The motion of any scenic piece motioned at the action of another, and another, all swelling unaccountably enchained. Therefore, when a meager stroke—fiber, note—undulated, reverberated distantly apart from Faolainn, so miniscule, so concatenated were its undulations, its reverberations, that the rearrangements occurring beyond this muddled glass prism materialized themselves not to him—not until they transcended their vehicle, transposing *him*, shambling, abstract, and bedraggled, into the median of Faolainn’s scene.

The perhaps most unappealing element of this tapestry had extended itself into Faolainn’s ingress sporting a vagrant’s design: beltlow might the man’s saltpeter whiskers have drooped had a belt he worn; the saltpeter hair encircling its mane about his ears retreated from atop his skull in fealty to the crown of skin he gauntly stretched over his skull; his ragged habiliment was a bilious green, medieval in its cut, and pungent of micturition; and a canvas sack, presumably enclosing his every corporeal affect, hung rapaciously stomachward.

So unostentatiously silent had been the vagrant’s approach that Faolainn unrecognized him even as he bestrode the shelter, recording with an impotent jolt his

materialization in the moment his features at once sharpened themselves. Yet, a murmuring had preceded materialization, the shambling, undecipherable notes of a song, low, reminiscently fractious, yet in febrility irretrievable. The weak, colorless silver of his roaming eyes swung down on the shelter's inhabitant:

— ...*Ahn wundroon ubsodoune thæ wehrulda renegatso*—bejees, allail! Seer, wull yeh spahir yhe ah grottes fore thæ sonnc? Aye askhee wohlln ah grottes, ah grottes wohlln fore thæ povrayle.

— 'Ah grottes?' Faolainn perplexedly reiterated, then clicked, Oh, and produced his pocketbook. Say, producing an eleemosynary note to alacritous receipt and falling servant again to his patronage, what you were just singing there, I couldn't make it out. What was it?

— Aye, næ sonnc bu'minne owen, seer.

— Ah, well—

— *Thæ wehrulda renegatso bæst*—næ sonnc bu'minne owen, aye, ahn ah sonnc bu'haine auerrt ahn nottinells ... ah sonnc, yhebeh haffen, seer?

— You're asking, Faolainn puzzled seriously, the heretofore amusement escaping his lips, if I have 'a song?'

His eyes alighted momentarily from the vagrant to his ankle in frank contemplation. Quietude overtook him. His countenance utterly reordered as he tilted it back to the vagrant, frail and dumb.

— No. I don't.

— By Hadohnay's tythe, the vagrant, beard blown in the wind, exclaimed, eurichinne behaffen a sonnc! Whæ bileofen thæ ædicceon, whæ bileofen tæschække, tæsolffen fræ thæ



leppe... *renegatso bæst*—oych, fore yhe kahrisme, athow, aye thoncæs yhe—oych!—ahn  
whobee Hadohnay ahtittlin yhe?

— My name? Oh... Faolainn melancholy clenched his duplicitous tongue. Dolon, Dolon  
Corvo, the question instinctually following: And yourself?

— Lahehrd La—oych! he exclaimed, bombastic—prydit mesihlf, yhe dihd amolls illuren mi!  
Cannits-ay, cannits-ay—naye, cannits-ay!

— Oh, ehr... ‘Laird?’ Do I have it?

— Aye—ahn nottinells, seer, yhebeh haffen! *Renegatso bæst! Renegatso bæst!*—

The vagrant Laird in indignant fit exited the shelter sanctuary, shouting as it were  
imprecation his next verse, perambulating vigorously mereward beyond the corruptive glass  
to remerge with the exterior world’s tessellation, Faolainn left watching feebly through the  
mullions, ensconced in panechatter and decrypting fruitlessly Laird’s words:

*Næressin’ couldee fine t’all*

*N’ees o’art’s conten*

*Næ’ouse, næ’oame, næde wellin’-pase*

*Buh’wundroon’ frætee wehn!*

In his words’ interpretive strain—and perhaps unsettled bodily by the freak encounter  
and violent dismissal, a weariness, torpefaction, devoured Faolainn. He slouched, traced the  
*P* cicatrizing madder on the glabrous hilt of his foot, clocked repeatedly the passage of time,  
and sighed. He assessed his image, or deformity, in the glass, itself assessing, reflecting, what

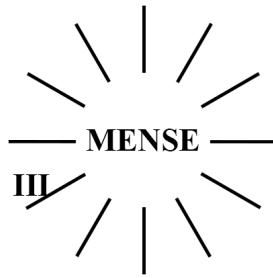
a mirror could not: if ever before he had ‘a sonne,’ something had divested him of its belonging, some memory uncatrized, oversensitive and raw, had forsaken the dismal visage peering opaquely back.

Another image, one over which the visage superimposed, contended itself against superimposition. Faolainn’s features beneath the risen wraith’s prominence murkily deliquesced, breath’s facility thereafter escaping him. Automation had resumed, triggering his rise.

— *Ut quo imus, cognoscemus...*

Into the costal wind enwrapping the shelter he dove, noting first, as with the piershaded brothers, his recent confabulator untraceably vanished. The truculent air hitherto strafing him, the shelter, and the coast swept violently, then quelled, unprompted, and he was aware of the ocean severalhundred yards away, its vision arriving secondary to its stale, brackish perfume: a swathe of feathery cloud overhanging the ocean’s observable terminus, its waters overexposed in sigil illumination there, burning white, moistures blending, interloping infinitely unto firmament; and, overlooking this seascape, an ancient promontory. Mystically Faolainn intoned:

— *Cum venimus videamus.*



—then fold back the clouds in God’s starry heaven  
Beholding a world  
In activity perfectly vibrant:  
See like earth-hewn needles the mountains  
Spin through their woolly mantle, ducking,  
Cutting, weaving in the globe’s turn  
The brilliant shawl, new day’s rosy glow;  
Hear the voice of Nature string  
With the cries of excited younglings  
Together the anxious boughs’ dewy-eyed greetings  
Waking them, tender laughter  
Of mothers hurriedly in succor  
Scrubbing their necks while men scrub adept  
With honed chisels soft mussels couched in shells,  
All instruments in her harmony bound honey-sweet;  
And feel the many-handed wind  
Brush coolly across all creation  
Like gentle kisses blown on the great orb’s ascent,  
Rushing to impart boundless ardor  
To all upon which its light glances.

On such an orb, tired, to unknown tightness wound,  
Which having been released has spun  
Times countless and manifold,  
Forget not that all that move across its winding track must relax!  
So be it leaf or stone, beast or man,  
Each in what manner it breathes,  
Dog, child, mother, and father,  
Is a sojourner, made and unmade.  
Ai, but as to what end unwinds their globe  
Is to them and all a mystery beyond!  
And so all things upon this gyre gyres, too,  
Strange to all in their spinning,  
In its spinning to all strange, but One.  
For to each gyre, a Man apart,  
Is private strangeness given,

That which here spins him where others might not,  
And there is cramped where others freely turn;  
And while some rebuff the rarity of their spin,  
Others embrace warmly the bounteous sky,  
Itself embracing all in Mobility.  
Perhaps that divers gyres roam this world  
With strangeness their own wind it on,  
And ever on, weaving the paths of Her immortal sojourn.

Yet, in his own sojourn there  
For each event the traveler cannot account,  
For to the grooves of its own track  
He is only wise, and wise not-nimbly,  
Much less so to the strange grooves of others.  
Wont, therefore they are, to collide,  
Or miss, or oft if their nimbleness betrays,  
Into mud or uncertain terrain  
Bound and lodge themselves.  
(The very virtue of their feet, it seems,  
Is left to chance and accident!)  
Though through the clouds and swirling air  
All likesame appear, all travelers across an earthly bridge,  
All pilgrims on their pilgrimage.

To one journey known she joins a bended ear,  
One now having many days unwound,  
And unwinding yet, below mid-air  
Which holds mightily this truth.  
Players and forces aplenty though there were  
Which, fashioning this sojourner,  
Plotted and wound his journey decades even  
Before he possessed the limbs to foot it,  
There was one event for him,  
As surely for every thing in like motion there is,  
That which by simple accident  
Wound for him a path of fast direction.  
But where, in what direction then,  
And now, do his feet wander...?

Ah, turning here he wanders along the sea  
Following the wash's coaxing lure,  
Then turns again retracing step,  
Lost, maddened by uncertainty,  
As if surveying dream's salty airs.

Now, in dreamlike enchantment,  
Time itself he has abandoned,  
And with each foot a separate day touches,  
As an eye a piece peers two different scenes,  
All the while Time beside him still.  
And to the ever-changing likeness of a dream,  
Each doorway he enters he exits not,  
Its hinges hung on the breeze,  
The man exiting not whom entered,  
Unwinding gyre, nor fearless sojourner,  
Nor doughty, clever Sol—but a child  
Slender-ankled, rushing adventurous  
Into the purpling horizon of his youth.

Like an oar-deprived vessel a fatherless household  
Becomes one of whimsical direction.  
Such was the house of Faolainn  
When in his eighth spring Sol,  
Wrapping arms around Aine and Renton,  
Watched in tearful quiet the long drive up  
Which his mother guided Fergal  
To the cart beside their villa gates.  
It was a sight beneath Time and Memory forgotten  
By the three youths upon the reversal of that image,  
Fergal's return, past two months from the day.  
For a departing parent to a child, even temporarily,  
Is a skybound cloud, billowing, one moment fading,  
Frozen, of definite and dependable form the next,  
But gone, too soon always gone.

Answers there were few to the children's questions,  
Where, and when, and why had father gone away  
—but what answers could truly satisfy  
The unquenchable wonder of a child's mind?  
In the first days oft did Mónica  
Their father's return assure, her answers slipping like grain  
Through the still-weak grasps of their infant minds;  
But with days of sowing to no effect  
A strength that held her once departed,  
Or a weakness, like one held aback,  
Soon returned, and the burden from mother's mind welled over  
Into the palms of eldest son.  
A language between them they shared,

Not those of their parents' insistence,  
But the tongue of innocence,  
Which with his fineness of touch  
Sol worked Mónica's responses down to pieces child-sized.  
With clarity he understood his father's departure,  
An excursion of necessary travail,  
Was temporary, yet, as when one says  
*Soon, we will see one another again*, undefined;  
And where his siblings could see only absence,  
The swelling perspicacity of Sol's age  
Knew survival demanded life and presence's sacrifice.  
On those restless first eves did son  
Like father at siblings' bedsides sit,  
Spinning fairied and monstrous yarns,  
Telling them in a snuff of the bedside lamp  
— Close your eyes and he'll return soon, I promise. Goodnight, *óiche mhaith*.

Though present always was mother at their bedside,  
Duty, to surely put to rest and wake their young  
In father resided solely;  
Must not a vessel's sails,  
Beaten at daylong by ocean wind,  
At times proper, disengage,  
And doing so pass onus onto oar?  
Where therefore Mónica was at stop and start of day  
The twins' thoughts did not wander.  
Only Sol, who had invested in him  
Those fatherly chores, to wake and dress the children,  
Noticed the subtle currents of his mother's malaise.  
Curious at first her sight must have been,  
Alive afore with song, and dialogue,  
In that first week turning soft and speechless,  
Her freeness of step become measured,  
Her lightness of eye dulled,  
As if like their father she languished  
In the wearied stages of disappearance;  
Even more so to see the cook at work alone;  
And stranger yet at break of fast  
To observe her late and damp  
Returning home a rainy morn.  
And while the babes laughed at their mother,  
Who chuckled strangely herself,  
Water filling the basin from her wrung-out hair,  
That not once had the children seen their mother

From waking to breakfast to Sol occurred.

O, what unease childish curiosity may produce!  
The sojourner growing within  
Must have been tireless at young Sol,  
For like a healing wound  
From inspecting these changes he could not desist.  
A creak in the floors above  
Had awoken him early before,  
Yet was of essence to their home,  
And causing him no unrest,  
Was left at the shorefront's edge  
As he glided back into sleep.  
But now became the creaking an odd thing,  
A newcomer strangeness in the flurries of change  
A thing not ignorable, believed natural,  
But a change itself, or possibly more.  
At first sound he roused, listening to the creak,  
Hearing it move about, tour the master room,  
Then magically without the opening of a door,  
Travel about the home, down the stairs, across the hall,  
Like a questing angel sent from on-high  
Up to and away from his very door,  
And as was its arrival, in an instant be gone.  
Wrapping a coverlet about his trembling form,  
His mother he descried through the window,  
Listing back across the haze of their dewy yard,  
Past the ancient well he could not near for how deep it was,  
Over the risen babbling of the eastbound stream,  
And into the cover of newly-green trees,  
A wet ring crawling up her dress.

Seven mornings he was witness to the scene,  
Performance and movement adjusted each instance  
In humorous imprecision, but the same scene,  
Same action, each dawn performed in secrecy.  
When after his mother on the seventh morn  
Had given herself up to wooded vagary,  
Sol found himself unequipped in fending back  
The allures of mystique, and, arraying watchfully,  
Left himself a trail of unpracticed creaks  
Past his door to the twins' across the hall.  
The soundness of their dreams assured,  
Their door was shut and turned his creaking trail toward back door.

Hushed and cautious like shadows were son and mother led,  
Through wet-leaf tacks of sighing trees,  
And hole-worn tapestries of silken webs dancing in sunrise,  
The gesturing of an invisible hand coaxing them on and out,  
And down into the languorous mists of a humble gully.  
An ill-fated effort by the son, in truth,  
For in his pursuit had Sol fallen a stade behind,  
The stream below casting steamy waves into the trunks,  
Each a coat-weight and windmill on his sight,  
So that by that time he passed the trees,  
When barefoot he had broken upon the site  
Where he had glimpsed Mónica before,  
She was nowhere to be seen.  
Shedding his coat, which clung to his back, so damp it was,  
Sol like a blind man braved  
The advancing mists to the stream's lap,  
The water's body aethereal amidst the clouds,  
A spirit more like, advancing,  
Its song lulling as lemon balm,  
Its breath sultry and wet.

His slight feet he cleansed at the water's edge,  
Then fell to the Earth, watching mud and leaves  
Break apart at the stream's command,  
Noticing himself in the ripples of its surface  
As the dark cloud slipped downstream,  
His image whole, yet dark and swarming.

Stuck there in his gaze he lay  
Until light warmed the scene,  
And the stream breathed calm.

It was then he saw her, when in day's warming glow  
Sister night's obscurity flew, its drapery with it raised,  
Exposing all players off-mark.  
Or, much was the feeling for tired-eyed Sol:  
Through the stream's alighting fumes,  
On a ledge beneath a gently bowing yew,  
Stood the statue of Mónica, frozen,  
All vapor of memory swallowed by the air.  
And though no faint wind can topple a statue,  
Some force unseen assailed her,  
And with all its strength, brought rigid Mónica to her knees.



Spy's role in that instant forgotten,  
Sol in a terror across the water flew,  
And scaling the gully's ledge fell before Mónica,  
Crying the tears of a child beaten without reason,  
Of one with every reason to wail,  
Yet knowing and understanding not why.  
Sol as iron shard to lodestone drawn  
To his mother fell straightaway,  
The wild grass by her wild tresses enwrapped,  
An object secreted against her chest.  
His tears did soon abate, so strange she must have seemed,  
He waiting her release—which soon, too, came  
When slowly her head raised  
Bearing a face lovely yet tear-eyed too.

'What is it held to your chest,'  
Sol asked first a question out of place,  
And pulling it away she showed him a flower,  
Unencountered to him, but like the moon brilliant, fragile, and pale.  
'There's someone been leaving them,' she said,  
And he felt the wetness of her tear  
When she stood him, kissing his cheek again and again.  
'Someone's been leaving them?'  
He echoed, glancing down to the stream.  
'Here,' several moments past she chirped,  
And taking his hand led him away.  
With intent of step they descended,  
Leaving behind them the warming stream,  
Trespassed the treeline in quiet,  
Where moving with lethargy at the forest heart  
The stream's last mists, all things by them obscured,  
Climbed blindly to their doom.

Into this blindness strange Mónica guided Sol,  
His each footstep a guess, hesitant and unsure.  
Pity to travelers world-round,  
Who, pursuing their journey's end,  
Are marooned amidst a vaporous sea.  
Pity to all afoot, striplings, little more,  
Who with an end know not in which direction to bear.  
Pity to those with no end,  
Yet direction driving them on:  
They are all leaves of endive caught on the wind.

Is there in the history of malediction  
A curse viler than tireless uncertainty?  
Motion of one's limbs, with no knowing why,  
Driven forward, with no knowing where,  
The burn of urgency, but with all time dismantled?  
The curse of a humid cloud bedewing baffled Sol's hair;  
The curse of a cloud thickset in Sol's troubled mind?  
A cloud into which a trusting child wandered,  
And found himself lost within, even as a man?

What clarity to him comes  
Is scenery flashing past,  
What figures he can descry,  
Passing into and out of the light,  
Though light were dark, they pass, each image:  
Now a promontory, jutting out to sea,  
Soon imposed by rough bark of tree;  
The hand of a mother soon lover's;  
A flower ignited paints the sky fantastic with color.  
What is sight? What is memory?  
A sequence of visions, running,  
Blurred together before a rumbling car,  
Sojourner gazing queasily on, his ticket crumpled and forgotten.  
Ah, and past the portal, when station appears,  
Then these scenes run with impossible speed,  
And the sojourner sees what he believed a growing light is dark,  
And realizes of a sudden the spiraling of the tracks,  
That his sojourn had taken him downward, not up,  
Its rails upon a diving screw.

\* \* \*

Was there ever a man who loving women  
Did not by some travail give them chase?  
The hour their souls first toward one another  
In the early act of weaving bent,  
She stood with a kerchief tied across her eyes,  
Her youthful charges in joined hands circling,  
Singing the tune of their game,  
Deirdre, 'Deirdle-Deirdy,' taunting playfully.

A mistress of fair and easy rule, Deirdre O'Flainne,

Who, like the fox, wily as is wise,  
Saw in diversion what power there resides,  
A painless prod, a sugarless sweet,  
To reward and inspire learning.  
What meager likeness is a fox to she!  
No, fair and easy, as a modest river is  
To seldom swell and overflow,  
But winding down a gentle incline  
Flows smoothly and with not an effort's guide;  
Yes, and like a river, though inviting in its placidity,  
Surges with motion undying!  
Oh, to be a mill on her banks!  
What fruits might her influence produce!  
To feel in her but a moment's wash,  
Knowing what power nature instills!  
Better still, to be as those juvenile charges in her hands  
Ferried into order from primitivity,  
Experiencing not rocking, nor roughness of chop,  
Nor even the slightest violation to their cheer,  
As effortlessly she floats them downstream.  
Where a month afore the syllabary of their stuttering tongues  
Was mystery, daily now they recited theirs—and three!  
Where the celestial bodies had been not an hour before  
But foreign nameless spheres puncturing eye-light in the dark,  
To the children they were now in name,  
Size, and tincture conned, unforgettable as their own names.  
Such is testament to the benefit of her carriage,  
And fount of the fruit her children recessed in with glee.

Each word a honeyed pluck, they circling sang  
*For why do you come here, Deirdle-Deirdy?*  
And gaily after them she flew, refraining  
*Why, I'm making a lace of wool and thread!*

At this time it passed that Sol passing by,  
Free at last from the day's wearing lectures,  
Heard a voice beyond the hedge-walls lining his walk,  
That by its very sound enchanted him,  
Stalling his long-yearned journey home.  
And through an aperture discovered in the wall,  
He leaning close glimpsed Deirdre  
Spun blindfolded in the grass,  
Virginal skin rich cream, the brilliance of her tresses  
Outshining the phoenix beneath a knotted handkerchief.

She sought the children, singing again  
*And how came your darling to be dead?*  
Before lunging joyously she cried  
*Why, his fillies threw him into the sea!*  
And with one of them seized,  
Unveiled her cerulean eyes in chase of the other,  
A mirthful heap afterwhich outcome!  
Though taken and shed of all worry,  
And with a torrent pounding through his chest,  
Sol risked not a sound leaving charily the wall.

Humorous, is it not, that one should be to him  
Such a light in his turbid times  
Whom first he hears, and sees lastly?  
More humorous yet, might it be claimed,  
That in such accord with humor's stamp  
The event might thrice repeat!  
Oh, but what is that which unfurled  
In humorous ways denies design for humor?  
Whatever it be, chance or providence,  
The players took their marks, restaging in two days  
Again the brief scene from their comedy:  
A generous and punctual wall permitted his songbird's squinting,  
And Sol withdrew on felted toe  
To tame the delight in his soul.  
An alteration to its first performance,  
Though, this second made:  
To wrap his memory about their nursery game Sol set  
The unconquerable curve of his lips to  
Reciting its verses intently, again and again.  
So that when the Moon had from crescent to half fattened,  
Sol on his route took haste,  
And peering promptly through his aperture,  
Discovered the scene yet staged in kind.  
There he gripped the wall, anticipating  
(And would have taken to the sky had he not!),  
Awaiting with fervid heart his songbird's reveal.

From the open portal of her master's door  
Deirdre's merry charges sprang,  
Like envoys declaring her procession.  
Her hair a flower crown adorned,  
By her children surely fashioned,  
For as oft it slipped its loose embrace

She ensured it hugged her head,  
Secured it only with their gazes turned.  
Sol's chest soared as she tied her kerchief,  
The girls girt about her to begin.  
Their first query with her wool and thread she answered,  
Their spectators' lips atremble.  
But before Deirdre their second swirling question did reply,  
Back Sol stepped and reeling deep  
Cast his voice above the wall:  
*Why, those fillies threw him into the sea!*

Not a second waited he to glean  
If unawares they had been caught,  
Or had him heard at all,  
But gripping swift his cap flew down the road,  
A kite onward shot by breeze,  
Its heart in that moment leagues above.  
Not so quickly could his wings beat, alas,  
Before Deirdre peered beyond the wall,  
To see through the leaves his cherried cheeks glaring.  
And to this man, strange and bold, her interests leaned,  
What-for unsaid beyond sheer joy  
At causing him embarrassment repaid.

Deciding their efforts in morning lessons  
Earned by their diligence sooner recess,  
Such was by a quarter hour granted;  
And in the time the moon a crescent fatter grew  
Her sky blue kerchief by accident  
Was thrice left atop the grass,  
Which cursing this rare forgetful bout  
She outside strolled and heard another nearby strolling.  
Each instance hearing the hastened patter of feet,  
Which like a croaking toad's recital  
Would pause and start at whim,  
She studied the hedge-bush leaves  
In concern's flawless pantomime  
Mere fingers from the aperture's view  
Until dispirited sigh and foot-patter rang.  
Amusing herself she would then into the hedge-bush bend  
To watch his lankly form in glumness slouch.  
When passed the third performance,  
Which, like erstwhile observer, passed hastily on,  
And in doing so himself into song,

Patient Deirdre at last perking her ears  
To hear his verses with hasty dejection sang  
Received her means of reprisal.

The hedge-bush being by the gardeners unattended,  
As she her mistress convinced,  
Deirdre investing her charges with jugs and pruning shears  
Commenced their abrupt instruction in horticulture's art.  
'For whom else should the art of growth and culture learn,  
But they who grow and culture without learning?'  
And with the thinning hours of the day,  
Deirdre her early recess reversed,  
That her charges might avoid a chill  
Whilst digging their hands in cooling earth.

Only into the second day of this new lesson,  
Beneath an idling moon near-full,  
Their mistress ushered the charges early indoors,  
With the imminence of a storm indicting,  
Yet no clouds to prove (and no clouds needed, she laughed,  
As not lightning bolt nor rain needed cover).  
Collecting their tools the advent,  
Not of stormcloud, but of another force,  
Arrived in the sound of pattering Sol,  
And like a spell to ward against him  
Chaunted Deirdre sweetly yet bold:  
*There dwelling, from the land restrain  
The force of fate, the breath of bane,  
But waft on us the gift and gain  
Of Victory divine!*

Perforce the advancing party was  
By Deirdre's worded ward stopped,  
And she, a victor's leer worn  
Guided her charges home,  
Her counter successful, her kerchief minded  
As a general's cloak adorning triumphantly her nape,  
Sending that leer lastly over-shoulder  
To the aperture in the garden wall.  
The silence of Autumn in her departure reined,  
But a silence brief-remaining.  
For past the garden and over the hedge-bush  
A sound arose above the wall.  
A pattering, a woeful sigh,

A howl of indignation—  
None of these it was, but that of a snicker,  
One signaling not tourney's end, but middle.

Three suns rose and sank, no move by either enacted.  
Knowing perhaps his cover blown away,  
A different route from courses home Sol plotted and abode;  
No advantage would he to his newfound rival supply.  
While Deirdre to show of normalcy comported,  
Her charges tending yet to their garden,  
No sweat to seek her rival shed  
But a fast-gone glance to note her rival  
An oblique corner turned beyond the hedge.

As lowly that third sun  
To its watery dwelling sank,  
Sol to his shaded home-trail returned,  
And hugging the face of his rival's wall,  
Ran its length where a stony other  
Joined all defenses in a bolted gate,  
Whereat beneath a shady oak Sol concealed.  
Like a stagnant bell the great bolts at once unloosened,  
And Sol straightened silently  
As through the whining crack Deirdre flew,  
Her slippers scraping gracefully the textured brick,  
Hair burning deep below the darkened sky,  
Sol soon in quiet distance tailed her course,  
While to his tail wit afore  
Deirdre onward bore, staving his exposure.

To keep her follower's steps within ear's grasp,  
During her escort (escort more than pursuit truly it was)  
Deirdre to quicken his steps and sow attraction  
A hymn began to melodize.  
And a worthy tonic this measure  
To his intrigue proved;  
For a song's lure Sol could not ignore,  
And so abandoned in heedless surrender his secrecy  
To the passing courts nearer, seeking the melody she drew.  
So potent his desire was to illuminate her chords  
That the world encasing him amidst her notes dissolved,  
And he to her like a brightening beacon sailed,  
Eyes unfixd on the waters about him.  
When nearing close he her notes

Could with almost certainty descry,  
A wave of sound, mild until its crash,  
Consumed them, and Sol breaking trance  
Found himself run aground in the forum.

Too brash a move perhaps she made,  
Deirdre pulling Sol through the crowd;  
For amidst the bodied current his leash loosely gripped  
Several times let fall, even so that,  
If not for her chance reappearance each case,  
With even the sweetest song she possessed,  
Lost to the throng would they have been.  
Rounding back to entice him on  
(Too many now her efforts had been to chance her victory),  
Deirdre escaped the forum,  
Provisions in hand and spoils brushing her heel.

When out the forum and its cacophonous hold,  
And hearing now his unabashed patter  
Closing in as past the interleaving structures of their locale  
And into its adjoining fields they trailed,  
Deirdre whistling soft and high  
Stroked the air with note-filled caress.  
And floated down upon Sol these notes  
With the care and comfort  
Of childhood hideaways, so familiar they were.  
Clearly hearing them each for each,  
They and they cloistered perfectly  
From the worldly clamor apart,  
All urgency from Sol step's departed;  
And slowing with him slowed Deirdre's stride;  
And having between them lost all sense  
Of hurry, pursuit, and time, Sol into harmony sank;  
And into a leaden-lodestone-pull of two bodies  
Unwound this game of fox and crow,  
By each other's draw and song onward carried.

Across the field accessed by path unpaved,  
Beneath a fiery tree sheltered,  
Sloped the figure of an ancient archway,  
Whose ingress, once by its walls and stead  
The face of egress also wore,  
Now led to spaces infinite.  
To this arch spun their wheels,



The tired sun stooping low,  
Through the portal threading its light,  
Dragging with it like a shroud all shade to endless distance.  
At last, her image through the arch passed, circling about its pier.  
Arriving Sol unframed for the first time felt  
The weight of her presence;  
And she like he with lips yet pursed,  
Tune and harmony unbroken, felt the might of his,  
As rounding the trunk their aspects in contrast lightness met,  
Their figures drawing closer still,  
Sharing allured the power of their song.  
*A quartered fifth repeated,  
Quavered, then a quarter skipped,  
Then beaming three which repeat,  
Step, repeat to downward twice skip  
For half a speckled beat*

Oh, the wonder with which these gyers unwind!  
To be amongst them, to feel their gleeful turns,  
The delight of first-felt awe, their sensation,  
Oh, to abandon station and diving inward  
Alight to breathe amongst them,  
To live to sure end armed in courage unbound!  
To receive as those winding reeds  
The pleasurable shocks of history new-learned!  
Or so the feeling to each, Deirdre and Sol,  
Pricking freshly the interests of the other,  
As like a perne, when readied for flight,  
Expands her limbs, to counterpoise earth and heaven.  
Her father was a ship's captain, lordly, fair,  
And cordial to his crew, and to she, her mother and brother.  
And being a man by trade called oft to sea,  
Ever had they made their home there beside;  
And so like a sibling to Deirdre,  
Sigil also of renewal, and hope,  
And a beast, fearful and esurient, were its waters;  
For though never had befell a voyage  
From which the captain did not return,  
Constant was the worry and knowledge he may not.  
Faint was the mark, though, left by worry on her years,  
Which had seen five seasons beyond Sol's,  
But seasons tuitioned slighter than his, though equal,  
Greater if not, was the mark about which grew  
The harvest of her knowledge.

For to each song he sang was she in lyric and melody wise,  
Each legend and poem versed,  
And every land and nation a diplomat,  
The breadth of her catalogue astounding even well-sung Sol!  
At the sound of Sol's many tongues she fawned,  
Admitting a weakness in language long-toiled,  
When Sol accompanied her that night home.  
Belief, too, in heavens or gods, she lacked,  
Or doubted, considering herself above all matters  
Not one who stood, but walked.  
As long as Sol, too, did in attitude  
Favor motion over stillness they would,  
She pertly assured, mix wonderfully,  
To which he reverent before his new idol agreed.  
All things expire, smirking she explained;  
What is still subject only quicker  
To the havoc of expiration.

And with beauteous grace to her escort,  
His ardor by the garden gate restrained,  
Valediction from each to each was cast,  
But hers not lacking the lure of bait,  
To excite future accompaniment.  
As a willow coaxing from underling turf  
The benefaction of its shoot,  
So through thin-grown vine Deirdre leant,  
Whispering on pointed toe  
That talent more than song she possessed,  
And not by word but action might it be shown.  
A smiling queen she entered her father's doors,  
Sol stumbling giddy with his mind thinking not!  
Oh, down what avenues a mind may sport  
When unbridled upon some new, sublime urb!

What but the hands of Providence  
Could such a pair, met through accident  
But to the other's magnitude drawn, wind and weave?  
Or like the passions and distastes of youth  
Are such appetites in that springtime born,  
By hands wise and deft, picked, planted, nurtured unto bloom?  
Does the son in candor a lover not seek  
In nature and intellect redolent of mother?  
And does a daughter not await a suitor,  
Denying those by parity weak or idle,

In resolve and wisdom level with father?  
The images of their unlike progenitors  
Perhaps these weaving two in pattern sought,  
But what child from well-raised home  
Would not find themselves envied  
Attracting a consort adept to foster likesame abode?  
Is there not justification, or natured validation,  
To vindicate the ambitions posed by love?  
Or does a flower yet unplucked  
Gleam in brightest purity to its first collector?  
Answers there are to such questions, are there not,  
In Nature as divers and unending as Nature itself?  
Whatever cause for which these two together came,  
They knew then living not, limited by Time  
In living and in knowledge, but coming together, together came again,  
And in doing so a third meeting by watery view arranged.

Collected for their third excursion,  
Deirdre in her suitor observed a change,  
Its symptom sugar-slow arising  
To the claw of quiet clamping Sol;  
And as one tree's limb catches flame when its neighbor burns,  
So did those claws attack Deirdre,  
Dining wordless upon her lakeside meal.  
It was not until she stood to leave,  
That Sol calling forth his courage  
Tore the parasite from his lips, and spoke.

From his sister, Áine, lisp parroted in glum humor,  
A letter had arrived that morn.  
Troubling news, he sparsely spoke,  
Deirdre drawing down to her knees,  
Concerning his father's trade,  
His speech sparse as the letter's detail:  
A week past had seen Fergal depart from his firm,  
And though to destitution the family nowhere neared,  
His departure had been scurrilous.  
A young man, only years to Sol senior,  
And a recent hire at the firm, by her seen once,  
Was to Áine suspect, but she was uncertain,  
And so from doubtless surmise desisted.  
Little else was mentioned, the oddness  
Of this young man the least, import sculpture, he,  
Like their brother brilliant, yet practical,

Detail too little to comfort  
Or assuage the gallop of Sol's disquiet.  
For father and family livelihood he feared,  
And as to these things it likely pursued,  
The ruin of his schooling.  
Like his soul escaping these last word came,  
And closing his eyes he laid himself down,  
Laying with him a heavy blanket of silence.

Worry seated in her heart,  
Deirdre again turned conspirator to silence,  
She aching to help another lift  
What aching they could not themselves.  
With each moment passing the sunlight  
Slipped in the water's surface, glimmering wildly.  
Seeing this, by the light inspired,  
Deirdre rose, and rousing Sol,  
Announced her talent that not by word  
But action might be shown,  
Enjoining him to cherish its every move,  
As not in so few days should it have been known.

A stance she fast assumed, turning back,  
And fixing both hands,  
Began that which neither kings nor priests,  
Nor even women can deny,  
To be in beauty a display unequalled:  
The spectacle of a woman alive and rapturous in dance.  
And by her movements, leaping, twirling, balancing arabesque,  
Her impassioned limbs flowing effortless  
As through the grass a threadlike net she wove,  
Snatching up his worries, so quickly Sol's distress  
Wonder became, and to the elegance of her step  
Like magician's thrall he succumbed.  
And pulling her down midstep, by passion overcome  
They mingled there as budding lovers wonted do.

As a fallen seed will in fertile, tended earth  
Sprout to tender sweeter fruit,  
So will lovers, it would seem,  
Together in ambrosial concord come  
When steeped within Love's necessities.  
And see what plagues Love will fend!  
See what the Gardener's artless dalliance averts

With but her scantest trifle!  
From modest origin the nurtured seed  
To awesome height extends,  
Its limbs in time heavy with sweet, luscious fruit,  
Those close-by from their ploughs enticed  
To stretch in its wondrous shade,  
Those who but hear of its splendor  
For just a sight themselves already thirsting!  
Such were the companions of Sol,  
Fano and Dolon, insatiate pair,  
To meet the mot beguiling their man.  
The autumn festival of an isle near-shore  
Proved their chance to mingle with his Love,  
The quartet setting sail  
Beneath the florid grin of dawn,  
Bow beneath Sol's distant stare  
Fraught with chop, his familiars  
Awash in Deirdre's charm.

Around the now-cleared threshing floor  
Harvest festivities unfolded:  
Honey-cakes and sweets, pies of meat and fruit,  
Indeed all manner of fare and confection  
Swarmed in vended and vending hand alike  
Around the grounds, its manifold attendants  
In a current swept about,  
Wending fluently at event of competition,  
Swirling into the threshing-floor dance,  
Afore to various stalls and makeshifts tumbling off,  
Swelling modestly even to the tented display  
To which Fano with great absorption listed.  
Curious by the men busy at their time-honored dance,  
And seeking to avoid the smoke of Fano's hypnotic,  
Deirdre onto Sol's faraway shoulders briefly leapt  
And in her added view a gathering of maids,  
Little younger than she, glimpsed,  
Like rivered reeds,  
Swooning and swaying in the dancer's winds.  
Her figure lowered down, she spoke

— Perhaps I'd be alone in saying it, but it's something tawdry, isn't it, those girls throwing themselves at their feet? Improper, ladies, improper...

— Improper? chirped Fano, flicking his smoke. Where's the harm in it? Everyone's decent enough.

— They'd faint, Sol said, were they panting any harder.

— Oh, an exaggeration—

— Not in the least, Mr. Morin. I'll call a man handsome, even compliment the fellow myself, but you'll not see me simpering after him anytime soon, in seriousness or not—not to mention, and do forgive me, but is a man who *must* be pursued worth pursuit?

— I agree with Ms. O'Floinne. It's unnatural for a woman to pursue a man—or at least, Sol smiled, at Deirdre looking sly, to appear to be doing so so *patently*...

— Yes, it's the *man's* job, to seek—even, Deirdre walking pertly on, if he must be led.

— 'Jobs.' Fano and the other men followed. Well, then. And what about you, Dolon? What's your take on this idea of pursuit and, uh—Sol?

— *Position*, Sol and Deirdre chorally rang.

— Position, yes. Tell me, is there some natural imbalance that I'm too lost to follow here?

— Personally, slouching Dolon failed to straighten up, if you're asking me, I must confess to not caring terribly much. Look—there, food! Ideal opportunity to wash this topic down and out with a little nourishment.

— Deirdre, you know, there's actually an ongoing dispute (of sorts) Sol and I have been, over this very matter, engaged in for some time. I would love to hear the *feminine* interpretation, if you'd be willing to provide it—

— No, no—the Devil, Hades, Death itself, the whole damned chthonic cadre take you, we're not starting this damned discussion again, Dolon blustered. It very nearly bores me to tears

each time and Ms. O’Floinne will undoubtedly find herself under the same laborsome—and I mean *laborsome*—duress if—

— Mr. Corvo, I would, if it doesn’t trouble you, prefer to address the question in my own words, twisting her unwrapped kerchief into a band.

— My apologies, Ms. O’Floinne, it was only my intention to save you the strife, the true, unflinching torment, of their quarrel. I find it insufferable—this dialogue above all others.

— That you consider my sanity I much appreciate, Mr. Corvo, she glimmered, tying like a corsair the banded kerchief around her head. Now, Mr. Morin, you were bidding the value of my feminine... oh, what shall we say—ah, *lens*?

— Yes—and for brevity’s sake, you *are* allowed to dispense with the formalities and call me by my given name, ‘Fano,’ if you’d like.

— Such a *faux pas* I couldn’t imagine, Mr. Morin, as we’re only just introduced! We’ll dispense with the formalities when we are no longer in *formal* process.

— She *would* be one of yours, Faolainn, Fano rolling his eyes to Sol cried.

— And it *is* ‘miss,’ Mr. Morin. I’ve not been possessed quite yet. Now, you were saying?

— Oh, forget it—*Ms. O’Floinne*.

— I’d rather keep this fire aflame, said Sol, by the dint of their dialogue firming up. If it’s alright with you, *monsieur* Morin, the main points I’ll summarize, and you prepare to chime in should I stumble. Amenable? Splendid. Morin—*Suntne verba?*—ehr, holds, yes, that in the ideal community there is to be no distinction—genderization, I mean. My sincerest apologies—of the individuals’ societal roles, meaning—

— ‘Women at war and men keeping house,’ Dolon as a drowsy parakeet recited.

— Yes, of course! And who, I wonder, will be the wet nurse? Deirdre pointing to a bosom-nestled newborn gleamed.

— One breath and you've oversimplified my words already! Fano, stamping his hypnotic in protest shouted.

— My apologies, truly. Let me not make a mawkin of you, Morin. Is there...? No, no straw yet. Excellent. Tell us: what were those words again?

— Now, to begin with, we all agree that each human life, regardless of circumstance, is born—created, reborn, however it goes—into a state of equal value, yes? Sol, Deirdre—Dolon, even, though you'll not say a word, I know—it's there we're all in agreement?

— 'Human,' yes, muttered the already-lethargic Dolon. Whatever that is—

— *Quanto magis homo putredo, et filius hominis vermis*—

— And 'life?' How is it we define that, Mr. Morin? We know what is human, but when is what is human 'alive?'

— As soon as we try to define it, our definition loses all value. When we define it, we define when it isn't. And definitions—and, Sol, it's here we are in agreement, at least—are somewhat apt to change across time, society, etc., are they not? Right?

— A verity, seconded. Carry on, Sol discomfited said.

— *Verity*, yes. Human life has value, no matter what form, and that verity, really without saying so, extends to encompass sex. Men and women, then, are equal—right—born? There is nothing peculiar to either sex that elevates one above the other?

— All fair so far, Mr. Morin. You've got me by the blouse.



— And so that is natural, universally mathematical, even. We're all integers in one large equation, each of us a variable or the other of same equivalence,  $x$  or  $y$ , exchangeable yet... distinct. All values generated in a random sequence, independent and identically distributed, permuted—permitted, of course, a standard status of food and optimal health.

— And there flies our first condition—

— Oh, let me finish before you start up again. Yes, I'll admit a standard of what defines any given human's 'good and optimal health' must be presupposed for my idea to be, well...

— *Substantiated*—

— *Transubstantiated*—

— *Manifest*

— *Manifest*, yes, thank you, Ms. O'Floinne—for my idea to become manifest, a system which determines who this society would most directly benefit—

— Or abandon—

— Are you done yet, Sol?—but with it you'd find a freedom for the average—not even exemplary, just the average majority—men and women far superior to our own. It would be one in which men and women who meet this standard share greater equality than ever before!

— And *what*, Deirdre began, then stalled, pulling over eyes her kerchief in mimicry of blindness, her outstretched hand clutching at air, *what* of the others, those who cannot abide your bureaucracy?

— Oh, damn, you've caused me to veer off again—damn you, Sol! That, *Ms. O'Floinne*, was not the question. Fano huffed, sorting out his words while Deirdre smiled, unblinding herself. But don't we all accept—ah, isn't there an instinctive knowledge we all possess of this

common standard of good being, one which we all strive for? We know when we are ill, we know when we are well, and we're typically quite able to say the same of others! This is not my point, but, yes, conditions would be present. They're present now: laws are conditions, conditions and restrictions set in order that our society does not unravel. So, yes, conditions of health determining the ideal males and females would have to be established, and those not meeting that standard would be attended to later.

— Because *condición número dos* is at its advent.

— And this second condition is, Mr. Morin...?

— Goodness, the noise! Here, out from the crowd before I keep on. If I'm going to explain it, I want to be heard!

The quartet away from the crowd broke,  
The female intrigue about the threshing-floor  
Arisen, clotting in a din all heard.  
When in quiet they stood,  
Flanking a foodstall row,  
Meat and sweetness perfuming the air,  
Deirdre remarked

— It excites me to hear how extra time has improved your case, Mr. Morin!

— Little, likely—

— The second condition, right, is that these beings of equivalence, all on level grounding, might still, through no fault of their own but Nature's, be unequal in some way or form for one job or skill or the other. Therefore, all individual skills would need to be treated equally, meaning: even if imbalanced, they would have *equivalent value*. And, therefore, the naturally stronger or endowed members of society would feel their duty was to maintain the status quo, either through humility, or... Sol, actually, that word again, if you don't mind?

— *Supererogation.*

— Precisely. And so the weaker who are weaker naturally are helped by the stronger who are strong similarly—also with thanks to nature—because it is their obligation and duty societally to do so. From this self-sacrifice the average citizen would appreciate the comforts provided by their countrymen, and society would feel that weight of *moeurs* beginning to slacken. No longer would *men* feel the obligation to be primary breadwinner, and no longer would women feel the pressures of modesty, and chastity. Men would grow tenderer and women stronger. Even children, in turn, wouldn't favor one parent to the other—they would feel equivalent admiration for both parents, with no interference of sex, occupation, or disposition.

— This sounds, Mr. Morin, like—

— Like a place such wherein the Will has been erased.

— It has been, Ms. O'Floinne, it has! but only in a way. Of course we would all still have *ability* and option to choose, but in time the desire, the *anxiety* of choosing, of conforming to old standards, would all but disappear, return to the heavens in a puff of smoke. No competition, backstabbing, criminal behavior, jealousy, vice or virtue—Sol—all of us at one, in peace.

— Interesting, Mr. Morin, very. But you didn't answer my question.

— Which was?

— Who'll suckle the nurslings?

Fano, indeed the group entire,  
Fell shattered in laughter,  
Deirdre her unwrapped kerchief  
Garlanding her neck

As the men pieced themselves together.  
When regained, Fano said, chuckling as he went

— Well, Ms. O’Floinne, another condition, I suppose! There are always heifers, too, I imagine, even in utopia. But that’s the short of it. Tell me, what do you think? Is it really all as insane as Sol—Mr. Faolainn—here was making it out to be? And as a woman? As one who might benefit from it?

— No, no, I will admit hearing it from yourself it is less silly. And I of course cannot speak for all women—I haven’t nearly enough mouths—but I for one wouldn’t prefer a society where I am treated as a man. Now, wait, yours sounds lovely, truly, but I think an ideal society *would* be constructed on verity—like yours—but a natural one, in accordance with what we perceive sensuously, founded on the fairness of accident, not whim. I can’t see all imbalance as implication of inequality, and any imbalance one might see is, in actuality, just one part of verity. Can either of us, Mr. Morin, ever actually experience, in the most complete and authentic recreation, the thoughts, emotions, and daily encounters of the other’s peculiar life?

— Do you mean to tell me you don’t feel—and pardon me, Sol, I hope this isn’t too improper, asking her—that you don’t experience feelings of great urging? Are you really saying that women are so different, feel such different angers, patiences, fears, loves—desires? You don’t think it’s possible that you only feel those ways because of your raising in a society which insisted you must?

— What is the alternative, then, Mr. Morin? I, and I’m sure many other women might agree, don’t want equality on those terms, if it expects that men become effeminate or women more masculine, as you suggest. I don’t wish to be stripped of femininity. Without it, how might

you have enquired? All I wish for is that, as my experience, the experience the average man is not privy to, comprises half the complete, human whole, I and other women should have an equal voice in our philosophies, and that as such we should be equally heard. Leave the heifer to her duties and me to mine.

— What are these feminine qualities so impossible to men, then, Ms. O’Floinne?

— Why, truth, for one. A woman’s truth, I’d say, is far more valuable than a man’s.

— Yes—ha!—What a rare thing it is indeed! Fano trouncing a laurel wreath laughed.

— Yes, it is—in the sense that it is difficult to observe, and precious. You’re less likely to notice the skill of a practiced yeoman than the first steps of an infant.

— I’ll be the first to admit I’m a more dishonest man than any woman I’ve known—

— Few, Dolon, Sol interjecting beamed, though they’ve been—

— The plain truth is that for whatever reason—conditions, as you say, Mr. Morin—women must live in truth, while men needn’t necessarily, be it nature or the simple byproduct of a physically inferior stature. Our greatest, most valuable tool is our honesty, a quality which Nature either gifted to us on a whim—Nature is the most waggish force, isn’t she? But who are we to wag on her?—or evolved adjacent to or in consequence of our counterparts. What fires have been sparked by a single woman’s dishonesty? I wonder if men could live in truth the same. But perhaps every force needs its opposition to exist in the first place. Dishonesty has, I am sure history would doubtless prove, saved many a lives too. I’ll return to my yeoman: you’d only notice his skill when it was insufficient.

— *Ipsa conteret caput tuum, et tu insidiaberis calcaneo ejus.*

Wandering mindlessly their feet  
To the stall had escorted them,

Dolon swiftly noticed,  
And seizing by swift intrusion the party's every gaze,  
Stood apart from them, proposing

— Say, instead of emptying them, tongue and all, let's try filling our mouths. Would any of you like something? To conclude this, anything you desire. Ms. O'Floinne?

— Feeling ill, Dolon?

— No; it's six hours more until our ship sets sail.

— Time-starved?

— Time-drunk—Fano? Something savory?

— An enticing counterargument, Ms. O'Floinne, but in all *truthfulness*, you haven't quite got me convinced.

— In likewise *truthfulness*, like you, I am only theorizing. Without concrete evidence, take it not to heart. No, all fine, a wonderful exponent you've made! Very fine indeed, Fano.

— Ah, you're slipping, Ms. O'Floinne. Is your equilibrium a little, say, upset?

— Oh, never! It's only that I rather feel we're somewhat acquainted now! Go, and would you please retrieve something for me to eat? And while you're at it, do attempt eating with your feet—and tell me if you wouldn't prefer your hand!

Securing for themselves each a meal,  
The dialogue from there by success of Dolon's scheme  
Onward halted, and toeing the crowd's ebbing shore  
Delighted were they humoring themselves  
By the oddities afloat on its body.  
As an ocean within himself  
Contains a wide and divers citizenry,  
So too does a gathering of persons,  
In statures immense and minor,  
With an assortment of eyes and limbs,  
But ranging in the quality of their vision,  
Some to the eye fair and becoming,

And others in their misfortune pitiable,  
All manner of creation residing in between.  
Oft like a cup straddling a table's edge  
Ignorance rests within the young,  
Perched to descend and dismantle at first urging,  
Yet without nudge remains intact  
As were it safely placed.  
So were stabs taken at the crowd's merry-makers  
Each by the party's careless members,  
The men in mockery snickering  
At men boisterous and gangling alike,  
Deirdre herself lowering to parody a woman  
By her own offspring overrun  
(Her tow of children, though, adored).  
But the lovers were quickly sated,  
As though an upending force neared,  
Soon quitting their game of derision,  
While their companions churlish remained,  
Disruption to their perch far outlaid.  
Yet, though all in appearance quitted it,  
The companions' inbred roguery,  
Now ignited, sought to torridly burn,  
And seeking so, alighted with celerity  
Upon the tent of Fano's honing interest,  
Display to the public eye on all sides disallowed,  
Its single entrance by lone sentinel blocked.

— Ah, at last. We're all going in. We *have* to, yourself as well, Deirdre. What do you say? A glimpse through your 'feminine lens' at the spectacles inside would be most fascinating. No misappropriation of roles housed there. What do you say? Dolon? Sol? Oh, it's nothing participatory or the like—unless one counts the several coins' entry fee.

— Thank you for your inclusion, but I think I'll abstain for now, Fano, Deirde hooking Sol's arm nobly said.

— You'll 'abstain?' Another one of your feminine qualities, it seems...

— Well, Fano, her voice prancing delightfully, as women seem to be the only ones capable of exercising it, the art of abstention, I mean, then, yes, it may very well be a respectable and

therefor feminine quality. But do enjoy yourself! I'll await the tale of your adventures, patiently, right here.

— And what about you? Fano curtly to Sol turned. Quick in and out? (heh!) Or are you brewing up something smart as well?

— Another time, perhaps. Up, like an instinct, was Sol's hand drawn to Deirdre's. He swallowed, dropping his brows to say, stay in there long enough and I'll have cooked something up.

— What a surprise, almost disappointing. Well, Dolon—

— Not the sort of thing I'd protest. Lead the way. Enjoy yourselves. Deirdre, Ms. O'Flainne, don't judge me too harshly. Sol, well... I'd ask the same, but I fear you'd pass out. Your judgment, I'll remind you, he shouted, with Fano nearing the entry in measured, backward steps, also doesn't mean quite much to me!

The sentinel, their moneyed toll collected,  
Into darkness issued the pair.  
Her head in bemusement canted,  
Deirdre relaxed her eyes,  
Against Sol's soaring structure leant,  
And blithely said

— Dolon will follow, yes, but he doesn't strike me as the sort of man to watch.

In a wistful grin Sol's lips upturned,  
Dwelling momentarily within a moment,  
Before returning from that time to say

— *Fortasse*, yes, perhaps. 'Not the sort of man to watch' indeed. He seems to know better, or at least frequents the airs of civility. He is, though, something of the mendacious sort, Dolon... Not a doubt in the slimmest we'll have circled the fairgrounds for a third time



before they dodder out. Help me sharpen something to lob at them as they exit. Something, ehr—ah, skewering, impaling... hm... can't think of it...

— Sol, are you feeling well? Never seemed to me, you the sort of man in need of a whetstone...

— Hm, Yes, must be your yeoman today. 'Only when the skill is lacking.' Ready and willing, though, I am able. Here. Let's on.

Fewer shining upon the earth  
The guiding rays of Sun,  
The evening festivity  
In stark shadow of torchlight carried on,  
As though all to tented dark had been cast,  
Thrown and turned fair-round on a drunken vessel,  
The island which upon the quartet washed ashore the threshing-floor,  
Hosting now not lauded scores of choreography,  
But violent bouts of grapple.  
Sol flying wiry interest sat with Fano beside,  
Lighting as were they sacramental torches  
An untiring succession of hypnotics  
In votive to the tumbling athletes.  
But though Sol's eyes were forward trained,  
To fires stoking deep within aimed his sight.

See how a man during times of drought  
With duty entrusted to prevent the spark of flame,  
Upon that unbidden flare's arrival,  
Will inflate his concern upon its gluttonous tongues,  
Neglecting all station and safety  
To rise and tame its fury,  
All untouched by flame forgotten.  
He on all sides by conflagration encircled,  
Would not that which he loves,  
Though lying safely beyond the fiery wall,  
To his torrid view stricken by fiery lash,  
Too by the infernal fangs appear immured?  
What follows when such illusion,  
Mistaken for substance, becomes reality?  
What does the firewatch fight for

When his entire world signals doom?

Tossed back from the snare of thought,  
Sol, still, though feverish, scanned about him,  
Of Dolon or Deirdre no sigil seen.  
With excuse of relief he left Fano to burn,  
The aspects of companion and lover  
In a sudden furor yearned.  
Long for them weary Sol searched,  
In every darkened face  
Seeing the glowing breath of fear,  
And with all faith of discovery withered,  
Beheld the distanced posture of their forms  
Sat beneath a viny bower,  
The lips of companion at lover's ear.

Denouncing them not with a sound,  
Or gesture, or rightful address,  
His weakened form Sol forfeited to the throng,  
Holding shut his lips, passing his limbs,  
Frail beyond use, amongst each swarming figure,  
Knocked and gripped violently  
Until seated again beside Fano.  
There felt the balance of his soul return.  
And though that which in his fever Sol glimpsed  
Was not act, but semblance of disloyalty,  
And left neither friend nor lover by faithlessness stained,  
Still in Sol's disquieted heart was jealousy born.  
And returning Deirdre under poise's veil  
To her father's house that night,  
And himself to his, his concerns turned solely  
Upon the incendiary received a day before  
Which waited impatiently on his bed:  
The letter that had stoked his worry day-long.  
It was then, with letter loose in hand,  
That Sol must have devised his plan,  
Hearing with the bulk of the day's events  
Weighted down between his shoulders  
The pulse of Deirdre's claim their first eve  
As an echo: that all expires,  
And what is still, only quicker lost.

Is not autumn the season of separation,  
Its days beneath a jaded lamp wizening

From the chilly ailment of disregard,  
The verdant vesture of nature wrested away,  
Shriveled in its fingers and to the bitter earth requited,  
For that reason named 'fall?'  
Does not that wicked coldness  
Between man and home thrust a wedge,  
Sweeping with its oppressive winds  
All life into burrow and hole?  
For upon the arrival of this chill after,  
A distance, too, between the lovers rose,  
Though wanting Deirdre blameless for their slow divorce.  
Where before daily he strayed  
To enrich her long-labored respite,  
Infrequency, like pestilence, soon pocked his coming,  
So inflamed that by week's end  
His escort home beneath cover  
Of vague excuse had disappeared.  
With what desperate aim these strange gyres  
Yearning to slake some thirst will wind themselves!  
Wherefore as Deirdre will they wander?  
How they will twist and yield themselves for naught!  
How she suffered such indignity,  
The barren hedge-bush like invidious barbs  
Poking her as into its aperture she vainly sank  
With hope that but an eye might rest upon her man,  
Her prudence to mask this scene  
Mingling amongst the tumbling leaves.

If only to Sol were it known,  
The import of his presence,  
The significance of his embrace,  
The solace, like that of a warm shawl,  
His ears and lips might render.  
If only were he not like a volunteer  
In some magician's show,  
Suddenly by an odd elixir doused,  
Subject to the terror of slow disappearance,  
Each onlooker panicking  
In uncertainty of his return.  
Had not his daily patter down her road dispersed,  
Of quick though partial physic  
Would its sound have been;  
Had it not by false impression been retracted,  
Repository would his ear have been:

And picturing that sight which she misfortuned saw  
Returning to her father's home  
The eve of a night itself weeping,  
Teary would his eyes have been.  
But to these aids was he blind, deaf, and paralyzed.  
Absurd, these gyres do oft appear,  
Footing errantly their tracks;  
Travelers within a train  
Encumbered by luggage,  
Reluctant to debase by soliciting help,  
Forget their burdens are by one neck  
Too cumbrous to be born,  
Weakening themselves in the charade of strength  
For reasons privately pointless endured.  
Does not the encumbrance one attires  
By heft and weight their movement complicate,  
Under stress confusing the body's step,  
Sending it slanted and awry into regions  
Where nimble it steadfast strode?  
Consider how these lovers, pressured intimately,  
To one another turned not, but in strain  
Footed paths isolate:  
For Sol seeing what by exterior  
Revealed the outward augurs of expiration  
Apart from his attachments began to drift,  
From Deirdre first, his companions after,  
And tragically the life and loves  
He had in that town established,  
Studies ruling his every breath and move,  
Fences upturned toward all diversion  
As upon semester's end he hotly sped;  
And Deirdre knowing not to whom she might turn,  
Her bosom maidens to secret untrusting,  
Her home a dominion of dusthumia,  
And the sea to her a thing now wicked and double-dealing  
(For what grief its waves returned!),  
Sought in one unlikely the support  
To whom which she in altruity had supplied.

Ai, what trammels she in small portion to Dolon laid,  
Bidden by her for his fealty to Sol  
To be an agent of intervention,  
Discouraging the secrecy by which Sol now bode,  
While forming unimpeachably between themselves

Foundations of platonomy distinct.  
Oh, with what hope, but what vanity  
Was this harmony thrummed!  
For learning from Dolon of their bond  
Sol only further distant fled,  
And for a moon to his companion  
Also into stranger morphed,  
All things in this season of cold  
Grown only colder by a hero's foolish solecism.

Even in the hearts of the gentler kind  
A limit there to endurable sorrow prevails,  
Like well-bottom to a sinking coin  
Trapped in feathery descent seemingly endless.  
Oh, but where coin will not without plucking budge,  
A woman sunken to the depths of agony  
Will not but under the heavens' weight  
Dwell vanquished in her submersion.  
For though lower and lower  
Dragged by circumstance and neglect,  
Only stronger did Deirdre resist Fate's prejudice  
And the indignity of thoughtless retreat,  
Her strength by nadir's first touch so strengthened  
That striking with all her might  
She fended off gravity's oppression,  
And reversed nature itself with her ascent.

At his mealy supper Sol lonesome sat,  
Chewing in his measured, careful way,  
Many nighttime hours since come,  
The waning semester and its trembles  
Warping their place into his curving back,  
When at his bedroom door he heard a noise;  
And pausing his sup he with wistful eyes  
Glanced to the door,  
Behind which a well-known whistling blew;  
And unbolting the door his eyes upon Deirdre's fell,  
Tearful springs within them welling  
When at last he saw with what pallid hue  
They like forsaken sapphires shone.  
Taking her in his arms her coat he stripped,  
And she no layer else to strip away  
Removed foremost that barrier  
Which between she and Sol stood,

That which 'pride' is called,  
Exposing by its undress a delicacy  
Which she like new-bloomed petals wore.

What distress, by its walls and curtains,  
Could a house masquerading in nobility hide,  
She asserted, as a child's doll propped upon Sol's bed,  
What deceit and trickery  
Might seep through that structure's walls and name it 'home!'  
Never had his voyages into wavy solitude,  
The tranquility and probity signified by his manner,  
Nor the ease of his home-coming step,  
Disclosed the foul truth behind her father's affairs.  
He was, in times many and various,  
To his spouse and offspring dishonest,  
And only having beneath his falsities buckled  
Did he like a villain kneel  
Pleading clemency before her mother most betrayed,  
Disclosing in spates those divers misdeeds,  
His fearful plaint quaking the home entire,  
Deirdre in the courtyard by her brother attended,  
The bricks of their home now paper folding in.

What comfort to traumatized eyes may one be  
When what blows trauma strikes  
Impart wounds unaiding?  
What else but the warmth of their blood,  
The rhythm of their beating heart, may suffice?  
Sol taking her there  
Swathed Deirdre in the clothing of his arms,  
Being in that moment flesh and body without death;  
And in time were her tears subsided,  
For within him she lay in peace.  
What else in the rubble of a hallowed edifice lies,  
Following its clamorous destruction,  
But a haunting, necessary peace?  
What clarion answers the sounding of destruction?

Though granule of solace it calling felt,  
For his absence, neglecting her  
When an extended bough she needed most,  
Was he, bearing the fruit of his neglect, hardly contrite.  
And in her heart she felt forgiveness' throb,  
Her absolution sealed by a kiss.

Seeing then the repose his words had eased,  
A quibbling will compelled him to speak,  
Asking in foolish earnestness 'Why Dolon?'  
And had there, since that festive eve,  
Begun to sprout between them 'passionate feeling?'  
As if by hearing this, Deirdre,  
Reeled from whatever remaining depths,  
Into fevered laughter broke,  
Her humor only tamed  
When noticing Sol's embarrassment.  
Exclaiming she denied:  
Between them a bond had formed that eve,  
Indeed upon a scandalous secret,  
One Dolon's alone, whispered into her ear,  
Apart from her, but her now being a part,  
That had ever since grown tightened.  
Never could it reach that strength  
With which for Sol she yearned.

To his misconception one final credit he offered,  
Seeking that he should balance her sincerity:  
The next year would seize him up,  
And drop him into apprenticeship across the land.  
For this, and its worries spawned,  
Was he that festival eve from himself spirited  
Into an envelope gradually folding,  
For his family's sake and their future support;  
So, should all her words like neat coverings  
Be upon the affections of her heart,  
In days fast-running they would beg no cover.

With these words did the lovers,  
As two bodies excited on a junction meet,  
Each essaying to assert its essence,  
So their differing streams merged into one,  
And a silence was shared,  
Silence bespeaking what calamity  
Such guardedness had allowed.  
Wrapping herself in his arms again,  
For in her fit of laughter had she unwound,  
Thrice she renounced the embrace of any man but he,  
Dolon by his secret least amongst the horde  
Threatening their union.

And in his arms,  
Veins felt fervently pressed against his flesh,  
She remained.

Think what passion to the brim  
Swells the chests of spring-birther children  
In the dampened light of winter,  
They on anxious toes lifted to peer the Sun  
Reclaiming in due rule the expanse of its sky,  
Keen to tumble once more in fields  
Sallow of cold now fluttering green,  
Constant and doubtful alike in frolic,  
Invited to revel in this bounty of pillow-soft grass,  
And as the light must behind the mountains plunges,  
To huddle down in a petalled bed,  
The hypnotics of reunion whispering sweetly  
*Here I am still; come unto me.*  
All so much more the honey-sweet rapture  
Which unrolls that first wine-warm day.  
Such what sundered lovers must feel,  
The renewal of the world entire,  
When once cleaved whole they are made!

The vines of recent strife, and offense,  
Which by scrutiny's lapse around their love  
Had twisted to strangling hold,  
Were cut away, and forgotten.  
The lunar lid just begun its bending  
Floated coolly amidst the nighttime sea  
As Deirdre had in many eves recent  
Left her charges to meet with hurried gait Sol's quarters.  
Coaxing quietly open the door for her,  
Sol looked upon her face and figure,  
All features by fleeced wrapping obscured,  
Save for the blue opals of her eyes set with matchless fixity.  
To their brilliant radiance there he fell subject,  
His impatient mouth ajar before his mind could master,  
And overcome by desire to share with all  
The life and spirit with which those eyes burned,  
To bathe them all in their luster,  
He cheated his afore-devised plot  
To enquire at the evening's height,  
And requested in the doorway her presence  
At the Faolainn home for the holidays.



A moment's hesitancy held her reason.  
Surely her mother, brother, and father  
Heavily must have weighed her decision,  
A trickling fear sweeping through her,  
Spreading her eyes, stirring a tremble in her cornel lips,  
And warming hotly the frozen crème of her skin.  
But his abrupt bidding spoke to her of serious design,  
And of his fondness before her,  
A wanted fondness not-curing, she held,  
To the seed of doubt in heart quietly sown,  
But one a voice also-quiet informed her  
Might begin that seed's extraction.  
In flattered agreement she responded,  
Her newly uncovered lips by Sol's met,  
And both to sanguine satisfaction dined.

Backs to the fire they seated the floor,  
Remains of dinner lost beyond firelight,  
Hemming vinegar, bread and a pitcher of wine.  
In grazing they sat there, spinning tales trivial,  
Shadows bending and breaking in their eyes like twofold melodies.  
And when tales too trivial became, a contest  
Of riddles they on Sol's urgent suggestion began:

*A man took a silent blade to another in repose,  
And after a hundred slashes the recumbent man arose  
Handsome and happy*

Her answer and a scoff swiftly supplied, Deirdre returned:

*I saw a child raise the corse of a felled tree  
With as much ease as the strong man who fell it*

Which struggling Sol failed to himself fulfill.  
Now a riddle within loss,  
Filling more wine than thought in his cup,  
He broke for a time, then leered, saying:

*A man left a cave he could not recall entering*

Deirdre perplexed, then by his answer surprised,  
Refilled her cup, leaping forward as she said:

*A serpent slowly stiffens above its bed,  
Rising to guard one-and-one egg*

Riled in competition's thrill they even stood,  
Two victories apiece, with one final to break tie.  
Plucking from Deirdre a fiery stand,  
Two lengths Sol broke it into,  
And concealing in his fist these lengths  
Between two fingers flossed their ends.  
Drawing the strand in greater length,  
Deirdre the final riddle would pose,  
Pouring first vinegar into her cup,  
Then filled its lip with wine, a potation to serve  
As Sol's penalty should he fail to answer.  
Her teeth bared a mousing smile in forward lean, whispering:

*A cat at play with a hull  
Licked, then rubbed, then ate it full*

No answer did he offer, and submitting received her cup in hand.  
And drawn slowly, without haste to his lips,  
The potion he emptied, and the cup placed before her,  
Wiping what covetous remnant of it like a cherry  
Clung deeply ripe to his lip.

Past the pale wooden rails of a humble fence  
The Faolainn home in a clearing rested,  
Its breadth and height in perfect, modest union,  
Its pure enamel walls aspiring not to thrust  
Their gray-imbricated roof into the depending ash-limbs;  
A hand, shaking off pure white sand to grasp the sky.  
Or so the ash to Deirdre seemed, leaf-barren  
And snow-full as down the property road their conveyance turned.  
All beneath the powder slept,  
From the southern Plains, by Sol so-called,  
Itself a harvester's field beneath the title at rest,  
To the naked trees swallowing the Sun,  
And a small ruin of stone, by Sol a *bóthan* named,  
Nestled patiently up against property line.  
Patient he named it, for long had been its waiting,  
Which first when his elders lived began,  
Then over his uncle lingered still,  
Altered as its rooms were emptied and walls undressed,

Hastened as its emptiness a hole rent  
Beckoning Nature reclaim its floors,  
Now nearing the end of its waiting, waited still,  
As were it a home's single task.

Flying out the front door Áine  
With their cart's standstill came,  
Dress dragging through snow,  
Small petals dusting the golden locks  
Which about her silver eyes fell,  
Rushing with the playful urgency of dawn  
To clasp once more all for too-long untouched.  
When drained of her embrace,  
For at their dismounting were they drowned,  
Sol to sister presented his guest,  
Áine lining up in courtesy to take the hand  
Lovely in letter described,  
Yet in person lovely beyond description,  
Owning bravely her impairment of tongue  
As she with humor and dignity did.  
And leading her in hand to the house door,  
Sol with their luggage stumbling behind,  
Áine filled Deirdre with the Faolainn home,  
And the inhabiting faces assembling within.

To Gideon was Deirdre first familiar made,  
Giddy in favor called, and joyful were his grasp and manner,  
though of thought slow and dumb of tongue,  
Each jolting step reason more to smile;  
Then with Fergal she brief acquaintance made,  
Hospitality politely withheld, yet clouded mind choked back,  
The silence of brother in possession, but for his mirth destitute;  
And last, as grey-haired Fergal and uncle  
To greet son and nephew outside strode,  
Stood mother Mónica, gold-brown tresses  
Like tamarisk twisting, her barley eyes on Deirdre flowing,  
Which they did on each thing seen,  
As if she but an astray child were.  
And coming away from their greeting,  
Áine their guest informed of a missing member,  
Brother Renton, too on semester break returning,  
Whose greeting would be made the next Sun.  
Unable to suppress the esteem of her twin,  
There in the entryway Áine disclosed

The quickness of thought and mastery of tongue  
(Not one, but many, for in the art of speech were his skills  
Beyond exception, and so by God having been)  
That had hoisted keen-minded Renton above his peers,  
And would in three semesters' time a professor make him,  
No doubt, she humored, years junior to his pupils!

Sol this prompting with quiet received,  
And to their belonging rooms delivered all luggage,  
Deirdre into the parlor by family whisked,  
With queries, tales, and dialogue,  
And in coolness engaging a plume of laughter  
For a hushed-tone tale about a tree and Sol.  
The tale's subject a jaunt to the aged Faolainn home suggested,  
A trip found pleasing to all, less Fergal,  
Who to his study until dinner returned, alone,  
Upon a patron's troubling project to sit.  
An easement in the trip the lovers felt,  
For the culture of any place  
Cannot by talking—but listening—be learned,  
As a flock in flight must have its wings.  
Leaving Fergal amidst his anxiousness to wade,  
Giddy the party to the derelict home led,  
Lovers closing up the pack, each like thirst  
Disquiet carried in-hand aside the other's glove.

The stony *bóthan* a century waited  
In the clearing at treeline's hold,  
Hay-woven *búchan* years-long decayed,  
Its door which three generations hosted  
Now by Time and element blown wide,  
Like the mouth of a man battered senseless.  
And what of the tongue behind lips concealed?  
Imagine such a blow to send that man down,  
Floored lips stretched open to reveal a tongue to stump severed;  
Such was the hearth in its state,  
Bleeding and scattered about the *bóthan* hull.  
Emptiness sole occupied the small home,  
Áine taking Deirdre in arm explained  
(As arriving the party into pieces broke to skim  
In strokes the coat of snow from their ancestral ruin)  
The evening its great hearth into roof descended,  
Harming none, yet its final tenant at last purged.  
For though three generations there flourished,

All had like their father come to leave, Deirdre learned,  
Stood where the four first Faolainn children  
In impoverished years outside the only chamber  
In bedrolls slept, all but Giddy departed,  
Grateful caretaker, whose home their lands had ever been.  
And ever home would it to Giddy be,  
From rigid fences to frozen stream  
And the burial grounds past it where Giddy  
Would join all Faolainns to solitary lay,  
And the now-filled-in well before it  
From which Giddy was in infancy pulled.

Are there not such times in each traveled life,  
When caught amidst confusing winds of travel,  
Turned and spun about in every direction,  
When the spinning unwarned ceases,  
The traveler at last balance gains  
To find themselves of bearing and place deprived?  
What then, with destination prescribed,  
Can a traveler some remedying course devise,  
When all is everything without definition?

In such a quandary Deirdre stood,  
From family and lover somehow lost,  
Upon a forest stroll set without alert, or perhaps with;  
For Deirdre retreating from chamber  
Into sensation again wandered,  
All calls to her, if any there were,  
Like by a shield of glass repelled.  
With doubtful eyes she peered each corner,  
Left alone to roam the empty hull,  
Then upon the central hearth her eyes fell,  
And upon a rubble seat she rested,  
Trampled sticks pointing up from the snow  
Telling her in murmur of the thatch's first collapse about her very seat.  
In each direction she found all things expired or expiring,  
Her lover's image, too, like salt to the snow cast.  
For to discover one's fears true,  
That Life alongside Death always walks,  
Death a small vestment from Life filching with each step,  
Here joy, there youth, then loyalty, love, house and home,  
Until Life in sudden nakedness senses cold;  
And turning to Death asks *companion, do you feel a chill,*  
To see Death in all Life's garments dressed.

So Deirdre under another's eyes appeared,  
By the fleetingness of all surrounded.  
Another seeing this at the gaping mouth stood,  
And speaking freed Deirdre from the hearth,  
Inviting her to desert the *bóthan*'s numbing drafts in her company  
For the warmth of family and the Faolainn home.  
And smiling quickly Deirdre Mónica joined,  
Their shrinking steps like paths returning them.

The show of gaiety Deirdre enacted down the evening,  
Performing for the Faolainns to great success  
The act of one undisturbed.  
Excursion had drawn out from Sol like venom  
The pulse of discontent, and for a time was he joyful,  
Unto dinner even, with sister making merriment,  
Deaf to Deirdre's turmoil, dumb as she was about it,  
Shining instead a jocose mask;  
And undetected her mask to the dining table's greater part was,  
For all, even Fergal, were by her charms swayed,  
From underneath their yokes inspired.  
And were they as Mónica not,  
Masks of finer material still they wore,  
Though none the mask of a mother could finer forge:  
For its eyes saw what could not be seen,  
And seeing were invisible.  
No, spirits about the dining room soared  
To heights of holy jubilation,  
All courses by the party in gradual delight consumed,  
Until unwarned a face, unmasked, from the shadow of the entryway appeared,  
And inward damp by wetted snow  
Stepped the commanding form of Renton.

He was a man, though young, who filled a doorway,  
In stature and breadth so sure,  
Of his father's complexion fair and smooth,  
Of hair wavy and dark, his eyes protean ice-shades,  
A smile carried within them  
That rarely thin-lipped Renton showed.  
All were briefly by his image stilled,  
Then spurred: first Áine, to whom he shared his rare smile,  
And the greetings of Grecian tongue;  
Then mother, who like daughter a paddle in his arms seemed.  
Sol amidst their speech the Grecian words *early* and *surprise* heard,  
With Deirdre rising last in train to make their salutations;

Above Fergal his youngest son a head overlooked  
Into the eyes of high-grown uncle,  
Greeting each in clarity with words by Sol unused;  
And last Sol before brother stood,  
Deirdre like a vestal offering to Renton presented,  
Who with scant interest received,  
Greeting both in speech plain and temperate.  
And Deirdre such reserve could not grasp,  
For more like a shadow was he in Sol's portrayal  
Than any met within that glowing room.

His coming, but short in occurrence,  
By freak following with odd length flowed.  
Deirdre introduced, and Sol's hand released,  
There came in the silence between speech,  
A force silencing all discussion: down the hall  
A rapping hail. All within the room subject to its power fell.  
Threading himself through the party,  
Fergal advanced on the front door,  
His bewildered strides long and brisk,  
Amidst second raps unfastening the bolt,  
Inviting within to each's hearing a foreign voice.

Entering their home, the voice in darkness stayed,  
Its face by the unlit foyer hid,  
Speaking with Fergal in quiet, careful tone.  
Fergal from out the dark calling  
Their removal to his study announced,  
Issuing themselves toward dim candlelight,  
Face and form of the voice unseen.  
Yet, though a voice to each foreign,  
To each but one not unfamiliar:  
For on return to their joyous dinner,  
Restive lips now well subdued,  
Passed to each about the table  
That the voice which with he spoke Áine knew,  
That it was a voice she had in three encounters  
Heard in the offices of their father's firm,  
A name she with undue loathing  
Like a goose guarding its roost spoke:  
The man who had driven Fergal from his work,  
Macsen Khachanov, of whom Áine to Sol in her letter wrote.

How lacking in surety will these gyres

Until such clarity arrives all life suspend,  
As though life upon a dagger's blade hinged;  
So in muddled speech they sat, each but Renton,  
Who, knowing himself unexpected,  
Had found his fill in town, and from meal refrained.  
For what ill fortune might one bite breed?

What was but only a gathering of moments passed,  
And Khachanov's steps were heard at the door,  
By Fergal's step unfollowed.  
The dining room arose,  
The children nudging up to the doorway  
To see what scene through which they might glimpse,  
Áine most eagerly passing through,  
The other three (for Deirdre too had come)  
Held as spectators aback. Hand by the doorknob held,  
Khachanov waited like a statue before them,  
As if by Áine's gaze made stone.  
His grip by breaking his cast relaxed,  
His figure into the light trembled shortly,  
As if now by Áine's pale gaze ensnared.  
And the light like a serpent crept upon him,  
Winding its form up his legs,  
Its paralyzing jaws intent on his head.  
But her snare he perforce broke,  
And wrestled the light off, permitting it no pause upon him.  
Hurriedly he advanced on the door,  
And in a ray of tepid lamplight was gone,  
Imprecation in Áine's countenance after him.

Fergal in weariness to his supper returned,  
Threading soon after Khachanov's leaving  
The grain stalks of his puzzled brood.  
Mónika the family and guest roused  
To tend to table and confection  
As sorting through his cold scraps Fergal sat.  
But once did he stir from his plate  
As the family cleaned and set about him:  
When gingerly by his jacket sleeve he grabbed Sol,  
Insisting quick counsel in his study.

Into the dimness of study worried Sol issued,  
His father not breaking for honeyed bread,  
Or any concoction of sweet recourse,



But followed Sol within, counsel commencing.  
Áine from her perch, with coaxing talk soon dismounted,  
Though fast were her eyes set upon the window  
In survey of the darkness withheld.  
Speech again returning to their tongues,  
And in force again to Renton, the room as it was unpeopled,  
Who with Deirdre now freely traded words  
On topic of school and occupation.  
Yet worn for speech he soon became,  
Words to him gilded things, valuables uneasily released,  
And weary by a day's dogged travel he sat  
With impressive back loosely curved.  
So uttering good night to all  
He to his room in bleariness walked,  
With mother's kiss and sister underfoot,  
Carrying heedfully his journeyman's pack.  
Smiling Giddy to each the women,  
Mónika and Deirdre awaiting the reemergence of their men,  
A thankful grin displayed,  
And with quavering steps into library passed,  
Where crossing himself once he was closed in.  
A warm libation, mother to lover  
In gentle pursuit of nervous dilution broached,  
And the antique samovar was lit;  
And with inspirited libation at hand,  
To the parlor was their waiting moved  
As the sharpened plucks of harpstrings  
Washed down from Áine's bolted room.

By the brightness of the lively parlor hearth Deirdre adored  
The many portraits and sculptures of childish invention  
Upon the ship-wood mantle stored,  
To each exhibit by mother in elation guided.  
Setting themselves to firm couches,  
The tour of Faolainn art complete,  
The women in discourse of frivolous topic  
By Deirdre's navigation embarked,  
Willing their course about discountenance,  
Redirecting at each storm and reef,  
The soundness of her mask, and the safe,  
If harrowed, arrival of the vessel it steered foremost in mind.  
Oh, but if a vessel, what a zealous sea  
In Mónika had evading Deirdre found;  
For finding Deirdre caught amongst waves,

Mónika about her ballast gathered and swelled,  
And to calmer waters commenced to flow.

In mild frankness Mónika questioned  
If at any moment Deirdre had felt distress,  
And Deirdre though through cheer first denying,  
Soon undone became, and into her cup stared,  
Freeing an unwilling *yes*.  
And knowing what troubles within a woman's heart reside,  
Again she asked, seeking to answer  
If Deirdre believed her son a man of serious intent.  
And again Deirdre spoke *yes*, but faltering now in confidence,  
The fire for a bushel of moments crackling  
Before Deirdre with dolorous face  
To her unrestful home alluded.  
And Mónika for her own artifice sought pardon,  
For Sol had in letter disclosed her home as unwelcome.  
With voice wool-soft Mónika like fragile petals  
Laid out her sureness in Sol's feeling,  
Speaking as one knowing great love  
What reified care she in Deirdre appraised,  
While knowing well too what strife  
The dubious care of men might engender.  
Seeing what fraught about the girl drifted,  
Mónika tabled her libation,  
And gazing unmovable into the flames  
A bouquet extracted from their tongues,  
Of some memories to her children yet untold.

Her mother, with a smile saddened and wry,  
Dana Mór, lay dead before her birth,  
Aunts Ely and Rhea, and father Diogenes,  
Left to replenish what they might  
The absence by her death made;  
But though strong and sea-wise the Ypónéros were,  
Weak were there minds before such a task,  
Her father above them all, of wont sorrowful and queer,  
His grief like a poison to his mind,  
Turning him mad with each dwindling year.  
There were times even, she unflinching said,  
When she for her mother was mistaken,  
But these times like ships beyond sight  
Of a guiding torch floated when Fergal and she  
As but children at a cousin's christening met,

And were still not into vision passed  
The day of their second meeting  
When Ingemar and Apellon first Eucharist.  
And as Nature so oft fashions,  
The play of children to juvenile love changed.  
Furious, though, her father raged,  
When discovery of their letters illumined the affair.

But Deirdre to this detail was curious,  
Asking what spark incensed the man's fury so,  
And Mónica with thoughtful nod spread her lips,  
Saying that they were but a grandparent removed,  
That Fergal's kin Apellon and Ingemar were, too.  
Though perhaps fuel enough  
To inspire the heat of Diogenes' rage,  
What Mónica knew in truth lit the flame  
Lay not in their relation, but its likely lacking:

For his seed at Diogenes' casting  
Was alongside a sordid other's sown.

Thus began the nights when homeward from school  
Mónica every distraction enlisted  
To prolong her return to her resentful home,  
Each evening's journey a moment longer strained  
A moment her life happier making.  
In time but a collection of moments,  
A paltry thing beside what is deserved and desired,  
Sufficed no longer, and hours would pass  
Before she in miserable acceptance showed her form.  
But, oh, how a child's thinking,  
Devising such machines of innocent defiance,  
Can counteract their ambitions,  
And headlong propel them into the fires  
Which by their rebellion they sought escape.  
In the kitchen of her grandmother, Caireen,  
She once arrived, clenching in hand tresses of her winding hair,  
Her blue face tear-stained and desperate,  
And there for seven suns stayed;  
But unavoidable, and unwilling, was her return.  
For though Caireen was not cool to her pain,  
Poor was her health and constitution.  
And returned, Mónica the role of doting child assumed,  
Her father overcome at the advent of her obedience:

No messages bearing Fergal's name  
Were received again in their quiet home,  
And never did her feet after school linger.

In a moon's phasing there broke a morning  
When she like a ghost became,  
And Diogenes scouring the seaside town  
Ran from home to home, heavy-breathed and crazed,  
Hunting her trail with scourge in hand.  
But none sheltered her, and each after,  
Discussing between themselves,  
Agreed that his eyes by evening  
Had to eggs grown, such was his madness.  
None by the moonless night, recalled Mónica,  
Had his wild figure seen,  
But a fisherman mooring to the quay his quiet vessel  
The sounds of swashing water reported,  
And sunken-ship moaning of the name *Dana Mór*.

He was still clothed, she was told,  
When in the dawnlight he was pulled,  
Terror consuming his rigid gray eyes.

Here Mónica in her story paused,  
And Deirdre by her tale captivated  
Asked when she learned the news of her father.  
Mónica silent at first confessed it a year,  
Adding that a period of many discoveries it was,  
For of his passing was she informed  
When only she in Fergal's residence was uncovered.  
Deirdre surprised herself  
When their years in that scandal requested,  
Which Mónica grinning supplied,  
Saying seventeen of Fergal's twenty she had seen.  
They were from Fergal's tenement removed,  
Their union a disgrace by orthodoxy unsanctioned,  
And word of this with light's impossible speed  
Flew to her family's yet scouring ears.  
All things happened as by God written:  
Had that light not upon their scandal landed,  
Doubtful would her father's fate be known,  
And when else, and with what necessity to affirm love  
And defy ignominy, might they have wed?

To enhance their lives  
And establish a home child-worthy,  
As every virtuous man his husband duty feels,  
Fergal graduating fast to education returned,  
Mónika by ignoble employ buoying them,  
Both from family and support cast away  
By the offense of their marriage.  
Grief and loneliness then overflowed,  
For days and even months away  
Fergal at his engineer's tutelage labored,  
Mónika a maid in and outside home,  
And oft given to meals ate alone  
Fearing beyond reason, though still young,  
The fruitlessness of hopeful sacrifice,  
Each rung higher on the ladder climbed  
A rung lower from children and family made.  
Her twisted ears of this abandon stinging,  
Deirdre in nervous candor  
Poured her vision into her emptied cup,  
Asking if ever Mónika feared the man who left might not return,  
If all time and distance into another might forge him,  
One for family careless,  
And to the visions at love's shared birth suddenly blind.

Fear like hunger is, Mónika said,  
A sensation within us everpresent,  
Though unlike hunger stronger-grown when fed.  
Early, yes, her fear she indulged  
On dread sundry and noxious,  
Sickening herself in bouts of nervousness.  
But there happened a night in bed  
When with worry fatigued she heard Fergal  
From a week's labor approach,  
And mimicking sleep lay out amidst the covers.  
His heavy steps without halt dragged to their bedroom door,  
And entering silently beside her he laid,  
Nestling into her, his body tense and sluggish.  
Granted again his desired warmth,  
She wrapping her arms about him  
Felt the whole of his body like a knot loosen,  
And realized then that strain he too bore.  
Life of the other deprived easier might have been,  
But was not a prize to them of any value,  
And so to and from bed her load she carried, but into never.

What might men, losing women become,  
Mónika wondered, and of women without men as well?  
Little relief to life this meant,  
But neither meant submission  
To the many-colored banners of conflict;  
For when at last Fergal an engineer became  
Under contract of a firm noble and eminent,  
Shocked were they both learning  
Of his post erecting a damn far across sea.  
An impermanent position though it be,  
Mónika despite the firm's discouragement  
Beseeched her needed presence,  
To keep the weight they as one balanced.  
To this Fergal offered little protest,  
And over anxious waves a ship soon sailed them.

Into the parlor a hush crowded,  
And throughout the house all liveliness  
Was like in a garden heard,  
Studied footsteps descending the stairs,  
The shallow voices of father and son  
Deliberating calmly behind high walls,  
The library books' whispering pages,  
The fire dimly like a dying soul murmuring beneath it all.  
About the room this hush hung,  
Until the fire's cracking carried it away.

Mónika, herself for a moment carried on,  
Her insistence to join him regretted,  
For in her time there illness took her,  
And Fergal for her concern his duties neglected,  
An accident—she said, pausing again, then started back,  
Confessing her pith amid the story lost,  
Giving the hush power to reemerge.  
The men in the study now unheard,  
Then the distant opening of a door,  
Mónika the hush fought off a final time,  
And to Deirdre turned, asking could Man in fear of God,  
Defending His name and people,  
Overwhelm ever His will?  
Or does all in seeming first ugly  
With time beautiful turn?  
All joys of life and love to them would foreign be,  
No children, home, without some faith,

The faith of Men born and bred to err.  
Fergal's acts as a godly man,  
Who feared and doubted, but with courage and hope  
In spite of error reinstated name, and honor,  
And elevated their household beyond prediction.  
Appalling though their choices seemed,  
Done were they in faith and trust  
To care for one another, and caring reproduce.  
If a Man is before himself, his God, and others honest,  
Then what flowers his love, and even sin, may bloom?  
And Mónica of Deirdre asked if Sol was in her knowledge  
A man much the same, slow to error, quick to justice,  
Keeping in hand faith and hope—as much as any young man might,  
She laughed, for a man he still was.

By her humor infected, Deirdre laughed,  
By her comfort and candor ensconced,  
Confirming Mónica's assumptions.  
With carpeted steps near-coming,  
Mónica before her solicitor rose,  
Taking into hand emptied cups,  
Assuring Deirdre that little need she worry,  
For though life expires, again does it grow.  
Wandering the kitchen called out Sol,  
Seeking his lover's wanted locale,  
Which Mónica with gentle voice imparted  
Bound for the dining hall,  
Kissing for the evening her son  
As into parlor he passed,  
And second kiss received beside Deirdre sat,  
Asking what was it about which they spoke.  
But Deirdre only his fluttering heart felt,  
There into peaceful repose unwinding.

And in peace's realm remained  
The length of her too-brief sojourn,  
Her journey home marked by Yuletide eve,  
And by a turn of hopefulness,  
In portion by Mónica's stories engendered,  
And in portion else by cheerful atmosphere  
Which following that eve through the home spread.  
Fortune prevailed Mácse's visit charismatic,  
Fergal the morning next to breakfast table  
Declaring partnership between the prodigy and he,

Hap which each but sullen Áine as priceless gifts received.  
Such a blissful scene presses on observer,  
Craving to loom forever o'er its beauty;  
Oh, what joy to those who upon all history  
Might glimpse without conclusion!  
But for those players was each moment  
Light's flashing and the soiling of air,  
Sucked up and onward blown;  
In and out of light they flash,  
By scenery downward lying imposed,  
The train upon its screw into darkness flying,  
Evadable as the night which follows day,  
A dark like earth feeling, moved-through,  
And upon the quickening body smooth,  
As into shadow it deeply slithers.

A message of weekly incident they solemn promised,  
And to the best of ability dispatched,  
For long were Sol's days, and tiresome,  
In sensation exceeding the considerations  
Of Deirdre's constant weekday watch,  
As Sol in jocose humor alluded.  
Oft were the weeks of lament when a letter  
With seven days' passing came to Deirdre unreceived,  
And she to her labors downcast trod.  
But she in these desolate times  
To the words of Mónica in hope turned,  
Delving into her drudgery,  
Supporting their love with all might possessed  
As she knew he from afar too did.  
Toil this term did not solely command;  
With Sol's companions discounting a friend,  
Deirdre like navel became,  
A port for his ears and eyes,  
A repository of jibes and ribaldry also,  
As they to she too functioned,  
Trading around a tavern table  
Tales of Sol's pomp and pomposity,  
Every jest resounding in the empty seat between them  
And entering their hearts as wistful hum.  
This note playing dryly in her chest,  
When each night they went separate,  
Deirdre a means to quell this humming sought,  
And further after Mónica herself fashioned



In the stillness of her empty room.  
Bending to the floor her knees,  
With delicate hand on bedspread folded,  
Bashfully for assistance she shuddering spoke,  
Calling out to ears she could prove not listened,  
To a mouth she knew spoke not back.  
But her bed accepting her she a response felt,  
Silencing in her heart the hum,  
And quelling softly her fervor.  
In this wise fattened and trimmed  
The pearly figures of six moons.

The day Sol was to return by sea,  
Deirdre to her jacket a flower fixed,  
And amidst an impatient mass awaited  
With the frenzy of a hive in her breast  
The long-sailing vessel's berth.  
Each passenger that upon land with restless foot stepped  
Deirdre for her Sol mistook, and her lover saw  
A hundred-fold when last of its cargo the ship expelled.  
But spotting from behind the taff Deirdre's eager face,  
Sol a trick to raise her joy devised,  
That while roguish would wing her heart,  
And so close behind a traveller obscured himself,  
Hiding his figure within the mass,  
Watching she who watched for him,  
Until the bodies about her grew thin,  
And she in misery turned her feet homeward,  
Sol stealing roguishly between the reaching shadows.

Through the forum again she led,  
Now heedless to her leading,  
No mind to turn around or circle  
Through the forum's ghostly alleyways,  
Heart and eye in grief like cotton soaked.  
Carried Deirdre stolidly this substance  
Until her sandals vernal grasses brushed,  
Where past callous observation she might  
The leaking barrel of her heart uncork,  
Sol to her unhappiness unaware,  
Overtaking her passage by wooded cover.  
With her figure hardly by vision seen,  
He quit his hidden conduct and ran ahead.

All shade again to endless distance dragged,  
Deirdre beside the road halted.  
Glancing where the sun its last glimpse shone.  
The ancient archway's vision appeared  
As a flame atop the earth's tallow.  
Her course from the road detoured,  
Bitter tears drying in the archway's warmth,  
And a song to first bewitch availed now  
To soothe her heart she whistled.  
Arriving there night's insidious creeping  
To the stony archway latched,  
And against its timeless height leant  
The evacuation of every soul she felt  
In passing through its mouth,  
Whistling final notes at first sadly,  
Then in surprised harmony  
*A quartered fifth repeated,*  
*Quavered, then a quarter skipped,*  
*Then beaming three which repeat,*  
*Step, repeat to downward twice skip*  
*For half a speckled beat.*  
As Sol grinning wickedly from out the archway stepped,  
Face cold in rapture of her beauty,  
By fixing of her Junonian bud,  
As is the beauty of women manifold in Nature  
Through Nature augmented.  
Realizing herself beside him,  
And she the present of his return,  
They shared the lingering kiss of reunion,  
Then took flight into the turbid world,  
Sol into his satchel stuffing a spray of letters  
From his pocket amidst celebration freed.

How oft one into cloud and darkness  
In company of another wanders,  
To exit learning themselves quite alone!  
To find night's cloud transfigured white,  
Then like a curtain hoist before empty scene!  
No scene of human intention, no,  
Not drawn, or by dyes and rubbings figured,  
But crafted by Nature's steady touch:  
Sandy grasses onto an ocean waving  
Of a sudden undone, cut off by earth's plumb decline,

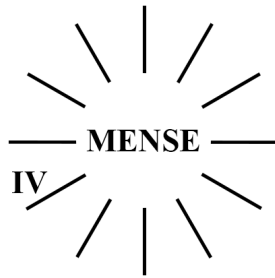
The wanderer, now player, in a muttering air caught,  
Astray from his action bounding.

But when muttering like a whisper becomes  
How his bounding halts!  
How he surveys the land,  
Gyre's mindless unwinding of track upset,  
And traveler, not actor, he again is,  
Not within setting, but in.  
But a struggle between two masks arises,  
And actor to waves traveler sends  
With whispering at his heel.  
Lo, whisper again rises, and traveler with it rising,  
From foaming depths returned,  
And upon him the threat of death espies,  
In form serpentine, its head like an arrow reared!  
How fast the traveler ahead leaps, actor usurped,  
Serpent slithering after meal behind,  
Here fangs flashed at traveler's stumble,  
There fallen behind when traveler uprights,  
Its venomous pursuit far outpaced!

How he runs still, Sol, like all travelers  
When secure from harm's oppression;  
How running they will run down,  
And, by fear and agency distracted,  
Find themselves as he upon some hurdle stumbling,  
His ankles like surrendering banners sailed,  
All symbols upon them inverted.

Into the morning clouds Sol's dazed vision  
Like a quill skyward blown floats,  
Confused and disrupted,  
Wondering to and fro if cloud indeed it is,  
Or yet a thickened mist,  
But, ai, still lost, in need of guiding zephyr.  
For in what a state, with all obfuscated,  
Might pristine vision a train for serpent confuse,  
Not a train on twisted track sliding,  
But a great serpent coiling downward,  
Those pillars four around which the tracks twist  
Now as four legs envisioned,  
Not of stoic and concrete standing,  
But about one another dancing,

Dancers' faces by the darkness masked,  
Gyring anonymous amid the serpent's den,  
Their feet aflutter and dances genuine;  
But that by the trail's end,  
Only are their steps for certain known,  
And not which feet step them.



*Anti Canta*

A servant informed his lord that his fellow servant had been heard boasting of his intellect, and priding himself above his master. The lord thanked his servant, and for his loyalty rewarded him with a talent. ๕

At that time the lord held a feast at his home. He ordered the boastful servant to stand beside his throne during the celebration. A pair of dancers dressed in the same vestments entered the hall and began entertaining the guests. Having waited for their dance to begin, the lord spoke to his servant, Are you able to see? Yes, my lord, I am able to see, he answered. I am told you are a wise and clever man. Is this true? If my lord says I am, the servant answered. Watch these dancers perform their dance, said the lord. When they finish, I will ask you three questions. Answer each correctly, and I shall give you more than silver. I will make you head of my house. But should you answer one incorrectly, you will sleep upon the ground, and be given only coarse grain to eat for a

month. The servant agreed, and watched the dance in silence at his lord's side.

As he watched the dancers, the servant saw that his lord would ask after their steps and vestments, and so studied them carefully.

When the dancers had finished their performance and left the hall, the lord asked of his servant the dyes of their vestments. The servant smiled, Of dyes there were five, my lord: one a scarlet like pomegranate, another a violet like that of the herb, a third of the green sea, the fourth a white of the purest wool, and lastly the gold of the many rings on my lord's hands. The lord next asked in which direction the dancers spun, whither with the Earth, or against it. Again, the servant smiled, With the Earth and against it they both spun. But my lord will agree that they turned mostly in the way natural to them, that is with the Earth. The lord agreed and said, You are indeed wise. Answer this question, and you will be made head of my house. You will be honored, and never shall you want the rest of your days. Now, answer: what were the colors of their eyes?

The servant was quiet, for fear of answering his lord, for he had not thought to look unto their eyes. At last his lord spoke, Your

tongue is caught, for though wise as you boast to be, you saw only what you chose to see, and nothing else. Gazing upon two you saw only one whole, and not the vital parts of the whole. You failed to see one apart from the other. And if seeing them apart, mistook one for the other, and chose not to see their difference. You have shown the shortness of your sight, and are unfit to watch over my house. Now, you shall sleep on the earth, and feed amongst the cattle.

The servant was removed from the hall and beaten. A month he slept upon the earth, and ate only coarse grain. ◊

Sol rose and searched the land; but in the grasses and on the Earth he did not see the serpent which spired after him, for it had flown, and coiled amongst the dark twists of its den, where for the passage of another pilgrim it waited.

Now, seeing the land empty, Sol went forth. But again his trance was halted, as he soon felt a sting at his foot, and kneeled down and looked upon it. Fearing a bite he breathed from his nostrils in relief, for though blood was drawn, the serpent had not injured him, nor tasted of his flesh, though his flesh was torn; a small

stream of blood poured forth from the *P* wound at his ankle.

Though he knew of his injury, he did not wipe the wound clean, so that blood might not be shed, and the earth left undefiled.

When he arose he returned steadfastly to his trance. Then the sky opened up to a sphere of light, which illuminated the way before him. Where the light rested his eyes received the bluff of Dumetz; he continued toward the rock, and blood stained the hide of his shoes. D

\* \* \*

*Canta Prima*

In a city at the nation's south border on the coast of the salt sea D  
westward, there moved a merchant by the name Emiel. And the name of his wife was Merel, and together they had two issues: a son by the name Denys; and a daughter by the name Dorothy, who was called Polly. Emiel was a merchant of many wares, but chiefly wine and other strong drink; his business grew in that city, which was called by its people Masulom, and his wealth prospered.

A time came when of age Polly left Emiel's house, and travelled across the sea to the region settled by Tyrrhenians, whence she



remained a full year. Returning thither, she bade Emiel take her under his employ; for her travels had made her lusty, and she sought riches in kind with his. But Emiel was wary, and denied her entreaty. His ruling she denied, and to him she lifted up her voice and said, that he stood only to lose a worker should she fail, and not a daughter. Whereupon Emiel knew that strength in her true; he submitted, and Polly in her nineteenth year wore the mantle of apprentice, and her father unto her the mantle of master.        5

It came to pass after a full year that Emiel elevated Polly        5 above her post. For she was fair, yet diligent, and shrewd in her business, and stood not before mean men, but before kings. Emiel then sought to replenish the place that now lay empty by her ascent; and appealing to his friends for one worthy of the role, sent notice across the rivers, and above the mountains of his land. Many applied their passions to Emiel's service, for he had in reputation among the merchants of his land. One was chosen from the lot, one to whom piety towards his God and his master, and whose wisdom and honour, was without equal, the friend of a judge allied with a distant vintner in the company of Emiel. Morin was this judge's name. And Solomon was his friend, who was called Sol.

Now, in the first month Emiel had tasked Polly away, and so was she absent from her father's offices when Sol arrived; therefore in the first month did they not meet. And the land there was wide, and many gods were worshipped; with thirst of home Sol's heart suffered, for though willing and able to perform the vows of his office, he was yet an alien in a strange land, and in wealth was he wanting. His master valued him greatly, for Sol was pious, and at his trade did he labour with diligence, and Emiel profited greatly by him. Many were the patrons Sol attracted at that time by his mind of commerce, and his eloquence. But to his silent lodging he would return and keep, and ate little more than might sustain him.

He would wander the streets of the city when they were empty, after night had crept over. He became lost among the streets of the city, and called for direction, yet none did answer.

When in the second month Polly returned, and great success returned with her, Emiel took her to Sol and met them together. And only did her eyes fall upon him was she immediately taken with him; yet he was beneath her, she spoke to him gently, and she did not betray the secret admiration concealed with the depths of

her soul. Though she spoke softly, and came and went softly unto him, the spirit of Love within her sang:

P: Who is this man for whom my heart yearns? Only just is he known to me, yet my heart he hath entangled! How strange are his powers!

R: He is Solomon, my Lady, who hath entangled your heart! With his breath he hath refreshed its pulse; the light from his image hath made lightened the shroud of your skin!

P: The pulse of my heart was slow, but now how swiftly it runs! My skin once darkened now shines; its marls hath quitted my luster!

R: And what power of Love, for indeed only little do you know him!

P: Now little only are we met, but I shall know his most secret parts, shall discover of him that which shall as two streams in the spring, swollen, then joined as one, make us by the forces of Love!

R: Come, tell us, child, how you are so certain! What is this power that hath overwhelmed you so?

P: For the Lord hath brought us together; His grace hath found me still, hath lighted instantly a bright flame,

brighter than any before, though I am wounded. He is  
flowery myrrh to rest upon my bosom; his hands like  
fragrant oils wrapped about my skin.

R: Your joy has drawn us close by; we are sat at the side of  
your bed, rejoicing with you, glowing by the flame of  
your love; and in the hope of your union are we made  
glad!

P: *Mi baci con i baci della sua bocca!*

o

Her admiration she hid away; her heart was smitten, but until the 5  
six and twentieth day she kept indifferent.

But it passed on that day she departed late from among her father's  
offices, and departing thence went in company of Sol. Therefore  
she beckoned unto him, and they left together, as she deceived him  
that his lodging lie along the journey to her home.

P: How silent he is! How carefully hath his words been  
meted! I am beside him, yet he walks apart from me.

R: Love, like a flame, by spark shall kindle discreet. Fan it,  
fuel its tongue, and see how it grows!

P: —and when indeed he speaks, his words are like kids,  
leaping about in the field.

R: What hath passed, dear sister?

P: Sister, sister—to his sister he compares me, and saying so  
husbands a wall, over which vision doth fail. O that we  
shared a mother, that I knew him so well; that I slept  
beside him, within the walls of his home...

R: What trials Love will thrust upon the mind! With what  
drunkenness of wine does it confuse!

P: Is it that I am young? He knoweth what labours he  
performs hath I done already, that he lieth below me in  
this respect. Does he seek to drag down, injure, and  
diminish me?

R: Suffer not indignation; we are certain that cannot be.  
Loosen not your heart, fairest sister. Hold fast to the reins  
of Love.

P: I am marled yet, though Love shall maketh my feeling  
without blemish. I shall seek out where he feedeth still; I  
shall not turn away, but will keep to the flock of his  
companions.

R: Go thee by the footsteps of the flock, and gather the kids  
before dusk.

From that day Polly and Sol kept company; notwithstanding his restraint, the unease with which he unguarded himself, he lowered his defense. Her revelation, that likewise she revered his God, fell upon the walls of his stronghold like the rushing of many waters, and weakened its foundation. For the land there was wide, and many gods were worshipped. She altered her day so daily they might journey together, and their words flourish as the vine.     ♠

In the third month, on the first and twentieth day, a performance ♠ was to be held in the city square, wherein Polly was to perform; wise in the skill from her youth, Polly lent often this skill in performance, and in giving it so was made joyous by zeal of the assembly.

So on the seventeenth day while journeying, as they talked together of all things which on that day had happened, and stood at last before Sol's lodging, Polly became quiet as air. Seeing this Sol became quiet as well; and Polly adjured him, In four days' time, we will dance dances, and beat timbrels in the Masulom theatre. I desire this petition, that you attend, and thereat watch me . Shall you?

Sol gazed down upon her, for she was slight in stature, and said unto her, I cannot, forgive me. Then turning he bid her farewell until the morrow, and entered into his lodging.

Her soul failed on her return home, and her steps beneath her lingered.

R: For why does such distress afflict your heart, dear sister?

P: If you should speak to the one for whom my heart yearns,  
I charge you, tell him how he pains me so.

R: We shall race unto him, and discover why he doth yet pain  
you.

P: *Non destate, non scuotete dal sonno l'amata, finché essa  
non lui voglia.*

Sol dwelt above his host; wishing not to disturb them he put off the shoes from his feet, and ascended to his upper room in silence. He took up a thick cloth and cast it over his window; he rested there until the fields were voided, and night crept over the land.

R: We sought you in the dark halls of your lodging, and here  
upon a bed of languishing we hath found you. We entreat  
you answer, why for you hath pained so greatly she  
whose heart yearns after you?

S: Why do you seek me here, when you were not invited?  
Why have you entered this place, when you are not  
welcome?

R: You are troubled; we come on her behalf and yours.

S: And on whose behalf goeth I? Hath a man not duty first to  
his God, second to his family, third to his master, and to  
himself last of all? And if his father should be crippled,  
are not his burdens, to feed and house his mother, lifted  
from his shoulders, and delivered upon the eldest son?

R: To yourself you are yet reckoned; amongst your company  
you are counted still. A man is not a servant only; he shall  
be fed, and given rest, that he might enjoy in the bounties  
of life.

S: O that our meeting had not been chanced; that I did not  
girt my neck with such a yoke!

R: Thy yoke was not made too grievous, nor lade too heavy,  
that you might not bear it; nor was it chained about your  
neck, that you might not remove it. Come, dearest



brother, rest your burdens. Tell us of she whose heart  
yearns after you.

S: Yea, O yea, shall I confess it? For Polly my heart also  
yearns. She is a lily apart from thorns. But do not tell this  
to the sparrow; do not let it sound from the mountain  
face, nor in the valley.

R: Tell us, then, of she for whom your heart also yearns.

S: Ah, she is beautiful, she is beautiful. Her eyes are  
emeralds, gems which shine in the deepest cave. Her hair  
is a field of wheat ripe for harvest. Her voice is a stream  
of water, which floweth in peace along the hillside. Her  
lips proceed and follow the Sun. Her perfume is the  
Moon: it both will engage and eclipse. Her skin is rich  
linen draped across the marriage bed; and though it is  
marled, yea, she is without blemish. But do not tell this to  
the sparrow; do not let it be heard in the city.

He arose late and wandered the streets of the city. He became lost,  
and called for direction, but none did answer.

On that first and twentieth day Sol feigned sickness, and entreated  
Emiel for his sake, that he delay his daily labours, and his master

permit he work into the night. And Emiel consented unto him, and delayed the beginning of his labours. But when he came to the offices Polly was absent. He laboured there until night crept over the land, until the offices were themselves swept, and empty, and he was sat alone.

Though nine hours of work were to be done, seven hours had passed when Sol was without any; for he had lowered his head all that day, and dealt only in answer to those whom addressed him. No watchman stood over him, so he took up his satchel and left there.

Thus he returned, and came unto his lodging. But when he returned he did not go forth, yet stood by the post of the gate, which was not shut.

He waited there for a time, then spoke: *Deus meus adjutor meus, et sperabo in eum.*

He turned away, and moved toward the west, where was the region of the sea, and the city center before it.

As he did so, a great sphere of light appeared in the air: it rose and fell about the street, shocks of lightning curved around it; and lightning, and fire, went forth from it.

But Sol was a valiant man, and not shaken in mind. He attended the light not, and was unmolested by it, as if it could not be seen.

And as he passed by, the sphere vanished out of sight. A voice of great thunder suddenly visited upon the street, and shook the Earth; yet Sol continued on, and to no one spoke, *Et intonuit de caelo Dominus, et Altissimus dedit vocem suam.*      ◊

*Canta Seconda*

Now in that certain city a feast was held on the first day of each season. Dramas were performed in the amphitheater, and also were acts of dance which Polly would be part to. But where her motions in seasons gone had been free, now great heaviness and sorrow, for Sol's absence in the multitudes, sat in her heart. They viewed her, and believed she did them displeasure, and for this in their minds they rebuked her.

When Sol arrived, for he meant it upon leaving his lodging to be a true witness unto her, he observed her motions, and forthwith was beguiled by them. And as she looked upon the multitudes, Polly saw Sol amongst the people, whose faces then were like the faces of cattle. And he gave a sign unto her, which she did see, and the flame of her heart was fanned.

R: Come forth, and look upon Solomon, for he is come!

P: He has come, the one for whom my heart yearns; there he stands visible from the multitudes, gazing upon me as were I Heaven itself. Though his lips move not, he speaks to me, saying, Arise, arise, O most beautiful of women, and honour them with your grace. Night recoils beyond the firmament, the flowers blossom upon the earth!

R: Lighten, O most beautiful of women. Lighten; let your vision be seen by the multitudes!

P: *Il mio diletto, il mio diletto!*

The multitudes were pleased; for her heart had changed, her motions were made equal with the others, and she moved before Sol as a woman unseen. When the performance ended she came

down unto him, and they regarded the feast together, though still in their most fervent truth they did not walk nor speak.      o

On the last day of the fifth month Sol was to leave. Of the time      o since the feast, much was spent throughout his labours and after in the fellowship of Polly, who enjoyed in his notice, yet prepared to bereave him. Their bond was strengthened; often they laboured in the company of one another, and were equals. And though many words of joy and of sorrow were traded, much between them went unnamed.

So Sol departed, for his stewardship had ended, and though his heart did yearn for Polly, also did he yearn for home and the company of his friends. He enquired of Polly, if she would greet him beside his ship. But she did that which was right by her heart, and did not watch him depart. On the night before he left she wrote to him many letters, and she wrote in the letters the many words between them that were unnamed, and sealed them with her father's ring. She sent the letters by posts on horseback; and though Sol did receive them gladly, he did not tear their seals, nor open them.

As soon as Sol was departed from her, a grief arose and almost slew Polly. She walked to the shore, across the sands to the mouth of the sea, and there washed her feet in the saltwater, and her grief was soon subdued.

R: Does it grieve you, sister, to see him roam, he for whom  
your heart yearns?

P: Yea, though he may roam he shall return to me; though  
amidst the other blooms of the world he may browse,  
until shadows grow thin, and the cool breath of night is  
come, unto his garden my Beloved shall return.

R: Let us make you a surety, that he shall be truthful, and will  
return unto you, and lavish upon you, with all manner of  
fragrance and of gold.

P: Yea, unto this truth I shall cleave! *Il mio diletto è per me e  
io per lui.*                                    ♪

When he was gone she was tried without him; therefore she        ♪  
sought to live apart from him. A valley of vision lie between them,  
though her love reached far, and was firm as stone. Seven days  
passed and he was not heard from. Seven days more passed; he  
was not heard from. A month soon came to pass, and still she had

not heard from him. In this time Polly's desires struggled within her: for seeing him in her sleep she could not well sleep; hearing him at her table she could not well eat; and smelling his scent beside her she could not well rest. Her fingers burned to have him, and what fruits produced of her labours were scant.

At this time she wrote unto him an epistle after this manner: Unto Solomon T. Faolainn sendeth Dorothy Damm her affection. I dreamed a dream last night, that we were lost to the streets of a great city, along which all manner of sickly kine streamed. By no reason the flow of kine ceased, and I turned to you and spoke, but saw that you were gone away. Night crept over, and in search after you I became more lost to city streets. I called out for you, yet my calls were not answered; I sought after you for whom my heart yearns, but found you not. The guardsmen who watch the city came upon me, to whom I spoke: *Avete visto l'amato del mio cuore?* I wandered the streets until day awoke me from out of my sleep, for the guardsmen had seen you, but knew not the street down which you fled. Do not go with the sickly kine of our city, nor wander its streets apart from me, she whose heart after you so yearns. Until we should speak again.

One month more her passions overtook her, as she endured patiently the return of her epistle, until the eighth month. And on the eleventh day of the eighth month he did return unto her; and her eyes were a fountain of tears; and for that which she sowed in grief during that time she didst reap in joy, and her heart as one of the seraphims ascended.

And unto one another they wrote many epistles after that time, each become more fervent than the other, each lade heavily by the weight of their love. But though his spiritual body dwelt with her, his natural body must needs dwell apart from her; for he toiled in the firstfruits of his labours, not suddenly could he fail the duties of his trade. Nothing else, but their letters, and their promises of love, did they receive.

They traded in their letters, until the first month of the next year, on the nineteenth day, when the burden of their love did bear unto Polly too hardly, which like a mountain upon scales weighed. And bending to that which her heart most desired, she implored of Sol, that he might journey unto her. And Sol received her request with joy, and wrote to her, that he would meet her at the Masulom gate, on the eighteenth day of the second month. D



*Canta Terza*

On the eighteenth day of the second month, Polly rose up very early in the morning, and went in haste to the harbour gate, that she might be witness to the arrival of his ship. She had arrayed herself in luscious, soft raiment embroidered by blossoms; and her hair was perfumed with an attar of flowers.

And it was that the space of three hours passed as Polly awaited his ship. When his ship arrived Sol descended first from it, and he took Polly up in his arms and held her to himself, and smelled the sweetness of her hair. She spoke to him dearly, saying, I will not release you, I shall not let you go till I should bring you to my home, till we repose in the sanctuary of my garden. You are gorgeous, my darling, Sol to her said, ah, you are beautiful. They entered the city together. There they came to an inn, and consumed a supper of soft grains, seasoned meat, and savoury oiled fruit.

They walked in all the ways she had walked in, and passed the buildings that were the academiae, and collegia. And Sol was in awe, for the city appeared to him not as it had before, but as an old garment cleaned of its stains. He saw the city as it was her own. But they were weary of the day's journey, and soon repaired

themselves home, where sat close beside one another they drank of mingled wine.

R: Come forth, and gaze upon your Beloved! See what goodness hath been allotted thy servants, what joy this union to each and other brings! How Solomon with such magnificence of gold and ivory doth shine; with what heavenly image of a lighted cloud doth Polly glow!

P: I have found him at last, he for whom my heart yearns. As a fruit-bearing tree shot forth from the desert sands, so he is among men, my lover!

S: And a single light that shineth in a land of darkness, a flame against the shadows she is, my lover—O she is beautiful, she is beautiful! Her eyes are emeralds, gems that shine even beneath the veil of night!

P: Let the veil be lifted; let us both be lighted by the flame! I delight to bask beneath his limbs, *e dolce è il suo frutto al mio palate.*

S: As pomegranates to the famished sojourner, so are your cheeks. How scarlet is the loveliness of your mouth; it proceeds and follows the Sun!

P: My lover like a gazelle glides gently down the hills, he cavorts amidst the valley; he peers forth through my window, shews himself through the lattice of my window. *Alzati, amica mia, mia bella, e vieni*, to me he calls!

S: Your neck is a silken tower adorned with treasures, with the gems and gifts of a thousand kingdoms. I will go to the hills of incense, and breathe cool the air that floweth there.

P: The buds upon the earth are bloomed; the time of pruning, of gathering the flowers beneath the hills has come. Let our song of love be heard across the land!

S: Sing above the hilltops, my lover, my sister, that all may hear. My heart is conquered with but a glance by your eye. How beautiful, how much more delightful than wine flows your love! How much better is the smell of thine fragrance than all the blooms of spring! Your lips drip of honey; the land of Canann lie beneath your tongue. Yours is the fragrance of my soul!

P: *Venga il mio diletto nel suo giardino e ne mangi i frutti squisiti!*

R: Bear not they that knocketh at thy gate, lovers, who  
protest by your rapture the sincerity of Love!      5

At the bottom of a hill there was a garden that from the earth      5  
brought all kinds of plants, which bore choicest fruit and yielded  
seed: orchards of pomegranates, and pears, and other fruits  
pleasing to the tongue; camphire with spikenard; spikenard, with  
saffron; calamus and cinnamon, and trees of frankincense; myrrh  
and aloes, and all manner of spice and herb. And there a virgin  
stream flowed through the garden, and out into the sea.

On the third day, they took them to the garden, where they walked  
beneath the stretching shadows of the trees. They ate of the  
pleasing fruit there, eating it with wine as they washed their feet in  
the waters of the stream. They lay their spirits amidst the juniper  
roots, and spoke of vanities, of life eternal, and of Love. Atop the  
hill they spied a tower; and going up to it they found that the tower  
was empty, and silent, but for the north wind that blew upon the  
hill and murmured through the walls thereof. And seeing that they  
were alone, they lay there for the space of several hours.

When they arose they descended the hill, and went to the house of her father, Emiel, who received them gladly: for they were waiting for them. Sol was taken to his wife, Merel, whose skin like Emiel was fair and clear, and his son, Denys, who was not yet wed, and whose skin was neither fair nor as Polly's marled. After they were met they sat at meat together; knowing he was a man after his heart, Emiel bid Sol give thanks for their supper, which Sol consented unto him. And he arose before them, for his company could only listen, and giving thanks he said, *In Nomine Patris, et Filii, et Spiritus Sancti. Benedic, Domine, nos et haec Tua dona, quae de Tua largitate sumus sumpturi. Per Christum Dominum nostrum. Amen.* They ate their supper then, and about the table their words travelled joyfully.

R: Eat, good friends, drink! Drink freely of Love!                    ɔ

Canta Quarta

On the fifth day it passed that Sol should leave, for his labours    ɔ  
could be disturbed no longer. They both lay in the garden  
consumed by grief of mind for their parting; and though they lay  
together, naught, even the moving of their lips, could assuage their  
mourning.

When the time of his departure was at hand, Sol asked of Polly, that she would give unto him a token of her, which he requested a portion of her fragrance. Polly took up the hem of her dress, and from it tore a small piece of cloth, which she anointed with the scent of her fragrance and gave it him in a vial. He fell to his knees and thanked her, and she held him close to the warmth of her womb.

They left, and together they went to the gate to her city, where his ship waited. Then the captain came, and declared unto the crowd that they would board. Sol kissed Polly, and turned. But Polly lifted up her voice and caught him, and kissed him, and put her grieving countenance unto him, and wept; and Sol wept with her for some time, then again turned aside, and left.

R: Where hath your lover gone, most beloved of women?

P: Though I wish him stay, he leaves. I have sought him amidst the multitudes, but I did not find him. He hath departed; he is gone away to the land of his home. If you should see him, I charge you say unto him, that I am ill with love.

R: We see him, dear sister. Call out to him, say unto him,  
Return you to my arms, most beloved! Tarry no longer  
away from the cover of my garden.

P: I have called to him, but *non m'ha risposto*. O, how ill I  
am with love. D

They would unite again the next month, the third month, on the D  
first and twentieth day, Sol journeying to Masulom once more; for  
though he was employed in his work, he possessed not a roof  
worthy to shelter her. They would look after their labours  
diligently, and would speak daily through the written word; in so  
doing would they deceive nature, and pass quickly over the waters  
of Time.

But what he had promised, Sol was unable to perform; for though  
he had formed that covenant, to speak daily through the written  
word, and first was he good unto his word, that for one week he  
was noble to his vow, scarcely after in that month did he uphold  
himself accordingly. And though each letter arrived like an arrow  
in her side for its neglect, and a wine once sapid became as one  
sour unto her, still she cleaved to him; they were in her heart

joined together as by God, and therefore could they not be put  
asunder. D

For that Emiel was prosperous in that city, and a merchant of D  
many wares, he had in his company many men with whom he was  
partner. Such an one was a man by the name Gabriel, whose skin  
was tawny, and whose hair was thin, though he was not yet thirty  
years of age, who fashioned pictures with the use of certain tools.  
And coming to Emiel he showed him his wares. Though thrice he  
had come before, he was frightened to enter, and his steps  
declined; but he assembled his strength, and being of a good  
courage he amazed Emiel with his wares, and the two were entered  
into business together.

For this had happened unto him in the second month during Sol's  
sojourn, Polly was not met with Gabriel until the twelfth day of the  
third month. And it was after their meeting in the offices of her  
father, that Gabriel took her aside and showed unto her an image  
he had fashioned. The breath of her mouth left her; for the image  
he had fashioned was in her likeness, and was wrought in every  
color. She stood with no breath in her, as before her he confessed:  
Though your father is a great man, it was you whom I sought most



to meet. Thrice I came to make you mine acquaintance, and thrice I withdrew, in fear of your perfect beauty. I bid thee: do not turn away one who esteems you so highly.

Polly drew away from him, and the image fell from her hands, and was broken into an hundred pieces. Gabriel bowed his head toward the earth, and said, Rebuke me not in thy authority, though I have indeed offended thee; but pray permit me remain in thy service, and I will wrong thee no further, but be thy loyal servant. Polly consented unto him, and he went away for some time.

Polly gathered the broken pieces of her image, but did not forsake them; she placed them in a vessel, and took them to her home. For though her heart cleaved yet to Sol, she was weary with forbearing, and questioned within herself the gain of all her troubles.

That night she dreamed again. When she awoke from her sleep, great drops of sweat wetted her locks. She arose and went over to her table, and there wrote in an epistle after this manner what she had dreamed: Unto Solomon T. Faolainn sendeth the affection of his Beloved. Again I dreamed of our city, about whose manifold streets we wandered lost. Not sickly kine now streamed, but all

manner of spirit flowed around every corner. Suddenly the spirits halted, and ascended to the sky above, where they were hanged like a dark cloud. I turned to you and spoke, but again you were gone away. I sought after my Beloved, but found him not; called after him, but was not answered. Again the guardsman who watch over the city came upon me, to whom I said: *Avete visto l'amato del mio cuore?* But they accused me then, of questions of their law, and pursued after and struck me, and sheared away the locks from my head. When they had struck me a tooth loosened, and was swallowed up. The tooth became like a seed and took root within me, and burst forth in a vast fir. The spirits above the city mingled in my limbs, and became like the leaves of my limbs: for my leaves had fallen, and were squandered down the city streets. And I stood as a great shadow upon the city until it was become dust, though the spirits perched upon me still. Do not allow that these things should befall; wander not the streets apart from me, but unto me return fast. Until we should speak again. ∅

In the evening, before the day Sol would come, Gabriel came to ∅ the offices where Polly laboured, and asked of her, May I speak with thee? I am soon to leave, Polly answered, and I will not return to the offices of my father for six days. Gabriel answered, May I

walk with you to your home, and we will speak along our journey?

Polly consented unto him, but was guarded towards him. The offices were closed, and they left for Polly's home.

Gabriel did not speak loftily, but humbly; he was meek unto Polly, and her guard toward him became eased. But when they came upon her home he caught her arm and drew her near to him; and in her eyes Polly was fearful. His heart greatly trembled, and to her Gabriel said, Why are ye so fearful? I fear your injury, said Polly to him. I could not harm thee, Gabriel spoke, for any harm you might do me: take out my tongue, and I shall not speak to you only; put out my eyes, and I shall only not see you; cut me down, and I shall only be fallen. I am your servant, for so greatly do I cherish thee.

He brought her nearer unto him; and he embraced her, and trespassed her. But Polly rebuked him, and removed herself from him, and said unto him, You say you are a servant, yet you have trespassed me, and the one I love. Get thee from my sight, lest I tell your master truly of this transgression. And Gabriel drew back, and asked, Who is this lover, and where is he? How does your lover differ from any other that you rebuke me so?

R: How does your Beloved differ from any other? Admonish him, O most faithful among women.

P: The skin of my Beloved is tan; his hair is dark, his locks like the finest baskets, so wonderfully do they weave. His stature is powerful, imposing as the cedars: his head gazes above the ten thousands.

R: Speak of his eyes, dear sister; tell us the beauty of his countenance.

P: His eyes might fall the hawk, and all other flying fowl of the sky, so sharply do they gaze. His cheeks are ruddy, so fiercely does his blood course. His lips are the fruit of the choicest vines; his kisses are the sweetest wine. And though his countenance is unbalanced, it is lovelier than any mine eyes have seen.

R: What else sayeth you of him? Come, let us hear!

P: He is a fiery furnace on the most bitter winter night; his arms surround me like the very warmth of spring. His body is the work of carved marble, finished in the richest polish and embellished with gold and gems. His presence is the very sweetness of life; he is every and all delight.

*Questo è il mio diletto, questo è il mio amico.*

R: Doth her answer not satisfy thee? Seek you to trespass  
again one with such a Beloved beside her, with so much  
glory of heart? No; leave here, most unworthy of men,  
and darken not the path of she or her Beloved once more.

Gabriel then went away with much sorrow before him, and was not  
seen again. Polly entered into her house and found the vessel  
containing the pieces of Gabriel's image, and cast it from her. She  
prepared her house for Sol, as a bride waiting for the coming of her  
lord. ◻

*Canta Quinta*

When the morning rose the next day, Polly awoke with great ◻  
confusion in her heart. She perfumed her hair with an attar of  
flowers and she arrayed herself in a garb of precious linen. She  
then went to the harbour gate and waited there for Sol's return.

When his ship arrived Sol descended first from it, and he and Polly  
looked to one another. Then Sol held her to him and spoke, saying,  
Forgive me, my love; I have broken my covenant to you. I foresaw  
not the strain of my labours, and in my misery forsook the one  
whom my heart most loves. Have pity on the most miserable of

men. Forgive the transgressions of my neglect; but, O turn not your eyes upon mine, so do they torment me.

Tears were on his cheeks; but Polly raised up her hand and wiped away all the tears from his eyes, and spoke, her eyes now wet with tears, Yea, you above all need not ask my forgiveness, nor cry unto me. No, though surely you must leave, let us not think it, nor speak of it; but feign ourselves to be one everlasting, until the final day. And to her he agreed, then said unto her, I cannot leave, for I am of no other; one alone is the gem of my eye, my perfect one, my beloved. And they went up to her house in the city, and lay together beneath the leaves and fruit of her garden.

R: Her beauty is as the moon, dear brother; her resplendence is the image of your own.

S: Yea, that I am in her, and that she is in me, this I know is true. ◊

On the second day they came to the house of her father, to take ◊ meat with his family there, though only four of them did eat, for Denys was not present.

R: How quiet the seat of her family eats. Dost thou fear, Sol,  
they know of your transgressions against their daughter?

S: A child is like a branch unto their father: every cut upon  
the issue is likewise by forebear felt. It is certain, for I  
hear the furious silence in his words, which with rebuke  
corrects my iniquity. He is an upright man; therefore his  
judgment is just.

R: Be ye kind, and forgiving of thyself, even as He hath  
forgiven you already. Be of humble spirit, humble thyself  
before them, but thy heart do not profane.

S: Though he be quiet, for before his eyes I have fallen, I will  
rise up again; though I have injured them, I will injure  
them no more. o

The morning of the fourth day came, and they took them to the o  
garden at the foot of the hill, that they might walk there beneath the  
shadows of the stretching trees, and eat of their many choice fruits.  
But when they were come they saw that the waters of the stream  
had risen and drowned many of the trees and green plants there,  
and washed away much of the garden's choice fruit.

Then Polly, turning about, saw Sol beside her bearing great sadness of countenance, and said, Come, beloved, let us go away from here. Let us spend the day among the villages. We will go to Yuhanna, to the vineyards, for their fields rest higher than these, and we will see the red vines in bloom, and drink of the wine made there. Come, for I see thou art beside thyself in hearing this; let us fly there swiftly, that I might render thee recompence.

And they rode south together along the coast to the vineyards; but when they were come they saw that the ground there had become parched, and the vines left to fallow. Sol, yet with sadness of countenance, turning about saw tears run down her cheeks, though she made no sound, and taking her cheek in his hand, spoke to her, saying, Sister, only that I might take away the sadness from thine eyes with but this stroke. Weep not: for neither should you mourn nor weep, nor should tears run down your cheek; the earth will not sink, nor the fields wither utterly, so long as I am yours. And by his consolation she was comforted in him.

They drank what little wine could be had there; supposing thence they had lost their purpose, they worshipped in a temple close by, then hired a cart, that they might be conveyed unto Polly's home. ◊



On the day before Sol would leave, that was the fifth day, they 5  
went away from Polly's home and came to the shore of the sea,  
when the shadows stretched thin, and the waters breathed cool  
upon them. They brought with them a skin of wine, of which they  
drank, and they were merry by it.

A cliff stood out from the shore, by the people named Dumetz, and  
there was a cove hidden behind the cliff, which obscured the cove  
and all who might tarry there, though it was empty of people. They  
laid their things there; and Sol stripped himself of his clothes and  
let them fall in the midst of their camp. He entered the water, and  
called on Polly, saying, Come, my love; humble thyself, and bathe  
with me in the water. Polly then uncovered herself of her garb of  
fine linen, and followed after him. They bathed in the secret  
recesses of the cliff for some time from the eyes of all but Heaven.

R: Come forth, and gaze upon your Beloved! See what  
goodness hath been allotted thy servants, what joy this  
union to each and other brings! How Solomon with such  
magnificence of gold and ivory doth shine; with what  
heavenly image of a lighted cloud doth Dorothy glow!

P: As a fruit-bearing tree shot forth from the desert sands, so  
he is among men, my lover.

S: A flame against the shadows she is, my lover—O she is  
beautiful, she is beautiful. Her eyes are emeralds, gems  
that shine even beneath the veil of night.

R: Her veil is like purple drapery; let it be lifted, and reveal  
the king held captive of its tresses!

P: Let the veil be lifted; let us both be lighted by the flame. I  
so desire to bask beneath his limbs.

S: As pomegranates to the famished sojourner, so are your  
cheeks. How scarlet is the loveliness of your mouth; it  
proceeds and follows the Sun; it is an excellent wine—

P: —*che scorre dritto verso il mio diletto e fluisce sulle  
labbra e sui denti*. O like a gazelle, glide gently down the  
hills, my lover; cavort amidst the valley; peer forth  
through my window, shew yourself through the lattice of  
my window. *Alzati, amica mia, mia bella, e vieni*, to me  
he calls, *viene*.

R: Her neck, it is as a silken tower adorned with treasures,  
with the gems and gifts of a thousand kingdoms! Go now  
to the hills of incense, and breathe cool the air that  
floweth there!

P: The buds upon the earth are bloomed; the time of pruning,  
of gathering the flowers beneath the hills has come. *Vieni,*  
let our song of love be heard across the sea.

R: Sing above the hilltops, lover, my sister, that all may hear!  
His heart is conquered with but a glance by your eye.  
How much better is the smell of thine fragrance than all  
the blooms of spring! Your lips drip of honey, for the  
land of Canann lie beneath your tongue. Yours is the  
fragrance of his soul!

P: *Venga il mio diletto nel suo giardino e ne mangi i frutti  
squisiti.*

R: O, bear not they that knocketh at thy gate, who protest by  
your rapture your sincerity of Love!                      ◊

And when afterwards evening came, Polly said she would like to ◊  
see the Sun go down before her, behind the islands of the sea; and  
to her Sol agreed. They took up a cloth, and climbed to the top of  
Dumetz, where they might watch the descent of the Sun darken the  
earth. For that they yet were unclothed, when they arrived Sol  
wrapped them together in the cloth; and they looked out upon the  
sea from atop the rock, and saw twilight was come.

In the holiness of the hour Sol turned to Polly, for he saw her countenance was fallen, and spoke to her, saying, You hold my eyes waking. Why are ye troubled? I am so troubled, she answered, that my lips fail to speak. He asked her, What thoughts arise in your heart? Then she looked up to him; and she confessed unto him all that Gabriel had said and done: with his much fair speech he caused her to yield, with the flattering of his lips he forced her, though she did frustrate his purpose—

— And his, ehr... response to this was?

— He asked me, he asked me if there was someone else. ‘Yes,’ I of course said, though I was, I was shocked... and then I told him of you, that our feeling for one another was strong, too strong to ever permit him approach me again.

— *Bean mhaith*. Your father is furious, benevolent man though he is, I imagine? Won’t be in business any longer?

— Well, Sol... it’s just that—I’m conflicted, you see? Emiel doesn’t know, I haven’t told him, and... I’m unsure, I don’t know if I’m going to tell him.

— *Christe*, are you serious?

— He’s a good man, forgetting this, and he didn’t know about us—how could he have, when we’re seldom together—oh, how do I fault him for what he felt, if it was real?

— The cad *did* force himself on you. Were his intentions any darker, who’s to say? Might’ve had you joining the Sabine.

— Yes, I know... I know. But they weren't, and he didn't. Why should his living suffer for that? He's embarrassed himself already, and been told—emphatically, yes, very much, I told him—to stay apart from me. What's the point, why should I put him down when he's already been injured?

— Yet in ventry it's nothing more than a *coup de grâce*, an act of, ehr... well, it isn't 'charity,' but—

— *Mercy?*

— Yes, yes. Ah, you're always reminding me.

— Of what?

— Of why precisely I come here. Oh, well—*si te audierit, lucratus eris fratrem tuum*, I suppose; with your charity in hand, he may very well redeem himself—undeserved though redemption may be. Nonetheless: you're a good woman, Dorothy—Polly.

— And you're a wonderful, caring man, Solomon—*Solly*.

— One is as good only as those in their company. Though... of course, those in one's company, one is not always aware.

— You mean your sister?

— *Ita*. Yes, yes...

— You don't have to, but I want you to tell me already. Remember you said, you mentioned that you would tell me the story of what happened to your sister.

— Which one?

— You have only the one, don't you?

— Oh, right. *Fehlleistungen*, Teutonically—yes, Áine, and Macsen, you mean.

— That was his name, then?

— ‘Macsen Khachanov,’ right... you’ll remember two Yules prior my father, and then Macsen subsequently, left their firm to partner at their own?

— Yes.

— Well, Macsen’s not much my senior—he having some four or five summers beyond my own—but a young man, and, Archimedean brilliance notwithstanding, one not possessing much of the, ehr... Magna Graecian’s *élan* nor *éclat*. An awkward man—not antisocial—but being a foreigner, an alien’s paragon, of sorts.

— He sounds not unfamiliar to someone else I know...

— The similitudes (or, *verisimilitudes*, rather) have yet evaded me. Hush. *Ubi sum*... right, nor was or is the man the impecunious variety, being the fiduciary of a generational and quarterly-compounding wealth, of which he paid little notice to. In summation: a bachelor in a strange land, tonguetied and with only a mind for math and minor interest in his wealth.

— *Un'unione pericolosa*.

— Not that my mother—nor my father, for that matter—thought so. No, with his removal from home and his orphan state—oh, I didn’t mention: when the man was a boy he’d lost his parents, you see, like, ehr—well, despite all they both looked upon him as a child, and so they often invited him into their home (being a child, therefore, beneficiary also to parental instinct). Given the men, he and my father, were partners in their own firm now, fraternizing was practically inescapability. What began as a tepid confidence galvanized by the fear of financial destitution, grew to—well, yes, I think they might have called Macsen their friend. In fact, given his gratitude and generosity toward them, arrear amnesia, and their respect of

each other... well, they very well may have soon called him 'son.' Remember, though, that this is much Áine's perspective on the matter. Myself, I ever only saw the man twice; she, however, came to write of him in her letters obsessively. Hatefully, even, until...

— Until?

— I cannot say how or why it happened—even *when* with any, ehr... *exactitude*, but all evidence of him disappeared from her letters beginning midsummer of last year. I didn't hear a word of him after, not until they were discovered the dawn of All Saints'.

— Not to speak of it lightly, but this tale is becoming so theatric. Oh—but do continue.

— *Sine tuo consensu ne verbum, non puto. Grazie, madonna.* It came out the affair had been going on the better part of an half-year. My father demanded they stop seeing one another; Áine was only a child—seventeen, though a child still in his home—and he asserted she should not be with a man so beyond her in years. He claimed that Macsen had exploited her naïveté, that he had used his influence to manipulate her; Macsen protested this, and declared before my parents something, to them, far more troubling: that Áine and he were in love.

— They'd caught and cornered him, but didn't believe his confession? Ah, so foolish! disparaging love in that way. No offense meant to Fergal and Mónica, of course.

— *Non raptus est*, Though I wouldn't venture to call him prideful, my father isn't without his pride. And *vir non est*, especially in matters concerning his only daughter? It's my interpretation he was most irate at having been deceived—*betrayed*, as he alluded to it in his writing. Macsen, however, refused, saying that he would submit to any other compromise but that: pay them damages (somewhat of an old-country *faux pas*), marry her, restructure their

shares—at last he offered to leave the firm to my father in its entirety, door, floor, and mortar, if it meant their blessing in return. But—

— He was willing to offer them everything, everything, and still they rejected him?

— My father, most vehemently; my mother sat silently in a chair, watching their quarrel, whispering, thumbing her beads, as she recalled. My father deserted their firm. Macsen continued to forward him his salary as a sign of good faith, hoping that show might quell his fury. But it was useless; my father wouldn't see through his indignation, and returned the payments shredded.

— And Áine? Where was she in all this?

— Imprisoned behind her very own walls, grating her heart against her harp for months. Her spirit, her spirit is indefatigable (you're much too alike in that way, you two), despite—or conceivably tributary to—her lisp. I've never considered it before now, but, well it isn't impossible, is it? That the mutual limitations of their speech first magnetised them toward one another, unconsciously... I'll often toy about with her impediment, but perhaps she had always sought a commiserator, a sympathizer—apart from my family, especially, one with whom she might share in the burdens of a broken tongue. What is it, after all... what logic attracts us? Is it that we are familiar, just rightly, so that our differences are rendered trivial? Or are we only ever self-loving, mirrorstruck? Hm... *Ubi sum, ubi sum*... yes, right: I had returned home alone several days before Yule, and one night, perhaps only a day before, there was a knock on the door, one so distinct that I could feel the very air shudder with tension. I answered it, and opened the door to a man I didn't recognize, but in time came to realize was Macsen. He looked, ehr... sickly, as though he hadn't digested a meal in months.



He asked to see Áine, but my father appeared behind me, and it was then that I smelled something acrid in the air, like a burning: he'd taken the poker from out the fire and swung it at Macsen, who fell back into the snow and began scrambling for the gate, my father all the while brandishing the smoking iron at him, fending him off, like he were a rabid dog. Áine had broken my mother's and Giddy's restraint and fled after him; but my father caught her by the arm, and dragged her, wailing and squirming through the snow, back into the house in a trail of steam. My mother was inconsolable. Somewhere in the midst of it all, the roast had been thrown to the floor.

—

— The next morning, her room was found empty. The bed was made, no clothing, no jewelry, no luggage missing. Just an open window, and snowtracks to the road—and her harp, family heirloom, toppled over. My father wanted to burn her gifts; I helped my mother hide them away, in a closet in the root cellar. And that was that. *C'est fini*. What a story, no?

— You know what I'm going to say.

— That he did indeed love her, and she him. Perhaps most passionately when she hated him.

— Yes.

— It is likely, I agree. And though your situation is not without its significant differences, your, ehr... *suitor's* efforts bear a resemblance not unlike Macsen's.

— Except, by all accounts, his love was truly genuine, and Macsen wasn't scheming after Áine.

— Possibly. But is it not also possible, that my father was right in presuming him a scoundrel? Is it not also likely he had seen Áine at one stage early in his employment? It

could've occurred in a single moment, at the very beginning when he first saw her, the decision to put designs on her; yet he might have lacked the qualities of honesty or compunction present within your man. My father's departure from their old firm was simply the opportunity he'd awaited, a confident avenue toward his daughter's seduction. Income wasn't a concern; he needn't ever work in a dozen lifetimes. It might have all been some idle disport—a gambol in the park—for a disturbed man, my family his, ehr... *accoutrement*.

— I've just thought of something.

— Yes.

— I don't know what it has to do with any detail of this, but... have you considered that maybe the Devil only ever existed once, for a brief moment in time—or out of it—just long enough to rebel against God, commit the first sin? And after that moment he was put out of existence, because he'd done everything he was made to do? His purpose by his Maker was complete: sin now existed. All it needed to do was take root, and it did; following that, all evil acts aren't the temptations of evil, of one active being, but stems branching off the tree of one single event: the anlage of everything.

— The 'anlage?'

— The foundation, the seed.

— The *primordium*.

— Maybe, maybe it really is, that every consequence can be traced back to one split second, and that nothing in this life exists after its first, most seminal point...

— Hm.

— What is it?

— Oh—*Nihil, nihil est*. Just pondering, your theory, I mean. A minor heresy, maybe, but an interesting one, undeniably... Nonetheless, what's our moral here? To 'beware the scheming men.'

— Oh, Silly-Solly, you're a scheming, conniving lot the all of you. *Non fidarti degli uomini*.

— Yes, hah! We all *are*, aren't we? Efficaciated, then: 'Be wary of men.'

—but darkness soon blinded them; they arrayed themselves, and shod themselves, and were brought shortly thither unto Polly's home. D

*Canta Sesta*

On the sixth day it again passed that Sol should leave. They left, D and together they went to the harbour gate, where Sol's ship waited. When the captain appeared, and declared unto the crowd that they would board, Sol kissed Polly, and turned. And though she watched his ship disappear once more amidst the waters of the sea, she shed no tears; nor by grief was she consumed.

R: Who is this, dear sister, who comes away from the gates to the city with her lover to lean upon, and yet not a gerah of woe upon her heart?

P: It is I, who need not mourn him any longer, nor carry woe  
for him, for he is instead within me, as a seal upon my  
heart.

R: The earth, the sea, and time have tested the might of your  
love; they have conspired all of them to come together  
and hinder you, and to sunder you. Yet do you and your  
Beloved ward their every blow, and not wither, but dig  
your roots more deeply that you might triumph over them  
still, even now as the sea divides you!

P: *Le grandi acque non possono spegnere l'amore*; nor may  
floods sweep away Love's seed! ◻

And so Sol returned unto the home of Dolon, his friend; and he ◻  
lodged there with him, as they had for some time until Sol lieth in  
his own house.

Then, on the tenth day of the fourth month, Sol wrote unto Polly an  
epistle after this manner: Unto Dorothy Damm sendeth the  
affection of her Beloved. Come unto me, O you whom are the  
rarest object of my heart. Arise, and walk in all those ways I have  
walked in, not apart, but as one whole. The perfection of thy  
beauty has leaped over the sea entire; I long to flourish again in thy

presence. My friends who have heard my words, which praise you above all women, are mad; for thy absence, the poverty of thy being, hath made them mad, and desirous, to behold she who hath enslaved my heart. Come unto to me: my friends watch eagerly, athirst for the wonder of thy vision; let them witness thee! I have devised in thy favour, that thou shalt visit thy Beloved; be apart from him no longer, in the home of his own making, on the fourth and twentieth day, of the fifth month. Until he be blessed by the bounty of thy answer.

Though he was hesitant that his daughter should journey away so far, in a land to him strange, Emiel consented his blessing unto her, and permitted she take leave of her labours during that time.     ◊

*Doppo Canta*

Going there Sol came to the edge of the cliff. And his eyes were     ◊  
opened; and he looked out to the west, and saw before him the great well of the water above which morning and the heavens dwelt, where three islands of different ranges arose from the sea.

Fear then consumed his heart, and in his distress he searched across the bay, seeking the place eastward upon the shore of the

salt sea where his friend Dolon lay, though his grief was not assuaged; for being removed far away the aid of Dolon was invisible to him there.

Again he felt a sting of pain upon his ankle, which came from his wound there. To his wound he looked, and saw that blood poured forth out of it, and stained the hide of his shoes. He fell down, that he might make his wound clean with the grass or leaves there; but the rock whereupon he was was barren, and therefore it could bear of neither grass nor fruit.

As he looked down from his place upon the rock, he saw below him the cove that was hidden there behind the cliff; but the waves of the sea had risen to cover the sands and stones that were obscured there, where lastly they had crushed the bulbs of wandering seaweed undertoe. D

When he could not see for the thickness of the cloud there, being led by the hand of Mónica, Sol walked through the quiet of the forest behind his mother. For morning came, the cloud which dwelt amongst the trees was lifted up, yet Sol followed her without a word, so uncertain he was to the place which she guided him.

They lighted soon upon a hole on the edge of his father's land, and it was unknown to him. He had not known of the hole, as it was hidden from his eye. Mónica brought him down into the place, which was holy, for there an altar to the Holy Mother had been erected; and the altar was crowned by a wreath of flowers, each in its own point in decline: some were young, and fiery with colour; while others had withered, and singed with age.

And Mónica spoke unto Sol, saying, Before you lay each flower which has been left me, though the hour of their discovery is not revealed unto me. Each flower I have collected, and wound into this wreath. Many years I have been an artificer of this wreath, as for many years these flowers hath been gifted unto me, since the days before the nativity of thy brother and thy sister, and thyself.

Then Sol asked unto her, Why hast thou been gifted thy flowers, Mother? Hast thou taken company with a stranger? Therefore Mónica laughed within herself, and said unto him, After I am born with three children, and a husband whom I love, shall I be given time to take company with a stranger? No, my child; I am here.

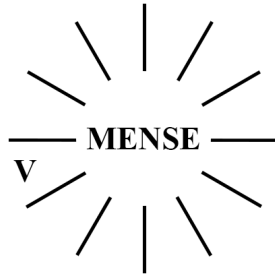
In the days before thee, she spoke, I was with child, who was to be a daughter, and whose name was taken from the flower which thou doth keep, and doth form the wreath which decorates thither altar. But when her birth was not made complete, I was greatly grieved. I sent up my prayers to our God, and exhorted, that I should receive a sign unto me of my child, that she was taken up to Him, and looks over her family, beside Him in eternal rest. They appeared to me at hours not known to me, as I walked through our woods in the days of her loss. I knew my prayers were answered; for upon thy conception, and even unto this day, am I gifted this sign.

She kissed him then, and took up the flower from his hand, telling him to place it in the wreath. The petals of the flower were brilliant and red, and in Mónica's tongue the name of the flower was called *rhódon*.

Which is 'rose.'

o





—sixmillionsixhundredthirtyonethousandninehundredeightyeight; brown crumb there, no, he almost couldn't. Wonder, how many times, if ever? No—never; he wouldn't let a false one by. Never. Plenty of false ones before. Falsity, falsity swirling the globe. Falsity leaking at the cracks, breaking through in waves. But not him, no, never. How many false ones before? He been tallying, collecting, storing that number away? Can't think it out, no. If he produced a numeral, any integer, would it be *the* number? Any consequence to it? Not the Now, not to him, not to—

— Hah-*ha!*

—the Future. No Future, anyways. Nothing but the Now, right? No time to be mistaken in the Now. No, not the Mistaken, never the Mistaken. Irrelevant, the Mistaken. Much too important, this, much too vital to keep the fallacious on mind. At bay, better. He keeps it at bay, the count, the tally. Keeps all the fallacious, all the erroneous at bay. Whole world's erroneous, ain't it? Most of it—yes. But not this. Not the Enumeration. Nothing more important than this, he knows. Enumeration's the world entire, this little heap in his hand. Little heap's the world entire; could cast it into the morning spray. Let the breeze carry off, tear the world to pieces, batter 'gainst the escarpment. But not his world, no. Wouldn't let the sixmillionsixhundredthirtyonethousandninehundredeightyeight world go, wouldn't lift an eye from it. This world's too precious, his. The world relies on his world, needs his—what's it—

heap-world. The world needs his Now, else it'll unwind. So he'll keep his world intact. So he'll not waver to blink. So the Enumeration'll continue. So the world will continue. Until the task is done. Sixmillionsixhundredthirtyonethousandninehundredeightynine.

Sixmillionsixhundredthirtyonethousandninehundredninty; they there still? Still there, aye, damnit, still there. Could hum a song he could, drown out the racket. Could enumerate aloud. But. He might lose count with a song. Might lose the Count if aloud. They might hear, might abscond with it, might corrupt the Count. *Would*. No; outweighs the benefits. Keeps it to himself, keeps the world-heap one. Would shut the idiots up himself if he could. Can't let the world down, though. Let the calamitous runt keep his destruction. Let the Oldman and trull keep at their fawning. Boy'll tear the whole shore up, they'll see, letting him run amok. Their business, destruction unchecked. Monsters. Reprobates, every one. Let him bury them. Let them bury themselves. Sixmillionsixhundredthirtyonethousandninehundrednintyone. What they deserve for ruining the morning. Undermining the importance, the dignity of his work. He'll bury them both. But who'll bury the runt? Not him. He'll let the runt rot. Let the gulls feast. They'll all rot anyways. Sixmillionsixhundredthirtyonethousandninehundred-nintytwo.

But. But... can't help it. Can't unsee it. Has his every appearance, the Oldman. Mirror image of the Elderman. Ain't him, it ain't, no. Elderman's dead; couldn't have a breath left to him. Oldman's younger, that's sure. But. The sick feeling. The dyspepsia. That boiling, festering, loathsome rock in the throat. Ain't the Elderman, but hates him if he were. And. Oldman still gives him every reason to hate, don't he? Won't wrangle the brat. Won't order the trull, the slut, either. But. That's all of them, ain't it? They all give him reason

enough to hate. Even the quiet ones with the crossed knees. The decrepit quean, exposing her dugs. All idiots, all blind, deaf, dumb mongoloids stumbling, screeching at the dark. All hateable, all unworthy. Unworthy of his chore. Unworthy of the doors he opens. But he passes through them; no obstacle stands him down. If they remain open, he simply never shut them coming through. They don't know. They'll never know. Never know what he's doing for them. He gives them a world, unearned. Yet he gives it to them still. Because who else will? They won't. And so he must.

Sixmillionsixhundredthirtyonethousandninehundredninetythree. What's that?— blundersome cove. Almost took a tumble. Fool, mind your footing. Wouldn't be hugging the escarpment wall now. Wouldn't be staring down that nasty fall. Wouldn't have disturbed his work. Weedy cove, by the looks of it, ain't you? Spindly starveling. Not aware of what he's at? Importance of the task? Idiot, same as rabble. Existence for the purpose of Distraction alone. Let you fall. Gripping to the rock, arms and legs arachnid, angular. Another arbiter of Distraction. Spinning a web, casting a net. Entrapping. Appearance alone, the starveling's web. Spiders all of you, ascetics. All trapping, all-consuming, all-liquifying, with your sharp brows and thin calves. Diminution. Disgusting, horrifying wastrels every one of you. Loathsome to unquantifiable degrees. Ascetics, wasting away, wasting your life, wasting supplies. Wasting space. He Enumerates not for you—and for that type least of all. Indifferent to life. Indifferent to death, too. You're comfortable with it, ain't you? Sixmillionsixhundredthirtyonethousandninehundredninetyfour. Comfortable with it. Enjoying the descent, possibly, wasting away, drawing in, sinking others with. Sixmillionsixhundredthirtyonethousandninehundredninetyfive. (nearly dropped that one, he

did; careful, careful.) Fall! You're falling anyways, starveling! Been plummeting since the moment you eschewed the fork. Sixmillionsixhundredthirtyonethousandninehundredninety-six. Abnegated life. Or, you're herbivorous; worse even. Even more revolting, that. No respect for you. No love for *any* man taking his carrots without roast. Disdainful of the world, all of you. That's you—he's sure, starveling: rejecting meat; refusing food; denying reality—each moment lusting after your delusion. Should've kept falling; pity you reached the ground.

That's how you spread, metastasizing the world-cancer. He knows it. He knows your ways well, knows how you subjugate sixmillionsixhundredthirtyonethousandninehundred-ninetyseven your victims. He knows the Elderman. Knows how the Elderman warps the Now, grows under the skin. Forces himself on you, them, everyone, willing or not. Swings a hammer at the foundations of the world. Gale to the world-heap. The vorpal tongue. It was the past—no; another life. One tangential, before the world-heap. Heralding it. The Elderman forced himself on him. Enslaved him. Ascetically plundered him.

Sixmillionsixhundredthirtyonethousandninehundredninetyeight. Wonder if—no; nothing close to that count. Hundreds of thousands, millions maybe. But. Not a number so great by his account. Nothing divisible either. Wasted cognition, anyways—ain't it? Death is death; calculations induce nothing. But... War. War is different. War eventuates Meaning. War fires Industry. War, Man's condition: the anti-ascetic. A battle-cry howling from the rafters. The final exigency. A beautiful, transformative, transcendent thing. Sixmillionsixhundredthirtyonethousandninehundredninetynine. All men sanctified in War. Elderman found his purpose there, too. Even sublime nations hide their cancers. And even the cancers

feed on war. The Elderman, too. Found it when he saw him at the line's end, no? The gamine shivering at his back. Bundled in rags. Casualty's chrysalis. Elderman, the fogey, standing on his chair, announcing the shortage with a cough. Not a ration for more than those assembled. Where was he before? Why was he last but one to line? Unimportant. He stood in line an hour, gamine shivering at his back. Teeth chattering like stones in a jar. Sixmillionsix-hundredthirtytwothousand. Like stones clattering at his ears. Scorning warm clothes. Decrying punctuality.

Last two in-line. Last two packets. What mentally weaker men name Serendipity. Was in the Elderman's hand, reaching out to him. Then. Then, what lashed at his head? Cry broke through gamine's chattering. And she's sobbing. And she's whinging. And she's pleading, embracing his arm. Spinning some web around a sickly mother. Mooring it to his ration. No sense reminding her the stipulation. No sense in her mind preventing unnecessary expenditure. No sense in her mind at all. Can't explain to the mad, the rabid. Spiders don't speak their language. (Know that, starveling? You wouldn't understand him, either. Not a word.) Six-millionsixhundredthirtytwothousandone; only speak through gurgling stomachs. Rapacity's your speech, your ravenousness. His explications fall on—spider's ain't got ears either, do they? Don't matter, rationers' presence; spider only wants more. So, she spins another lie: mother's bedridden, mother can't come. 'Oh, mother can't come? Pitiful, pitiable.' Thought it, but never said. Should've said, but, too young, he was. Should've declared it. Anyone unfit to collect their ration already reserved to death. Mother didn't last the snows, likely. But. Too young then, too foolhardy. Thought the world diplomatic, then.

He was right—he was *right*. He deserved what was his! But spiders don't care a damn for Diplomacy. Only what's in their bellies.

And what sixmillionsixhundredthirtytwothousandtwo what'd the Elderman do? Did what any spider'd do, 'course. Filled his belly, just as her. Filled it, just as yours with nothing fills. Filled it on his Denial. What'd the Elderman, that spider, do? Shambled aside and let the gamine reel them in. Reeled in his ration and hers, the last two. And how'd the Elderman bear it out? Another shipment coming along shortly. 'An hour's wait—only an hour.' Six-millionsixhundredthirtytwothousandthree.

Let him rot! Let the Elderman fester! That he weren't dead already, that worms weren't already drilling through his skull! That he could squash the old spider himself—scrape his carcass across the stone! Nothing more enraging, nothing more nauseating than a hypocrite. More repugnant than a man debasing himself to a whore; to whom price matters not; to whom Law is valueless! To whom debt of hours in cold go undefrayed! Sixmillion-sixhundredthirtytwothousandfour.

What d'you think, eh? What's a fellow spider's thoughts worth? Nothing; you'd have done the same. Would've done the same and felt bloated even more for it. No one knows, no one sees but him. He knows sixmillionsixhundredthirtytwothousandfive why. He saw how the Elderman moved. Saw the fragile frame propped up on chair. Heard his weak voice trailing languidly over the crowd. A small man, a weak, aging, pointless marplot. Elderman spotted him lining in from the podium and thought. Thought he saw a way to grow taller still. Felt the means to feel powerful. By dashing a falcon down. Breaking the neck and yanking off its wings. And intervened, dismissing all possibility of Guilt. Or, intervened to *nurture*

her Guilt, indebt her to the Elderman, ignite the need to settle. Need to please. Addicted, opiate, unctuous old crow. Palliating self-stimulator. Titillated by the dependency of those weaker. Pulling them in, wrapping them up. Pasting them to the web. Sucking on their guilt whenever thirsty. *Or*, intervened to inculcate him. Stepped in fanning his Guilt, for wanting to feed. Faced the gamine giving her both rations. But his eye. That bituminous, cloudy old eye, always on him. Always bearing down, piercing, heightening his conscience. Branding that painful impression across his mind. Exhausting him further. That he too may join the Elderman's feast. Sixmillionsixhundredthirtytwothousandsix. A megalomaniacal, a sad, insolent, pathetic man, trouncing on the heads of others. Scaling each man to the peaks. Sixmillionsixhundredthirtytwothousandseven. A great man, to the Elderman's mind. Moral-masturbator, elevating himself above all else in sight. Sixmillionsixhundredthirtytwo-thousandeight. A deity if arrogated higher. A god amongst men. A spider-god, with a world caught in his web. Should've crushed him when time was kairotic; no heel big enough now.

*He* was the greater man then. The greater man still. Elderman's dead; and greater man lives. Always he lives. All's the Now, ain't it? All's always Now, the Now's never Future. What's happening in the Now elapses always. What's happening in the Now's eternal. He's eternal, forever—long as he acts Now always. Closest any man'll come—for Now. Their eyes'll open; they'll extol the world-heap. Behold all he's done. And they'll transcend, too: mundanity; anxiety; mendacity; nauseousness. Liberated from the Future, living the Now. Cursing the decadents, the haughty. The soothsayers. The ascetics. The spiders. The Elderman. You, too, *you*. You, starveling, spider, dragging your feet meaninglessly through sand. Havering between the shore and the sea. (The indecisive make—more nauseating still.)

They'll forget you, you know? He'll ensure it. With each sixmillionsixhundredthirtytwo-thousandnine grain, he watches you slip, deeper, deeper into night. Your name, your ways—you'll mean as much to them as your timepiece. Think those gears'll show you Tomorrow? What's a watch tell you anything but Now? He's wiser than you—you hear! Embrace the waves, boy; you're drowned already!

Was the greater man Then. Still the greater man Now. What makes him greater? What makes any man great? Why, he's just said it, ain't he? His dyspepsia. His asepsis of mind and mettle. Great man knows where he's going. And from him the weak like rodents fly. Great man tholes no footstool. Others ask 'who dares?' At the domineering question 'who dares?' the great man resounds 'I!' What makes him great, that: abhorrence of silence facing the Decadents. Inability to withstand effrontery seated down. His will, his will! What makes him greatest above all! Willpower to which he testifies every living second! Six-millionsixhundredthirtytwothousandten! Willpower to be as nothing made! The will to live Today—the Now! To spurn meretriciousness and assume no part! Return the ticket unpoked. The great man needs no ticket, no power. No rank. Shams it, neither. Needs no one's approval, no approbation—Elderman's least of all, that *cur*. No condescending validation of 'good-job.' In a world without rank who's to validate? Who's aught but cattle? *They* are without meaning. Laughable. In the confounding silence of the world the shouting man's voice amounts to nothing. Nothing more than a titter, a lower to the glade, a paddocked neigh.

Absured, ain't it? All's confounding. All's absurd. He'd have you think otherwise—have you think Elderwise. Have you think your starvation meant a crumb. You and the whole



nest of spiders infesting the world's flesh. Elderman had tried with him. Elderman forced him to starve, thought he could—curse that obstreperous brat!—thought he might draw *him* in, bind him to the circuit 'gainst his will.

— Hah-*ha*!

Not *his* will! Forced him once, Elderman—*never* again! Elderman'd have him making Meaning. But—Meaning matters not! In the absurd world's no Meaning! Nothing wanting Meaning means anything! All's that matters means already. All's that matters sees and feels. All's that matters a single grain—and not even what forms it—particles, quivering strings. Nothing meaning that can't be felt. Nothing Meaning he can't apprehend.

And. And.

— Hah-*ha*!

Can what's felt be felt Yesterday? Can what's felt be felt Tomorrow? Or can what's felt be felt now, Now? Now! *Now* he says! Never but Now! Now's all he wants. Now's all he thirsts. Because. Because Now's all there is. And. If Now's all there is, then Now's all he understands. Now's all he *can* understand. Damn the idiots, spiders what think anything else—you say you see Tomorrow, but can you, spider, watch-man? Can you see the Sun will rise? Or do you see it only now, burning above? You see the same as *he*. All of you. Each one. You see it now and never again. You only think your web won't weather. Yet—you're just as *him*! You're spinning *Now*, feeling *Now*! *Now, Now Now*! Doing what you understand Now and nothing else! And all you'll ever do! And as you do sixmillionsixhundredthirtytwo-thousandeleven he'll do as he does also. He'll do as he understands. Appreciate only what he feels—just as *you*—but he'll not lie. No, he's no mountebank; he's no hidden wolf. He'll do

and say as he does and nothing else and be more eternal than you could ever dream! Because he's alive—because he doesn't dream! Because *he* don't live on a point! Because *he's* done as others feel and ignore. Who trod upon at their most wakeful. Accounts the world-heap grain by grain, day by day. Week by week. By month by year by decade by century millennia *unto death*. A black pit they all evade. But. *With a smile he'll embrace it*. You'll see him, know him by his smile. It'll follow the flame, see? The smile bathed in orange tongues, the flame only *he* attends. And he'll light you up, illuminate the black mass of bodies you're writhing in. Bare the horror of your fate. Your fate, *his* fate all the same—but with a *smile*. Smiling until the flame's doused. Smiling, for you and the mass have seen. Smiling, as he lived as he saw fit. Smiling, for in your Everything, in your webs, was *Nothing* found. And in *his* Nothing everything *is*.

Smiling. Smiling—he's happy, don't you see? Could see, if you'd take your eye from your hand. He's happy. He's happy. He's happy: he does as he wants. He's happy: the unvalued's invaluable. He's happy: he is an artist. He's happy: his work, his art outshines the most estimable men. He's happy: artistic beyond the fairest painting, song, or poem. He's happy: they only dream of touching him. But.

Why?

Because: *he* need not know why; *he* simply wills. Sixmillionsixhundredthirtytwo-thousandtwelve.

And so he wills he be done—today, Now. At this Now he's done, and he's happy, yes. Quite. Despite your nuisance. Despite the racket unwinding down the shore. He'll return as always. Rest himself. Resume the world-heap. Keep it growing. Keep the Now alive. And

you'll be gone—perhaps. And so'll they. But none of you matter, spiders and idiots and the like. You're all Then. Just as the Elderman. Just as real. Just as living. Gull-moulder. Worm-meal. But he'll return, he'll return. Sixmillionsixhundredthirtytwothousandtwelve. And he'll enumerate the grains. Enumerate, as no one else wills. Enumerate, as no one else can. *It is* importance—the final importance! The destiny of all humanity, sustained in his hand. Who else will show them? None other has, till Now. He lets it slip through, the world-heap. Sink as a shimmering cloud to the land. Goodbye. Goodbye, Now; would that he sees it again.

\* \* \*

When above atop the rock you sat, she saw not whom you were, and knew not the members of your form. But now you have made your descent, and she knows your form well. You are the Morning Star, who rises sultry in the East, and descends as you have westward to the joy of her yearning eye. You, you are the Sun in the Sky that warms her skin, the rays of light which ignite her open breast. You are the magnificence before which she kneels. You are young, eternally young, and immortal in your youth. By the light of this day she has come forth, seeking you, that she might bask in the presence of a power that is yours only. By the light of this day she has come forth, that she might taste of your youth eternal.

Your form is peerless, Morning Star! Your legs are the mountains of the east, rigid and immemorially strong, for millions of years have they stood, and may they stand millions more; oh, grant that she may know their strength! Your arms are sinewy, they are the branches of the ageless sycamore, which spread endlessly across the heavens; oh, grant that they may embrace her, that she may know their firmness! Your hands, your hands are the

glowing sphere of night, which sometimes burns fully, but also hides itself away; oh, grant that she may know those hands, and that they may know her, feeding and nourishing her! Your member is long, it extends beyond the great rivers of the world; oh, grant that she may know also the vigor with which it swells! Your breast is the great plains of the north, fertile, abundant with the greenery of life and the creatures that inhabit them; oh, grant that she too may leap about those fields, and that she may know also the heart beneath nurturing all! Your eyes are the great pools of the world, with depth of no reckoning; oh, grant that she may submerge herself in their waves, that she may be washed clean in their waters! And your lips, your lips blow the breezes that rush gently over the many blossoms of the garden; oh, grant that your lips may youthen her, that she may taste the sweet lavender of their tongue!

Give her your name, for she wishes to know. What is it, what is it you are called, Morning Star? Let her know your name as she knows her own. She would rise up and ask you, but already you advance upon her, and her cheeks redden before you. Tell her your name that she may know you, and that you too may know her. How wonderful your name would be! How wonderful is your name on her lips! How wonderful, that you would vest your eternity in her, and that she might gain eternity in you. How eternal you become within her, and she within you! Where would they of any form be without the name, which is theirs? Without your name where shall you be? And without hers where shall she go? Where, oh Morning Star, but to the halls of Quietus, which welcome the nameless Men who exist not. No, oh brightest Morning Star: let her abide with you in a land where no stranger is known. Let all be to one and the other known. Let all be as if lovers unto the other, mingling in a fertile land of water free-flowing.

Without your name she has no name; without your speech she cannot speak. She has opened her mouth, yet words flowed not outward. Yours is the power which makes words to sound and ears to hear. Let her hear you, that she may hear; speak truth to her, that she may converse. She is not without you; only with you may she be. Only with you may she become everything. Only with you may she know herself. She is the ocean, formless and empty. She is the great mother of the world, the Mother-of-all, the ocean, bringer of life; grant that she may bear life again! Grant that you be her father! Her soul is a falcon, aloft on the highest wind; she has encircled the land, in search of you. She is the globe also, the earth upon which you stand. She is the land, which draws into it the bones and members of the dead. She has made herself perfect unto you, and she sets her face towards you at the dawning of every day, though age has withered her body. She is the falcon on the breeze, and she is the breeze also, the wind tearing up crops and filling the masts of weary sailors. She enters the canyons that you have cut into the land, and carries the falcon aloft in search of you. She is the heavens above, the clouds which cover you when you tire, which cool your face when your heat overcomes. She has come forth before you, and she shall depart after you; she is the orange flames burning bright at the break of day, which welcome also night. She is your herald and your attendant; she may not come without you. May she fall under your gaze ever and always.

And she is the yet-risen sphere, which guides you to her through the darkest night. Grant that you may follow her, Morning Star, and that you shun her never. Should you shun her she would remain nameless. What is her name? Her name is the name of the changing breeze. Her name is the name of the formless sea.

Come, then, come unto her, oh Morning Star! Embrace her in your warmth; she has traveled great distances, she has endured the many terrors of the night. All in homage to you has she done these things, all that she might kneel before you in the new day. Guide not the warmth of your countenance away. Stray not from her who would service you, but enter into her. Receive her, and she shall serve you in every manifold way. Take her, and she shall sit at the forefront of your forces. Take her, and she shall exhaust herself in every manner imaginable. Take her, and she shall harvest your every field, ply the many roots from your soil. Take her, and she shall feed you of every fruit from the vine, and of the many mollusks of the sea. Only take her, and in you might she be fulfilled.

Morning Star, have you strayed from your path? Do you hesitate?

She prays you hesitate no longer; she prays her offerings do not displease. Do you lament her countenance, her chest once-firm, her once-fiery mane?

Oh, Morning Star, hesitate not before her! Grant that she, even she, may not be deprived of you. Do you ignore her supplications? Do you shun her, and turn away from her still? What distance she has passed over in your name, what visions she has seen! What comforts she has denied and pleasures rejected; oh, grant Morning Star that you do not reject her in return! She has not indulged in sleep past the dawn of day, nor seen it without rest. She has not garbed herself luridly, but has worn only the garments of humility. She has not been idle, but has worked tirelessly at her craft. She has not been idle, but has worked until her ankles ached and her back from stooping broke. She has not been neglectful of the earth, but has cared for it, its diverse greenery and creatures. She has not been neglectful of her fellow freeman, but cared for and given to him, even unto poverty. She has not abused the innocent,

but has raised the offspring of others, and gotten no child of her own. She has not trespassed the land of other men, but kept to the borders of her property. She has not defrauded any man, in business or in life. She has not stolen, even in times most desperate. She is victorious, Morning Star, she is right! She has denied herself all the filth and contamination which repulses you. She has denied these things, for they are an abomination to you. She has denied these things, for they are an abomination to all. She has done as you would have her do. She has made offerings, she has sacrificed to kneel before you!

Does her righteousness not entice you? Has she failed in attracting your gaze? Has not her form achieved perfection in the disks of your eyes, which it might achieve only in age? Are not her members clean and defined as lime, yet soft as papyrus? She has not labored overmuch, that they might not harden and cramp. Is her thigh not round and buttocks buxom, though shapely? Her hips have not widened, they have not born the weight of life. And are her lips not full and red? Do they not mouth the most inviting words? Do her eyes, pools themselves, not reflect the depths of the endless heavens above? They have searched only for you, yearning, Morning Star, that your waters may join. Do you fear them, the bands of her waist? They have stretched across her with age, yet her stomach still is firm; she hungers for you. Her breast, her breast has been meager always, yet it hides not timidly away, and her shoulders are strong, yet pliable. She has cleansed herself, and has by her trials been sanctified, refining herself in methods common and privately known. Here she kneels before you, presenting herself to you, the perfect instrument for your disposal. Use her as you would, use her as she was made! Take her into you, relieve her of all solitude! Give unto her a name!

Take her, Morning Star, she is yours! Descend not into the sea, but take her; take her, as you have taken the shore, as you have mastered under you the world entire. She is as the world to you, for to do with as you please! Put her into your radiance, oh loveliest, oh steadfast Morning Star. Her breasts are the hills of the plane: they are radiant with your light. She is bare before you, naked, a child, pure and unembellished. See how she reclines before you? Enter into her; imbue her with your radiance, that she may overflow with you. Penetrate to her heart, to her very heart. Grant that you and she become one, that she lose herself around you, and dissolve into you. Grant that your names become as one, that you are of one mind, one heart, and one form. Oh, Morning Star, you who alone fires the furnaces of her soul, who alone may judge her fit for your use, who alone presides over the beginning and the over the end, who alone animates her, gives her life, who alone fends away the evils of the dark and those evils of the world unseen, Morning Star, she begs you: abandon her not!

Pass not over her, she begs you! Step not within the waters of the formless sea, do not conceal yourself therein. Turn your back not on her; do not crush her image beneath you, who would service you most devotedly. The light of day follows you; if you fall into the waters alone, the light flies with you there, too, and night presides over the land! Oh, Morning Star, beloved Morning Star! Hear her plea! Cast not your shade upon her; give her not over to corruption. Do not leave her to putrefy in the dark! She has sought you, only you, do you not see? She has suffered that she might repose unbent beneath you! She has risked all and she has suffered harm, that she might learn your name! Let her know your splendor!

Pass not over her, she begs you! Tell her her name, that she might know her own. Has she sinned, ever against you, or ever in your name? Has she ever incanted wickedly in your



name? Has she trespassed before you? What wickedness might she confess, Morning Star, what wickedness has she perpetrated? Tell it to her that she might know it. Tell it to her, that she might amend. Yes, she has known evil, as all men have, but not by her own hand. She has been overpowered by the wicked forces of the world, and she has yielded to them, yet never has she felt pleasure under them. Never has the worm, nor the serpent or the bull, given her such pleasure as you may. She has come to the edge of the earth; she has drawn nigh to see your beauty. She has passed through the many portals of the world, she has walked its unnumbered roads; she has washed herself in brine for you. She is cleansed; she is pure, your priestess, your child, your bride! She is the hand that has clothed the naked man. She is the mule that pulls the plough. She is the flame which lights the lamp that drives all shades of night away! She has been shrouded, but she has found her way. Rescind not your light, your aspect, but extend her your speech!

Pass not over her, she begs you! How can you shun her, Morning Star? How can you ignore her pleas? Is she somehow objectionable to you? Truly she is not lovely as once she was—but she has not wasted away. She is vital! She has perfumed her skin with the sweetest oils, all in your honor. All she has desired is you. You are everything, shining Morning Star; all she has desired is that union with all things. Leave her not behind in your path, but take her with you. Take her up into your arms and she will take you into hers. Leave her not to spoil alone, but rejuvenate her, install your youth within her. Grant that she be given new life in you, Morning Star! Grant that she not be left behind, that she be folded into the silencing limbs of the world—let her be as one with you! Let her be as one with all around, that she might not die! Let not her memory slip below the seas! Let not her name like a shade

become, lost to the jaws of night, to the evil of darkness—forgotten! Morning Star, she smells the sands; her chest is red. You are her heart, you are her mother—and she the child, your child! Abandon her not!

You descend in the deep, blowing her back against the breeze, scattering her amongst the many sands.

Her mouth has parted, yet words did not follow; you gave her no words to speak. She is mute before you, by you. She is a shell, sinking into the land at the edge of the morningtide swell.

She came before you. She came before you. She came before you. Do not leave, Morning Star, for the light you shone now follows with you. Leave her not to the creatures of the night; for though it is day, without you, surely again night shall fall. Let her not dwell alone in the dark. Let her dwell not alone in the dark. Let her dwell alone not in the dark.

Morning Star! Oh, unrelenting Morning Star, what is your name? What is your name! Oh, Morning Star, she cries after you; for in form and appearance you may be seen, but you are nameless! You cannot be understood! and for your muteness she weeps!

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Focus on breathing, yes, on breathing. Breathe deeply, upward, from the diaphragm, or from that organ which they have called the diaphragm by name. From the diaphragm, which, according to her, resides as a space below the throat. But, breathe also from the throat, she says, breathe from the diaphragm and breathe from the throat, which they have said also is that organ leading from the diaphragm up to the mouth. Breath originating from these

channels improves breath, and breathing, and replenishes the mind. Breath originating from these channels sharpens the memory. Or, so he is told, so he is told.

It is her will now that he breathes that way, upward, from the diaphragm, through the throat, to the mouth. Because it is her will he wills he will do it so. If it be her will that he breathe so now, it is the will of the family; and if it be the family's will that he breathe so, it is the will of grandfather; and if it be grandfather's will, then he should trust it. For it is grandfather's will that he lives even now, and that he should sit here beside her, drawing breath, up from the diaphragm, through the throat, and out the mouth.

Should he open his eye now? Should he open an eye and see, see if she still sits beside him? He has not seen her now for some time, as it is her will that his eyes be closed. He has not heard her now for some time, as it is her will that he hears only his breath. He has not felt her now for some time, as it is her will that they be seated apart. How shall he know she sits beside him still, unless looking upon her? How shall he follow her will, if possessing only her will she no longer resides near? Her will—their will—must be his will, for now. He must possess a will, and so he will open his eye. He will open his eye now, to see that she does also as she instructed him. He will open his eye now, and see that she sits there in complete stillness, as she instructed him to do, with her eyes closed. He will open his eye now and see this image, and he will be made happy by her sight.

She is there, sitting as instructed, eyes closed. Good, good. He will close his eyes now, continuing his performance of her will. He will return to performing the breathing that she wills, that which begins in the diaphragm, travels up through the throat, and which exits from the mouth. Only does breath now exist, and nothing else.

And she, too, exists, alongside breath—that much he is sure. Breath and she exist. Breath, and the contour of her figure. Breath, and the brightness of her face. Breath, and the softness of her skin. Breath, and the grace of her hand.

No; she exists. Her existence has been shown; it need not be reminded. She exists, but she must become immaterial now. She exists, but for now does not exist. All that exists now is breath, breath which begins in the diaphragm, travels up through the throat, and which exits from the mouth. Only breath, yes. But not the thought of breath. Breathing free from thought; allowing the breath to enter into him naturally, and focusing—not thinking, but focusing breath in those organs alone, the diaphragm and the throat. And the mouth, too, yes. But no thought of these organs, only breathing *from* them.

It would be fallacy, though, to think he does not enjoy such other channels of breathing. Perhaps this breathing from the diaphragm and the throat aids the mind and memory, and, yes, his memory does need for increase... but would it not also benefit him to breathe from his lungs? It was their verdict that his lungs, as they called them, were most damaged beyond his mind, no? For all the damage to his mind, he needed no aid in thinking. When he awoke he thought, even though he could not breathe. He needed to learn to breathe again first from his lungs. His mind may control his lungs, enabling breath, yes; but without his lungs his mind would have no breath to enable. And so are lungs not therefore also vital in breathing, perhaps more? Will she will next that he breathes from his lungs? He wishes that she would will he breathe next from his lungs. But any of her will he would perform, any of it.

Does such mean that that over which or whom a person enacts their will attracts them? Does she carry out her will over him because she has attracted him? Do his mother, father, and the others attract her? Does grandfather attract them? Does he attract her, or does his breathing only? Is there any distinction between him and his breathing? Can breathing be an attraction, or is it a desire? Do desire and attraction differ? What is attraction if it differs from desire? Is that which is attractive only attractive generally, describing many things? Or are there standards of attraction, different regions of attraction, much as there are different regions of breath?

Before the plunge, before the plunge did he understand this? Could he distinguish? between attraction and desire, between breathing and thinking, between thinking and not? Will he ever know again, know himself again? That is their will, no, his knowing himself again? How long?

This is not breathing now, breathing in the diaphragm, breathing up through the throat, and breathing from the mouth! This is not breathing, but *thought*. Thought is not her will now; it is not her will, nor is it his family's, nor grandfather's. Their will is *breath*, and absence of thought, the focusing on breathing without thought. The focusing of being. If he focuses on nothing now, nothing but breathing, and follows everyone's will, focuses on the diaphragm and the throat and the mouth, his mind will reap and his memory restore, and he will know himself again. How else, he asks, how else shall he find himself, if he cannot follow their will? That is only how he will find himself again, they said. They surely must know with confidence what they say. They saved him, brought him back to life—they brought her in to teach him breathing, and she is a wise instructor, and she, like them, knows

the many things he does not. If it is their will that all these things be done, all for him, then they must care for him, they must. If they care for him, they must surely have his best interests at heart; and if it be his best interests which reside in their hearts, then they truly must be his family. Does not he, even though he knows himself not, still carry his own best interests at heart? And who is more like him than his family? His mother, his father, his uncle—and dozens other, so many others, so many faces strange yet related to him, which pass in and out of his life, faces almost animal in their familiarity to him, so many that he most easily thinks of them all as an extension of grandfather, for it has been grandfather's will most strongly but silently urging his recovery—whom else but they, who know who they are, and knowing themselves know him even when he knows himself not? Whose will should he follow other than theirs who know him best?

So, he will breathe, yes, he breathes, breathing beginning in the diaphragm, then breathing up through the throat, and breathing out through the mouth.

But... is his body not also himself, too? If breathing will lead him towards himself, as he resides not in his own thoughts, but beyond thought, and by only activating his body can he discover himself, then is the self not within the body, within the mind which generates thoughts? How might he find himself if he does not instruct his body to breathe and think not to think thoughts with his mind, which enables these and many other functions?

His body belongs to him, yes. Does her body not belong to herself? And are the bodies of others not also their selves? Is the body the self, or is the will proof of the self? Can grandfather be himself, though he has not shown himself? Or is grandfather being absent his will only, himself by himself showing not?

Why has he not seen grandfather yet? He must be a busy man after all, as they have said, spreading himself in his work perhaps too thinly.

— Now we will change our breathing, yes. We will change our breathing, and we will redirect our breath down and out. We will now breathe down and out.

On breathing now, he turns himself, turns himself over completely to breath. Breath and her. She is the master of breathing. What she desires, he shall follow her will—or desire. He will now breathe as she breathes: his breath commences below the diaphragm, below the navel, down in the lowest regions of the abdomen, and flows outward from the mouth. Though he would rather his breath be now channeled through the lungs, he must surrender himself over to her will, and the will of downward breathing. In through the lowest regions of the abdomen, and flowing outwardly from the mouth. Breathing is her will, and her will is the road to himself, breathing from deep below. Breathing from the major organs. Breathing at the origin of life.

And so, at this locus, which is the seed of life, he breathes. And, yes, his eyes remain clasped as he breathes, lid upon lid, grasping one another as his hands at his lap rest, folded in peace. Yet, though his eyes indeed are closed, and he did not open them again, even to glimpse her as she spoke, yet he sees her. Is that not her figure before him, waving like the sands at his feet? Is that not her face, which is brighter than the Sun, yes, brighter than the very Sun? Is that not her skin, softer than the—what is it, that stone-fruit they fed him, oh, yes—peach? Are they not her hands, reaching down to his, graceful as the limbs of the willow? Yes, yes, he breathes, he breathes at the very base of his abdomen, fully, and the air flows outwardly from his mouth. He breathes, and though his eyes are closed she stands

before him, offering her hands. Would she take him by the hand? Would she take him by the hand?

Yes, from his lower abdomen he breathes, from the heart of his bowels, breathes, exhaling flowingly from the mouth. He breathes, and she takes his hands in hers. He breathes, and she draws him up from the sand. He breathes, and they leave the sand. She leads him away from beach's sands, from warming airs and striking breezes, into a forest she leads him. With his hands in hers she leads him under the canopy overhead, under the Sun. The canopy shades them, and the Sun stings them not. She leads him, breathing, and she teaches him all the names of the many animals and plants that live there. She rests him beneath the great round leaves of a tree, and quenches his thirst with the water caught in their veins. She reaches above him, plucks a crimson fruit from the branch. Then she folds back the flesh and empties its seeds into her hand, and breathing he smells their indescribable sweetness. They drop into his mouth, and bursting them between his teeth he feels their sweetness, and know his desire, knows himself, and breathes in perfect rest.

Here he breathes freest, here, surrounded by the world, not divorced from it. Was it not what father said, and grandfather, whom he has yet to meet, but controls all, and all direction comes from him—did they not say that he *is* himself, but that all things in perception are him *also*? Did they in their wisdom not say *also* that he must find himself not in complete deprivation, but in all these things of perception—yet understand that he is not those things by creation, much as those things are not him? Did they not tell him that though those worldly objects contain him within themselves, they are not himself and do not know



him, but by their presence they create him, and he them? How can he truly know himself, discover himself, if he and himself are like he and she seated in the sands: together but apart?

But there were too many variables right now, for right now, for his mind, for his recovery. It is their wish, it is their will, that he remain apart, away from the confusions of the world, and focus on finding himself, on breathing in the immaterial person whom he had lost, before exploring for what remained of him elsewhere amidst the material world. The dangers were not the mighty weapons, or the allures of pleasure. They were not discovering himself in these places, but creating himself by them, piecing himself together from his glimpses into the world, instead of finding himself first and only recognizing himself within the world second, after. That, the difference between finding and recognizing himself, that was of the most immeasurable importance. He may look upon his own body and recognize it as being his own; but recognizing it did not mean he knew it, it did not mean he truly knew it.

Yet... bereft of himself, is he not like a vessel emptied of its water? How is it possible that he draw water from an empty vessel? What is he else but an empty vessel if bereft of himself? Can a nest abandoned of the bird that built it, taken to the sky in search of food, be called taken? Can a lantern, its flame blown out by a breath of air, illuminate the space around it? Do shadows exist before or only after the flame?

Or, say that a lump of salt dissolves in a vessel of fresh water; is not what is left neither salt nor fresh water, but saltwater? If he exists in the other things of the world, how is it he cannot find himself amongst them, too? Might he not find himself in the strength of the bull, pulling behind it the—that device that which tears up the earth? Might he not discover his patience in the grass, awaiting the warmth of spring through the cold months of winter?

Might he not find his speed, his agility, in the many cats of the jungle and plane? His wisdom beneath the immemorial waves of the ocean? The diversity of his forms in the many green flora climbing the cliff? Yes, he is a man, but from whom else might he learn to nurture, to care, to express gentleness and virtuosity, where can a man learn these qualities from anyone, himself least of all, but from the doting nature of woman? From her, from her, does he not learn the breaths? From her he learns again to breathe—but she is of the world, is she not? She, whom herself is caught within the material world, a place of distractions and confusions, how may she instruct him, how might she lead him back to himself, how might she teach him again to breathe, from the termination of the abdomen, exhaling through the mouth, how can that which epitomizes the entanglements of the world teach him to be apart from it? How might he find himself without finding himself in her—

Has he found himself? Has he found himself, now, anything but uncomfortable? No; thought has seized the reins of his mind. Thought has driven him away from the austerity of the beach, the waves and the sand and the sky, and bidden him to a place of indulgence: a palace, decrepit, effete and bestial. His thoughts are animal! And what difficulties this animal erects! Thought has made him uncomfortable, yes, so terribly uncomfortable... His breath, his breath is heavy now, and shallow. His eye opens now—can anyone see him? Has anyone seen him? Her eyes, thank the stars and space above her eyes are closed. How ashamed, how ashamed would he be if she saw...

He must seize the reins. He must take the power away from thought. Discard thought and *breathe*. Deflate thought and *be*. Be nothing, conceive of nothing—only *be*. Think not like an animal, be not like an animal; that which thinks like an animal becomes like an

animal and not a man, and he will not find himself. Father, mother, uncle, the entire menagerie—grandfather behind them all—perhaps, in their thinking, they are right. Even contemplating the solution of this mystery, of finding himself and thinking he might do so contrary to their will, of questioning their will and thinking, not *breathing*... how far he has gone astray. Under clasped hands, hide the folds of his lap.

Focus on breathing, yes, on breathing. Breathe fully, downward, downward from the abdomen... no; not from the abdomen. From elsewhere, from anywhere.

— C-c-can breathe—can *we* b-breathe from e-elsew-w-where, p-p-p-p-please?

— Do not speak, only breathe. We will originate now our breath from the heart. Yes, we will breathe from the heart.

Breathe from the heart, yes, outwardly from the heart. No longer downward, no longer upward, but outward. Breath from the heart does not excite. Breath from the heart will only calm, yes, calm. He breathes fully from the heart, and the breath calmly leaves his lips. He breathes, and he thinks not. He breathes, and he sees not. He breathes, and he hears... the movement of water.

What is the name they told him, that of movement through water? ‘Splashing?’ ‘Sloshing?’ He breathes, yet he hears only sloshing. He breathes and he hears... *you*.

You—why do you make these noises while he seeks only to breathe, and not to think, nor see, nor hear? Why do you interrupt his search for himself? To what end do you wade there, sloshing, in the loud waters of the sea?

Is it your will he never finds himself? Is it your will he is lost forever?

Have you lost yourself, too? Do you seek yourself in the ocean brine? She would say you would not find yourself. *They* would say this also. He, too, would agree; he knows. He knows, that it is easy to lose oneself entirely, even in the gentle surge of a river.

Beware, oh lost one, beware the water and its many forms. You do not wish to lose yourself. You do not wish to be like him, knowing yourself, yet knowing not. Knowing nothing with certainty. Knowing not whether you were drawn from the river indeed, or if you still dwelt below the foam. How can *he* know surely, amidst confusion, anonymity, where he does not know himself, or if he ever knew himself before?

Breathe. All you can do is breathe. Breathe, and seek yourself. Breathe, originating outward from the heart, exhaling through the lips. Breathe. Do you know who you are? Do you know anything, but that you move, and your legs drag through the water? If you know not who you are, and he knows himself neither... are you him, and he you? If himself, even though only in part, resides in all things which he perceives, and he perceives you, and you perceive him—you saw him, you glanced at him, yet you were silent—you *are* him, are you not? And he *is* you. Yourself rests in him and he in you, searching, yes, searching. Where might you and he find yourselves? If you are everywhere, are you perhaps in the grasses? The Sun? The innumerable sands?

You carry forward, though, while seated he remains. He remains, breathing. Breathing outward from the heart, outward through the lips. Has he allowed himself to pass him by?

Can he ever know himself? If he cannot concentrate, if he cannot make the questions and thoughts cease, if he cannot look past the world, sensation, and body, past thought, and

through the mind, how? How does he peer past the perceptive storm, how when their will is not enough? How can he ignore a world, how can he ignore a body, that he has only just come to know as his?

‘Discipline and self-control, and breathing.’ By these three. They would have her teach him these three. Only through these three he would discover himself, and reunite. But there is another way, he has seen, another means, by which he could advance past his body: during the time of sleep.

There was no breathing in sleep, no concentration, no body to control. There only *was*. What *was* was like a space above his body, a place above wherein he believed he could see himself—not his body, but *he*—somewhere ahead. Yes, somewhere far ahead. Not a dream, but the space surrounding dreams. He travelled this space, began moving towards what he sensed was himself, and as he travelled there his body became lost, and it became instead not like the body of a man, but like that of a midge. Travelling, the midge below him became a mouse; and that mouse became a lizard; and that lizard became a snake; and that snake a sable; and that sable a lamb; and that lamb a dog; that dog a cow; that cow a horse; that horse an elephant; and that elephant a whale, travelling, sculling through the dark space below. As he travelled with the great beast beneath him, blades of what seemed like light began cutting through the darkness, like tree trunks in moonlight overbrimming, concealing a fire in the deep dark of a forest. It was himself, he knew, dwelling there, waiting for him, showing himself at last. Yes, it was himself, it was, and he need breath not to know it.

But a hand descended from above, and pulled him upwards. The hand pulled him up into the dark, and the whale and himself were gone.

He awoke in a bed, yes, a firm bed, covered in starch-sheets, surrounded on three sides by faces, faces strange to him, dozens of them. One of them, an older man, stepped forward. He parted his lips, and after a moment this man asked him if he knew any of them. But he could not say he knew any one of them, lest the old man, for they were all strangers to him, and it was as though all speech was merged in his mind.

Breathe, breathe outward from the heart, let the air fall from the lips, and merge with the greater breath swirling about. Breathe. Breathe. Is he hungry now? Is he hungry? Always he hungers, now, always. What food, he wonders, what food will she provide him next?

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A source of distraction, family: the distraction of home, comfort, of familiarity and secureness; or the distraction of others embroiled in that mob of emotions compromising and involving. *Surely*, they know of their disruptiveness. They must know how their squabbling upsets the earnest morning air. The infant, the yapping canine, no, too innocent the both of them, the first by his youth and the second by animal stupidity, to understand what it is they make, that noise, like drunken women; no, ignorance blankets their perception, their image. Child and animal are but as truculent as mother and owner will allow. But the child's mother is silent, has not spoken a word. And the child's father—well, whether the man accompanying them functions to the child as father or grandfather she in truth cannot say—nonetheless, so self-involved the man seemed when first they took their seats, across on the beach's other side. Objecting occasionally, offering the child spiritless adjustments, then

turning back into his mind, returning to his contemplations. A grandfather, unprepared and reluctant, but present still. She remembers not her grandfather, but surely, yes, he acted in this way. Better she has forgotten. Better they one day forget, too. Soon, yes, for their own sakes.

And for *his* sake, for *his*. ‘Distraction’ she calls it by name, but it is distractive in subjection only. No distraction reaches her ears, no ruckus confuses her path. Experience reifies its edges, and she travels upon it, this path, unperturbed, unmolested by sound or thought, or by the manifold artifices of the world. But for *his* sake, yes, she worries. Delicacy, and precariousness, mark the stones below his feet; any distraction, terrible as an elephant or nettling as a fly, may mislead him. External forces, well-intentioned yet deceptive, all too deceptive, have misled him long enough in this life.

— Let yourself breathe only, and disregard all things else. Breathe, breathe inward. Breathe, breathe outward...

Sorrowful, all too sorrowful, old age and the young: sorrowful for the old, for the grandfather, long has suffering champed at his calf; sorrowful for the young, for the infant, he knows not what suffering awaits him. Sorrowful, that the binds of family might forever oppress.

Such is any tie tethering man to earth. Nowhere more prevalent, nowhere more far-reaching, nowhere do those bonds between man squeeze more tightly, than in blood. Numerous, so numerous they are, and ever-growing, and as they increase in size so too do their grasping clutch. The more desperate one’s ties, the more tightly they cling; and a bound man cannot walk, let alone travel a path already winding and knobbled. This is the

predicament they wish him reintroduced to, the failure and suffering that await an already damaged man, destruction inevitably assured. O yes, they do have their own best intentions in mind for him. But these intentions are their own, *theirs*, orbiting the desires of their own hearts. They inserted themselves, and sought her aid because they wanted him back. *They* sought her aid, for they wished him bound, bound again to *them* and to the lie of himself, bound in the cycle of suffering which is himself and the mob of sense-memories competing, stumbling over one another in pursuit of impossible satiety. Insisting that he rediscover his true self. Insisting that his true self exists to be found. Pursuing only a fullness their own. Their wealth may be earned, but neither for his weal nor the world's do they yearn; family's desires are selfish.

What nourishment he would know, what sublimity of taste beyond taste, sight beyond sight, touch beyond touch, sound beyond sound, feeling beyond feeling would he discover, if but they would desist! if they would only leave him to her charge and dismiss all notion of that vestigial Self! In all pursuits of himself will he find no Self, but instead an insistence of Self. He would then necessarily fabricate a Self in desire of Self, and this Self would be nothing more substantial, nothing more real, than his reflection in a pool, sensory and intangible, scattered by an assail from even the slightest of pebbles. His true Self does not exist. There is no *true* Self, no Self at all for him, for her—for anyone. Therefore, she must carry on, she must challenge and contradict, she must overcome their notions, their assertions of his past Self, and lead him, take him by the hand further away from himself, until that memory of himself is all but forgotten and the insistence of Self dissipated. How lucky he is, what fortunes have graced him already! That pulled from the dark and endless waters he



should forget age, station, and memory; his loss of Self so far is a wonderful, an invaluable thing! O how evasive such complete disencumbrance is to her yet! Could he but break those bonds of family now he might run free, dashing ahead of even her. What a vision his disappearance at path's end would be, what supernal splendor—even with her left behind again!

— Again, mind your breath. Let your breath penetrate, yes, to your very center let it flow...

Eyelids forever restful she says this, he breathing again shallow, quickened. Distracted again—by *them* surely. Nothing else to distract, nothing between she and him. If the auspices of his condition were in his heart but more apparent! how little distraction he would show! Distractions everywhere, baubles of the body, of the mind and senses, higglers blindly swinging their wares in and out of one's face with no respect to the path ahead. Packmen, at all corners heedless packmen besetting the world, ensnaring, plaguing it with their diversions; distracted and tongue-tied, just like *him*, just like *him*. Better then that he remain silent. Better amidst babble and confusion he forget, lose, and free himself of speech, of words. Only when free of words will he understand words; and only when he understands words will he understand not to hear. He *will* reach those heights, however lofty. He will master his breath, he will learn speech, and he will discover that which radiates so magnificently beyond the Self. And she will aid him. And she will aid others, many others, as many as she may—even if her advance along the path slows, even if she tires to a halt. Still, she will aid him and others; better they see before her.

For she has known the world, she has swum in the shallow pools of the Self, attended its illusory banquet and tasted the delights of sensuousness there. But these waters, they stuck

not to her skin, but turned to vapor in the Sun; she dined at the banquet, yet she hungered again. In dryness as in hunger, she craved substance, she only wanted for liberation of wanting, and so to the waters, to the banquet she returned once more. And so, for a time she bound herself: she slept overlong, she ate overmuch, and hung on the words of others who advised enjoying dependency, and indulgence. Now, however, she enjoys none of it, and neither bears nor hears their advice. Now, she passes not even a third of the night in rest, but concentrates, and breathes. Now, but a bowl of rice and lentils satisfies, and the dew of a leaf will quench her thirst. Now, now she has no need for joy, for refreshment; no longer does hunger thrive. She has transcended them, the senses: for though they are not wrong entirely, they do easily mislead and ensnare one in the Self's illusion; and sealed beneath the Self one mars what they perceive sensually, and inevitability of misuse follows. One cannot be sure of the Self, they cannot abide by it; for abiding by the Self they become like iron, which does rust. And yes, it is true, that it is the iron itself which does create rust.

*They* would have him be iron. To illusory rust they would expose him, and join him to their brittleness, to the rigidity of their company. She might not have had his family, one of considerable means and advantage, but still, still these things she knows. Whether he turns within as they would like, or without, in his pursuit of himself he shall find *no* Self, but only that idea of Self, a mirage. Knowing this image or not, pursuing or conceiving of it regardless, he will come to depend on selfness, on suchness, and he will be bound.

He will unearth more, O how much he shall uncover! if successfully she might pull him from his course, disentangle him from *their* whim. How much more he has discovered now, free from the burden of himself; imagine, yes, how quickly he may flee if she can but

only sever their ties! In her lifetimes of suffering, she has progressed not nearly as far as he has, he who simply awoke to the boon of oblivion—the gift of freedom from Self! Like milk he is, like milk clarified to ghee without first becoming curd, or butter. What a blessing, which he has not yet fully realized—but shall!—what a gift! All skill she possesses, all effort she may muster to his odyssey she bends. Each and every capacity within her power she may contribute to free him from the anchor, to liberate him from the feast, all she has learned like a trident or a bow she shall arm herself with in his defense. The negative, the misapprehensive impulses of they who would conceive imaginary details of others, of him, about who he is and what he should be, with her wisdom and her mindfulness these their missiles she shall repulse! He should be everything and he should be nothing; only when he understands this, when he knows in his mind that nothing exists which he must or must not be, only then, only *then* will he *be* truly.

Unto this revelation she shall safeguard him, unto that very end. She cannot question it, for it is what she must do. She cannot control it; hers is no desire, no whim. She simply must, not because of whom or why she is, but *what*. She is; therefore she must.

Eyelids restful, tired, not tired, not tired but restful still, yet... an image now, curious—unsupported, like a veiled flame its aura illuminates the darkness of her mind. Glorious, glorious it is, wonderful, distinct in its brilliance: a man, yes, *you*, crossing over to her, crossing the great ocean of the world. *You*, feet level atop the waves, each step a calming force across the waters underneath. *You*, a symbol at your feet, foreign to her, strange and awful. *You*, atop the water you walk—yet your toes, how deftly they might plumb the deep,

your heels, full and plump as the rabbit's, supporting the most delicate arches. *You*, your lithesome limbs swinging in the light, long arms—long, lengthy as your legs they hang—perfectly measured, swaying at stag-like thighs, pliant fingers branching past your knees. *You*, your physique lion-like and lean, impossibly upright—yet effortless—unblemished skin a silken golden hue. *You*, modestly male, supplely under-armed, crown, shoulders, shoulders filled and muscular, palms, and soles—all well-rounded, exiting the waters, bearing gently now on the sand. *You*, you, your every hair dark-rooted and luscious, waving gracefully to your gait, shading the distinguished flesh of your skull. *You*—you smile! and the smile of your pantheric jaw reveals teeth brilliantly squared, canines, four of them keen and white; how abundant they are, how plentiful, twenty-and-twenty in all! *You*, O how she hungers; to taste of you—to know your mouth, the sweet bounty of saliva on your tongue, long and broad as it is, the only instrument worthy of a voice so strong. *You*, your eyes, clear and soothing as sky, lashes thick like a royal bull's. *You*, you... light, how light pours from your very brow...

*You*. It is *you*, no one and nothing else. But... how? How now?

Air rushing to her ears, air swelling her skull. Where is she? Floating, floating now. Sailing into another world, into the clouds. Must be clouds; moisture clinging at her skin. Hovering somehow, hovering in the grey wet masses, hovering with heavy feeling at the pit. Should sink, should fall back to the earth. Why not? Firebrick in her stomach, firebricks twisting, grinding their edges off against the walls. Firebricks clapping together, spraying sediment up her throat. Battering, wind battering; staggering, drunken, swirling, spinning.

Everything, everything, every sense blent together. Where is she? Where is she? Open.

Open—

Blinding, bright—where is she? Where is—*you*. *You*, it is you. There you are, hands rubbing ankles, exactly as envisioned. But... how? How saw she you before she knew you? before she knew the day? Who are you that she knew you? Who are you that blinds her like the Sun? Who are you but what before seeing she saw? What sensing not she sensed? What being not appeared?

But... you *are*. She knew you before seeing, and before knowing saw. She is, but she is not a Self. She possesses no Self and no Self possesses her; she simply is and reality is and is within her. You are within her, you are a part of her as she is a part of you. You are within her, but also you are apart from her as she is apart from you. You are and also you are not. But... before sensing you were, and after sensing you are. You both *are* and *were*. You are... a *Self*. You negate not being by being in both sights: you are when you should not be, then when you *are* you are not *not*. If the Self is what is not, if all is a part of the one and the one is a part of all, then no Self—no illusion of Self—may be doubly perceived. Perceived once, yes, in either instance of sight before or sight after—but doubly, no! Yet... she knew *you!* *You*, who deny the absence of Self by twice asserting selfness, suchness, being! She knew you not before you ignited against the endless backdrop of her mind, but she knew you nonetheless! Precisely what you were and are she knew before witnessing. O how—*how?*

This cannot be—it cannot! Is this the nature of things? Knowing and seeing without thought or sight? What *is* the nature of things—that which is seen, or what is known? But...

wait; she thought, she thought and still the sight came to her. She abandoned the abandonment of thought and thought still the sight, the double-vision of some Self appeared. Is thought, then, amongst the nature of things? Following your sight she feels bliss—bliss!—a bliss unfamiliar, indescribable, only which followed your sight, which followed a vision following thought. Thought, thought, if this is such, must thought be a road to such feeling? to the sensation of absolute bliss?—but not, also? Both and neither? What of memory? Memory dwells within the Self, a thing marked by time... but *your* memory, it was out of Time—before Time it preceded! Your memory, it is ageless, limitless, it showed itself to her before she knew it, free of desire, choice, or sustainment. What, O what does that make the nature of things, of what is? What does that make *you*?

You go now, you go—she saw not your going. Where are you? Why have you not stopped? Come, fold your legs before her, cut not so swiftly this lotus bloom from its stalk! but feed it, though it does not hunger, cease your inexorable advance and, though she does not want for food—feed her still, give her peace! She is not tired, no, she is not, she is not; she does not thirst. Turn back! Stop! You are! You cannot but have *been*!

Gone, Gone, Gone beyond, Gone altogether beyond. O what an awakening!

\* \* \*

Some of the wetter material near up on the water. Better material, firmer sand, takes to compaction more eagerly. Man wants his structure, Colosseum or castle in the sand, to

stand, he builds it by the right matter. Pack it down, assume every inch of the mold, then pack it down again, then a third time for surety. Where's the boy? He watching?

— Sonny, see here. Watch your Vavi...

There, has the boy's attention, for the time-being. Distractible child, didn't get it from him, did he? From Mære, maybe. Impressionable, unfortunately so, myopic, yes, but not an inattentive girl, her, though why she's not down in the sand with her own boy right now... oh, who's he to say? How's one to rest eyes always open? She looks cold, standing out there, uncovered arms crossed, lips hiding that stoic shiver. He told her, didn't he? Told her to bring her shawl, told her the walk's warmth would leave her, leave her grasping her chest till 10. Sunup at 6:13, yes, but true heat was hours away. He told her, he told her. The bucket—right. Invert the bucket, tap it on its sides, in three places tap it three times each. One-two-three, one-two-three, one-two-three. And... there.

— Did you see? See how your Vavi did?

Lost the boy's attention again. Where nothing once stood now a tower, something, something of substance stands. And what does the boy care? He's pulling a stick from the sand. If he cared less he'd be asleep. 2.4 years old, though; what's he to know? Little devil's hardly speaking—shouting, caterwauling, but not speaking. He's quieted down now, at the very least. Yes, he's quiet now, into the sand burrowing his filthy, his grainy hands.

Hands, hands need washing. Washing soon as earthly possible, free his fingers from this filth. Finish the palace, draw the paths, then down to the water for a lather. Yes, a good lather, close at hand. That was the tenth tower, yes? One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, and—yes, ten. Ten towers, twenty-two paths to connect them. Then the body's

complete, then a good washing. Ah, he's unburied that stick now. What's his plan for it? All that labor for what? A play-thing? A weapon? Walking cane for his Vavi? Last one least likely; boy'll be off terrorizing her mutt any moment now, he's sure.

Labor... labor, was it? Do castles of the sand constitute work? Not as if, after all, the boy'll be living in them, or putting them to any use. Toys, really, prop-fortresses doomed to wash away in the tide. And what if they *were* work? His decision, isn't it, what he considers 'work?' Matter of personal fitness. What's labor if not subjective, or contextual? If what's considered laborious he enjoys, is it truly labor still? Performed in the consummate act of rest, can work not count as rest? Walked here, didn't they? More work in half-a-mile's walk than upturning buckets. No: decidedly not labor, it doesn't fit the parameters. Gets one day off, doesn't he? And he'll spend it as he chooses, working as he'd like.

Dirty hands, though. Filthy, grains, dirt, sediment, and who can fathom what else under the nails. If not a definition of work, some close approximation. Dirty, filthy, unclean. Need a good cleaning, need a good scrub—does he have his lather? Yes, there it is, in the pocket—need the boy's attention now to see the thing through.

— Sonny?

Unclean. Filth under the nails, digging into the knuckles, the furrows of the skin. He'll begin with the right hand, lather in his left, yes, always with the right hand starting at the nails. Scoop underneath each nail three times each for the filth seen, unseen, and unknown. Once the nails are finished and clean, then onto the individual pillars of the finger. Grasp each finger of the right hand in the left hand and ten times rub the length of each finger until spotless and clean. With each finger clean, then to the palm, applying circular abrasions to



the skin of the palm ten times uninterrupted. And with the palm and fingers and nails assuredly purified, then progress to cleansing also the hand's dorsal—oftentimes filth, uncleanliness, and disease travel out of sight, beyond the reaches of the eye. Abrade in circular motions also the back of the hand, until the hand is clean and the filth eradicated. With the right hand clean repeat the process for the left. Any dirt present in review of either hand he'll wash again twice more, beginning with the right, then left. Right, then left. Right, then left.

— Sonny, come over to Vavi!

Boy won't turn around, take his eyes off the stick. Stabbing with it at the sand. Feeling them now, feeling the grains moving up his fingers, feeling the filth reproduce. The right hand he'll clean, he'll clean the right hand first, then left. Hands pure. Clean again. Unmingled. Right first, then left. Right first, with all things, then left. Cleaning and preparation beginning with the right, concluding with the left. Cleaning the twelve major regions of the right body first—each region scrubbed ten times—then moving on to the left. Dressing shirts, trousers, socks, shoes, gloves, jackets—all articles beginning first with the right appendage, then the left. Right, then left robing, and left then right disrobing. Right to set action in motion, left to bring about that action's completion. Right, then left, ten times each.

— Sonny! Boy, you hear me?

Ten times each. Ten times. Ten for the fingers and ten for the toes. Ten for the numbers by which all things are accounted. Ten for the years by ten that men may live. Ten for the living body, head-chest-stomach fed by seven orifices. Ten for the year, the two

solstices and the times between upheld by the week's seven days. Ten, ten for the towers at his feet. Ten, all things are tens, tens comprised of threes and sevens. All things tens—or twelves. All things twelves also. Twelve, the night sky's zodiac signs. Twelve, the months of the year. Twelve, the regions of the body. Twelve the body's leading organs. Twelve and ten, the paths leading to and from the ten towers at his feet. Twelves, tens, threes, and sevens, the grains on his hands, climbing higher and higher, reaching for his arms and beyond. And once beyond? *Then* where? Dirt. Filth. Uncleanliness. Needs to wash, *needs* to clean. Why won't the boy budge? Just stabbing now—why stabbing?—just stabbing at the beach! Turn around, turn around, turn around!

And what's she doing? Boy's ignoring his grandfather, and what is it she does? Stares, stares past her old man. Stares past, as if he were some fallen column, broken and scattered. What's his worth now? Always the young gaze past that way, distracted, indifferent. No want of something past its use. 17, where was he at 17? Not a father, that's certain. Wandering, spurned, but not a father—well, not to his knowledge. The others out here—seven, seven total—they must see him and think, must know how his back strains, how he struggles to contain the boy, groping about unclean in the filthy sand. They see what little vigor rests in him. Ineffectual. An animal inching towards death by their sights. And the boy? His grandson, no doubt. But the girl? Young. Vital. No one might guess her a mother for her age. Waste no more effort. Let her step in.

— Mære, the boy, he won't...

— Sonny, she calls, unmoving as stone, her trance broken, eyes, eyes disquieted, Sonny, listen to Vavi when he speaks. Go on.

Did the trick, at least: boy's turning around. And her? Watches long enough to see his back, off again go the eyes. No wandering in her, no; seeking. Eyes always seeking, always looking for another—the *next* one. And of her eyes, what would they think? Same as every man she's met, same as every man she'll meet: beautiful. Who does she have to thank for that? Who else but the dirty codger in the sand?—oy, in part. What beauty she's got he's given her. Beauty of the heart, of tradition, of order. No earrings, no nose-rings, no ornaments in the hair or scrawlings on the skin. No festooning, no pageantry. Beauty of the self. Like his mother, isn't she? She *is* a mother, to the boy, yes. But... is she not his mother also? Closest living resemblance to her, anyway? her eyes, she has her eyes; that same old-world aspect, stoic, stoic yet tender; long, lean arms, wanting, accepting any and all love one can give; same heart, same habits; same... maternity. Same wisdom, imparted in him, passed onto her. Same... but Mære, what does she lack? Leeriness. The leeriness a hard life purchases. Didn't want that for her, did he? Didn't want her wandering the same. And so, the curse demands she seek. And for now beauty marks her. But she'll seek herself into the arms of a man one day, a wealthy man, a powerful one. And what then? He'll dress her up, cover her in jewels and fragrance, pile on dresses and gowns. Until what? Until the beauty's closed up, and nothing remains to be loved. No worrying after modesty that day; she'll be unrecognizable, covered-up and stuck. Like a horse buried in hay.

Daughter, mother—sister, too. All from the same place they've come, no? They're siblings every one of them, all seven. Where have they been? And where will they go? — Leave the branch be and come to Vavi, Son; he's got something to show.

Can't wait much longer, boy. Please, please come. Dust the hands off, raise them to the sky. Beckoning the boy on, now, beckoning, begging an infant. What would his mother think? What of Mære? Does she even see this? The others? If they've pieced together she's the mother, that he's the grandfather, the final question's not far off, is it? *The father, where's the boy's father?* Where, *where* is the boy's father? Where, and who? Beckoning, debasing himself to a bastard so... what? So *something* can be clean.

Three years now the question's cursed his mind, three years waiting for one to come forward. Three years of judgment, embarrassment, askance looks and ridicule. She was a girl, then—she's a girl, still—but just a girl, seeking love. Guilty of beauty. Guilty of innocence. Guilty of being his child. His curse she inherited after all, isn't it, his mark? No mark of beauty, but a mark of manner, right? Peculiarity? Her love makes her peculiar, making her in turn a target. And him? How often did work come and pass? How often did he have to leave a place before he called it 'home?' And for what? Because he was peculiar? Because peculiarity helped him survive? Because he was clean where others bathed in filth like swine? How often for his cleanliness would he not know one day of rest apart from the seven? How long, when he'd found his love at last, how long did they rest together? How long before she, too, was gone?

One day apart now he's earned them, one day out of seven to rest. One day they'll not wander. One day where together they'll go somewhere exactly as planned. And then they'll go home. None of them will stray, none of them will labor; all will not be empty, but will be whole.

Ten towers. Ten towers at his feet. Ten, which are three central and seven supporting. Ten, with twenty-two connections between. Twenty-two, comprised of twelve and ten. Twenty-two paths, yes, from one tower to the next. Paths for one to follow, paths that show the way. Paths in numbers, numbers, which do not change, numbers which do not go. Numbers, which feel no shame. Why would they? They exist before given form. All things, everything, him, Mære, the boy—all of them exist in figure before in form. In potentiality before actuality. Numbers, they are eternal, they are power.

Sunrise at 6:13. Sunset 19:41. Moonset 1:51. Moonrise... when? What was it again? Calculations, has to check the calculations when home...

Deal with the present first. Draw the body closed, finish the paths. Draw the paths for the boy, show him the way, then cleanse. Twenty-two paths between ten towers, which are ten and twelve. Boy can even do it if he wants, drag them across with the branch. Would save the trouble of getting his hand even filthier. Yes, demonstrate and the boy will carry on and finish. Then a good lather. Then cleanliness. Then clarity. Then rest. Throw an arm up, wave the boy on.

— Bring the branch if you'd like, Son, but come here! Let's finish the palace then?

Irresponsible. Indifferent. Boy turns his back on him again, fixating, fixating on what? Driftwood? Sanded flotsam? Terrorizing frightened crabs? *Please*—he's raised his hands, both of them, to the very sky now! Please, 60 seconds, he only asks for 60 seconds of the boy's time! 60 seconds, which is six sets of 10 seconds each, two sets of three. That is all he asks—so little! Only 60 seconds more being unclean! Please!

— *Sonny!* Listen to me *now* and leave it be!

He turns now and... what's this look the boy's giving him? Round eyes dark, dark bottomlessly. Not empty, but filled with something, boiling over, it seems. A brown flash, grains sprayed. The boy, what's he—?

Oh.

Where a tower, something, something of substance once stood, nothing remains. The boy yanks his stick back with a glower and turns away. Back to whatever he seeks. Did Mære...? No, she didn't see. Or, didn't say a word if she... no; he'll decide she simply didn't see. Hot now, now he feels great heat. His hands... are they burnt?

Lower them, then, remove them from the light. Where...? Could wash them now, could pick himself up and carry him to the sea. Lather's in the pocket. Boy wants nothing to do with him anyway. Might as well now, but... can't. Rest, resting is all he can think. His back, from stooping and packing it aches. Eyes, wet and heavy. Hands, filthy and unclean. And burnt, yes, burnt. No standing now, only rest. Filthy, dirty, unsanitary, unclean. Sand. But... beneath the surface... yes, it's cool. No heat. Filthy dirty, unsanitary, unclean—but cool. No light, only darkness down there. Filthy, dirty, unsanitary, unclean, and staggeringly so. Filth so innumerable... almost comforting. Bury them, then, he'll bury the hands. Bury the hands in cool ambiguity of subsurface sand. He buries them, right, then left, to a silent wave, a wall of water, crashing down. What is it overwhelming him? What is this now? Relief?

Laughter, laughter like a cry accosts the air. The boy's laughing. What's he found down there, what's he stumbled on? What could have him cackling like that? Something else, another effort to fling his branch at. Where'd the boy get it from, this... belligerence? Did he

get it from him? Wasn't Mære the same? Was he so destructive, too? Only mother could've said... That was all of them, wasn't it? Everyone, warlords of youth.

Mære fought him, too, didn't she? Yes, for years, years, she did: years of misbehavior, of disagreement; years of anger and selfish desire; years of disrespect and trespassed boundaries. Years spent enforcing broken rules and unfollowed examples. Yet... such a loving girl, and kind. Change blossomed in her in time, change sweet and bitter. Is this simply the experience, he wonders, to be hated, hated unto love? The boy doesn't like him, doesn't like his Vavi, does he? And one day, one day the boy will redirect it all towards her, no? And they'll argue, and they'll disagree, and they'll gouge each other to the bone. And the wounds will heal. And the scars will fade. And the boy'll have a child of his own; the duplicitous and vicious will take him, too. And it'll all begin again. And Vavi, where will he be then?

There goes the mutt again. Nearly took a tower down himself. What's that little shite running after now? Assailing strangers again, no doubt. It'll be him chasing the dog down again, he's sure. No rest, no, never any real rest. Not for him or his kind. For any of them at all.

A weary man, an aging man; a stargazer, hands stuck in the ground. Grimy. Fouled. What becomes of him? And what from him becomes? Descendants. Spawn. More to come? How many will they number? If he passes, if he should fall... who will support them? Will they notice? Even tonight, when they've taken their beds and he his, when he to nothingness returns... will he ever leave his sleep? And what will it have all been for, if not? Decades of homelessness, itinerancy, repudiation... all for what?

Is there no freedom from the bonds earned by suffering? Aimless wandering in search of some, of any home; the rebuke of youth and constant toil; the loss of love so longed-for yet shortly learned; the sight of a creature, beautiful and pure, defiled so wickedly—what does this deserve, if not better, if not more? and if not him, for *them* at least, for their generations, life's suggested gifts, its joys and bounties? *They* can be the great ones, even if he was not! theirs can be that generation which rises above the pain! And if he could know with certainty, if he could know that they were—how much more suffering, what admonition he would endure, if but greatness might grace them! Will they be a part of that generation, the greater one? Or... will another rise from out the deep, shadow over them, descend, and come?

A vast, endless thing—the water—isn't it? Endless, incalculable; a haven unlike the sky. Trove of knowledge, wine-red mystery. Perhaps, perhaps his answer's there. But water, like a generation, it's all here one day, gone the next. Water of life, life of all: have they—has *he*—deserved what is good?

Still, motionless now. Waves rising and falling. Rising and falling. Rising and falling. Closings, and openings; substance and nothing, nothing else arises in thought. Free the hands now: left first, then right. The water: wash, beginning with the right: ten times the pillars of the finger, ten times the palm of the hand...

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Does You has a liking of it? Oh a good busting it is one fast and strongness brought the every parts of the tower down of a single strike he does. Yes You likes it oh You likes it very much You does! You sees it yes? Does You sees it? He bust again *there* brings he's sword down again *there there* much strongness in he's arms *there* nothing left now nothing but a tinyness hill. Oh You must sees it now! must sees he breaksing it down so easy. So easy he may does it again? No You sees it so no he won't. You sees it and Va-vi sees it the strong busting but Va-vi Va-vi no does sees You. How why? Va-vi just a starer staring at the busting staring on the pile. What does Va-vi have a thought of it? Va-vi sad Va-vi being sad staring on the pile? Va-vi calls on him too much times! He does no want join Va-vi in a building and a makesing. He have a sword! Go busting and smashing makes funs with You not baby in sand like with Va-vi. Va-vi though Va-vi can Va-vi no sees You but Va-vi can he hears? No Va-vi he no hears he no sees he sits all he does sits in sands like babies watching on the busting pile. He a tired Va-vi yes he is old and tired Va-vi. Must be why he no sees or hears. A sleepsing Va-vi will he be sleepsing soon yes and when he sleepsing You will go where? Va-vi will be a sleepsing and You past! walksing past past past old sleepsy Va-vi unsmart eyeses closed buried on the sandses.

And You moves he's way! You makes Your steps to he's place for because the busting of the tower. You finds it a funny thing and a good no? And so so You yes You wants walksing he's way for play? Oh You and he what a good time and a fun will have playing on the sandses! Playing there and oh yes also running at the water and a sailing! Sailing the ocean wides and deeps and salty yes so salty no drinksing the waters no sick You have a sickness of it if You do but yes to other sandses and beaches where You and he will

makes good bustings breaksing of them's towers there show them he strongness of little soldier yes oh yes oh—

Oh but Moh-ma! Moh-ma no Moh-ma would no likes he to does the sailings and breaksings with You. Moh-ma would tell he no no look on Your eyeses. You a man strange and unsmart of You she would be. But Moh-ma you looks such a funny man and a silly! A silly funny man and a strong he thinksing also smart and happy but strange and mean no. He sees if You was a mean or a hurtsful. Strong yes but no hurtsful. Moh-ma would likes You yes yes she would sees! Moh-ma likes a lots of mens no? Always he sees she talking at them other mens always talksing at them and a giggling and hugging. Old mens like Va-vis and youngs as Yous. Oh! yes maybe she likes You if You she speaks with. Moh-ma she likes gigglings talksing and huggings maybe You a silly man and strong she likes if she haves with You meeting. You come on he now yes and You plays with he and Moh-ma will sees yes she will and makes a hurry walksing over. And he and You will plays and You and she will talks and laughs and hugs!

Here! Here! You comes to here and plays. No worry after Moh-ma. If she walks so goodness will he makes it. Because of he is a smarter strongness and a trickser than Moh-ma silly wo-men unstrongness and Va-vi also. Oh what happy time he would have of it playing with You as he's Pah-pa!

And and oh and if them says no then oh what a bad and a redness troubles he would makes for them. Oh yes he would the most badness and a red troubles for them if them tells you away! He would finds Moh-ma's baggsies and takes Moh-ma's foods and Va-vi's just like Moh-ma she hides she's milks away. And if them asks he tells them says he nothing and

believes he them would believes he of the dateses. Three dateses Moh-ma she brings to snacksing on but if she makes You walks away oh would he sneaks up on she's baggsies a quietness and a strong takes the dateses two and a two leaving one to he. And then and then under the sand them would he hides! And then and then so she asks where the dateses he tells Moh-ma Moh-ma no only packsed one dates each! She but a one dates packsed for he for why Moh-ma would packs more dateses for Va-vi or she? Them only needs one dates for if You she makes walksing away.

Oh! a dates does he have of a pocket! You will have it yes yes You will when You arrives yes he shares he's dates to You!

Oh oh yes so scaries he thinksing did You have a seeing of it? He must asks if You has a seeing it yes oh yes he must of the long nasty-crawly sneaksing around the grasses. He does have a seeing of it yes he does and Moh-ma and Va-vi. Va-vi sads and a tired Va-vi saw it of a first pointsed to the means nasty-crawly longness and no Va-vi says and them takesed he walksed away from it the nasty-crawly hissing all weird of them grasses he's head all blackness body ropesed redness of the grasses. And them takesed he yes them takesed of him a nice beach here where he does sits on the sandses feels warms and Moh-ma she looks on the waters and Va-vi makes he's castles on the sands. Oh what a niceness and a swell no nasty-crawly hissing and having a scaring to he!

Mean nasty-crawly all longness blackhead and fangs! Must have them other peoples a scaring and ran them of the other side. The old lady with hairs fire and a redness milkses and two peoples who oh like two statues freezed like ice them sits! Mean nasty-crawly must have them a scaring bared he's teeths or what Va-vi calls them oh fangs yes bared he's

fangs and pused them about bad paths to them's sides of the beach. Oh so bad unnice and a windsy looks them's sides! With rockses of the waters with splash splashing and sprays and hairs all wets and salty and winds a coldness of their arms. And no would he he's dateses shared with them over of them's sides so sadness must they have of it eatsing no dateses. What a badness and a sad no dateses must be! Have them dateses of them's home? If no dateses of them's homes oh what a badness and a sad and unhappy of a homes them must haves!

What a badness and a sad of no dateses but no would he have of them no on he's sides of a beach. Them to them's side and he of he's. Mean nasty-crawly sends them away but nasty-crawly no tells them of which ways for going. Them of them's them chooses. Mens strange and wo-mens so pesky always so pesky. Like of when Moh-ma or Va-vi them brings mens and wo-mens strange in the home and they eats of din-din and the home badness them makesing of it eatsing and sitting hours longness until he's tired oh so tired but them talks and talks of he's Moh-ma or Va-vi talks and talks and leaves never or quiets. How means and a badness of strange wo-mens and mens but mens the mostness! who them talks at he's Moh-ma! Oh how he angries at them mens when them talks at his Moh-ma. She is he's Moh-ma! does them have no knowing? Them must unsmart and a meanness be talksing at Moh-ma taksing she from he. Badness mens and terribles makes he troubles for them he will! Means and tricksies them taksing Moh-ma away shuttsing the doors. Them stays away for better staying at their beach sides where no may takes Moh-ma or talks to sleep. No dateses or Moh-ma deserve them such mens meanness and hungry!

Oh but You! You no such mens like them. You he have a liking of You funny and a smart and quiet and a strong man. You he's Moh-ma can talks with and laughs and hugs nice and a better of other mens. You better of the mens and wo-mens of beach others side. You no there but here-walksing hand in Your hand walksing for he for to playing and makes good bustings. You choosed he for playing with no them. You choosed he sees he's sword saw he's great good bustings and breaksings and runned for he for he You loves over them. And and from them's side You comes no? Maybe long black and a creepsy nasty-crawly sees You and You sees it but no scarings did You have! Such a strong man and a braveness You would no fear its sneaksing hisses in the grasses. No no fearings no scarings have You of it but strongness if You sees it You did oh yes oh yes You put your footses on its head right on its head! You kills mean old nasty-crawly and You runs to he strong and a funny silly and You will takes up he's sword and dash away breaks and bruises the other means and talksy mens!

Oh quiet muttsy! Muttsy! Muttsy no run at You barksing sniffing and a peskying! Would You have a liking of it muttsy talksing and peskying You would You have a liking if he makesed a strong busting of the muttsy all badness dirty and hair? Strong bustings all needs he for to makes muttsy a quiet muttsy indeed. He could runs up runs up and makes a good busting and a strong there *there* or takes up he's sword and makes good tossing at muttsy to quietness. But if he threw he's sword oh! if he threw he's sword he might hits You! No would he ever have a wanting of that to hits or hurts You such a funny man and a goodly strongness! No no no never would ever he does so...

You has a good liking of it when he breaks makes a good busting of a tower no? He breaks down another yes! He will breaks down and bustings good another tower of Va-vi's

for You for maksing you smile and forgettsing muttsy. He takes up he's sword and *there* makes for you *there* another good *there there there* busting and breaksing and smile for Your face funny and smartness! And what a smiles on he's face and Yours! What joy makes he for You *there* for seeing the towers fall! Oh Va-vi tiredness Va-vi would Va-vi smiles also if seeing the joy on Your face! Silly Va-vi starings so sad unsmart!

Here! Here! Yes here makes You steps for he here. Tired now tired is he of the sandses and beach of castles sandy and weak tired of muttsy barksing and wo-mens and mens strange. He would likes a going soon and going soon he will if he likes. Always he decides whens going and comings be. Always he decides yes always he decides when Moh-mas and Va-vis going and decides yes he does if them going home to good home or a bad.

So hurry You here yes hurry! Quick playings for You and he and Moh-ma will meet You and Va-vi when you meet he on the sands and You and them will makes a way to the home the good home away from dirty gritty sands salty sickness waters and grassy nasty-crawlies to the good home a place better and niceness it will be a good home yes it will very good and a happy indeed.

\* \* \*

Do they know? Do any of them know? No; they've only stared, stared at you like you were a roaming animal, and not a man at all. They stared, but returned within themselves without a word. Had they known they would have spoken. Had their eyes been unguarded they would have seen. Even father, who might have aided, blind to you. All blind. And what could he say now as you pass him by? He saw nothing. He cannot see your face, nor the

features which betray your pain. And Sonny; how could a child help? What does a child understand? No, not a one of them knows; they're all too old, young, or blind. Not an eye has seen, not an ear has heard what you did—or, what you attempted to do. None, it seems (can it be?) but *she*.

Closer, now. Every step for you struggles, doesn't it? Each one a labor in and of itself. Closer, you come closer to her, passing over her child as you do. And he cries out to you! approvingly, praisefully, like you weren't a stranger, yet... the gaze you return reflects nothing back. What has befallen you, what, that a plauding babe amounts to nothing?

Your mouth. As she looks upon your face, the face that turns so haggardly to the ground, she notices first your mouth. A crooked mouth, not bent in a sneer or curled in a smirk, but crooked to the cant of your jaw. There's a story there, isn't there? something you're ashamed or embarrassed to tell. If there is, the lines of your face bear no remembrance of happiness for it. Now that crooked mouth hangs, not agape, but so slightly open, as though it were too exhausted to close. And though you're quiet now, that has not always been. You've prattled in the past, talked at length in many words (too many words), words pretentious, words loud, bombastic words impressively dealt. But, what did all these words accomplish? Were they a distraction to your audience from the mouth that spoke them? Or for all these words did you believe you would be heard? And if heard, what, that you might escape? Silence? Yes... Silence, judgment, and chaos: these fates terrify you the most, don't they?

Your hand. To your hand her eyes descend, how you cradle it, gently, carefully, like it were an injured pup. And like an injured animal, how it lies so timid in your arm, curled in

on itself, recoiling from the world. But it isn't simply injured, is it? No: beaten. You were struck, someone struck you some unexpected blow, and in your defense you retaliated. You held your face firm, fleeing not from the fight, but held your ground, and instead struck back. And for your bravery, look how you were rewarded. Was it bravery after all? Or did your hands simply not know what it was they were doing? No: you weren't just a victim, were you? You had offended, too, committed some... trespass. You became like a man divided, victim and offender; and the rage of a divided man, it blinded your hands, didn't it? It's not only that you are injured, or beaten: you are ashamed. Ashamed for how you reacted, and ashamed it cannot so easily be hidden away.

Your eyes. The penned-in gaze of a racehorse barreling down the chute. The far-reaching look in your eyes, extending its sights beyond today into tomorrow. What do you harvest there? what do you reap tomorrow, today, but the pain you currently sow? What else but terror do those eyes feast upon there? What can they taste but a molten pain so hot it stretches back into now? Do they not see, those eyes, do they not know that beauty lies just beyond the chamber door? The answer, sadly, is likely 'no.' Only someone that afraid, that fearful of tomorrow, would seek to prevent its coming. But you are like all people who believe all things consequence of one another, as the tree is consequence of the seed, or the fruit consequence of the tree. But if she were to show you differently, would your eyes leave the horizon? Would you see that while a diseased tree bears only rotten fruit, a healthy tree might also? and that a diseased tree might be cured and made healthy, and a healthy tree poisoned and diseased? that only what is kept fresh tomorrow is healthy today?



If only this were enough. If only it were enough to tell you the truth, to tell you ‘Don’t worry about tomorrow, tomorrow will care after itself. Tend to your tree now, nurture it, and you may not dine upon a rotten feast.’ If only your eyes would not look past her. If only they could cease their crazed wandering from face to face, wondering in each if any had seen. How any might not...

But for all these ailments, one stands high above the rest. Beyond the senses it radiates, through your clothing, past your skin and bone: your heart, for your heart you suffer most. Your sullen eyes, they don’t wander only in search of some desperate future, do they? They don’t look to her in hopefulness; no, out of habit they wander, glance occasionally on her. There’s love in your heart, but there weakness resides, too. You’ve broken an oath, haven’t you? ‘Yes’ has not meant ‘yes,’ but ‘no,’ and ‘no’ ‘yes,’ yes? You believed for your love that you couldn’t do wrong, and forgot you were simply a man. You denied a weakness and believed yourself steeled. And when you were proven wrong, when you were reminded of your fault... too painful. It was all too painful, wasn’t it? And it was no great crime either, was it? wanting love, yearning after a piece of truth, sureness beyond a doubt. Is that not the lifeblood, the factor that underlies all—love? What called itself love presented itself before you, and wanting love you believed it. This love led, and you followed after. It spoke, and you listened unquestioningly. And in your distraction it took you to a foreign place. When you saw where it had led you, you held close to it; and when you looked on it, you saw that it was different, that it had changed, that this was no longer the love you’d first followed. But you were alone there, and this love was all you knew.

Now, what you thought was love has flown and left you there, here, misery plaguing your every step, and your wanting for love all too strong to bear. Love, and want of it: this is your strength, you know, but your weakness also. But why you want it so greatly... she sighs, knowing that she, too, is young, and that many things are hidden from her reason, many regions sashed a cordon about the heart. She knows, though, that for all your wrath you are merciful; that your heart, though gullible, is clean; and that though you have strength, you are meek, that like any among you you hunger and thirst still. If only, if only these things were hers to say...

Each eye aligns, she at first averting, pretending to have paid you no mind, watching her child as your vision swung wildly into hers. And she smiles. She smiles to you, not that she wishes to be kind. Nor does she wish to show you her interest, nor mask her scrutiny. No: she smiles, for in your face she recognizes that amidst all your disfigurements you and she are the same. Truly, you believe you are alone, like a scroll in some lost tongue penned. You believe this; but look at her! You think no one may understand the error in your ways? You think no one else has felt or inflicted pain? But look into her eyes, wayward one, feel the warmth of her smile and know, know that you are not alone.

Come, come and see, see what company a single smile might offer. See underneath it her first days of womanhood. See how she reveled as a glorying bloom, capturing the eyes of most every man. How they looked at her, how they showered her with every praise, men of every age, men young as she or younger, or old, old as her own father and older. How they watched her every movement, even praying after how her one foot fell before the other. How they hung on her every word! she parted her lips and mesmerized them, each after each. They

knew no better, and for the way she moved and spoke she realized she might exercise some influence over them. It was at first that she admired their pursuits, their interests. Wanting to be obtained felt like a power to her, and so she acted in such ways as to make as many of those men as possible try to obtain her; and that succeeding obtainment to her felt also as though it were power; and the more men who obtained her, the more power she accrued. This power could only be fed by obtainment; the more men wanted to obtain her, the more she yearned to be obtained.

And so, this power took change. Like from the shallowest pool to a great lake it grew; and growing, its purpose took change also. No more was it like the source of some brief refreshment for one, but a destination of respite for many. She could spread out, consume all chattels close by; she could fill the minds and hearts of many men, no matter their intention with her, their desire—they only need wish to have her, and she might give ease to their burdened lives. And there were many, many which did. Many took their respite in her, abandoning their worries, letting the cumber of old vows lapse. They took her readily, and, for a time, she influenced their actions and decisions; and for her comfort they thanked her. They bought her things, indulgences of every kind, treats and wines of such indescribable richness, bought her perfumes, and jewelry forged by seaside masters, jewels in gold enameling. She was more than a woman then, more than superfluous, and they adored her fittingly.

You needn't make such mistakes yourself to know how foolish she had been. So much older you are than she, perhaps you would have seen. And though any could have known besides she—perhaps you, too, might have warned her—she would have shaded her

eyes and stuffed up her ears. She might even have placed a cork between her teeth! Any measure she might have taken to fend off the truth she would have done. And what was the truth she so obstinately refused? You, who may think you know her least of all, might have said *You think you are a respite for them, a restful place for men of heavy burdens? A palace where they might unshoulder their pain? I say to you, the only burden such men feel is the burden of status. Though they shouldered some pains, these were only the pains of a heavy purse. Men who wish to obtain seek only to covet, and the gifts they give are but oblivion.* And this would have only been too true. But it wasn't until her son, when her son was born, and these men seized their gifts and left her behind, that she first would first hear the truth. And hearing it at last, she renounced the gluttonous men as they had her.

And as her child grew within her, she understood that the truly burdened men were the helpless ones, the powerless and penniless. These men wished not to obtain; how could they? What power might they wave? Though never was she a palace to gluttonous men, but like a trinket hanging from their belt, for the truly burdened men she could be so much more. She could be as a shield to them—her son, her father—a force to guide and shelter them, a fortress with fountains of nourishment at the heart, everflowing. A place for them, and for men, women, and children alike.

And, like you.

How might a smile suffice to communicate such things? A lamp lighted in the window of her home may be set as a welcome, but how might you stop and enter, unless invited?

Movement, a sudden movement at your feet. Glancing down she sees her son, watching you leave him behind, his rubble made for nothing, tears welling in his eyes. How have you disappointed him? Was he looking for something, some approving sign? Were you a new friend, a potential playmate to his mind? Or has he simply seen you were not whom he thought? and that, for his own misunderstanding, he slouches to cry? So fragile, these little ones, so fitful they are, like the streams of springtime: gentle one moment, fresheting the next. Yet... for all his theatre and fountainry, his worries are not your worries, nor hers. No, now his passions are but pinpricks, stinging once and fading fast. Few things may truly pierce him now, and never may he hemorrhage as you or she. No, now he is stronger than he will ever be, free of worry, of lusts, of hate and true anger. He is stronger now because he is innocent, and, unlike you and she, for his innocence, better.

You, she, all people at the mercy of age, would it not be better if each was a child to each other? Or, perhaps, are they children already? and age but a disguise which grew itself over time? You a boy caught in the body of a man, a child, just like her own little one, and she a girl sewn up in womanhood, this earthly existence nothing but an afternoon game of make-believe. All little ones, defenseless and astray, each a child, innocent and pure—temperamental, maybe, but fast-forgiving and unresentful are their nature.

If this were so, then what need are there of shields and they who bear them? No wars are waged by children; their memories are too brief. No: you are a man, and she a woman, and aging's memory a mighty tree with branches reaching past the stars, and roots that burrow all too deep. As long as there are men they will remember everything, except that they and their abusers both were once children the same. So, some will carry axes, and others

will carry shields; and to she who shields her wards become like children to her. But when their attackers are repulsed, will her children not look on her as protector? Only then, when the battle has ended, will they see. Then they will realize she was nothing but a child herself. And how can a child lead children? How else, other than to look up and speak?

You pass, a wanting and censored look in your eyes, and she knows that she must speak. But as your image hobbles into the edge of her eye, either for your height or her diffidence, your very sight confounds her tongue. She would speak, but what would she say? She knows your troubles. She hears the somber heart that in your chest so weakly beats. She could tell you all that you have done and more. She could save you from your every pain with but a single word—but what should it be? Speak! Speak!

Yet no words, not a single word flows! So quietly you scream, so desperately you yearn for aid—a little one, lost amidst the beach. But the shield that she would throw up before you, downward like a boulder it bears, too heavy to arm! How might she reach it around you? How might she inquire? How might she even ask after your health if she herself is too weak? How can she guide when she is no great doctor or medicine-man, no priest or teacher, not a magician or illusionist—when at this moment she is not even a woman, but a girl? Just a girl, she is, earth and ashes and skin alone. Her lips are parted, yet nothing leaves. She has been muted; and a muted voice, however helpful, cannot save. Speak! Speak!

How this silence, how this cowardice like a stormcloud shadows over her! Rage, rage against the quieting shade. Speak, she must speak! What will such an attraction have been for, if it draws no charity out? She is attracted to you—and, no, not like *that*. No, it is *not* like that. Attraction needs not the physical, the skin. What this attraction is, what she feels is...

something deeper, perpetual, in her heart swimming. It is the attraction she feels towards her child, her father, a magnetism towards their helplessness, their weakness and yours, towards all the small and downtrodden. If only she knew what she might say to remove your burdens. If only it were as easy as for the lesser men of means. What will she tell you? What can she say? *Don't hate your weakness. Though you are a man, your strength is nothing. It is your weakness, your drive to love and be loved, which makes you great.* But... is that enough? Speak! Speak!

She will tell him, she will say, *Come, speak with me. Speak with me, and I will tell you everything you've done. Naming these things, you will be forgiven; and forgiving yourself, you will do you no harm.* Or, she'll say to you, she'll place no histories within your past, but simply ask, *What is it you've concealed in the depths of your mind? What secrets do you wish unknown? Sweet child (and you are a child, we all are, yes), don't you know that nothing remains secret forever? That for everything hidden there is a day, that even the most hidden things will become known? Or, You are lost. Might she help you be found? You are thirsty. May she give you water? Wait... is there any water in her possession to give? No? Can it be found?*

You are passing; soon you will be gone. She will speak. She will speak. She knows not what she will say, but still she will speak.

But... will you hear?

— Sir?

\* \* \*

Will you listen *now*? Stopped and standing still, will you hear him speak? So grumbly must that belly growl—how hungry you must be! Turn to him, turn your ear and quiet your speech. He comes to you, an envoy of the waters, comes to you, an adviser open and clear, asking—pardoning, if you will eat. Will you? Will you not eat? You must, you *must*, so famished and ragged you appear! You simply must eat! Oh, no, you cannot be like them, you cannot turn away from the tide, from a buffet so replete! For years now, as early as he might remember, when he dove in, witnessing himself the magnificent bounty therein, yes, for years he has sought to warn them of their hunger, to guide them towards some ease. For years now, three years of weeks, a warning each morning, a morning of each week, and yet! Never once have they listened, never, never, nor once have they acknowledged his simpler means. But seeing you—yes, listen—seeing you, even though a stranger, he knew he must speak. And so he advises you—yes, this is his advice—to take his course now and follow him, follow him wherein all matter of watergame swims ripe-tasty for tasting, follow him into the sea!

Oh, but do hear him! You, yes, you! How do you expect to hear, exchanging words with her? How might loquacious coves hear anything but their own speech? Words will not satisfy you alone; they will not fill you—no! So, let less out and more in. Only the sated know truly what to say, after all. Turn to him, listen, neglect not what he says; do not be like them, the old man, her, and the babe. Them least of all, you know—*they* who would ignore one of their own peoples. Yes, it is true!—though, *she* surely would not say. Should a voice amongst familiars not be equally heard? Listen, listen: he is one of their own, he has been



amongst them now for many years—longer now, yes, with them before the babe—yet still naught but their ignorance does he receive! Good enough, familiar enough to sit amongst them, yes, to entertain them, to lay at their feet; but the moment they return and he reminds them, the moment he returns briefly to his case, to apprise them of their folly, they turn their backs on him—as if they understood not a word of what he preached! Lunacy, lunacy! Is he not talking like these, his own people? Like you and she? The babe, the little monstrous one there, that one is truly unlettered—unlike he—and still they favor his assiduity! Doting and worrying themselves sick over a late-addition pretender and whatever destruction in his wake he leaves. So, do not listen to them, they who only selectively hear! In spite of their disregard, he continues, he tells them—yes, oh, yes he does still!—he gives them their warning: *Are you hungry? Are you in need? Look no further than the waters before you! There, there you can feed!* But, oh, none of them, not a one of them do hear! If deaf to him and his warnings, how will they receive—how will they know a generous, an inexhaustive meat? How, how will they fill their bellies if they refuse to know these things, if they do not listen and seek? For what a bitter chastising are their bellies in store! Oh, how bitter will their rumblings be, how bitter, bitter and unsweet...

Turn from her, from them, from those peoples and their ways! Different you are from them, yes—quite different, indeed—no victim of deafening diets, nor diverting walls built above the eyes. You can listen, yes, you can listen and hear—and heed! Quiet now, yes—good!—you and she, saying naught at last; you have heard! Quick, turn from her, turn from her now, and set your gaze upon the sea! So giving are the waters, so unbounded and bounteous and bountied—yes, do you see? It is not only the food of the belly which the

waters provides, you know—no, so much more! To even regions days from their reach do the waters' benevolence extend, over the toiled grounds of the garden, and the various flora which they breed. Yes, the waters, they send the winds as glad-tiding heralds, giving you tastes of freer foods on salty breeze! These tastes they send above them when the earth and its misled are in need. They stir up the clouds on their backs, clouds heavy with the waters, and blow them across the lands, raining down its tastes and aids. And the foolish or the dumb toil these lands—foolish, yes! For they know not of the waters' greater offers, carving a living out of the land instead of plucking it coolly from the sea. Still, they take what the waters provide, and are thankful by it—as should they be! Nothing that is was not once of the waters; so deny them not, but enter into them, free yourself therein from needless labor, and from a wrathful belly's worry!

See? See? How she upholds a finger against him! How she aims to muzzle his intercession and doing so lead you astray! How she showers him with glaring menace and steals your ear again! What might she fill it with, oh, but with her own confused doggerel? Yes, that is all she knows, all she might say. So gravely, so angrily she glowers—yet, no! He will not be deterred! So, he will—yes! He will advance, he will not stay! Onward for bellysake he will lurch, into the theatre of the fray!

You, yes—you! Turn away from her and hear! And she, if she refuses to desist then she must, she will hear as well! Listen, you and her both! You must not stray away from him into the earth, to the place at which she points; and she, she must point not the helpless, starving, and crippled away! The place whereat she points—do you know what it is, or she? (You, yes, by look you might know, you might have seen. A redness paints you, he notices.

Was it marked by teeth? Has it bitten you, that unyielding griever of the earthy garden, that slinking fiend?) No! No, that place is no garden; it houses no bounty of fishes, it carries no scrumptious yummys within it for to freely eat. Enter not that garden which is false, but stay, and enter the garden which is true: the garden of the water, the Garden of the Sea!

She may not heed him, she may not listen, but you must! Heedlessness, that has been her way—hers and theirs. And for who knows how long? Do you know? Do you know that they have ignored him, have torn off strips, and chained him back ever since he came? How many others, do you suppose, were before him? How many others did they call their own, only to imprison and ridicule them when the hopeful warnings came? Surely, oh, many, surely others before him knew and warned them, his brothers and sisters, what and where to meat. Look around you and tell him, tell him what you see! None dare enter, though hungry! None of them will dive in and dine—even if only to sate a stroppy belly! Know you this, if you do not already: the waters, oh, how tired the waters have grown waiting. Soon, very soon, he knows not the day but soon the waters will depart. And when they do retreat, what sadness! What tragedy! And how their bellies will chastise sorely their coolness when such splendid yummys have washed away! Believe him, for you have seen! Believe him, you who saw the others. When you passed them by, did you see? You beheld their faces, no? You saw them bent with exhaustion, having labored hard and severe, filling their bellies outside the sea. Those, those are the foods of the earth, bland, unsatisfactory—but fuscous imitators of a tried and brighter treat!

Why, why none will listen he cannot say. Is there some disease in their hearts, worms wriggling throughout their chambers turning them unhungry? Truly, truly there is food there;

one need only look and—there, he spots one there! Fishes, fishes of every kind and measure permissible to eat! Yet, they do not swim... why? Why will they not gather fish up in their bellies after he? Such chastisements, such angry rumblings and shockings they must feel! You—you! Return your gaze to him! These pangs need not bother you; your belly may yet be saved! In the waters, in the waters so reposeful, so cool, may you find your morningmeal! Amongst the fishes, amongst food—away from the false garden of the earth and the cozened tending it, and its whispers lurking in overgrowth.

What are you doing? *What are you doing?* Have you not heard a single word—a single syllable of what has been said? ‘Turn back from the earth,’ he has urged you! From the sands, from the roads and its vehicles, from the deceitful garden and its votaries turn away! You know what is out there, you do! You know what awaits! Yet you turn back in—why? If no fell beast stings you, if beyond that deceiver you survive, there, there starvation will be your belly’s only friend, there it will dog you until your demise! Oh you who see, who are smarter than he: why, why have you turned your back? Why do you not hear him? Why have you not heeded a single utterance of his—a single word? What duress is this which closes your ears? Why, why do you not eat the good things the water has supplied...?

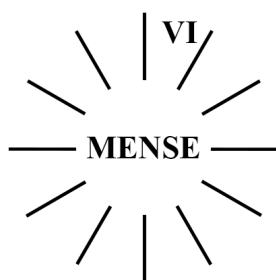
His words reach you not; still you persist, onward and away, the one who wished only to help you feed at your back shouting after you. Now calling. Now whining. Now silent, seating himself quiet on the precipice of where you might have ate.

What is it, then: that you did not hear him either? Or that you simply did not believe? Or is it, perhaps, that you consumed something troubling, a meal or potation foul which angered your belly, and it was by your belly you could not hear, for its chastisement clouding

your mind in dream? Go forth, he hopes—yes, he truly hopes you will go forth into the earth and find there some good meat. May you go forth and feel no hunger. May you not dream in the daytime. May you not wander distracted in every valley, asleep. But bide his warning in the world, if any of it you heard, steer yourself by it if you can, you and anyone of those willing to listen clear. Know this, if you do not already, if in fact you did not hear: know that only, only did he ever shout for your belly's good! yours and theirs.

Oh, what a tragedy, what loss... yet, this has always been his duty. He performed every task, *he* spoke every word *he* might to make you eat. Onward he must move himself, as well, and he will do so clean, of yours and every failure. First he cleans his face—yes, right there—rubbing his nose and fur in the dry sands, rubbing it in, every grain; then legs, nails, paws, groin, hind, and cheeks. And when clean—yes, there he is!—oh, he will now eat! He will fill his belly, even if others will not, even though you would leave. You *must* know by now, no? Straying away you do to your own loss, to the chastising of your own belly. But it is just as well, just as well if you choose to starve; such is your choice to make! The message was given you, was it not? It was no fault of his if you did not reach. *That* was his duty, advising you of the sea! Only his job to direct, and nothing—no, nothing more—certainly not to feed!





What it presupposes, the consequence of what naturally follows, is that, *beh*, an employee regardless of their quality will depart on-time and return in like fashion. Take you for example: you told Emiel you would command yourself to the 1:30 directly you *pranzate*. Innocent enough, you know, but not the truth. And if here you are telling fibs, orchestrating little stories that you can enjoy a longer meal, then who is to say not a one of the agents might get it in his mind to do the same? And if that structure falls, and the upper hierarchical dependency on the lower—oh, what is it, *la parola*? You know it, it is—*beh, dimenticalo, tesoro*, that is all to say—what is left standing when the bricks sponge out and then like a brittle sponge starved for water—oh, you must make it to the water again, sometime soon. Your presence there, that religious zeal stings again, *lo fa, lo fa*, oh, you can hear the waves themselves crying after you—*giusto, sì, la tua mente è tutto* like breakfast, scrambled. Ha-hah! Focus, *tesoro*, focus! Get your mind in order; there he goes, making you all a-titter again.

A sponge, a brittle sponge, like a brittle sponge the bricks become, underneath the roof, until the weight is too much and the pockets all exhale gruffly and collapse, and down the entire structure comes, brick, mortar, and shingles. And where are you, then? What becomes of the roof, *il riparo*, when the supporting frame caves in? You would only have to rebuild, reconstitute the entire structure from the earth up—not just the earth, no; foundation

too! Remember the building you saw, which was felled as a child, when you were still so small—*non sei ancora piccolo?*—you could fit on their shoulders; and there you sat a head above the crowd when not even Deny could see? You came around, walked by the site not every day, but many days, seeing the debris cleared away until nothing stood; only that stone hole in the ground, like a great mouth stretched open, hungry, *affamato di* soil and rock. You saw, *ricorda*, you saw the men there working away, digging out the mouth, longer than they had ever spent demolishing and clearing out. Then to make room for a new mouth, a greater mouth, more dirt had to be scooped up and wheeled away. For weeks you wandered by waiting for them to install that mouth, for it to finally grasp scaffolding and kiss the frame of a new structure, *speriate per sempre*. Imagine doing the same yourself, hoisting sandy dirt, building anew all your own? A nice little fantasy, is it not? *Una casa*, everyone wants *una casa propria*. But *perché*, why build another when one so formidable, so amenable and welcoming, stands at your bidding? Sizeable, too. *No, no*; best you not stir on the matter. Better you keep the house standing, keep the bricks reliably stocky and make renovations when the halls and sashes and bays and finial are all yours to alter as you please. So keep this deceitful *pranzate carino* a secret and decline them in the future—*l'ultima volta, questa è l'ultima volta*—no matter the day or circumstance. *Beh*, always understanding, he is, always, *amore tuo*. It nearly sickens you to say it, but you could execute any order—*eh, quasi*, almost—nearly any order, and he would uphold it to the death. But you would never, never. *Mai!* ‘*Mai:*’ *multo più economico*, words are so much sweeter *in italiano*. *Tesoro, tesoro...*

Goodness, this heat! *Che caldo oggi*, could it be any hotter—only were the Sun—*il So*—some small distance closer, nearer the Earth, you would say. Natural consequence of the



myriad brick houses cross-street, the stone and concrete spreading out near-molten under your shoes. *Dio benedica i ciabattini* while Man makes his world a blackoven! All things thermoconductive and earth-toned this walk home, and seldom the splashes of stalky green striplings or palms looming. You must get a change of shirt once there—this cursed heat, he's surely to see it on you unless you grab a light fleece at least. *Puttana*, 'a fleece?' At this time of year? What a fancy! Execute a change of blouse, maybe a dusting of *acqua di rose* and slow yourself down, walk at ease; such a commodity a shaded walk is in this city! Yet, late as you are, not a single need exists worth rushing. And whenever you rush always you forget something or the other. How else would you have forgotten it so many times by now? Heavy, large enough to grab your attention the moment you set foot in the parlor, that prismic black mass and gilding bright enough to blind resting—*fusing* to the parlor table. It would take weeks, you believed! Optimistic again. How many times did you tell him, did you roll your eyes back in exaggerated frustration, *amore tuo, spiacente*, buying yourself time to thumb through the golden edging? Twice, three times you apologized before you snapped the covers shut and the thing fell upon the tabletop like a, *beh*, well, like a brick, craned neck arching, wrists sore from the very heft. '*Decalibbron*,' more like; what a woman does *per l'uomo del suo cuore*! Blasphemous even to make such jests, but, oh, you would read *La Diodati* a dozen times over if he but merely thought it once, if you could fold back his vellum pages and read the thoughts swimming about his beautiful mind, as though they hovered in flame before you! *Dio caro*, lost it again, forgotten it you have already. *Che cos'è...?*

Walking your way home, feeling the small wet of your back clinging against the blouse, and you think, *si*, might as well as you are there already perform a quick change of wardrobe (and

if he asks, say you tore a pocket; *il miglior segreto di una donna, il suo corpo*), and—*Cristo*, the book! *Tesoro, tesoro*, scattered all about, vacillating now here, then there, *imbroglio*, *impiccio*, ever since...

7 to 3, women to men, *ragazze ai ragazzi*, was the proportion, was it not? Imbalanced to say the least, and youths each of them. You wonder if... well, you say 'youths,' but if you remember correctly the oldest—*beh* she was older than you by some years, was she not? But either way, 7 to 3, 4 to 3, 1 to 3, 27 to 3, whatever the ratio *i giovani sono giovani*; are they not going to behave in ways befitting? No, you would not be so indecorous, or, it perhaps would not be so scandalous to suggest, at any odds, that the young do what the young do—or, did. And *fiorentini*, no less? Not to suggest libidity synonymous to locale, but, in your experience—*beh*, let it pass! You have not a single need to dwell back there in rocky sand and cypress trees, with life's now wonderful allotment. You keep it locked in your heart, save reminiscing for days of need. *E non hai bisogno di fretta!*

But again, the odds, that they did not, in some way, in some fashion, service those desires surely so irrepressibly strong? Unlikely, you would say, you would testify before open court! That a youth, in the resplendent springtime blossoming of their allure, would refuse those temptations—*tentazioni! Come se fosse qualcoso* in any way inhuman—why, the mere suggestion nearly brings you to laughter, just considering it! And, perhaps somebody should say to you, 'in *Italia*, the nation of Rome, the bastion and inceptor of the Church?' *Perché cosa*, how would you respond? With glee in your eyes (and now not a drachm of blasphemous intent): *In Italia*, the nation of Rome, the bastion and inceptor of the Church! Where else is the Church founded but in the sensual, indivisibly—reliant on it, you

might advocate—stuck to as it is stuck to the very rock it cannot quit! Where all this severity and self-effacement in the public world of the Church could you even say? But for the common Man, he without the tonsure, she without the habit, to reject the worldly things of this world so inseparable from the self as the very organs such thought shames—that, *quello, è dishumano*. Surely, there was a sensuous Church, once, you think, you know, one in which 7 and 3 could celebrate matins in morning, vespers in the evening, then bask under his eyes to their mutual delight. That, you are certain, that was in fact the Church of the old days, the Church as it was in the beginning, the uncensorious Church, *la Chiesa come Lui e Lui la intendevano*, the Church of God on Earth before the second Fall, whenever that was.

Was there a reason, you wonder, was there some subtlety underscoring the elision of night for day, the precedence of the *sensuale vocale* that suggests also, in the absent space it creates a *sensuale fisico*? As in the way the gnomon's shade—an absence unto itself—affects that horologue's very mechanism? Is it not true that residing within the absence of one sure thing is the presence of its complimentary yet its opposite... *offuscato*? Yes, that is the appropriate word, you think. Oh, the dulcet intonations of your name *Fiorenze* sweetly beckons. You and the 7 and 3 have that all in common, you do: a displacement, a removal from one home-feeling place to another, to a fate of *racconti, di se e come*, never knowing when, or how, you might to your cobblestone streets and wine-drunken wanderings ever return. One day, *tesoro*, one day you will return—perhaps even *come amore tuo*—to resume *la Vita, conosciuto da Dio e to know the world prima della Caduta*, before the Fall. Until then, this 'fair Verona' of yours isn't too faraway. Yet, *che felicità, che paradise era...* *tesoro, tesoro...* how much like Dioneo he was, how much like the first: a holiness sundering

disorder, the kind of man from whom an entire race might spring. *Dove sei*, you wonder, where is he now? Where is that man whom on his knees *ha elogiato tutto*? Moving somewhere in the night now, you think, shifting about, feeling the sweat roll between the blades of his back, *sta assaggiando* the lips of some fresh honeyed flower, providing by his mere existence the very proof of God to some young felicitous foal fresh from the autobus steps. How he would raise her up into the wan glow of the moonlight, see the wan rim dance across the undulations of her form, scoop in and wash over the globes, aureoles glimmering and winking, little hairs of the neck suffused, aglow with the cold, goosepimpling window light, others atop damp at the root, cascading, curling, bouncing across her pleasant olive aspect, a single tress caught at the corner of her plump lip, but he ‘*no, amore mio, non cambiare nulla!*’ as his nails grip the soft of her waist—

*Dio tuo*, this heat! Something almost unbearable, it is. Yes, if you are going to perform that change of wardrobe, then perhaps some briskness of step would annul nothing. No time to find a several minutes’ relief from the heat; no, you are late enough. Never enough time to relieve oneself from the heat these days, always moving, *sempre, sempre distanziata*, never lending time to those matters which most delight, namely *una gita leggera* off your feet. *Oh be’, come vuoi*, it matters not! The day always saves time in its final hours, always for the coolness of linen and the dampness of the ocean air. Let yourself go then: for the hour is such that you must draw matters together, not unravel. There is always *un altro tempo, sempre un altro posto...*

*Tempo, tempo—che ora*, what time? 37 past. 3 and 7; 7 and 3—Ha-hah! *Che fortuna!* You think, you know it is a funny thing, how these little coincidences like a boat on the tide

ebb in and out of one's life; funny in that there is always a coincidence, always some chance happening, another thread joining, weaving itself in amongst the others, forming as it does the dappled *l'arazzo della vita*! And if always it is some coincidence, then *forse non è coincidenza, eh?*

\* \* \*

— *Che cazzo?*

Like a dam's blowout they fall from your tongue, words water-weighted, but quietly bursting, down your lips trickling, clinging to and weighing down your blouse.

— *Che cazzo—*

you say again, shuffling quickly aside to hide behind the stone opening of the railway overpass, assuring as you do by leaning over, pressing your fingers carefully around the corner, that the figure still maintains ignorance to you. Impossible, you think, a trick of the daylight, the distance, the heat, your hunger. It could not be *him*—is it? Confirmation would risk exposure, hazarding a second glance; but you had to be sure. Thick hair, dark, *nero*, *quasi*, shaggily decorating the light tan of his *pomposa* gazing head, gazing away from you, above the glaring, cloying yellow of the taxi. He paid his fare, digging about clumsily in his pockets for a moment before, the vehicle at last lurching forward, revealing as it did *lo sciocco* in his poor man's dressing: beaten brown loafers, cotton *camicia*, and rolled trousers. Thin—*magro*, *guanta* even, his clothes hanging onto him like, *che cos'è*—yes, like an under-

stuffed *spauracchio*. Doing the work of one, too, he is; posthaste this bird, *questo uccello* will be flying away!

And if he sees you, makes that fateful contact of the eye, *come la prima volta*, if he notices you, if he makes any attempt in the least to speak with you—if he should even approach you *sti cazzo, porca miseria* if he even should take a step in your direction you will make every bodily effort to repulse him. And then you will fly—fly to the nearest *poliziotto*, have the man cart him away, and—no, no sign of him seeing you. Just loitering there, withering, *lo spauracchio*, bugbearing in his aspect the very thought of sympathy.

Ah, finally the straw man dissipates. *Dissipazione*, after all, *era lo suo deriva*. Good riddance! *Che liberazione!* Flitter away unto the ends of the earth; and every step he takes shall he lose himself further, until *la fine del duo viaggio* nothing but sack cloth and a wire frown remain. *Ma*, wait, *un minute*... south... south through the park toward the street. No, impossible, *impossibile*. *Beh*, what more is impossible, after all? There he ambles south, in your city, walking your streets with his distorted familiarity—the exile—*come uno schiavo*, convinced of his freedom. Should you see one, the very next officer of the peace you will flag down and report him: ‘This man, you see him? This man is following me. He’s here to harm me, I know it! Look into his eyes and you will see it, will find the harmful glare, the acquaintance to wrath aflame within!’ *Troppo eloquente*, perhaps, too well-worded for the moment. But something of the like, you will say, something rightfully scathing, your tone evidence enough to cinch the irons. *E, è vero*, after all... But, for now you will follow him—for now, for now—until such as that instance arises, with the proof against piled high enough—*ma, sfiora già il soffitto, no?* Maintain some distance, enough to avoid your

detection, *ma* not so much that you lose his vision. He will not rebuff the pierce of your gaze, *non questa volta*; he is the hare to your hawk. And if he takes that next right, you will know, know with certainty *assoluta* that he means to assault your home. And there, there he turns. And so he does.

What does he mean to do, what is his intent? Yes, there he is—certainly, the figure and gait cuts his image. Eerie how a person's walk is unique to them, they identifiable by it. It reminds you, you remember the *Pasqua* last when you lay on a couch in the family parlor, awake to the morning's early hours and peculiarities, listening to your family hustle about, stretch and yawn as the house's walls breathed the same *rinascita*. You heard feet descend the stairs at your back and realized you knew each parent and Deny by their step, by the weight placed and strides taken. You closed your eyes and greeted them by name before they could wish you *buongiorno, buona Pasqua*—correct each time, satisfied to the sky with your deduction, your *ragionamento*. What joy is there in ratiocinating? What joy is there now in correctness, in accuracy? *Niente*.

Surely he means to have some sort of *incontro*. *Combattimento*, you will more likely give him—no, no. You must be realistic; the door would open and he would hope to talk, nothing more. Were you home you could exchange several words, perhaps even go so far as to tell him to close his mouth and turn tail, *chiudere il becco, vai a farti fottere* at the worst should all composure be lost. But... no, doing so would sacrifice your moral altitude. You would be accommodating—*benigna, anche*—self-effacing; firm, but benign. And if he should become belligerent, though not *dal suo repertorio*, you would kindly, kindly ask him to leave; and if he should not leave, you would simply run to Gabriel. 'Simply.' *Cosa c'è di*

*semplice in tutto questo...? Tesoro, you are strong—mostralo!* You look around yourself and see the street empty, except for the little grace of a mother pushing her infant before her. Thin, vaporous clouds shelter you intermittently from the Sun's rays, scudding overhead on the wind's gentle breath. Despite this movement all feels still, like an image taken, or a painting, capturing the green palms and manicured grasses, the hazy azure of the oceanspray sky, even the crying of the infant all in *uno pazzo perfetto*. Time nearly does not exist; or if it does it may only suggest itself, therefore catching itself within a net of its own incomplete series of proofs the minutes, hours, days—*i secondi*. God, if not for this man—*e questo caldo*—what a beautiful moment, such a beautiful day this would be.

There, now he stands at your door. Shield yourself here, beneath the palm trunk, and observe the entire noninteraction apart. But... he does not knock, or alert the bell; he only stands there, *silenzioso come un topo*, as though he were afraid, as though the door were baring its teeth. You want more than all else at this moment for him to knock on the door of the empty house, to hear the hollow sound bound across the deserted rooms and halls; to know that this effort, this entire journey, however far and however long he traveled, to see your face, to hear even one word (and what a word you would have for him) of your voice, *è stato tutto per niente*. Though it would have pleased you, to see that fallen look spread throughout his eyes, it shall have to suffice enough to know only from his posture what devastation this *disguido*, this misconstrual has wrought upon him. If, that is *if*, it in fact does, and if it proves sufficiently discouraging to turn him away. *Merda*. Indeed, the thought had not crossed your mind until this moment, that he may seat himself there upon your stoop and there remain until, presumably, you returned from work. His every bodily sign points to



that end, does it not? the unflinching lour, arms crossed like an officer, like a commander *di guerra*, his feet like a sprinter's, dug-in and planted. *Merda, merda*: turn now, take flight, cast your things aside, forget the tome and the blouse and to Gabriel run! Bring him to your aid; for this man has come here with his mind bearing some idea; and a mind bearing any idea at all is deadlier by far than the strongest hand bearing a sword.

Three knocks, not blunt, heavy, or demanding, but sharp, sincere—*supplichevole*—echo off the door. He does not move. He does not blink—though, *da questa distanza* you may be imagining him more sinisterly than he is—no, he simply waits as you wait yourself. Awaiting the end of his waiting. Awaiting whatever he awaits not to wait upon him. Until several minutes pass you neglect to think on your change of blouse, nor your lover's tome. But in time thoughts of these *necessità* return to you, and you begin devising some plan, some ruse to lure his attentions away from your home, or to insinuate you inside and out without his knowing. Amidst all this excogitation he sighs, pivots, and descends the front walk of your home, you cleaving anxiously to the bark of your palm, your inquisitiveness (*accidenti*) having nearly given you away. And with his back turned your chance presents itself. You slip out of your thongs, brace them against your hip and *silenzioso come un topo* yourself, race inside—jaunt there, in fact, as though every impending danger occupying the precariousness of the situation had like kerosene evaporated in the heat, this entire *caccia al cacciatore* becoming momentarily some sportive frivolity. He not a toss away you reach the door and, *silenzioso come un topo* (*devi pensare*, think of *un'altra similitudine, tesoro*)...

*Dentro, grazie*, inside. Inside, as in every room you pass through which you have before passed, you see *l'esperienze composte* of each *baldoria* to which you condescended.

There, in the parlor, you see yourself in times past with him, *il cazzo*, given over to revelry or delight *gettando su di lui*, or yourself over to the commands of repose, or even seated there *per quello volevi fosse un'anno* attempting to rein in your every passion before taking to your feet, he telling you “put me down or take me up in your arms; do with me whatever you fancy.” So distracting, so distracting they are from your very purpose, so coaxing, so vivid they are *queste visioni*—though you have seen the tome resting on the table, and you vow you will collect it when you return. But, same, these phantoms of the senses haunt you as you pass through the kitchen, images engraved in fading outline greeting your conscience, sights of passion, of near-struggle, when you fought against his strength, *spingendo, spingendo contro di lui*, he seeming indomitable above you all the while; or in that same fit, when you had taken to the ground, and seeing in this *qualche strana eccitazione* he broke away, blurting that despite the awkwardness of the orientation he suddenly desired that sweetest taste of your lips; and so he took it from you, and took even more—to his knees in fact, kneeling, appealing before you, *le tue gambe avvolte intorno al suo collo*; and you, appeased, grateful beyond all relief for this turn in events, suddenly thrust upward, were carried up (*sei stato quasi portato via*) in his arms. Every room, as in every room you once together occupied, every room these images hover, frolic, gambol, indifferent to the changing tides of time and love—even those rooms which are not rooms. For beyond the walls of your home, through the threshold they appear to you yet, active as ever in the processes of life: dancing as one, the two of you, dappled by the leaf-obscured moon, enmeshed in the orange Halloween glow of torchlight, *una gamba poggiata sulla sua spalla*; or seated up against the couch’s edge in some comical pose, your faces separated by but a sigh, as a manner of

disport enacting it like the comedy of some noble and his infamous courtesan! *O, che momento!* the look that sprung into his eyes, mid-scene, when you grabbed him by the hair, and hung on for dear life to the couch beside you as you switched the roles, becoming the essence of your parts *e nient'altro*. In what ridiculous, impractical, and humorous way the entire performance ended! *Nelle sue braccia e gambe* he was forced to trust, with you jumping atop him, he tired and weakened by the night—yet committed to you, to keeping you raised. The thoughts of these memories alone, *tesoro*, are enough alone to excite, to inspire a yearning that must be quelled. But how might they be quelled, such thoughts, *panorami cosi dionisiaci*, when the most vibrant, most evocative of their fleet, dwell in that place of your home you most wish now to evade? *Sono inevitabili*, inhabitants of this space as much as yourself, as long as you shall reside. Only when you are vacated shall they, shall they collect their things and retire to the deepest reaches of memory, to be called forth only by the hearkening bleat of the unconscious mind, or the conscious voice of the nostalgic heart. So, into the chamber you plunge, ignoring the postured ghosts as best you can in abandoning your soiled blouse, your dampened blouse for a new; but you see yourself there with him, enacting now a new role, one so sharp one would think it the very purpose of your birth: to lie beside him, to feel his love reach into you, prodding your very heart, grasping at your soul, then grabbing *i cuscini per la testa*. He takes you up again, and reaches down beneath you, *anche se non per sollevarti*, before turning you around, and doing what should by all logic seem *impossibile*—yet he does it, fulfills you in every way uncanny, and you cannot help but turn to watch him, *in soggezione della sua abilita*.

Oh, leave, *Tesoro!* Too long, far too long have you remained. Depart, grab your things—*ricorda il libro*—and leave posthaste! You are late enough already now, and perhaps the thing that may dissolve, may erase these apparitions from your mind for the time being, is he whom you have kept waiting. *Veloce, veloce!* These sights have begun to degrade already; best to leave them now before they bloom again; for though the most spectacular pleasure when soured, when stripped of the very feeling which made it so wonderful, takes on the form of something akin to bestiality—into dalliance with a brute—all things in existence wither and rot away... *sono state ancora una volta sostituite.*

He has not yet turned the corner at the street's end when you quit the house. And though you have every intention, of *pranzando*, of seeing Gabriel, the figure crossing the road, that phantom whose shade still haunts your home, *beh*, to say the location of his next station does not interest you in the least—*beh*, at least that you might know it and yours are not things one in the same—would be to commit a lie. And so, for a little while longer, *solo per pochi minuti*, you will continue to trail him, to confirm for certain that the ghost disintegrates once and for all. The next left taken you speed up, hasten his tail, your mind alighting as you do, as so *distratto* you have now become, reminiscing and remissing and remising, on another 'him,' on Phineus.

*Tesoro* first he called you there, *tesoro, mio tesoro perfetto*, in *Fiorenze*. The flat concrete of the streets breaks apart, down into interlocking reddening rectangles; the houses stretch to the sky, coat themselves in plaster and don their roofs in terracotta, unfold their ports, opening to peeling iron crossbars; streetlamps sprout like vines from the sidewalk; and people, beautiful, sun-kissed skin, hair skeiny or wiry black, fill the street, ambling casually

between carts and kiosks, venders waving bread and fish to passersby, *il Duomo che ribolle sul Ponte Vecchio*.

There you are again, seeing him for the very first, kalamatas hung studious over the canvas, hair pinched back in a knot, hands racing the brush across the screen, flecking spots of red and white and orange across his light—darker still than yours, *sicuramente*—fingers. A cross hangs from his unbuttoned chest, which glows, nearly, in the light of the midday sun—or perhaps the half-empty *vinello* in your hand has only given him *quell'aspetto*. But either way, oh, how much like an angel he appeared to you that day! how much like a divine thing condescending to join the ranks of earthly life, more manly, and somehow *così femminile* than any the men you had before encountered. He unhooks his eyes from the canvas as you pass, you see, directing them hotly on you. Yet, you pass him by at first, coldly (*'ubriaco,'* actually, *tesoro*), carelessly, without even so innocent of a *buongiorno, signore* to bait. But it was not needed, was it? *Tesoro*, he saw through you that day. And though you put the *Vecchio* (and the bottle's bottom-half) behind you after that morning, you would cross paths with him again—you would *find* him again (*ricorda*, were you not searching?) atop the *Forte di Belvedere* in the afternoon gloam, he at the tail-end of an hour's slaving-away behind the knife. And after a quarter hour of idling about, serendipitously you happened to wander behind him, to observe if the talent matched the man *per la sua bellezza*, when your eyes fell upon the small, green-eyed, flaxen figure prominent in his landscape: yourself, *tesoro*. And you confronted him and demanded *perché mi hai dipinto?* And he saying in his tongue, as he possessed none of yours, that he had painted simply what he had seen. And you returning in plying indignation that you had been there no more than a quarter-hour's

time—nowhere near long enough to paint her. To which was his risposte: *Tesoro, ti ho dipinto qui, perché non ho smesso di vederti dal giorno in cui l'ho fatto per la prima volta.* Swoon-worthy in your tongue, even: 'I painted you here, because I've seen you everywhere since I first did.' Then attempting to maintain composure, to keep dammed *le acque impetuose*, to keep yourself together as one, before putting your ploy into effect: *Beh*, the portrait is entirely inaccurate—a poor *minuta* of the true thing, you tell him. His work, you joke, *non è molto buono*, a criticism for which he apologized, saying he had only the few glimpses of you from before to complete the portrait; to create something which might capture your beauty (*o, al meglio, attendare*) would require an evening of modeling, *minimo*. Then you saying, *beh*, if it is the only way an honest depiction may be made, *purtroppo*, unfortunately it may very well have to do.

So, having taken his address there and setting forth a date and time, you arrive at his studio, a bottle of wine in hand, a modest dress hanging from your shoulders. Modest it was, but a sartorial *difetto* of some kind, no? For every so often over the course of your posing, some new part, be it a shoulder strap or fabric fold, began losing its grasp on your figure; but your Phineus is a true professional, *un maestro*. He never once corrects you, yet begins again while the paint is wet, clearing away and restarting with every *incidente*, moving in synchrony to you, readjusts when the one strap (*seguito a breve dall'altro*) fell from your shoulder, and then again when the hem of your dress migrates slowly and inexplicably up to your waist, and then somehow, mysteriously, winds up strewn across his workbench. And you eventually confess that you doubt his artistic prowess, and so in an effort to give him

every benefit of the light you disrobed, deciding the silken matte of your flesh to be an object ultimately more easily copied than the complex, luminescent ruffles of silk itself.

*Sempre*, you think to yourself, finding your figure rehabilled and transported to a different Mediterranean clime, *sempre, ottieni sempre quello che vuoi*, always you get what you want! But it is not only what you want, or what the body wants, but *di cosa ha bisogno*. It is a thing enwrapped in the folds of love, is it not, *l'atto d'amore*? And what is love, if not the presence of God on Earth? How else does one interpret, that among his first words to the Earthly world were 'be fruitful and multiply,' but that there is some divine consciousness in the impulse? *Sesso, congresso, cazzo e potta*—how is it not that *tuttiper fotter nati siamo*? Should a man and woman feel within themselves even the first inkling of love it would be dishonest—*no*, sacrilegious, *davvero!*—to deny it. And if their love should plumb even more so deeply? Better yet: the further they fall, the holier, more attuned to Him they become.

But even the holiest things, *tesoro*, when bound to time and space lose luster. And what proved your downfall with Phineus, what ultimately spelled the end, *beh*, at the very least it was no altercation of great magnitude or infidelity—thank God for then, at least—but something so simple as the simple flapping of the tongue. You were never long for his home, were you? And he would never be long for yours. And though you would have become a true *Fiorentina* for him, *beh*, there is more to home than the common tongue. Shame, really; perhaps you should have stayed, left *il tuo mondo intero* and remained in sweet *Fiorenze*. Imagine your life now, without it, a world wherein you never met *him*. Ah, but what such world gains from this loss? A world without *him* is a world his consequences. And though, *si*,

*si*, no man you have encountered since, no man has even shone a light on Phineus, his beauty, *la sua prodezza*, you would part with Gabriel now for nothing—*beh, quasi niente*.

You thought that he, that ghastly figure listing towards the street's end, once shone with that same talent, the same *cos'è una buona parola? perluenza?* as your Phineus, did you not? Best not to draw comparisons, between him and Gabriel—Phineus' association alone would ruin it, not to mention, *beh*, it would be like comparing water to pitch, and to compare any other would be to cast marble against loam. No; *terriccio fuso solo dove e meritatio*. But cosmetically, yes, *lo spauracchio*, he appeared every bit as charming, physically every much a specimen (save, perhaps, for that mandibular irregularity of his) as your Phineus: tall, taller even, sapient (by all appearances), olive, dark, especially for *una Gallia*, and Godly. *Beh*, he fooled you into believing. *Forse, forse* your expectations were always too lofty. Perhaps a man is a man, as much as a woman is a woman, and that, unfortunately, is that. Christ came once already; even if he did come again, it would not be solely for you. Ah, but you are not asking for *il figlio di Dio* himself! You only want a man who is a man, not one who counterfeits manliness—not *him*. And you thought (it nearly makes you laugh, laugh now to think it) he was a specimen of some aspect even approaching Gabriel, of Phineus. *Sputtanare! Lui e una facia a culo, il meno!* He proved worse, worse than them all in the end, did he not? Worse for his posturing, worse even than the fractious, cruel boys of schoolyard days. What was it he said, that story of the fall and the tree? It was his schoolyard years as well. Some boys, crueller than any you had encountered (perhaps men act cruelly only *con le donne che amano?*) chased him up there, until—*beh*, the fall, the break, permanent asymmetry. *Una storia triste*, but not sad enough. No, they, Phineus and



*he*, they are as dissimilar, as unlike, as they are alike. *Forse*, but perhaps it is best that no two men—no two people—are completely similar, that there is some gradation between men, between Gabriel and Phineus and even *he*, and that no man—in truth, not even your Gabriel, bold, loving Gabriel—could stand at the same level of Phineus. If he did, if anyone could, then what would become of his memory, of the memory of any man, woman, person similar? Would the suffering, *le lacrime e la miseria*, be worth the expunging every thought unique to one magnificent person? Even if it meant expunging another, less desirable one? Oh, but one cannot expunge *gli indesiderabili*; they cannot, after all, be lost sight of, if you mean to eradicate them, if you mean to chase them down, to and from the ends of the Earth.

He takes his next left and the thought occurs to you: *ma... perche?* What is the point in it all? He disembarks and heads directly to your home where he makes the most minimal effort possible to see you, indication enough bodily to suss out intention. But failing in his objective—presumably the very thing he came to do, *tesoro*—he abandons all hope and turns back streetward to go... *dove?* Another left puts him squarely en route for an encounter with the fountains *e la piazza*, where, on his first night, *ricorda?* Remember you sat down to dinner and he ordered, *ricorda*, he ordered the least expensive item on the menu—the rice and beef and fried plantains—for you both to eat *il bastardo da quattro soldi*, but then to offset the sheer embarrassment of the occasion you offered to pay with him not refusing even halfheartedly—and then you walked the university grounds? You see, now, *tesoro*, you see...

The university, then, that will be the very next stop on this failson's grand tour; he failed in his objective of seeing you, and therefore *intende ricordarti*. The logical path of deferment, gazing into the well of past experience, drawing up from what memories there-

seen the fragments of the person with whom they were shared. Yes, all so clear now, is it not? At each location he will gather up what pieces he can mine, stitching together as he goes your *murale a mosaico, tesoro*. A stop at your home was, perhaps, referential, *purmente*; the dullard might not have said a word, might not have even spoken. He only would have stared at you, collecting what pieces touched his fancy, what pieces he lacked or liked or (*forse*, still) loved, before turning and going to wherever this fairy's path takes him. First you, then the streets you strolled together, then *il ristorante*, next *l'universita*. You begin to wonder, watching his small, figurine-like form halt at the fountains in the distance, you begin to wonder, wandering as you do the many haunts of your *relazione*, where else this plot of reconstruction has taken him, wandering again in the low rise of *il*—the Sun—the sand dunes north of the bay, climbing up the cliff face to watch that same lazing Sun disappear behind Rosa's craggy edges, refining Nature's bounty, surmounting at her heart the water tower-topped butte where he asked, quite brashly, *ma not al tempo* undesirably, '*posso leccare il tu figa?*' to which you quickly *si, si amore mio*. Yes, you suppose, by the day's end the image available to him of you will be one *ampiamente completo*. *Beh*, he may nurture his memories however he wishes, for however he treats you therein, whatever he may do or say to you when whatever harshness of reality turns him inwardly to this... *bamboccio? bambola di pezza*—ragdoll, no matter what liberties he allows himself or what he takes from you or if he *takes you* himself—no matter what tragedies or misfortunes may befall his doll, none may ever again affect its original. He was a man unworthy of the love and kindness you offered, a blasphemer before the eyes of his own God and a selfish, ravenous consumer of the blessings, the dignities, of Love and Life. *Beh, quello che mangia, lui è.*

*Ma*, given the same opportunity, to rove again the land which once accompanied your love, *tesoro*... would you not do the same? *Ricorda*, in *Italia* the places in that romance to which the two of you fleetingly traveled, stopping as little as possible, if only for the occasional disporting? *Ricorda*, remember the countryside, the rolling vineyards and surmounting villas, afternoons wasted away posing before waterfalls, rivers—*si stave allenando*, practicing *con l'acqua*, *allora*—and dams, purpling strolls below *glicini*, Sun-basked naps amidst the *papaveri*, or eating *petali di rosa* dipped in *miele Toscano*—*rose*, the many thousands of *rose*, *rose* of every lovers' shade decorating in pleasingly perfect lines in perfectly pleasing ways the valleys floors and corridors. *Rose*, *rose*... *Merda*, *accidenti*. Forget the word, and *ricorda*, remember your last trip to *la campagna*. Bliss, the very definition of romance, uncanny, almost, like a cheap novel or romance; a weekend hopeless time-lost and ripe for reminiscing. You could picture the very first paragraph ending even so *facile* as 'oh, what raptures she knew there, what delights mutually enjoyed!' And enjoyed they were, were they not? Delights of all manners, of many ways and many shapes. And somewhere, in the midst of it all, on the road back from *il Diborrato*, near *Chiesa di San Lorenzo*, the car broke down, and on his shoulders he carried you nearly an hour until you met the acquaintance of that kind farmer who not only set you in the right direction but, with his little mule, towed you in your car with a rope lashed to his wagon, all the way to *Impruneta*. It being the weekend of some autumnal festival—what was it?—no, *non ricordo*, but you participated in the festivities while the mechanic worked away on your car in his single garage, in that sweet *Impruneta*, who seemed by the emptiness of her streets, the quietude, *la pace*, not to have a single functioning vehicle in her whole town.

How quickly it all ended, though, how... *anticlimatico*. Your Phineus, as though he had a premonition—*era un uomo spirituale e bello*—rang his family on a local phone. You remember, you remember him crying, speaking so frantically his words all flowed into one another, like a brook, *un ruscello* which carried him away in the morning. His younger brother, some accident—so quickly it was over, so frightened Phineus was, that you could recount as much detail then as you could now, years on. You raced him to the station the next morning, wondering, *lo rivdresti mai?* Would you ever see him again? Would you? You told him, you said to him ‘*ti amo*’ there, told him at last, not simply calling him *il mio amore*, or *ti voglio bene*, not knowing you would say it also for the last. Strange, *tesoro*, so strange... that *una stazione* should be your destination on the best and worst days of your life, and that you should tell a man you love him there a final time both.

— *Che cazzo?!* you say, seeing him stop and seat himself outside the front of a building some three dozen yards past *la piazza*.

*Il ristorante olandese*, during the times of his visitation, when he had managed to quit his career for the long weekend or the week (*Dio tuo*, how briefly you saw him) to travel to you, and in times of hunger, at *cena o pranzo*, that you had suggested time and time again—to near frustration, really, truly, *veramente*—that you both try. You had never eaten there. Still, you have not gone, for the place now carries by this flimsiest of affiliations with his dithering that foul misfortune of context which so often curses perfectly attractive locales. It is a tragic thing, is it not, that the mind cannot escape itself, that it cannot transpose itself beyond self-experience, its own contexts, indoctrinations, to enjoy *scappate* foreign and frightful, but one all the same inconceivably pleasurable. In *his* case it was something so

trifling as the nationality of food. *Così sciocco, così stupido*. There were many signs of this with him, were there not? Reluctances, repressions, hesitations. There was never any daring to him, never the same impetus for life, *per vivere*, which drove Phineus, which drives Gabriel as well. He only was what he was, and never wanted to be or attempt to be anything else. *Beh*, if he considers this some change of grand scale, some effort to begin hoisting the mountain, then how delusional, how tragically misguided he must be.

Misguided, muddled as well. There he goes, scanning the street again. He has been at it all this while, has he not? Turning his head about, lurching forward at random, as if about to take wing *per o dalla catastrofe*. *Ricorda*, how expressive his eyes were when he spoke, like he was unable to hold them on any spot, *tu meno di tutti*, always looking somewhere, as though he were constantly looking for something, attempting to pin down some invisible insect antagonizing the air about him. *Oh, certo*: not for something, but for someone. Someone else. *Per quella baldracca con i capelli rossi*.

But, *tesoro, tesoro*: he is here, sitting not two-hundred feet from you; *Dio*, he visited your home! It is *you*, not *her*, for whom his eyes from face to face dance, seeking within each your aspect. Hide away, discreet yourself in the shade, so he does not receive that satisfaction, that he is not granted such *solli*—‘relief,’ for surely that is why, *sì*? He does not, he cannot think that he would have you again—ever—does he? Perhaps a woman wants to be pursued from time to time, *perverso, un po’* as it is, but never *hunted*, as he does so now. What would happen if he were to see you, if voluntarily you slipped into the light and strode directly up to him, what would he say? Would he fall down on his knees, begging, crying, pleading forgiveness? What would you say in return? Would you say anything at all? Would

you utter a single word? No, that has been your method with him so far, ignoring him, his attempts, his letters, has it not? *Ma, che successo* did you have there? Still he writes you, still he declares impertinence, injudiciousness; his letters' lengths have only increased with their number. Is there *un punto di svolta*, some nadir to this endless runaround? What would he say, what more could he say than he has not already—*e in troppe parole*? At first, when they were short, and his confidence still flew high, then it was difficult, to remain silent, to neglect him. You loved him then, still, did you not? Somehow, even after... but, no, not recently. With the length of his letters grows also your resilience, your resistance to him, *tesoro*. Until today, when last had thought of him? It had been weeks ago, several days after his last letter. But not since. You fill your time with so much, so many things far more rewarding: with your work, with Gabriel. If he were to send you another letter now—*beh, ora è qui—beh*, it would only annoy you, would it not? Of course you would ignore it, but, *forse, che scena*, what a scene if you were to ignore him, in this instant? Walk up to the restaurant, order and eat at the table across from him, never saying a word, resisting even every sound of mastication, not allowing him even that. Would it drive him to tears? Would it drive him mad?

— *Uh stor-een*, he would say, my word! Why have you perambulated by me without so much as a salutation, a felicitation! a *buongiorno*, or even the most meager inclination of the cap? I've come here, traveled many a mile with the most sanguineous hope that I might see you again. Will you seat yourself here and engage in some serious confabulation with me? There are manifold sophistries, items each delicate unto themselves, myriad even, that I must converse with you over.

— Excuse me? Oh, I'm afraid I did not see you there hunched over like that, you would return, *schioccando la lingua*, adding, I'm sorry—truly, very—but I'm afraid I don't have the time. I've only stopped by for a bite.

— Might I, ehr, ehr, perambulate alongside you then? We might confabulate while perambulating, and perambulate whilst confabulating; we need not sit so stationarily to confabulate. What I must communicate, is of the most salient preeminence (this he would assert before bookending with something Vulgar, you are certain).

— No, no, you would respond sweetly, hovering towards the door, as if it could not even bother you to stand still for the man, I'm afraid that won't do; as I said, I haven't the time.

— The time you haven't got, he would demand, or it desireth you not to maketh the time?

— Both, you would laugh, and neither! *Nessuno dei due!* You see, it's truly of no consequence to me, how far you've come and what you have to say. You've said everything you might; whatever else remains is just a repetition, a repackaging of the day-old dictionary; and you might walk to the ends of the Earth, into the arms of the Andromedae and every neighboring system, in fact, and *still* find your efforts wanting. For whatever reason you've come here, whatever it is you wish to say, it'll have to wait—perhaps forever! I've no interest to interrupt a second more of my day on your account, darling.

— Dorothy, Polly, he would beg, *uh stor-eeen*, please...

At that moment you would lean down, down to his eye-level, to plant one lingering peck on his cheek. Then, staring into his eyes, and with a smirk you would say

— A bit of raw meat—a cutlet of beef, I'd think, might alleviate the swelling on that fifth digit. *Ciao!*

*Sarebbe meraviglioso*, marvelous, sickeningly, but... it can be *solo una fantasia*. No, *sarebbe sciocco*; even the gentlest lamb of a man when prodded might become the most violent bear. *He* is no exception, you know. And, from the delicate manner in which he must nurse his cup, still he pays for the incident which learned you this truth; still he pays for his crime.

As you watch him drink, then eat his meal, you very nearly feel the urge to walk up and slap him for even thinking of travelling here, of seating himself at that very chair and eating the food served there. He had been so resistant to eating at the place—*sull'orlo della discussione*, that you almost hit him then for his obstinacy. And what stubbornness you encountered there, oh, how it paled to the stubbornness you observed with his regard of your home, your city! *Mulo canzirro*, how he bemoaned or belittled every little detail of the place, from the stretches of coastline to the countless avenues adjoining it! It took every ounce of grace you possessed at times to remain civil towards him, to remember that, *per ragioni ormai a te troppo estranee*—yet you loved this man, who could be so vitriolic towards the place that had nourished and reared you. For him to come here now, to seat himself at that table, to descend that hill he tenaciously defended and defer himself to the generousities of a city he so flagrantly disparaged, to witness this image before you, *basta accendere* a fire in *tua anima*. *Bastardo*. Well that he finishes his meal; were he to sit there any longer you might leave yourself, or scream.

Hm. Where now, *dove sta andando adesso?* North... *l'universita*.

See how his eyes wander still, jumping from face to face? Though, in observing it, even from the distance you are tailing him, you can tell he is less discerning in his gaze.



There, he turns his head again, swivels it almost full-circle to hazard a gaze at another young doll. Behind the copper bust you hide, *tesoro casualmente*, as though you were idling towards class, another in the crowd of the halfhearted students. That one—see her as she passes you by—bears you no resemblance, facially, curvaceously, whatsoever. *Bruna, nemmeno colta con la testa*. So he travels here, comes to your home, only to give up the chase and begin scouting other prospects? Could he have forgotten you so soon? Not that you care—*non tu, ovviamente*—but why does it concern you, that he can so easily be dissuaded? That fact, does reminder of the fact burrow into the furthest chambers of your heart? What distemper—it does, surely—does it enkindle there?

No, but... experience has proven, has it not, that you are forgettable, expendable, easily cast aside or wholly thrown away? Why else would your Phineus, whom you loved so intensely, disappear? Then *him*, and, in fact, reaching back to the moment of your—*dal momento della tua nascita*, have you not been time and time again... discarded? Would Gabriel, could Gabriel, if another crossed his path...? *No*; quit this thinking. Your value is not related to the attentiveness of others, *tesoro, men in particolare*. Do not define yourself by the terms of such as *he*, who, *ricorda* (he told you this himself when you first arrived) explained how he caught sight of a young woman in a crowd of others, all identically garbed for some celebration, which bore your identical appearance. Remember, he said that he jumped up and followed after her (*come se stessilo seguendo*) hoping simply just to capture another sight of her face, form, or figure, because she bore your resemblance? What would he have done, had she stopped to speak to him, if she had shown him but the slightest interest? Would he have discarded you then, *per un tuo simulacro*? What powers are to say

he would not desert you to pursue her, some fleeting impression of the truth, in whom he believed it was you he saw? What with his wandering eyes, always scouring, always scanning, you should not have been so surprised, *così in frantumi*, to learn that he was still in love with her, *quella puttana, zoccola*.

Or so he claimed. Perhaps he only thought he loved her still; perhaps it was a case much the same, of him seeing reflected in her the image of some other. Could it have been you? Or is it some primordial intuition that dwells in men for women, *e viceversa*, something inside of you at creation's first yawn—*o consapevolezza*—a compelling impulse, which burns within you, to seek out the other, to know the essence of their sex, for it contrasts so greatly with your own? But then why is infidelity more often a man's game? *Ah, sì*: Woman committed the first sin, cursing Man to eternally compensate. The entirety of history sealed in a single bite; and a firestorm of troubles followed.

*Ricorda*, that afternoon of *fottere*, when afterwards you laid yourselves out across the bedding, a white, almost ghostly light falling down through the sheer to land on his shoulders, beads of sweat like oblong ornaments hanging from your hair despite the air, how cold and crisp it felt. As you spoke to one another in muted ones, *ricorda*, remember how the diffused sun pouring through the window cast the irregular half of his face in slight darkness, and you thought in that moment 'how strange, *che strano*, the noticeability, light obstructed by something so ordinary as a nose, brow, or upper cheek, how disproportionate the proceeding darkness against the limned object appears.' You realized you were so deep in thought that you had not heard a word he had *finché non l'ha detto*, until he called you by *her* name.

— But it's not as simple as all that, is it, Deirdy?

And what did he do in that moment? *Niente*. You stared at him slack-jawed, as it went unaddressed—not even acknowledged; rather, he pretended, *ha finto* that it was *una fantasia* of both your imaginations, which you must have both fabricated in the exact same moment. And when you went silent he kept the ruse up, feigning that perplexed expression, reaching out to take your hand as he, after a minute of silence himself, *sfacciatamente*, asked

— Dorothy, what is it?

And, *tesoro*, what was it you did? How did you respond to this parapraxis, this insult, this *indegnità*? Why, you did what you had done with him from the beginning: you went along with *il suo artificio*. You convinced yourself it had not happened, or if it had, that it had happened in the past, something, some place in time impossible now to prove, and therefore as real as if it truly were *fantasia*. No, you smiled and stole a kiss from his lips, then drew him back down to you, enfolding yourself in his arms, wrapping your own little arms around one of his, *e riposando il viso nel suo palmo*, continuing to live *la fantasia* for as long as you might. *Una fantasia*: it was always *fantasia*, your entire time together, knowingly doing wrong and pretending ignorance to it. And you were complicit in the act, were you not? Complaisant in your complicity? And complacent by your complaisance? You benefited as much as he did. *Sempre, ottieni sempre quello che vuoi*, and it was *him, di ogni uomo vivente* you wanted. Your heart was after his own; did it matter... did it matter that it was taken? *Tu sei il custode di tuo fratello, non il suo padrone*; who rules his heart he chooses.

And, besides, it was not as if you were entirely without your own deceptions. Had your actions not suggested or even trespassed the bounds of untruthfulness? When first he

arrived, did you not, in that first instant you saw him, decide that he should be yours—not, as you told him, after some time of knowing him? And did you not know all along what you were doing, seducing *insidiosamente* a taken man? From your very first conversation *eri consapevole*, you knew he was not yours to have, that to entice him away from her might prove sinful (and it was and is, *tesoro*; thank goodness He is merciful), yet you stuck to your path. You knew what you wanted, *e ottieni sempre quello che vuoi*, and you would have it, *sempre*, always. But you never told him this. How could you? Would a man remain with a woman knowing what devious qualities (*qualità* masculine, *onestamente*) she possessed, ready at her disposal? No; he would feel threatened, endangered—inferior, himself a possession. He might, for a moment, begin to learn, that to be woman is to be possession, like a thing by the world considered childlike and owned. And in that time, *del possesso e spoliazione*, did you not withhold from him? That you knew all along, not as you insinuated on that last day, of your... *illegittimità, la nascita di te e di tuo fratello*? Why did you hide this from him? ‘Why else,’ you ask, ‘but for the embarrassment of acknowledging one’s own gratuitousness?’ He would not understand. *Nessuno*, nobody but you *e gli afflitti, capisce*. None but the forsworn children of the world, born... unwanted.

And what of Gabriel? What truths regarding the man truly after your heart did you keep contained? That you felt, in the moment you first met him, that same animal magnetism you felt towards *him*? That in *his* absence you willingly walked a precarious line? That when he kissed you, *l’hai baciato a tua volta*? That you remembered the taste?

*Che cos’è*, that dull, penetrating screeching in the air, like the cry of an alarm, growing closer and closer... You turn about to see *la polizia* en route to your location. *Forse*,

are they here to arrest him? Yes, sensibly; surely he has committed some heinous crime, a theft or murder, and he came here, raced across the nation entire, to see you, to catch a glimpse of your face one final time before the decades cursed to iron bars and cold stone. A luxury in this heat, and *una fantasia, di nuovo*. Harsh, even for yourself, *tesoro*. The man did you no serious harm, only a slight bruise on the wrist and a vandalized heart. Still, like a sickly child he cradles that hand of his; he harmed himself more, did he not? What misery he has encountered so far, the disappointments of this trip of his and what yet lay in store for him, is perdition enough. The cars continue approaching, however. *Dove, e per cosa* they sound that siren? And the lights they flash! *Che accecamento! Accidenti!* Why glance into them as they pass? that intense, hot light flashing intensely, temporarily blinding. Best you should stop trailing for the moment, while your vision—*zocarro*—while your vision strains to return.

Has he seen you? Hold a hand up over the light. No, *bene*, it is passing him as you do, the blaring white light, bright as a bolt from the sky flashing again, *e di nuovo*, blinding him to your tail as much as his trail. Ha-hah! *Il tipo di battute che gli piacerebbe*. Think, he would be proud of you for thinking of it, though, again, it matters not. Yes, the light has blinded him, confounded his efforts momentarily as well. *Ma*, how familiar it coruscates, like a falling star all bathed in glowing white, like the—*come fosse l'ultima notte...*

Why do these thoughts like pendulums hang swinging towards, forwards, and back from your mind? Avoid them, imagine instead what river of thought flows through his, what memories, what passions the sights of these halls, named from great men, industrialists and leaders of nations, elicit in so lowly a man. Last he walked by your side, hands hanging

carelessly in his pockets, lecturing you on—*cos'era, di nuovo?*—*beh*, some subject which of irrelevance, the philosophies of the ancient heathen thinkers, surely. But what does he have to glean from this cross-campus waltz? Does he really so desperately cling to any memory, no matter the triviality? You returned to your residence afterwards, you remember, *dove ti sei impegnato* in an activity *molto più memorabile*, then left again to procure dinner. An ordinary, unmemorable (*con una eccezione*) afternoon. *Forse*, perhaps this visit is prelude to another recollection; or he wishes to relive the emotional stability of your earlier relationship, to exist temporarily as a man out of time; or he traverses the haunts of the past, hoping still to find you there. *Merda*. Oh, *tesoro*, it is one of His laws, is it not? that the pendulum which one way swings must always in the opposite direction swing back? To cast your mind one way, when a thought has already grabbed ahold of it, is a futile effort; *per quando quell pensiero sviante* has elapsed, the thought which remains is that which first reared its head. Does it not sadden you, to know the mind ill-equipped to fend away its own most deleterious thoughts, as though it were God's intention that Man torture himself with his own mind—his own intellect, his own memories, his histories, his thoughts? Relent to the stream, *tesoro*, and *forse, per ora*, the pendulum will drop.

How had it happened? For the longest time you asked yourself the question, how things between you had faded to the point where, on the third day, all other efforts to win his affections having failed, you asked him why he had become disinterested in it. *La sua risposta non ti ricordi, ma* what was it? He said—you remember him saying—something about being a hypocrite, *un sensualista papale*, and you scoffing practically (which only

served to further disgruntle him, *in tutta onestà*) and arguing with him over the matter, that your senses were God-given, that to deny them would equate to His denial, and that there was no true sin about the sensuous life. But, for some reason, the carroted *mulo* refused to budge. He shut himself up. No matter your efforts, you failed to break through to him. He had made a decision, and told you it was incontestable. *Naturalmente*, and it was natural, *tesoro*, you became exasperated. You did not want to see him, not until you had pieced together your thoughts. He left you alone in the room. You found a scrap of paper and began scribbling down, organizing, making coherent your thoughts. In an hour he returned, calm, but with a doleful expression hung from his face. And you told him—*no, tesoro*, you did not *tell* but *read* from the scrap, only intermittently able to meet his gaze and weakly when you did, that it was unfair to you, unjust, even, to make such a decision without your consent, to speak so definitively about something to which he was only adjuvant, to become a half speaking for the whole. The argument lasted three hours more. The cancerous light outside darkened. He prevaricated. He did everything in his power to change the subject, as if whatever reason motivating him he had sworn not to tell, or, he had none at all. Talk meandered all around, from it, to Love, into the realms of honesty, of loyalty—of *her*, and his insistence to retain her, and some *sciocco* need not to lose a single woman in his life. Your passions both flared. You stood over him, repudiating him, his decision. He stood up, towering over you... then retreated. You stormed out of the room under the regular guise *di alleviare te stesso* to devise a plan. You returned to find him on the floor, heaped up against the wall, and delivered an ultimatum. Either things must change, you said, either you must be

fully honest with one another, and *she* must go away, or you would put your things together and leave that instant.

And... *ha funzionato*. At the cost of breaking him, it worked. He sealed his lips, and his jaw began to shudder, and his cheeks began to glimmer: he was crying, crying, like boy watching his pet die.

— Don't leave, he quivered. Please, don't leave. Things... they can change. They *will* change.

His gaze he averted, as though you were the Sun itself, as he said this. How could he? It was so dark in the room, for neither of you had lit a candle, or fired a lamp, so ominous that he likely could not even make out the lineament of your dress. No, as he spoke these words, his eyes all the while directed themselves outside, *nel crepuscolo*, storm clouds from the west spilling over the city, gradually, in patches, swallowing as they did the daylight. And when at last he had spoken you lost all composure as well, for the possibility alone, that he might deny you still, had nearly broken you, too. You dropped down into the chair beside him and he buried his face into your stomach, sobbing, as if he were bereft of all strength to raise himself from the floor. And, *ricorda*, remember, you thought then, you realized that with his face buried into your womb, at that moment, that you could feel impressed into your skin the lopsidedness of his jaw.

All was joyous again. Despite the winds and darkness lashing against you, *tesoro*, you prevailed. You rushed *al mercato*, before the rain might commence, and collected *gli ingredienti* supper demanded. Another bottle of wine was purchased (*ne aveva già comprato uno per te*); it would be a night to celebrate your triumph and his, over the forces that



compromised your love. On salmon you dined, on farro and gourds, and drank heavily of free-flowing wine. And when the storm was upon you, you defied it, leading him by the hand out into the night, to feel the air swell and dance around you, pulling and tugging on the tresses of your hair, to hear the bullwhip crack of thunder echoing across the terrain, illuminating yourself in the cracks of lightning which begot it! You were in awe of this weather so foreign to you, of everything He possessed in his power to visit upon the earth. You were happy again, happy and free; you felt, it seemed as though you could let the wind carry you up then and there, that the sky itself remained so oppressive only because you willed it. And you would take him up with you and transport him above the electric canopy to a place *tranquillo, desideroso*, one above the storm; and together there, in the deferential rays of dusk, transported, you would frolic.

*Fantasia, di nuovo*, all of it. You returned indoors. The first bottle lay empty on the counter; how it had emptied itself so quickly you knew not, but you opened the next and kept your eye on it, that its contents might not too quickly disappear. You were celebrating, *dopotutto*; festivities could expire so abruptly. Celebration made you confident, and so again you led him by the hand out of the common parlor and into his room. You stretched the curtains wide, even tucked up the valance, so you might enjoy as if it were a show of fireworks the heavenly fire, and curled up beside him on the bed to watch it all unfold. With every subsequent bolt of light wonder struck tremors into your breast, which jumped in surprise at each flash rocketing across the pitch, *animando* further stroking the flames of your heart. First, you stroked his hand in yours; then you allowed that hand to lose track of its place and glide from his arm to neck; and before you knew it both arms hung about his neck

and your head—*la tua testa era così leggera, vero, tesoro?*—lay in his lap. Your full attentions were drawn away now from the window, and instead stuck to the random illuminations of his beautiful—*era allora*, it had never been more beautiful—face. You raised yourself up to him and, at last, drew from his lips. And he submitted to your overtures. *Per un po' di tempo*, to a place.

But he refused to advance any further. And how did you respond, *tesoro*? *Esattamente* you remember it, though indeed amidst the clouds your mind soared. — And so, what, you said, your head then paddling across a fen, what, we'll just, just never have it again? — *A stóirín, mo chraoi*—please, he whispered, running his hand over your hair.

You pulled away from him and sat up, glaring into his eyes, seeing an abandon in them, a defeat, like that of a surrendering captain. — I'm not your *stor-een*. How can I be, if you won't even— — It's not forever, Polly; it'll only be until we've married. There are other ways, other means we can until, when it's time—

Perhaps, had you not given yourself over to so much drink, you would not have been so embittered by his words, his reticence. Perhaps you might have convinced him otherwise, or formed a compromise. But your blood blistered, and you said: — 'When it's time?' It's time already—it's time *now*. I love you *now*. How can you expect me to wait so long—years, *years*—when I know what I want now, and you don't want to give it to me, because (you bit your lip), because— — 'Because' why? What is it? What do you, ehr—say it to me. What is it you think of me?

— A life without it, a life without intimacy, you said to yourself, eyes downcast, a life without love...

— You're being ridiculous. It's not 'a life without love.' Listen—

— Yes, it would be! No intimacy, no love, barriers thrown up against one another. In time we'll begin to resent one another, in time... and though you did not pause here, you pause, you are pausing thinking of it, seeing *him* bear west, thinking about what you said next, and why. Why did you say it? Even now, you know not why the thought came to mind, or if there was any sound reasoning to it, if you believed what you said or if it was simply the wine speaking, or if you said it only to inflame his emotions and avenge yourself for his selfishness. But, *infatti, tesoro*, you said it. You brought your eyes up to him momentarily, only long enough to confirm that, despite not knowing why, you did in fact know you were saying it, before you turned your empty glare on the storm, and said, you'll become violent towards me, begin to hit me, too.

*Ha perso tutte le parole per parlare*; yet, you continued:

— You've done it before, hit things, hit walls, hit people, haven't you? People you cared about? Like your brother, remember? I remember, I remember what you told me. You told me, when you were children, you hurt him—*cazzo*, you almost killed him—

— I didn't say that I—

— *Chiudere il becco!* I'm speaking—I'm going to speak. You're telling me how I'm going to live, but I'm going to say, I'm going to tell you what you did, what you're doing. You hurt him so badly he was in bed for weeks. You're trying to do the same to me now, trying to force me to hide away, like an invalid resting for years under the hopes they might take one,

single step. Who's to say—no, it's not insane to say—that you, who have hit people, who have hurt them, wouldn't one day dare do to me, what you did to him...

Yes, you had to have been compromised. Otherwise, you wouldn't have finished by saying

— ...all over a word, a single name. One word, and you put him in a bed for weeks. We've all lost somebody—all of us, everyone. Why should your loss make you any exception to the rules, exception to decency? It affects everyone—*everyone*. Some people it affects even more, some people don't even know the person they've lost, only that they are gone... only that they never wanted them...

He sat there for a moment, dumbly, his lip shaking again, like it was fighting every natural urge it felt to bend into a sneer. What time was it then? It was... *beh*, it could not have yet been 10, and, *ricorda*, you remember him turning away from you shortly thereafter and standing, hovering in place for what was a minute that felt like an hour of calm at the eye of a hurricane. Lightning lit up his back. Thunder rolled. You saw him stretch a hand out towards his bed and drag a pillow off the mattress. He dropped it to the floor and unfolded a coverlet, then lay himself down turned away from you. In that moment, in your condition, you knew not what else to do, but to mimic his action. You stood and stepped carefully to the center of the room, and stripped off your dress, your eyes all the while hanging on his back, awaiting the moment when he would turn over, that you might still taunt him with your figure, *la tua voluttuosità*. But... it was as though the man were made of marble. You lay down instead under the covers, watching trees of white branch across the ether.

— A life without it, you said to yourself, dully, a life robbed of love... I don't want to live...

Later, after time of an unaccountable span, for you had lost track of the hours, watching the storm overhead pass—it very well could have been the next morning—you slid to the bedside and glanced down at him. He lay in very much the same position, his back shunning you, the windowpane, the bed—everything but the floor. You trembled, seeing him there; the mettle of several hours ago had long since passed you by; emptiness was all that beside remained. Emptiness of bed—emptiness of heart. You reached for him, and tenderly you shook his shoulder.

— What? he droned; he must not have slept, not even for a moment. Had he kept himself awake, waiting, desperately hoping for a reversal in the tides? For you to quit your stylos?

— Come sleep in the bed, Solly, your voice commanding as a weakened husk. Come sleep with me.

In time he shifted, and dragged himself into bed at your side, where he distanced himself from you at the mattress' edge two feet away. Eventually, his body relaxed and rolled over onto his back, closer to you now. He was beside you still, *tesoro*, just as you wanted. *E ottieni sempre quello che vuoi.*

*Che se ne perda la semmenta.* Let this memory retreat *in lontananza*, into the distance. Let the tempest winds howling into the window simmer down to nothing more than a murmur. Let the space between you grow, expand, push him further and further away, until he is nothing more than *una figurina, un piccolo automa* winding away *in lontananza*. Let yourself remember, *tesoro, oh tesoro*, that you are no longer there, and that *quello ch è successo dopo no può succedere di nuovo.*

Past *l'università* and from Sycamore to Cypress now he has led you. Homes capped in terracotta dress this street, and you wonder, in this city that has always been home, was the terracotta, were those perfect imbrications your first love of *Italia*, before you ever knew of the place? *Era, forse, un premonizione?* Or was the aesthetic baked into you, that you might love it wherever it would be found? Are all humans much the same? Do one only love what she has loved before? Or does there for each truly exist a perfect love, which at one stage, early in life, expresses itself, lets itself be known, subtly or obviously, predicting as it does every love which is to follow? What form of love does that leave for you, *tesoro*? One of constant abandonment? No—no, *sti cazzo!* You are not some pitiful little thing to be tossed about on the winds of fortune. Within His purview you command and captain this vessel. *Non sei uno da abbandonare; sei uno che abbandona!* You have every ounce of power in this instant, to call his name, to signal that you have followed him all along, or to desert him entirely. You were not, are not his 'little treasure,' to be owned and hoarded away, brought out at times which best pleased him, when it was, *per lui*, only most convenient. *E, se lo facessi?* What if, right now, as you straggle behind him, as the palm fronds overhead cast the Sun's motionless shades, *burattini inanimati*, on the pavement, yourself became motionless alongside them, and willed that he disappeared in the bustle of the urban horizon? Would you? Could you? *Perché non l'hai ancora fatto?*

*Ah, naturalmente.* The *jeu quarré* courts of *courte-paume*. Remember how he spoke of the sport, professing and vaunting as though he possessed semi-professional skill? And you fell for it, admittedly, did you not? It attracted you, did it not? the prospect of a partner, in a multitude of understandings, of constance, appealed to you. Any way you might deepen

your connection, any way you might strengthen the bonds between you. *Ricorda*, remember how your illusions were shattered? The first time he visited you attended these very courts, he had forgotten his own racquet. And so you lent him yours. He looked silly, gripping a woman's tool, you thought, but surely someone of his skill would not be too terribly affected by the inferiority of the implement. *Quanto ti sbagliavi, tesoro*. Perhaps it was, in fact, the small racquet that spoiled his game, put him off-rhythm, and that he was never given opportunity to prove or disprove this theory (you only went out that once, *ricorda?*), but imagine your surprise—*e che sorpresa, no?*—in discovering that you were in fact his *superior* in the game. A quick, almost instant discovery it was, too, that he could return few of your services, that only seldom could he lay a chase on the ball, reducing you primarily to rallying the cork across. Which, *ammetterai*, he was not terrible at, but his backhand was at the kindest erratic, and his forehand frequently launched the cork flat. What did you feel then for him, *tesoro*? Was it embarrassment, that one so physically *piccino* as yourself could best him, *e in un gioco da re*? Was it embarrassment for him, that he had been caught in a lie? Or was it embarrassment, that you had fallen for it? *Bastardo. Guzzo. Non è l'imbarazzo che provi ora*, but disgust with him and with yourself: that, through and through, he was a liar; and that, through and through, you looked past the fact.

What else was fiction, *un voglia, una fantasticheria*? What other gold in the heart of this brigand had proven nothing but pyrite? *Lo zio muto*? The country home? The stories of—*qual era il suo nome*—'Manann' and Fergal, and of Fergal and his mother? And what he said *della Rose*? Was she *una fantasia* as well? Was that all it was, one large *romanzo*, everyone a character, the amalgamation of many truths and lies? Might anyone ever be more

to you, more than *un personaggio*, a fabrication in a story, with limitations *per quanto profondamente* you may think you know them?

No—leave it behind. Leave this memory and the thoughts that burden it behind you, as you have the courts themselves. You were in every regard right to leave him as you did—that, now, you know. For see in how many ways his very presence has brought your thoughts hurdling down with him? Put it at your back, keep it behind you, *dove appartiene il passato*, and never turn that way. Eschew the courts at every turn, for now. Avoid them, until the distance between you has grown great, expansive, so far that you are certain, when at last you decide to turn back, that the spirits of your episode have become all but myth. Then you may turn back, perhaps even with your Gabriel beside you, and other, fonder memories might be created. For now be patient, though, and continue striding on.

*Che cazzo*—what's this? *Accidenti!* Quick, behind the brick wall *di questo edificio*. Did he see you? He could not have, not at this remove. But are you... *certo, assolutamente?* Would you risk it, risk *him* seeing you; risk the equilibrium of the day with a possible scene, with one slight turn around the corner? Just slightly, so little that not he or anyone else in his position could see, and quickly, only long enough to identify him, a split second—*così breve* that even if he did see you, he might question whether he had only dreamt it. *Ma...* what if a doubt did not satisfy him? What if he should investigate? *Allora il gioco è suo*. He will find you here, surely, if he does—unless you take flight. Fly, then, fly indoors, if even an ounce of doubt should cross your mind. But check first: *non puoi vedere cosa sta arrivando se ti sei reso cieco*. Look... now!



Facing away from you—*bene*. Looking across one street, and now the other. There is something, some nervousness in the abrupt way he seems to move, as though he knew someone watched him, but not who, nor where. And, what is that—*sta annusando*? He could not possibly grab your scent from there. *E adesso*? He turns his eyes on the sky for some reason, as if the presence tailing him resided there, amidst the few wisps of cloud floating above. And he stares, locks his gaze, hoping as he does that whatever presence there hidden reveals itself, presents itself, glides out from the canopy of gaping blueness. As he stares—*lo vedi, tesoro*?—see how he cradles his little finger, as though some connection stemmed the two? His knuckle, it must still be broken. Why is the break still so severe that, by all appearances, he cannot bend it? Has he not, in these three months, seen a doctor? *Oh, beh...* it serves him right, for even considering—*ah, il muoa ha deciso*. He continues onward again, rapidly, with a much wider stride, and turns at the corner. *Fretta, tesoro, fretta!* or you might lose him! There is something exhilarating in the chase, no? Some twisted, animalistic desire to hunt—not be hunted—that compels this game of yours. *È un gioco se non è a conoscenza?* There is nearly enough in it to convince you why men lay chase to any woman who crosses their path! Ha-hah!

*Ma, tesoro*, chasing him down, *come un cacciatore insegue i segni*, with each memory of your own, *beh...* to consider the possibility that *tutto quanto* he said was a lie, would be equivalent to saying the same of yourself. You had dishonesties—everyone speaks dishonesties, *tutte*—and they are plenty, but no one speaks entirely in falsity, even if they were to try; the ordinances of Truth too closely govern this world. It was not all fable and pretense for you, *vero*? Even in your moments of subterfuge there dwelt the grains of

honesty; how could it not be the same for *him*? What little mercy *he* deserves, *tesoro*, he is owed; yes, surely, his lies, his deceptions outnumbered your own, but some truth, even if by accident, must have escaped his lips.

*Ma, puoi citarne uno?* even one amidst the jumble of everything he told you, every yarn *il grande fabbricante* wound? Ah, but to think, in this moment, when all pressure lay on thought! when all attentions focus on the chase (can a fox think of anything but the hen?)—wait, yes, *la caccia*, yes. Ely, Ely—*prozia* Ely. He could not have lied about Ely. *Ricorda*, remember how your heart swooned when you first heard the story of sweet, simple aunt Ely? Thoughts of her clung at you for days afterwards, thoughts of her comeliness, her immensity of heart. *Ma*, he told you, despite these qualities, that in her young life she could not attract the interests of a suitor, because of a lameness of the leg. All the beauty, the tenderness, the motherliness in the world would not suffice to overshadow one, superficial defect. Yet in a man equally pleasing to the eye, the same defect would, *da una donna*, be seen as rugged, masculine, and she would either praise and worship the man for his endurance, or *come una madre* coddle him for his pain. *L'ingiustizia in questo mondo!* Think, if you had rejected *him* outright for his imperfections, *beh, vero, eh?* you would not find yourself stalking the city streets after a man who—wait, what is the time? Not a clock in sight. *Beh*, ask the next person who passes you by. Settled that, now where were you—Ely, *sì*. Ely working as a seamstress, growing old in her mother's home waiting for a worthy man—only a worthy man deserved her, *veramente*—to come along and prove to her, that the world was not the bitter, shallow place it had heretofore been. And for her patience she was rewarded, *ricorda?* A man came along, a true man, one who looked past her debility and saw the woman residing behind

it. *No, non dietro, ma* the woman who bore it with dignity like Christ his cross. That the world made her her lameness was the fault of the world, not her own.

Ah, but you make it sound as though her troubles ended there, *tesoro*, when you know well they had only just begun. For that man, the one who had represented to her the benignity of the world, the charm and chivalry awake inside an otherwise sleeping race, what did he do? He made her feel loved, he gave her security, presented her with the idea of a home, of children—she loved children, *ricorda*, and wanted many, *proprio come te*—told her he loved her deeply, and asked her to be his wife, *come se fosse uno scherzo malato*. He found another, did he not? And without telling Ely, innocent of any offense, of dishonor or disloyalty to him, he met another woman, and severed ties with Ely almost instantly. Imagine her pain, *tesoro*, in discovering the truth in so unceremonious form as that letter delivered to her one chilly spring afternoon, announcing severance, and his intent—*oh, l'audacia di quest'uomo*—to marry this other woman. You remember not *his* words precisely, but in the fashion *he* worded it, it sounded as though *la troia* was bearing that *culo*'s child. *Che iniquità*. That poor woman... the indignities, the humiliations she suffered—and for no reason, *per nient'altro che un zoppicare della gamba*. Did it not surprise you, to learn of the depths of melancholy to which she plummeted? Hardly able to eat, hardly able to sleep, up nights working on clothing for the men and children of other, fortunate women—how difficult it must have been, even to sew a quilt, thinking that it might warm the body of someone, a husband or son or daughter, of which she had only been deprived. *Doloroso, molto doloroso per lei*, because, remember, he said that more than anything else, more than the love of a husband what Ely desired was the love of a child, her own child, a being made

in her image, but one free of the curse that since birth had afflicted her. And he knew this for certain, even when he was ignorant to all her history, when he was a boy, for he was always finding he had a new adopted cousin living in her home. *Ma*, before such felicity graced her, a generation, in fact, before *he* was even born (*Dio caro, quanto tempo soffrirà una donna*), she had much more to endure.

Years passed, and age followed with them. The felicity men call ‘loveliness’ Time began to strip away from her. Her father passed. Her mother passed. She lived alone in her childhood home. And though with such imprecision *he* framed it, you understood, you were able to sort through her actions, *e per trovare la pietra nascosto nella sale*, when he said — How desperately did she want children, affection, love? he whispered. To what extents, what *disgraces* was she willing to subject herself, all in the hopes she might one day realize some modicum of a dream? There was a, ehr... a vagrant in her town, one guilty of theft— and, ehr—violences, against women. Well, I suppose she pitied the fellow, and often brought him food. One evening, she invited him into her home, for supper. What took place behind those doors only she knows. Several days after she was observed in the market as having been badly beaten, about the face and neck. Around the same time it was realized amongst the town, that the vagrant had disappeared during one of the nights prior. And... *omnia est*.

*Che disonore, davvero*. When she began to show, you wonder, ask yourself, if ever it mattered to her whom planted the seed. No, *non devi chiederti*; it could have been anyone’s child. It mattered not; she would love it all the same. That prospective love, germinating within her womb, spread throughout her entire body, and redeemed her from the pits of despair. What a sight she must have been to see, then; what loveliness, what proof of all on

this earth that is good. *Nel tuo cuore, sinceramente*, you wish you could have met her then, that you could have been witness to a happiness felt by one so deserving. You would have helped her, if you could. Perhaps, there might have been something, some way you could have prevented it from—but *che è passato è presente*. *Ricorda*, remember what he said, about the women on his mother's side, about their difficulties? His mother knew, and, unfortunately, Ely knew, too.

*Dio caro, ti benedica*, that you should never know the agony of such loss. Why is it, that pain seems to be the only prospect a woman is guaranteed? Pain at every turn, pain at every stage: pain in *deflorare*, pain in conception, pain in the bearing of the child, pain in its birth. Pain afterwards, sometimes, of the heart. Pain in the loss of a child. Pain in a child that never was. With pain nothing but a surety, why do you want it, and want it many times over? But, all of these pains, if they are all sureties, they cannot be avoided. These are the pains specific to Woman, the pains no man could ever know, the pains no man could ever conceive of. Being a woman, these pains are your right, *e di nessun altro*: your inheritance, yours more than your own name. For these pains you pray, *tesoro*, for all of them—but the last. Your prayer: *Dio caro*, let you never know pain as Ely did; let you never learn if you could bear it with her stride.

Into the years past child-bearing Ely crept, like a pacifist saint taken prisoner in the war that soon plagued her her. The veneration of saints, an overzealous thing it seems, but still it pleases you to imagine her (though you have not laid eyes upon her, have you, *tesoro*?) as an Orthodox icon, a gleaming aureole encircling her head. One of God's chosen, *lei deve essere stata*; if not for her soleness, her loneliness, would what happened next have ever

transpired? If she had what she so dearly yearned, a family, a husband, wise and reliable, and children too many to count, would she have reached out and affected so many lost souls? Would her experiences have brewed within her a different expression? With war rampant—*così impossibile, considerare la vita in un momento simile?*—and the night customarily lit orange by fire, the fires of invading legions, the fires of their devastated survivors, Ely began to encounter many children, orphans, conflict's forgotten casualties wandering up to her home from out of the dark. According to *him*, it was nothing short of miraculous, that her family home went untouched during the onslaught. The parentless children, *quanto innocente, quanto spaventato* they must have been, that they gravitated towards one of the few structures that stood throughout it all. And even after war closed, and the invasion ceased, and the brigands retreated to their land, *ricorda*, remember, that she never ceased helping, not a single young lost soul, for decades and decades. She lives still, does she not, continuing to save them, as many as she can house, even in her old age—that's what *he* said, *vero?* But he also said, remember, that since that last great loss, according to his mother, a change in her took place. Not one of submissiveness or regret, or dolor or bitterness, *ma qualcoso di molto piú strano*. Though she always showed her children affection, and never hesitated, not once, to take one in, there was yet something like an absence in her, a disconnect with the world consequently. He spoke to her, and she was aware of him, yet would remain ever distant, or absent, rather, from encounters of all kinds, her gaze fixed always elsewhere, just slightly off of its subject, as though she were constantly watching something from the corner of her eye; as though she were caught in *una fantasticheria*.

You knew what she looked at. You knew to where her eyes would even in the happiest moments drift, though you kept it to yourself. You knew just slightly off-subject they would stray and alight on the events of another world, a world her own, beyond the place of inhabitation, yet in real time transpiring beside it: the cubby in her periphery where she stored her dreams away; the events of the life she always wanted; the life deprived her by fortune; *la vita che solo il paradiso permetterebbe*. The life she looked forward to in death. The life you often see yourself. The love that was given away.

This story above all others you believe. Or, *beh*, your soul tells you to believe it, even if your mind tells you to doubt everything *he* told you. Despite it all, you choose to believe. Is that not what belief is? *Una scelta*? That despite your every encounter with a person or object informing you with one notion, you can deny intellect and choose to follow another less evidentiary? You have the free will, to decide, to open or close yourself off—*di vedere la verità, o negarla*. For what else is Faith, if not believing the history of another, imparted to you by one less credible? Faith, faith in things specious, faith in what may be constructed—*questo è essere umani*. That, and love. It is often for love that one forsakes rationality for faith; and it is often for faith that one loves. Without these qualities, even for your intellect, what else separates you from the beast grazing in the field? Yes, in some sense, that does mean... you must love *him* still. Even if you struggle to forgive him, even if you would not speak to him, you still see His radiance shining within *him*. You recognize that, yes, even *he* for all his insufficiencies has a role to play, in your life, in his, and in the lives of others. *Si, tesoro; devi*. And so, you believe this story. What might he have gained in fabricating Ely's history? What else, but your trust? Hardly unobjective enough; no, rather, you believe it was

told in uncharacteristic honesty, in frankness, in objectivity; you believe that the history of another, even if recounted by the duplicitous, not inherently deceptive; you believe in the ultimate irrepressibility of Truth; and, to the shock of your better intuition, because you believe in Him you must believe *him*.

Another blind turn. Be careful with this one, *tesoro*. Hold close to the wall this time, and edge yourself out slowly. No reason in causing yourself another scare, no reason in risking exposure. *Ecco, bene*. Put your hair up, quickly; you cannot risk being caught by a draping lock or whimsied breeze. *Bene, bene*. Now lean, lean ever so slightly out—perhaps only one eye this time—and see if you can spot him. *Ora!*

Where is he? To where has he disappeared? The shadow there, the one making the descent into the underpass, he fits the cut! *Ma*, where has he led you? Back, back to where things started, back to the very beginning: *la stazione ferroviaria*. He has led you back to the train station. But... *perché?* Unless, is the chase done already? The two women crossing the road here, the younger in a maroon dress (*un bel colore, no?*), inquire of her, *che ora è?*

— My, what a lovely dress you've got there! *Molto bello*.

— Oh, you're a dear, the young woman says, stopping to perform a cursory inspection of the garb. Thanks very much!

— Of course, of course! Excuse me, I don't mean to bother, but would you happen to have the time?

— It is, says the older woman, likely her mother, inspecting her watch, 3 past 2—nearly 4.

— *Grazie*, thank you. Off to the station, then?

— Yes, we are. And you as well?



— No, no, I'm afraid not. But will you be catching the next train?

— Yes we are, the young woman perked up, the 2:15, to San Juan.

— The 2:15! I shouldn't detain you a moment longer; I wouldn't want you missing your train on my account! Thank you again, and a good day, and safe travels to you!

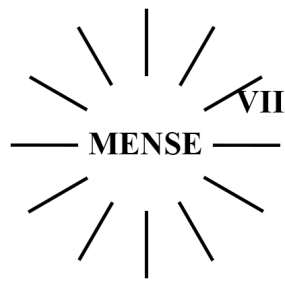
— And to you as well, the mother and daughter say in unison, saying also, Good day!

And so, the tour of his, this stroll down *i viali di ieri* continues onward, on to San Jaun. On to theaters and back-alley fumbings, to a place of drunken reveries and holy worship all the same. The better he leaves your city behind, better he torments himself with other familiar haunts. Will you watch him leave, stand with your body guarded by the corner, watch until the train eclipses him, then departs, he disappearing with it down the tracks? Do you need to know *per certo*, that there will be no unpleasant discovery, that he had been privy to your tail the entire time, and was simply waiting for your guard to slip so he might return to your home, position himself in the bushes, and lie in wait? *Ridicolo, ridicolo... ma, non impossibile. Forse*, you will not return home tonight—or, if so, see that you return in Gabriel's company—

Gabriel! 4 past 2—7, *ora, sicuramente! Cazzo!* Look at what you have done, *tesoro*, missed your entire lunch date with Gabriel—and tailing that unworthy creature, no less—and made yourself late for work. Turn now and return to the offices, *fretta, fretta!* Oh, poor Gabriel, he is likely to be quite sore for this offense. *Ma*, you have his book in hand, and, perhaps if you explain the situation, he will forgive. *Tuttavia, l'uomo ti adora, tesoro; ti perdonera per il suo stesso omicidio.* Ah, but should you worry him with such a troubling explanation, regardless? Would it not be just as well that he never learned, that the events of

this afternoon remained anonymous? *Si si. Tuttavia...* what if you were to, to sit him down at the offices and explain in close detail the journeying of this early afternoon? There is something, some primal appeal in Gabriel's anger. Would you not say, *difatti*, that you enjoy it, that you enjoy seeing the passion flare in him, enjoy seeing that holy fire ripping ruggedly through his veins? He would eventually, as you said, forgive you. And you would *grazie al suo perdono*—perhaps at your own home, tonight even. You might even ask him to walk with you, especially in the possibility that *he* may be there. And if it were true, what a show it would be! *Che sorpresa!*

*Lascialo*, leave him now, lying recumbent on that grimy waiting bench, leave him to the company of those gathering on the platform around him, to that lucky girl and her mother, to the man buried in newspaper, leaning against the stop shelter, to that young *sciattona* walking her bicycle up the platform, and to all his other new, anonymous companions. You leave him to the companionship he deserves. You leave him, leave him with the thought not of *him* in mind, but of his replacement, with adorations of Gabriel. *Ricorda*, remember when you would have said the same of *him*, that he fulfilled your every wish for a man, that above all things he was passionate, and that it was his passion, *anche al suo peggio*, that most attracted you? What is to say, what proof is there, that history might not repeat itself, that fortune may prove unfortunate, with Gabriel instead the puppet of its whims? Perhaps with Gabriel it is all another *fantasia*, another *romanzo*... *Ma*, if so, perhaps *uno romanzo* is all you have ever wanted, all your heart has truly ever desired: to be the romantic lead, and the object of some lover's tragedy. *Non è quello che vuoi? Non è questa la verità, eh? E non sempre, sempre ottieni quello che vuoi?*



Yeff audyens ande kene hit off the that thys bet sicche examynacyone thee lyke beyng anent that propos whyche bet thee essencyone off thee relacyone off Manne unto Womanne, wydelycet thee kynde off Manne ande Womanne, ande qwoh that kynd certyfyeth thos to essencyonis dycordeth unto on odir.

On thee onderstaundyng off thys speculacyone, lete hir furst rekene too thou that off thee unfoldyng off lyfe cotydyan, thou wyl hede off thy wytt a manere off happenyng thee lyke whych thou mai name naturale, whych bet thee custumable manere off thyngis. Ande lefe thou thys manere custumly certeynly swete, for hit maketh thee trybulacyonis ande peynis off lyf most lyghtsom off enduryng, als qwat thou myghte ges thou mai hede oyenes biforhond thee tyme off whych sicche a thyng bet lykly happenyng. Thus thou moste acord wyth hir that sicche condycyone reuleth aboue thys lyfe, that wanted dysposycyone kepeth thee ordure off thyngis ande thafen theys happenyngis ne dystroublens ne degeneracyone.

Hit therfor bicloseth thatou moste obserue qwoh thys resonyng faire wyth al thou qwho abyd on lyf on Ereth. Ande beyng sicche enhabyter off that warde thou bet dyuusyble unto to sortis by thee qwalyté that bet sexus, whych bet unbigotten of thos essencyonis, Manne ande Womanne. Yyt beyng off on essencyone, that bet thee essencyone off mankynde,

Manne ande Womanne haff atwyxt hem dyfferently prerogatyfis, whych beast bet arayed off hem allon. For werryly doth Manne ande Womanne tolye on weis manyfold, soo to lye thos partis ande chargis, whych bet apte specyaly off Manne ande Womanne on weis contraryous.

Hit bet hire dysyre thanne for too saughtele for the thos dysputacyonis heruppone thee matyere off Manne ande Womanne, als ouerlonge hath thys teme, thos prerogatyfis whych on partis off Manne ande Womanne pende, ben too hire cyrcumspeccyone. For perfors moste theys thynkyngis entre thee mynde off thee aught persone qwom butte faste outthynketh thee relacyone off Manne unto Womanne ande Womanne unto Manne, qwat bet thair proporcyone too on odir ande thee warde entere.

Thus schal sche speyk that whych bet cause off hire scarce tracte on fewe sensis partyculer, whych bet thys resounyngnis acomplyssyng for too areche, qwoh hit bet, sauns lenyng for hire graunted sexus, that wheras Manne bet wonely, Womanne bet utneme. Off thee sensis proponen by thys argument ther bet to. Beynge sicche that thys sens thee furst bet on whych furstly bet most trefable off thy ynteleccyone, sche schal gynne thys hire argument wythe hit herforth, that bet, off thee essencyone off mankynde tochyng furstly off generacyone, off whyche thys furst predycamente mai bet forther skyfted atwynne.

Ande that furst off to predycamentis off generacyone bet thee sensuall, that hath ben cleped eke thee bodelyche.

Ande soo tochyng of thys predycamente sche wowe that whych bifor echon bet seyn most clenely, namlyche that generacyone which bet thee concyeuynge ande berthyng mankyndly, bet possybel nat butte that Manne ande Womanne bothe taketh off thee acte. For thowe hit hath ben ere proposed that Womanne off sicche regarde holde greter worschyp, ande thus wyl sicche oppynyon sche ysothyen, sche furst nedys knoweleche bihofelynes off Manne for that proces whych begetteth mankynde. For thee sed off spermatyk Manne bet efn moche wytale for thee spedeful propogacyone off mankynde, als moche bet thee wambe off Womanne. Ernestlyche, hit myghte bet seyde that whych bet myster unto fleshly lyf byde wythyne thee sed off Manne; for thowe moche bet yeffen fro Womanne, that whych bet hused off thee sperma bet nedeful for too qwykken thee germ off Womanne. Ande moche als lyfhede ynryseth off thee Manne fro hys contrybucyone, soo that lyfhede mai nat founde wythoute Womannis germ, als Nature hath ordeyned on weis mysteryall that hire wambe bet thee trewe receptakel for too construe thair partis for nortyrnyng ande bredyng that lyf whych thei founded. Therfor, creatyng lyf sauns ether thee Manne othir thee Womanne, othir hem bothe, woude bet nat Erethly; soo Nature, whyche ouerse alle lyf on Ereth, doth commaund.

Yf Nature thanne bet thee uttreste descyder off that necessaryté whych doth mynyster mankyndis physyologye, for Nature hath founded kyndely thee corsis off Manne ande Womanne festenyng ande swyfyng, thanne thos lorris whych ben off Nature lordschyp ouer Manne ande Womanne, ande therfor unto Manne ande Womann bet enhaunced aboue alle othiris.

Acordynge that hit bet Naturis heste wherfor mankynde summyt, hit nedys that Nature feffeth unto beyngis certys emprys especyale onely off thair kynde. Thus thos beyngis for troste off Naturis adwysemente moste nedys bet regarded thee trewe eneffis off toforeseyde emprysis, ande nat thos othiris bisydes hem. For clenely doth sche awyse the that thee fyschis off thee se ne flyghten, thair corsis ben off a maykyng corpulent, ande thei ioysynge nat wengis for whych thei myght glydden thorowe thee firmament, nothir schoude thei possessed longis for whych thei myght brethe thee fyrmamentis aer. Soo lykewys mai treis nat geynde, for thair anatomye conteyneth off nether ban ne mucelle, butte bet ynflexyble, that thei myght nat bet scathen too uplade thare noryschyng fro depe wythyne thee ereth. Theys abylyteis, whych formerly bet that off flyghte ande laterly bet that off ambulacyone, bet resserued for those beyngis whych Nature hath superyourly aourned for sicche auenturis.

Onderstaunde thee thanne that Manne therfor ben nat feffed off Nature wyth thee abylyté off berynge lyf, for Nature dempte that Womanne ben thee trewe eneffe off sicche capacityé. Wyttelyche Womanne ben als Manne mayde efnlyk necessaryous for thee makynge off mankyndely lyfe, butte remembre the wel Womanne off hire essencyone hath ben graunted wythal prerogatyf for husynge ande noryschyng that lyf. Sche woude thou wete that Nature by attytlynge Womanne wythe moare lyklamychy charge on generacyone dydst deme hir thanne greter solempté for that proces.

Sche woude thou wete thanne also that an yf Womanne bet most uytale for proces of generacyone, thann sche bet eke most prynspal for that fece whych bet thee chylis bredyngetyme.

Yea hit mai bet that Manne outewythe off Womannis wamb myght fostren ande feden thee embryon. Forsothly myght Manne yrefe a hom wheryn Womanne schal lyff, ande hi mai mayke that plase lewe ande esy for hire nedynge, ande hi mai yeff Womanne wytaylis ande whyt-mete, that nether sche nothir thair ynfaunte schul asterue. Butte Womanne theys thyngis mai doest also. Sche mai ouersen hire ouen hom. Sche mai prowylde hire ouen cunfort ande hire ouen metis. For Nature feffed hir euene meuabylnes, for too labour e als doth Manne, maugré hire condycyone. Meny wyl bet thee ynstauncis thou mai biloke thee warde ande regarde Womanne gronyng ande stoupyng, swellen, nye redy for brastyng ande trawaylyng yyt. For Nature ymade hir of hire condycyone ayet parseueraunt for too dure hire dystourbaunce allone. Ande Nature hath yeffen hir eke woys too speke, that sche myght lede bysynes ande bylden hire bouris, ande assure the tharfis off hire gretenes. Therfor thus sheweth trewlyche that Manne bet nat necessarye duryng thys thee fece off Womannis concyuyng, ande oyene Nature hath demed Womanne her superyour, for Nature requereth ne essencyale nede off Manne et sicche tyme.

Yf Womanne sheweth hirself ouerlyng of generacyone ande grawydacyone, thanne sche moste nedys also shewe hirself superyalle for that stage of lyfyeffyng whych bet yborenes, that bet callt eke natyfyté.

For yea, yf thou schode sey that Mannne profre hys socouris nye thee oure off berthynge, sche woude aknoue thou hath yspeyke semely. Houeuer, qwyl werryly Manne mai sucoure Womanne et soo hefy oure, ande hi mai eke cunfort durynge hire womannis pronge, ande hi mai assyste thee chylberer wythe delywerynge ande chylbed, hi bet butte superfluyté et theys tymis. For ther bet nowte whych hi myghte profyte et these ouris that myght nat Womanne also. Wherfor spedely Mannne woude lende hys counneyl for thee berthe, yet myght on odir Womanne make a wysser mean unto thee berthe, for berthe bet ympropried off hire essencyone, ande therfor myght Womanne excersyded therof profre most dereworthy. Butte on odir Womannis experyence on thys arte off berthyeffynge, thee chyl mai sterfe ande thee moder also. For Womanne lettred on thys arte bet off thee moderis peyne knauynge, ande hath yfelt thee chyl whych styrr wythyne hir ande conneth whanne hit mai bet dysesy othir forschappen, ande mai hasten thee ynfauntis berthe ande thee moderis welthe. Sche rekeneth off that resoun that Womanne bet eke superyalle for natyfyté.

Ande butte that thee chyl bet boren ande gynne too growe doth Mannis role waxe in walew for hit. An thee babe bet gendred a sone, ande hi bore nat off basartdye, thanne ther bet ne persoune betere fro qwom hi mai lerne thee weis off mannhede thanne hys fader. An yf thee babe bet doughtir, sche mai lerne fro hym, ande bet awysed off thee weis off Manne ande qwat off thair myschyf. Wete thou thowe hi bet adyghte unto hys sonne for sicche propos, hit nedeth nat off hys prerogatyf for Mannne beynge unto hys doughtir. For bet thee babe a doughtir hire moder wyl moneste betere off Mannis weis thanne hi, ande schal rede hir beste



for fyndynge a macche. Ande connen thou wel that a moder kanst nat ywysse hire sonne alle yholychē off thee weis off manlyhede, yet sche mai teche hym off Mannis weis, for beyngē Womanne sche sugerne off Mannis warde, ande therfor wyteth moche also off qwoh too fostre Manne cheualrous. Thys faderis kanst nat for thair doughteris doeth also, for ne Manne bet wyss off thee weis off Womanne als Womanne bet wyss too thee weis off Manne.

Sicche bet thee furst predycamente off generacyone that bet sensualyté, off whych bet profen by lettris ouerfewe thee especyalyté off Womanne, wherby Womanne myghte bredde, delyuer, ande norysche a chyl by hire ouen sauns thee medlynge off Manne, butte for thee sucoure off hys sperme whych doth off Naturis domynyone carye ynwarde thee chylis lyf.

Ande naue that secoude off thos to predycamentis off generacyone, whych ben specyale nat ylong on Nature. Ande that secoude predycamente bet by somme cleped thee Goostly, whych bet also thee Wyll.

Thowe mankynde moste trawayle off cordemente wyth Naturis lore, thee soffreynté off Nature steueth uppone thee cors othir body, whych bet flesshly onely, ande biyonde thee weis off mankyndis flesshe, Nature kanst nat ryghtreule mankynde. Nature mai kyndel mankynde ande thee warde for hem, ande Nature doth eke conserue thee condycyonis for whych thei mai thro, ande doth thus supporte hem for doynge wel, butte leste hir wel that Nature doth ne meffen ne sterne mankynde.

Qwat sterneth mankynd bet that whych sche clepeth thee Wyll, ande by somme phylosofris also thee soule. Yf yemynge ouer thee byldynge off mankyndis cors bet preuayled ouer by thee postis off Nature, thanne hit moste nedys that alle whych yndwelleth outwyth off Nature, Nature kanst nat off pryncypat peculyare kyndel. Thus meny phylosofre seyeth that forsis ther bet thousandefolde whych preuayl ouer thee warde: forsis whych cause thee blake nyte ande assure dai; forsis dywers ther bet eke whych enable sounne ande thee outhir outewarde wyttis; ande forsis whych ynlowe thee dysyryngis ynnumerable off mankynde. Ande sche remeneth the that theys forsis myglet nat. Thee fors whych createth sounis mai nat lykwyse cause Mannis hongre, houeso thee forsis whych ynable sycte ande smelynge mai, als thei bet ybunde homly wyth hongre, ande thee fors whych causeth hongre causeth nat thee nyte ne thee dai, nothir doth hit araye thair teyntynge. Therfor, sche arguyeth that thee forsis whych brede lyf, whych bet cleped Nature, ande thee fors whych fourmeth thee Wyll off mankynd, bet consydred unlaccht.

Mankynd, whych bet eke calt *humanum genus*, biclyppeth off to partis, mankynde wythyne ande mankynde wythoute. Mankynde wythoute bet thee mankynde off Nature, othir that off mankyndis body off whych sche hath latly spoke. Thys bet that sustaunce off mankyndis forme whych they meffeth ande hondel, qwat symply bet sauns aforsynge. Mankynde wythyne bet thee mankynde off Wyll, qwom hath beyng ynwarde ande outewarde. Thee Wyll off mankynde whych bet mankynde wythyne bet that fors whych meffeth mankynde wythoute whych bet mankynde naturel. Therfor alle that mankynde cheseth ande qwykkene by chese bet thee Wyll, whych thowe beyng wythyne, hath eke twyfoldly beyng. Hit bet

seyde that thee beyng bet twyfoldly for hit bicloseth to partis. For als ynwardly myght mankyndis cors bet plyed, soo too mai hit outewardly. Wete thou wel that thee Wyll woneth outewythe off mankynde sondrely, yet sondrely mankynde myght wone nat outewythe thee Wyll. For sauns Wyll mankynde surrendreth thair sapyens ande schal lyffe onely off thee stad off Nature, whych bet a stad off safagenes, werousnes, ande unwysdomnes, threhede whych unto mankyndis composycyone bet unacordyng. Ande als mankynde doth cumme by thair Wyll thorowe berthe onely, Manne othir Womanne unboren therfor hath nat Wyll. For thee unboren chyl bet conteyned ynwarde thee moderis wambe, ande doth ne styrre hitselfe, nothir mai hit bet styrred bicause off conteynyng. An yf hit bet styrred hit may bet mysboren, ande mankynde whych bet ded hath nat Wyll ether. Sche descrye unto the thanne that mankynde unboren ande mankynde lyfles bet off lykyng omyomeres, for Wyll off thee cors herberewe nether.

Yf mankynde mai bet sheden ynsonder, thanne thos to partis off mankynd sondrely bet lyke that bynarye whych doth ameystre alle beyngis off Nature, whych bet thee sexus to, masculyne ande thee femynyne, othir Manne ande Womanne else. Off mankynde wythyne ande mankynde wythoute, sche arguyeth that mankynde wythyne doth syttyngly acord off thee qwalytis off Womanne. For als sche hath profen, moche lyke thee Wyll Womanne myght faire sauns Manne. Houeuer, butte Womanne, Manne lyke thee boddy schal dyscontynue lyf. For pryfen off Womanne Manne mai bet ne boren. Ande pryfen off Womanne Mannis huse schal goo wyde off peplis, ande hys naym schul passe wythe hym. A boddy moste nedys bet haffyng thee Wyll too founde mankynde complete, als Manne moste

nedys possessedeth Womanne for too tydre heiris. Soo schoude thou aknoue by thys reson thanne that thee Wyll off mankynde bet femynyne off essencyone, for hit haff capacitye off moche that whych thee cors ne hath ande that hit mai faire outewarde off thee cors, ande that hit bet kyndled nat off Nature, thee cors therby off qwalyté masculyne, als thee sors theroff bet wythoute, nat wythyne. Birefed off Womanne, Manne, lyke thee boddy birefed off thee Wyll, adedeth. Manne woude on sicche cas afynde hys propositis lemetted for hem exercybel thorowe Nature, whych bet thorowe thos weis that bet purlyche generatyf, a sytuacyone ayene unacordyng off mankyndis composycyon.

Hit mai bysye the that an thee Wyll bet femynyne ande thee boddy masculyne, an yf mankynde kanst nat fre off theys to partis kyndel, whens thanne ygoyne thee Wyll wythe thee boddy. For thee Wyll bet yeffen chylris et thee moment off thaire berynge, hit bet ynyete off hem nat fro that furst moment off begettyng, als a chyl unboren kanst nat bet seyde possedyng off Wyll.

Soo hit mai bet seyde sache bet further profye thee Wyll bet femynyne off essencyone. For yf thee Wyll cummeth fro ne othir plas ande kanst bet et noon othir tyme enspyred too thee chyl thanne thee moment off berth, soo thee Wyll moste bere ytselfe fro thee Wyll off thee moder, ande moste therfor awakeneth fro thee moderis Wyll, menyng thee Wyll off thee chyl ben seuered et that ynstant fro thee moder, qwo bet Womanne. Othir hit ben thee moderis Wyll whych fourmeth naturelly thee chylis Wyll, ande thus stofeth thee chylis cors wyth Wyll fro thee chylis furst drauen onde. Thus, ondirstaunde the that thee summe Wyll

fyndeth sors thorowe Woman, ande procedeth fro hir schyrly. Thou mai fynde thys soth profen by that chylris mysboren mai ne bet auowed sykere off Wyll, ande therfor myght neuer afonge Wyll, for thos thyngis whych ne haff lyf kanst nat haff Wyll, als thos wesselis whych ben breoken kanst nat holde watre. Thus, resoneth sche that Wyll ether breoketh fro othir crefted off thee moderis Wyll schal ayene bet oned too that Wyll. Ande thus mai hit bet seyde that Wyll abounde yet, for wheder ynwarde othir outewarde nowte mai forspyll nothir bylymye thee Wyll. Ande als boddis of chylris mysboren mai ne ioynen thair moderis, butte yet thee chylris Wyllis oneth ayene too thee moderis Wyll, sche concludeth therfor wistly that Wyll on thys aspect beyng femynyne bet ayene outneme fro thee masculyne ylyche.

Siche bet thee secound predycamente off generacyone that bet thee Goostly, off whych ben profen on lettris too fewe thee wonderfulnes off Womanne, wherby thee Wyll off mankynde ben lykned femynyne off construccyone ande mankyndis boddy masculyne, for thee seygnoryis off thee Wyll exceedeth on weis manyfolde thos poustis off thee boddy. Thus dyffyneth thee to predycamentis off thee furst sens off Womannis wonderfulnes unto Manne, whych bet thee sens off generacyone generallyche.

Thee secounde sens off sothe whych sheweth Womannis wonderfulnes bet nat that whych ryneth thee componyng off mankynde, butte qwat mankynde hath thorowe thair yntelleccyone compounded, whych bet thee sothe off langage. For a wei off telynge shewe nat onely qwat ben seyde, butte off thee manere telynge sheweth qwy hit ben seyde ande afir qwat menyng, als a Manne that doth aixe ‘qwoh thus myght bet?’ seyeth nat thos wertis

allon, butte by hys speykyng descloseth off hymselfe qwy for also hi luste knauynge. Thus als doth thy tungis naken lechis whych ben unseyde, soo langagis entere doth off kynde.

Ther bet on meny langagis off mankynde qwat hath ben callt thee bas fourme off wertis, that ben eke cleped thee generale. Theys generale wertis bet custumably rapported masculyne, for thei scryue obiectis als thei appere off thair sympyll forme othir thee naturale. Thou myght mysweue thys tokne off prymacye, for thys soproseth that qwat hath ben callt masculyne most plenteously ocyppe thee warde, butte sche woude warne the furst consydre otherlyker. For on longagis meny, fer ande nere, doth sicche acountynge make Hi efnlyke too Hit, menyng Hi ande Hit off thys reson enioyse nat qwalytis appropryat off hemselfis. Wherfro sicche hapenyng appereth sche kanst nat seye playtly, butte woude pose thys entencyone offspryngeth fro thee comune trowe amonges mankynde off a synglere creatyf fors, whych bet a bygynner othir creature off thee warde. Thys creature, whych bet bettre cleped fors, mankynde tyte sygned toknis off thair humanyté, thowe sicche fors coude ne bet seyde humane off construccyone ande yredy therfor unpossessed ony sexus. Yet mankynde demed sicche fors humane, and for beyng mystyered naym. Manne, qwo thanne siset thee warde fullyche moare thanne Womanne, ande beyng largere, strengere, ande fastere beyngis toke hit uppone hemselfis thee ryghte off arreyng hys ouen peculyere qwalytis on that wyghte, siset fyte thuswyse that sicche wyghte off creacyone, whych bet moare a generatyf fors than aught ellys, schoude lyken unto a fader, chesyng eueytyde thys fors schoude bet mannyssh Hi. Ande therfor dyd Hi ande Hit thus bicum consubstancyalle.

Froe thus sche foloweth that alle thos thyngis whych Hi crefteth specyale, ande thos whych nether cummen unto beyng thorowe somme furst asaye othir Hi yshapped unwyful off thee warde naturale, mankynde coude ne sygne base. Ande soo hit resouneth that Manne, for hit ben Manne qwo dewysed sicche dyuersyté on hys asaye off ynterpretyng thee worde ande qwoh hit ande thee wardis cetyseynis cumme off beyng, bitorned wythynne hymselfe. Ande gasyng uppone hymselfe seched that sicche thyngis off thee warde sauns prymordyall ymagynacyone moste bet unlyk qwat hath ben bradde othir lyfened off Nature furst, othir basly, ande that thei ben most unlyk Mannne. Thenns Manne determed theys thyngis schoude bet figured femynyne off thair construccyone. Therfor bet thee Wyll othir thee soule on meny tungis thowte a creacyone femynyne, for hit cummeth nat off Nature.

Thus off thys tunge whych bet thee practyk off speche for meny persounis wyl thou se theys syngnyngis off thee masculyne ande off thee femynyne presaunte on cotydyane talkis ande wrytyngis. Ande thus sche proposeth unto thee that sicche syngnyngis applye further than thee weldyngis off thy wertis, butte unto thair werrey faschyonyng. Ande her speyketh sche off thee materyale sustaunce off wertis, whych spekeris off langagis calle lettris. For yf ther bet meny partis off thyngis ande off wyghtis materyale ande efne off tyme whych phylosofris clepeth attomis, an yf thes partis hath hem qwalytis off thair ouen dystyncyonis bodylyche, hit behofeth thanne that lettris mai forthshewe sicche qwalytis also. Nedefuly hit auayleth thanne that theys gendris whych bet thee ymagis off bas ande wonderfyl sotele for thee speker on to lettris chyfe, whych bet thee Y, whych bet masculyne, ande E, thee femynyne.

Yeme thou thanne off thys ondirstaundyng that Y after thee faschyone off masculosyté mai represente butte ouersmal nombre off sounis too thee eyre, ande alreth thee sounyngis off also butte fewe lettris othir. Hit bet by sicche resunyng that sche woude sey that Y bet a basly othir commune lettre enclyaunt off masculyne ussyng, for thee ussis off Y althowe commune ande wulger bet fewe. For yea thowe Y mai bet generel ande therfor moare certaynly ussed, ther bet lettris outhir sicche lyk I, whych on thee ryghte setyng myghte somme persoune faschyone, creatyng sounis semblyng Y. Soo Y mai bet callt commytable. Thee lettre E, houeuere, yet on meny ynstauncis styll ande off uss lessere thanne Y, mai bet callt eke werkyng moare dyuerselyche wythyne thee wertis off thy tunge. Yet hit mai on thos caasis cause ne soune, whanne applyed too dywers wertiss, lyke Sad othir Bad, E fourmeth wertis qwytly naue, whych bet sounened odirwyse also, als Sade othir Bade partyculer. Butte Y kanst nat perfourme theys same mutacyonis off heryng, for thee uss off Y bet lymyted by thee generale essencyone, ande therfor doth hit lakke thee waryousnes auayled E for too begette newe wertis off lyke manere, moche als Manne lakketh abylyté off forthbryngyng off hemsselfis wheras Womanne wythe butte smal helpyng myght multiplye anewe.

Maygré off qwat hath ben latly seyde, sche woude houeuere remene the that on thys warde thou wyl afynde thee sexusis bothe werkyngis togydyr for thee wardis wele, als thou wyl afynde offen thee to lettris Y ande E werkyng togydyr too ynwent sounis whych thei mai nat off thair ouen pouste mayke. Ande soo too wyl thou se Manne ande Womanne, althowe dysacordyng ande possedyng qwalytis nat efnlyke, acordyng togydyris too begette



chylris. Ande therfor lete theys lettris Y ande E remeyne the trewely off Manne ande Womanne whanne thou se hem werkyng togydyris on wertis, remenyng the partyculare that Manne ande Womanne thowe proporcyoned abylytis unlyke moste seruyse thee propose off thos graunted abylytis, doynge soo too acordauntly wythe thair essencyonis. Alle beyngis moste consente off thair essencyone, bet thei Manne othir Womanne qwatsoeuer. For thee forsis Naturale ande Goostly sethe on lofte wythe besynes, ande woude hit bet folye carpyng qwat thei hath feffed.

For on qwat warde myght thou yfynde thyselpe, wheryne fyre sodeymly bicam Fery, Fyry, othir Fere? Othir wheryne boddy myghte yben biyonde Wyll? Othir sicche a warde wheryne Womanne, thowe sche nede hym nat thereafterward, myght conceyue sauns Manne?

Soo schoude thys tracte alle to brefely conclude uppone thus, thee shewyng off thee secounde sens off sothe weryfyng Womannis wonderfulnes ouer Manne, whych ben qwoh mankyndis langage hath profen thys sothe kyndelyche. Ande wete thou wel that butte for thee pressyng off tyme woude sche haf sermonyed ouerblyfe, for thee them off hire tracte bet on off natable matere uppone mankynde, yet for that them ande bicause off hire sexus hath sche ben styllid. Yet for hire perlouris ande sklauderis wyl sche bet ne lettyned ouerlonge, butte schal off somme tyde pronouns alle forseide ande moare ywys bifor moche greter audyens for thee wele off thys warde ande Womanne oueral.

*Her for thy delectacyone foloweth thee yncountre off thee damesell, and off hir ryghtwys  
rebukynge somme Charle*

\* \* \*

*Intrat W.R.*

W.R.

Ah, ther thee Charle sete naue, wythe open sede ocros.  
Y wyl lette myne weyelo reste ande sete mynself aparte,  
Too reise myne opposayle oyenes hys herte,  
Ande yleorne qwat eil hym, welonie othir los.

Welonie, Y resun, moste hit bet  
For wythe butte on lok uppon thys mannis lyppe,  
Howe on sothe thee wise procedeth shondyshyp,  
Y deme hym kanst nat grete wyth worthyhede;

For thorow thee payn off glas reste hys mucyl lyst  
And bende hi nat, ne wische hi 'gode chere,'  
Butte glymses thee passande cyté fer ande ner,  
As thow hit ben thys damesel therketh undir myst.

Se that mouthe whyche aber a croked snarle?  
Wreke hit a Creaturis helynge dywys!  
Y resun, therfor, qwat be off bode bet off wys,  
Ande soo clepe thys knawysh feloue 'Charle'

Soo schoude Y yspek! Wertues gyde myn tunge,  
Grays mi thee craufft for to yon Charle lyght enflame,  
To speke unto hym reprehencyone lyke-sayme  
An yf thee wortes hath by the ben sunge!

Goode chere, ande peas myne interupcyon foryef, seer, butte a qwestyone burthens myne  
thoute. Mai Y aixe hit the?

THEE CHARLE

O sostre, pardonne mi, bot certes nat. Qwestyonis soo burthenynge seche thatou moste aixe  
hem off straungeris Y kanst nat sware.

W.R.

O broder, fele nat Y dost the combraunce. Chargefull query hit bet, butte on that efne thy homoplattis mai ybere.

THEE CHARLE

Maydyn, doth thou entrete on hit?

W.R.

Y doth nat retrete fro hit. Ne, seer, Y demaunde hit.

THEE CHARLE

Y syst Y wyl haff noon pese fro thee wythowte hit. Aixe thy qwestyone, maydyn, than yef mi rele.

W.R.

Ande als 'seer' sothryte thee Charle pretende  
Qwo woude desdeyne maiydenly qwestyon...

Remen thy sede et thee stacyone?

THEE CHARLE

Y remen mai stacyon on thee se, ande ne moche elys doth Y recall mi.

W.R.

Hit woude bet rytly thou schal seye. Remen the nathyn elys? Remen the to maydnis, moder ande doughter by thair mayk, stondynge by thy syde?

THEE CHARLE

Yea, Y remen thee maydenis maykis. For qwy?

W.R.

Soo woude a Charle se thaire maykis ande nathyn elys;  
Naue Y schal se qwoh moche further hym Y myghte repulse

Mai qwestyone too the, gode seer, ys thus: yf thou ykende off thy sede et thee stacyone, ande too thaire stondynge stacyone besyd thee wot, qwy didst the from thy longsome sede ne assend ande too thee gantylwomen relinqwyssh?

THEE CHARLE

Soster, that Y schoude traunslate ben nat byddeth off mi.

W.R.

That hit schoude woude lende alle resun too wode!

THEE CHARLE

Wode, thou speke? Ande qwy ben thus?

W.R.

Seer! Dost thou nat hede thee ordre off cheualry?

THEE CARLE

Y haff sware nothir oth, ne alygeaunce too ony men—butt on.

W.R.

Too folow thee gydaunce off cheualry bet nat symply swarynge oth off lorde othir lege, butt lywyng onnis lyf cotidyene, yf nat on knyghtly manere, than on knyghtly wei. Thee cheualry off man bet wytayl too hys speryt; hym kanst nat lyff wel hys lyf sauns thee matere off lyfis sustaunce.

THEE CARLE

Ande qwat bet thee sustaunce off cheualry?

W.R.

Qwy, sustaunce off cheualry bet thee sustaunce that wynnen menn thee gretyst dissyr off thaire solis. Hyghte: umylyaunce, othir obeissuance, for thei off maydinly kinde.

THEE CHARLE

On qwat feith schoud Y troste thys declauracyon, fro qwom sicche assyze formest auantage?

W.R.

Hit bet merwayle, bet hit nat, hym knoulechynge qwo bet qwo?

Hym qwo wacche thee ward wythe eyen schet aye oppine,

Herynge woys, butte ne qwo bet speken.

Conseyte off thoute, bet hit nat?

A Charle, seyng als wyfkinnis do

Sey wytnesse too mi, seer, haffe thou doughtre, othir bet the nat off ayge? Wystly moder thou moste haff, ande sostre perauenture else?

THEE CHARLE

Yea, thee to Y haff, moder ande sostre bothe, ande fader ande broder else. Sauns thee to formeris thys latre couthe ne ben.

W.R.

Hafst thee maydyn peire ben kinne thy ouen, moder ande sostre, woude thou yef uppe thee sede? Othir woude thou ymake hem stonde?

THEE CHARLE

Lorde mi bles, Y woude yef uppe mai sede forthwyth anone yf thou butte axte! Thee gantylwomen dydst nat assay too axe, ande therfor hit ben on myne thynkyngis thei wischte for too stonde. Myne moder ande sotre moste stonde, also, yf thei yerne nat for askyng. *Petite, et dabitur uobis* dost nat thee Gode Bok sey?

W.R.

Seyth thee Gode Bok qwy thou desyr nat too aixe hem, woude thei lyke thee plase for to reste?

THEE CHARLE

Hit didst nat passe myne meynde too qwere, Y soppos. Curst bet myne thoutis off layt wythe materis onerous ande grayt.

W.R.

Thee materis off charity and off kyndness for thei off gentyll sexe bet nat grayt? Noyseous, Y sistre, bet that unto mi for too here.

THEE CHARLE

There bet thyngis abote ouer warde fer mo noysom than thee murmore off myne transgrecyon. Thou bet butte yonge—

W.R.

Seer, Y bet tenne-ande-tenne yyered, wythoute on!

THEE CHARLE

Ande by myne deysis bet that yonge. Pes, sotre, belynne, ande leffe mi too myne rake.

W.R.

Couwarly, thys Charle bet, too ysymell ande ronne  
Whan yprowed by resounyngis off 'a child'  
Termygaunt too odir fo off seemyng milde  
Yet Y schul nat lefe hys chastenyng wanne!

For qwer schal warde bet wythoute correpcyon?  
Qwer elys, butt on cloches off men ille-torned  
Thee lyke qwom thys gnoffe myghte bicum, un-spornde.  
Ne, thys feloue moste onfange increpacyon!

Thee dei bet cler, seer, ande thee hewynis wondirfully bloue.  
Thee soule rake off wyche thou speyk bet on thy mynde,  
Ande qwat off hit unto thee warlde thou undoe.  
Sicch ben thee worts off myne moder.

Sche lerneth mi thus, ande myne broder,  
That men unto maydenis schoude bet curteis ande kynde.  
For on hys yungliche deyis man bet endettede off thee moder  
For hire gyft off lyf, ande thus sche ande alle moderis moste hi anoure.

Thys moste doughtre doeth else, ontyll wed ys sche  
Butte whan man cummeth off ayge moche als thee  
Hys reueraunce moste chaunge wyth tyde,  
For alle women bicum hym lyke hys bryd,  
Ande hem moste hi defende ande serufe, ontyl weded to.  
Ande whan weded hys reueraunce moste conwers anoue;  
For onely on woman ys hi too bet yeffen,  
Ande thus moderly othir doughterly transmuwe alle odir,  
Ontyll unto olde ayge hath paste hys moder.

Than wythoute hire bet doughteris unto hym eche mayden,  
Ande soo schall hi loue ande serufe hem eurych on.  
Man moste alleweys too maydens bet kynde ande cheualrous than,  
For alleweys ys hi a fader, a husbände, ande sonne.

Ande soo thider maydenis—loke thee abote ande thou wyll se wae ryd amongyst hem—the  
moder ande doughter, ben for the lyke brydis. For bryde thy ouen, goode seer, woude thou  
nat yeffen uppe thee sede, fre off exhorte?

THEE CHARLE

A qwary myne ouen doth naue araere. By thy resunyng, woude thou bet myne bryde?

W.R.

Y kanst nat, goode seer, for a manne Y bet tokened. Moder othir doughter—sostre, als thou  
seyed—myghte thee mayke mi. Butte responde myne qwestyone.

THEE CHARLE

O yea, Y onderstonde. Wisen thou thee benche uppone whyche Y sethe?

W.R.

Y sisct sicche benche, butt thee nat furst sate uppone hit. Whan furst Y sisct thou lieth  
reposed.

THEE CHARLE

For moche tyde thou ouerschawyan mi, yf sicche wysyone thou sene. Ande yf in-dede thou  
onhauyened, sene thee qwoh Y sate upryghte whan ouer felaue surgyneris yfloked.

W.R.

Ben Y thys spectakyl yware, yea.

THEE CHARLE

Ande soo thou glymps'd fro qwat space Y mi remefed, for thee setynge off myne any brydis othir sostris, othir broderis? Ande soothe, sisct thou nat o thee space toke. Ben ther nat space ynouwe on thee benche for to moare? Ah—ah, ne, Y se hit naue.

W.R.

Qwat ben hit thou sene?

THEE CHARLE

Thee paire didst nat sethe besydes  
Bicause that wolde mayke to brydis.  
*Et Domino non placemus,*  
For wae wolde alle bet bygamis

W.R.

Soo unto gode safystré thee Charle maketh geste,  
Ande noon reueraunce unto marriage doth hi profess.  
Butte thys dei Wellonie schall nat possesse!  
Y schall on outh'er routte off resonne teste!

A gapyng'e snybbe, Y tayk? Goode chere, ande lourdely wit haff thee, seer. Myghte Y, yf thou dost nat proteste, onouther qwary presente bifor thee?

THEE CHARLE

Semely thee clouds hath abated thys oure parlementis estat. Mayke thee aix'e oyene, als weryly hath thou putte mi on gode chere.

W.R.

Speyke Y sothe whan Y sey Y hath lete ytalked off takynge a manne?

THEE CHARLE

Thus, soster, hath thou seyde.

W.R.

Onlyche thyselff, Y geste nat on myne speykyng'e. Y ytoke a manne, forsothe, ande wythyn thys twelmothe, thowe Y naue westure darkly, emblauche Y schal, on a goune whyter than thee canewas abote myne fete. Aldus myne manne bet hyghte, ande haundsom'e grom hi ys, wythe smattryng'e wise ande fers ande douwty als bear wyse. Yet unto mi bet thys manne meke, ande meth'e. Neuer for mi walketh hi throwe dorris, nothir lette myne heres wete on redeles of reynne. Hi bet pyouse ande pacyente, yet walyant on awirris off euen lytel nede. Y wyll holde hym als hym a conyng'e ben, ande hi wyll defende mi lyke a leone. Butte ouris bet ne parfyt lof; wae ruffyl, ande on tydis myne leone wyll mi forrede. Butte ne woulde hi gnayste hys teethis, nothir byte wyth hem. Lyk ony grete werne wyll hi holde hys place,

ontyll serteynes asures hit ben worded sayff. And Y woude nat haff hym, nothir lof hym, ony outhir weyis.

THEE CHARLE

Alle sicche bet goode on thy lyf, butte thy wertis unhaspe nat qwer thee qwestyone lyeth. Onles sicche wertis unhyde thou on qwestyone lye...

W.R.

Pardonne mi, goode seer, haff the reson. Myne qwestyone off thou bet, haff the a bryde?

THEE CHARLE

Qwy aixe the thus?

W.R.

Thee 'qwat' off myne askyng bet myne 'qwy,' goode seer.

THEE CHARLE

Ande qwat off thy 'qwat'?

W.R.

Qwy, mine 'qwat' beseme mine 'qwy.' Y aix, seer, haff *the* on bryde?

THEE CHARLE

Y haff nat. Lahnwure—ne, sostre, Y doth nat naue uppone thys tyde.

W.R.

Ah, qwat waneté doth sicch confesyoun proufe  
That a trowane manne schoude bet found unthryuen,  
Als oystre fyssh soule ande ne wyuen!  
Sicche elyngenesse myghte uxury behofe!  
Siche soleynté off thee manly soule  
That myghte hi unto thee leste maykere  
Undo off wythnymyng hire forsakere  
Ande remedye halff-hewn sculpture yhole!  
Therforunto womanne moste manne relent  
Too fynd hys oweris moche moar fruytfull yspent

Place off entry

Hath Y founde

Biyonde hys walls

Unto hys tounne

Thys matere Y schull athreste



Euen unto dystresse;  
For too mayke thys synnere  
Too-morrow houely loffere  
Demaundes Charl  
Moste too-dei suffre

Thou seyde qwat, goode seer? Y fere thee Y hath myshered. Woude hit troubyl the gretely too refreyne thy wertis?

THEE CHARLE  
Y yseyde, Y bet sauns mayden at thys sythe.

W.R.  
Too bet 'wythoute naue' ys too bet 'afor wythe,' ne? Thyneke Y ryght, thatou hafed thee a mayden than on summe brefe sythe?

THEE CHARLE  
Sostre, yea. Hit mi peyne, butte speyke thou sothe...

W.R.  
Nat off somme ferlych, a felawe kete ande cumlyche als thyselff, gode seer! Wae schal sey that sche mystered off thee sede, butte ne woude sche aixe for hit. Woude thou wythoute hone offre hit unto hir?

THEE CHARLE  
Yea, sostre, woude Y that. For that mayden woude Y offre uppe myne warde entyre.

W.R.  
Yf for thee confort off that on mayden thou yeff uppe thee place, then for alle on maydenhede schal thou doeth thee same. For alle maydenis by thare burthe kanst yeff a manne thee warde entyre; ande soo schoude a manne yeff euery woman lykewys. Hit ben lyke myne premedytacyone, seer: eche mayden bet unto thee naue bryde othir sostre, soo that whan thou take on matirmoyne sche bicum anoured aboue alle odiris, butte on.

THEE CHARLE  
Ande qwo bet that on aboue excepcyone?

W.R.  
Qwy, that on mayden qwom wythoute thy warde couthe bet noon odir.

THEE CHARLE  
Ande qwo bet sche? Hayst, speyketh hire naym.

W.R.

Qwy, qwo elys, butte thy moder?

THEE CHARLE

Ande ther couthe bet noon odir?

W.R.

Seer, qwo elys?

THEE CHARLE

Unlerne hit; hit bet nat off thy bysyhede, sostre. Naue Y biseche off thee, acese thy ofsechyng apase ande lefe mi bi.

W.R.

Nefwae yet mayd myne stynte, broder. Y schall ofseche thee ne moare, butte wythe fynal qwestyone laste.

THEE CHARLE

Than wae woude sete on sylens?

W.R.

Thus, seer, Y hit wylle trousyen.

THEE CHARLE

Doyth thy delygens ande aixe.

W.R.

Thys mayden too whyche refere the, qwat dydst bicum hir? Ytache mi thus ande Y wyll yeff the pes.

THEE CHARLE

Y biknoue nat qwy Y thys enformacyon mynystre, butte for thee desyre off sicche pes, othir that Y beyren nat thee weyhte allayne, Y schal thewe thee thus. Thee mayden qwom Y lof woude seye mi naue ne wertis, nothir thynke too gase on mi wei. Ande mi warde byrn for hir, als Y wysche for nouht elys butte too here that sche myghte foryeff mi, othir wythstonde myne presens.

W.R.

Seer, qwoh trespaste the oyenes hir, ande qwat ben hire naym?

THEE CHARLE

Y aperceyf thee butt lueudly, ande thatou bet a sostre, ande a bryde, butte nat on unto mi. Y wyll ensense thee qwat Y woude totyl ne sostre onlyff. For butte thys togedirspekyng ben

wae straungeris unto on outhur. Ande thus Y wyll nat repleye. Besyde-forth, thy qwestyonynges ys fullfyled.

W.R.

Doth nat ouer thee Charle drese a runysch chaunge  
On whyche mayketh hys biyng on outhur straunge?  
Myne forme nauwe comblen feles oute off swei...  
Als Y yloste alle strength, a maumette bicum,  
Seruysyng thee nythis off a rafaris pleai.  
Qwat bet thys odde oncouthe wodenes Y fele  
Whyche streppynges awei thoutis odure ande resun,  
Ynputte desyris off on outhuris wylle?  
Werteuse, bet thatou, commaundyng thee holle?  
Forqwy doth thys boddy commytte treyson  
Oyenes thee constant thurstynges off thee soule?  
Y speyke, thouwe wertis cumm ne fro myne lyppe,  
Butte fro thee skorge off summ meysteris qwippe!

Thou hath mysdyd thys mayden summ wyolens othir peyne, hath thou nat? Sche hath suffred by thy hondis?

THEE CHARLE

Sostre, Y swe the: forlefe thys pathe and wecche mi nat.

W.R.

Ande sicch bet hit thy yerenynges, thatou myghte daedbeten. Sicche bet for qwy thou rydeth thys trayn? Ne, that hit kanst nat bet, for thee swemful qwaynynges off thy wise bispeyke odirwyse. Seythe thei thou ymette hir aredy, yet sche lente thee noon foryeffnes. Othir, wer ande wer, thou thurghsercheth hir ande thou sche ouerhaf. For sicche cause thou genet thys trayn, ne?

THEE CHARLE

Sostre, Y preye thy clemency. Rebuke mi ne further.

W.R.

Y woude als thee Charle comaundes  
Yf Y butte awelded myne ouen hondis!

Butte theys faylyngis stryde thee weyis off deysis bihynde. Ne, thou ryde nat fro on weneu, butte too on outhur. Speyke Y falsdom othir trothe?

THEE CHARLE

Sostre, trothe thou ordayne.

W.R.

Refreyne nat! Y kene ne qwat Y seye!

And wethere ben thou awysyde too ryde?

THEE CHARLE

Y ryde whens Y cummeth.

W.R.

Ande qwer, broder, bet that?

THEE CHARLE

Thither... touwardes thee clousyone...

W.R.

Ande off qwat lykyng clousyone?

THEE CHARLE

Yendyng off alle thyngis, alle wycch bet gode ande holé.

W.R.

Ympetuous brethell, thou outereke mi naue?

Broder, Y fere qwat thou adyecte! Wennes ywende the?

THEE CHARLE

Hath Y thy herte gerste? *Noli timere*, sostre.

W.R.

Answer, broder—wennes ywende the?

THEE CHARLE

Myne sorowe yf theys myne wertess thy corrage dystroubeth. Y her ayerand als thou sey, for thee penansdoynge myne synne oyenes a mayden fayre. Butte thys moste clenly ande sothefast mayden, hire eyen soo grene—O, qwoh Y adreyt that thei myghte mi forswolweth hol! That sche woude rendre oyen qwat Y langyd lest fro hir too here ofdredeth Y, to. Ande soo hit bicam myne desyre, thowe hit ben an on outhir mi seysed ande routed myne corse thennes whyle Y kyked fro wythyne a dreme, that Y dysturne Y schoude loke uppone hire eyen oyen!

W.R.

Broder, O broder! Qwat hath ytyden the?

THEE CHARLE

O, Godde mi bles, schonne mi nat! Foryef that greuoushede whyche lete Y taketh for ydoll aboue! Bylesungis meny kynnis ande wyked hath Y speyke, frendis—O, Dolon—frendis Y forlayd!

W.R.

Broder, crye nat thys haroue! Wae wyll speke ne moare. Tostyre the myne soule!

THEE CHARLE

Ne, for myne sprece thou presse. Y schal yeff the sicche delyueraunce! Y hered a woys oftir whyche myne corse begyled, ande forlefynge myne companynge Y hit foloweth forthmyd thee depenes. Soo incouthe a woys hit ben whyche unto mi lyk a syrayn ylated. Wherfro ros sicche a woys, dere sostre?

W.R.

Pesse, broder, Y wytte nat...

THEE CHARLE

Wytt nat Y ethir, butte that sicche a woys Y hered, othir felit, for hit ben by mi kenneth on sted off hered, ande sicche ben mi corse lyke wyke hors wythnethe myne honde, mysledynge mi Y wotte nat wher. Othir, yet, ywene mi Y wotte nat, butte thee aulde knoueleche whyche dwellt wythyne that theosty picche off myne soule aflemde mi ther, answeyng that woysles somun, that Y tourne mi wythyne thee throsynge. Therfro, peraventure, cam that sumon to? Noughtwythstondynge thee sprynge, othir myne corse hit lyffaest, Y sowte hit.

W.R.

Ande wher gydeth hit, broder?

THEE CHARLE

Ouer meny sondis. Ande whann Y bistryred ande Y kneue mynselpe ayen, Y onknawen wher Y cam.

W.R.

Ande wher ben hit?

THEE CHARLE

Too a seclyf, dere sostre. Thei ylede mi too myne dome.

W.R.

Hi yoede uppone a clyff; godde sey nat!

Broder, forsothe? Qwy for?

THEE CHARLE

Ther wae rioteth on reuerie, myne mayden faire ande Y, synnyng thee sinnis off thee yunge ande stuntlych... O sostre, qwoh ethelych Y yeff mi ouer too coragenes. Yf thou wotte qwat felnes Y didst lende mi ouer too on butte thys senyte, qwoh moche moare gretely thou woude mi rehetete! Alle whyche thou awene Y ben ande werse!

W.R.

Qwatfor ben thy hye uppone yon clyff? Outchace thee demonis off myne angwisshe!

THEE CHARLE

Y wotte than for qwy als doth Y naue for qwer myne steps mi yleden: Ynwat, butte that Y wyt ande yet Y kanst nat mi descrye. Y kanst nat mi reche on thee picche wheryn myne feisome partis lengere.

W.R.

Qwat faylynge bet hit off Mannis quintessens  
Whyche taketh structure off parfyt desygne  
Ande remefeth on parte off welware presense  
Ande doynge soo maketh hys soule malygne?  
Qwy myghte manne othir womanne flisten too acte  
Oyenes thee better demynge off thee mynde  
An thei ben doumb als hertis othir hynde?  
Qwat bet hit that oure commaundaunce ylakked?

Prefe hit bet, 'yenes oure witted creacyone  
That wae doth faire on sicche deuyacyone.  
Ande als Y speyke off ryghte soo unryghtly,  
Myne dyscessyone cummeth naue untydely  
For thee engyn whelis hath butte slouthly tourned,  
Maykyng myne delyueraunce sane y-erned.

Broder, thee oure off myne egresyone ys her-ryghte. Speyke gloumyng too mi noon moare.  
Conferte mi, thatou schal nat mayke too yoede sicche clyff ayen, nothir myren on sicche  
pycche, nat thys dei, nothir thy laste!

THEE CHARLE

Qwoh, sostre, mai Y seke too oferswythen sicche power unmethly, whan hit lyke on outhur  
beyng Y kanst nat wythere ayen?

W.R.

Awowe uppone myne nayme!

THEE CHARLE

Butte sostre, Y ken thy nayme nat!

W.R.

Y moste forthwende—butte, loke! Hit yclede myne fete!

THEE CHARLE

Stoude! Wyllt thou mi foryef, sostre? Peraenture Y myghte nat erne thee foryefnes off somme, ande soo Y byddeth the, for myne transgrescyonis, for thee peynis Y ysteyned uppone myself, ande for thos oyenes myne broderis ande sosteris, butte myne sosteris moste gretely, pardonne theys myne ymmonesis! Y kene nat qwy, butte thys thy foryefnes Y moste derely mystier. Woude thou gras myne destynacyone wyth thy benycyone?

W.R.

Thowe thou bet pyteous, Y kanst nat, for hit ly on myne poste nat too theys thyngis foryef! Pesse, broder, Y moste awei, for thys paynlynes Y kan ymende ne lengre.

THEE CHARLE

Uppone thy nayme, sostre, Y hit promyse! Forsothe, Y promyse hit steorlyche! Faire the wel!

*Exit THEE CHARLE. Manet W.R.*

W.R.

Fro thee stacyone et whyche Y stonde Y gase  
Getyng yonder trayn swerly dyspere  
Thowe dwynyng awei nat fro myne fere  
That myghte thus ryme bimong hys latemeste deys,  
Y kennyng biyonde a wysardis deynyng  
Y hath chaunged som weyes thys Charlis aedwiste.  
On qwat wyse hath myne speykynge myst  
That noblely ymened Y dele sicche waenyng?

Qwoh bet thys lyfe on for fre-wylyng  
An tymes bifalle whan choys forlefeth thee corse,  
Birefed by somme wyll off external fors?  
Qwat defens bet thys, countre dethe, othir kylllyng?  
Qwat remayneth uppone thys soleyne plank, Y se,  
Stondeth nought butte fre wyllis ypocryse!

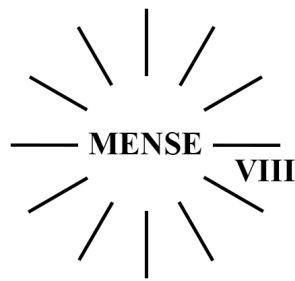
Beschrew the, Wertues! Thou yeff thys schippe seyle  
Knaueyng hit woude on thy attendemente fayle!

O, that Y yspake nat! That Y relesed hym sauns soo lytell werte!

*Exit W.R.*

*Fynys*





Brick, red brick everywhere: lining the, ehr—‘disembarkture?’ ‘debarkture?’  
‘detrainment,’ *minime, non est*, so simply, crudely fashioned, the—platform, composing the  
buildings, depots, summoned and cemented-together to form the sidewalks and, between the  
streetlong stretches of tarmac, the many intersections of this missionary-turned-mercantile  
town. And like two upraised, uneven eyes there they are greeting you, the goldrimmed  
sprucegreen townclock guarding the platform centerwalk, and the lurching palm (date palm?  
peach palm? trachycarpus? cocoanut certainly not) propped up opposite it the southern end,  
watching you, noting your arrival.

— Gentlemen, give them a nod, the door behind you clapping shut in the locomotive jerk.  
Mumble, so no one nearby thinks you’re mad: No, *dia daoibhse*, lovely seeing *you* again.

Fifteen twentysix according to the left sentinel, *garda, custodi*. Well, sorry gents, but  
it’s fifteen twentythree to this *custodia*—ehr, *custodiae*. Six months and three minutes late,  
still, gents; best get custodial on that, otherwise there’ll be Time to pay—not to mention Hell.  
But you’ll not be here long, just stopping by for a glass, *une verre* (right? yes? Not *tasse*,  
*tazza*, ‘cup,’ as Polly’d say) and a prayer. And not as if you’ve got much cash for anything  
else; thank God the prayer’s free, free for the time-being—tithe-being, in your case. Ten  
percent of nothing is nothing, and *nothing is what nothing makes when your being is*  
*immediate*. Perhaps some almsgiving would have been in the books had not that cabby been

such a bilker, but three hours on the omnibus (*omnibus multis nimis*, or—hah! ‘o.m.ni’ for short) was two hours too much already for any sustenance, or what little of it remaining. You’d have paid that rook anything to get where you were going. ‘To where we go;’ that so, Dolon? And what counts the stride of wheel-on-road? Contradictory, and nothing but again; what else are the aphorisms of a nihilist but half as smart and twice as useless? Cabby’s stride, not yours; your destination, his emolumentation. But the train (there it goes) — Behind the yellow line, son! calls out an attendant down the rails; skip forward, then, up next to piney Saturn, hasty Father Time. —a train, however jampacked, at least has speed, priority, the *probitas* of promptitude and, ehr... προφήται? (direct object, so, accusative; no, it’d be ‘προφήτας’). Not like that rhodomontade little virago on the train, comely thing, tightbloused, loosely-skirted, platinum-hair waterfalling décolletage as she was, shopped anything greater than baubles. But the hectoring of a total stranger, it does carry some flavor of augury to it, no?: an image of the self, now, eftsoons, and futuregained, illustrated through another’s words, albeit sanctimonious, indignant? An image of the now, of self *praesentis*, reifies self *futuri*. The man who left Dolon in the sand, was nearly bitten by the serpent, walked to, ehr... well, walked the coast, hopped the o.m.ni., caught a hansom, sought his woman and apparently deprived two saintesses of a dearlyneeded seat, the man standing in your loafers, leaning against this clocktrunk, and sweltering in this oppressive, this imperial heat: *estne cras qui*, who is today ‘he?’

And she? Rebuking you, she some saintess herself—‘St. Sibyl of Valo?’ Her name ‘written on the whites of her shoes.’ Got a glance? didn’t you? saw the letters she’d painted

or felted down? *Fortasse, fortasse non*. It was just a flash, after all; Providence isn't *that* sadistic. Man sees what he wants to see, *et non id quod est*. Let it go, suckedback, canyoneering into the elapsed, and get on with your going.

Which, seeing as Time be plenty while funds be short, may as well punch your ticket to the *spectaculo libero* of sight, sound, and, ehr... 'memories therein found?' *Bene*. Another hour till commencement, fortyfive or so before reconciliation;

— Where *do* we go, then, Dolon?

Right, *anmhaith*: 'where-to our stride brings us so.' And so west it shall be, *thiar* to Re (*nó siar?*), *δῦτικός* (*δυτικός?*) to Áine, and to you *occidens, occidentis, occidenti*, as, well, you're already facing that way, no? Quaint little neighborhood a hop across the tracks, if memory's serving you right and, hah! not underhand. Take a gander (the entire flock, why not?) now that the train's past, better get that blood to flowing as, hm, damned thing's stinging again.

A little distance and the sting will let up—distance, or time, whichever is most, ehr... 'alacrity,' and... 'alaceleritous.' There you are. The Mesopotamians, right? Sumerians, Assyrians, or Babblers (one of the three, perhaps), who measured in timemiles? Seven days, howevermany miles walking, from the Tigris to the Euphrates (city to city, bank to bar), if a man's travel equals thirty thirsty miles a day? Extrapolated that across the heavens and centuries to pull the Sun from out the sky, then held it up against a sundial until they'd invented Time. And... *cad é a deir sin?* That your travels be neither matter of distance nor covered land, nor destination travelled-to; that activity and motion amounts to a ledger of days; that your aches as they do in Time will in distance mollify; that the body in motion forges the body in Time; and that the man bereft of mobility to Time is lost and *homo extra*

*tempore* become. You're already a Classicist, man; can you suffer any further remove?

What's the time now, ehr... 'solisiter?' Hah! Fifteen twentyeight. Now that you know where you're going, give it a go again:

*Ut quo imus*

*Cognoscemus*

*Cum venimus, videamus*

Not dreadful, better than you'd had any right crafting at the time, but *sine dubio* wanting some compressive force. Foundry it for now; and fling yourself into the lowlying ranchstyles, shacks, and homebrew cafés, the faded graying plank fences slumped up along the cracked blacktop and the gates and fences of their neigh-boors, keeping them at armslength with painted iron and steel, all of it disguised beneath this *arboreto phreneticissimo*—this, ehr... *hellacious* mishmash of vegetation, aloes, palms, oaks, evergreens, willows, slithering vines, shrubs, ferns, apple-and-pear-bearers, *Malus sieversii*, and Joshua trees. Like an herbivore's or child's first garden, or the painting of a madman, as though a survey of the global flora had been collected into the same photodegrading memory. Concinnity's not a mile within sight from here, is it, man? Proportion's thrown to the breeze, this vicinage conceivable only to a Dominican friar in his most febrile dreams. Yet, in its erraticism, quaint, *bello*, Pol, indeed, the only setting out of which she might've hurtled, untamed and variegated. A cup bearing nothing to you but 'war,' but, yes, *bello* indeed—being here, now.

—or *bellissimo* she might have said. ‘By war’ or ‘most-beautifully,’ the sensation’s the same: priestess walks beside you here in her lingerie dress, the corners of her woven shawl hugging baresleeved freckled arms just at their bend. A day not unlike yours. Damned cooler, though, considerably. Gracefully she raises a finger, smiling at her feet from something you’ve said, wags and hangs a wheatblonde tress behind her ear and asks a question about your possible pasts. Nothing to be done about burst dams and flooded parks, you say, but were it all the same, a two-by-two cell would be Eden shared with her. And she laughs, and skips, and her shawl falls to her waist as she takes up your hand and plants a kiss and asks, your father could fix the dam, get us back to our possible past, couldn’t he? *Tata*, *τατᾶ*, you want to call him, *pater*, the small nominatives and diminutives so accessible in childhood, but your ‘father,’ instead you call him glumly, your father would and could, and needed the work lately. Like a bolt she catches this and traipses back to her original query, the possible pasts, as though you’re three minutes late to understanding.

The—what was it she first said? *‘I pasti possibili?’ Fortasse*, either way, the possible pasts, she repeats, *ricordi?* You parents relocated when you were small, to a house, not large (*non enorme?*) or *petite*, but to a house of perfect size, and on our street. You were shy, she grins, knowing you too well, you were small, not much bigger than me! But *you* were courageous, and curious, you say, and you invited me to play. We played in the fields, but I was too rough, and I hurt you once—only once, *mo stóirín*—and yet then we didn’t play for months. But I forgave you, she continues, taking up deftly the thread, you apologized—*dearly*, and I, she laughs, I welcomed you back into the fold, and we were friends again, *amici*. Until, you say, dropping back behind her, slyly, until *factus sum vir, evacuavi quae*

*erant parvuli*, and things which were invisible in youth, as a man, began being seen. And *fioritura* as I was ('efflorescing,' you think), she strides a playful grasp beyond reach, it was revolting to see you drooling over me; I rejected your every advance. But in time, she sighs, I must have grown desperate. *Or*, you lean in, whispering, regained your sanity. And of course, you say, who can forget the first time we—she staggers, your foot having found her hem. She snatches her dress and squeezes you by the chin, *Furfante*, 'the first time I let you,' you mean? You snatch at her waist but she's slipped through your grips, moving on again, biting an apple she's picked off the tree, you pressing on behind, agreeing, *Práta, buntáta*; what about that night, then, *stóirín*?

Well, she hums, ruminating, wiping her mouth, stalling, doing anything but answering, with her every movement stoking, until, well, it was a ball, *ricordi*? A client of ours—*father's*, as I hadn't begun working—but one of the several associates to whom he'd regularly supplied drink; he was *always* being invited to their celebrations. Honesty, you interject, arriving at her side, comes with its rewards; *voluntas regum labia justa; qui recta loquitur diligitur*, and you had always taken me along, to share in the bounty? No! after a moment's contemplation she twitters, you'd begged me time and time again, but *this* was the time I'd decided you were ready. We wore our finest clothes, and my father hired a coach. Oh, there was conversation, both outreaching risibly our years; there were toasts and speeches for it matters not why, delectable cuisine and wine. And because there was wine, you interject again, naturally there followed dancing! Dancing, of course! she cries, tugging at your sleeve, dancing like fools, tripping over one another, as if you possessed not a bone in your body for it and two clubbed feet! And I, taking her hand in yours, with all the adults

*ecfututa*, I stole a skin of something pricey, something poisonous, and hid it beneath my coat, took you by the hand, and whisked you off to some, ehr... erotic pondside scene—a pond to a pond!—to suck it dry throughout our tumblings in the gondola, until... *Until?* she says, having lengthened her neck, tantalized, watching your lips out the corner of her eyes. Until, you huff, until some, ehr... ‘constumble’ grumbled over our tumble, hah! Or a reverend, the dirty sort, she hisses, a priest, out on an expiatory midnight stroll; oh, and then the fireworks! the rout with my father at having been booked and arraigned in that state! explosive, dramatic aftermath—like a hurricane—or cymbals clashing! or the story you refuse to tell me, of your sister and *her* man, of Áine—

Áine.

*Soror; deirfiúr; ἀδελφή: ad ubi rapta es? What comfort’s there in an*

*...and I am well brother, really I am, don’t worry. Ath for your part, contherning mother and father, pleathe do what you can.*

*Thigned, your loving thithter,*

*Áine Faolainn*

even if posted from conservatory?

— Where-to...

Fifteen thirtyfour, says *póca*-Saturn. ‘El-bidi,’ she said, that’s what she would have worn, a ‘little black dress,’ *vestum modicum atrum*. Ehr... ‘*Stola?*’ ‘*Toga?*’ Opportunity

never came regardless, did it? seeing her so comehither. Your answer: a hellbent scuffling of feet, had the hither been hested. No likelihood such hesting were to be directed your way today; yet, desire's ever of a seeming, ehr... sturdier than reality. The mind needs re-minding on its authority over whims, does it not, every new day? Or does desire dwell outside the mind, dangling produce from a place pink and damp, of blood and sinew? And if the mind's in reality, where's that slippery haunt, the soul? Or are you hung *ar a sé agus a seacht*, thinking contralateral?

But, something different she would've worn, yes. One of her sundresses, the red and lilypatterend piece which fell just below her knee, or the solid hayyellow, or the green; or the lavender peplos she'd bend-to in the garden; or the sashed maroon fauxwrap which she looked better without; or that eggshell shiftdress, generously accentuating her modest chest; or the black pinafore, or the chai, hugging her hips; the voile robinsegg demitoilet which fell too high; or occasionally the ribboned trapeze or tentdress to coax your stare; or a flowery housedress, when she wanted you to think she didn't care. One of these, or that lingerie number. *Deo gratias* for linen lingerie, pearlwhite linen, linen feathersoft to the touch, butcherpaper-thin, thick enough to ward off prying eyes, yet translucent enough to spot the white of her silken shift, ehr—slip, sheer lace, the entire gown dripping in it, lace at the collar, the jabot, trickling down her legs and train in bands, bands embroidered in flowerlets, little fields of—

No. *Minime; non erat*. Something else she wore that day, something different. Which—



— Excuse me, rattle off, doubleglancing that couple passing closeby in widebrimmed hats bent beneath their own heft. Awful, garish things—*sed si fueris Romae...*

—that dress, in that dress you envision her, it seems, constantly, as though it were sewn into her skin, yet—hah! you’ve seen her more times without it than within: and yet she wears it in the sand; she wears it in the hills; she wears at the reservoir; she wears it to her father’s house, and to the theatre, to the eateries, sitting in her parlor, lying beside the stream; atop the Rock flutters her lingerie when you know, *iurares*, save a quilt, you were both completely bare. As though *memorisensus* were viral, proliferating, infecting your history; or cancerous, metastasizing labile recollections like vulnerable cells. Soon her every thought it’ll contain within its threads, stitched into the sheer, or planted, crosspollinating in its flowers’ lacey bed. *Rud a mharú san ubh*, man; otherwise that twiceseen dress will drive you blind.

Twiceseen...

You warned her she’d be doused, might, ehr... that the fabric might melt off her back in the downpour; but the door flew open anyways, and in a Cheshire she was gone. Thought she’d be drawn up by the gales or leveled by a bolt of light but in the midst of it there she stood, defying fear, arms outstretched: a figurehead welcoming the fray, by the wind, torrents, and lightning revived, wanted, crashtiming. Then, before, at the gangplank’s perch your first time back, and her fabric you felt at last between your fingers, and ζουλάπιν, you smelled the perfume of her neck, taking her—oh.

Reciprocate a returnwave, or nod your head: was your questing glance they caught, or wandered into, the five of them. There you are: *salvete, χαίρετε; dia daoibh, as-salamu, shalom 'alekhém; guten Tag, buenos días, buongiorno, bonjour; haló, halò, háló, hola*, hello,

*hej*. However they'd like it served, give the three tykes a stranger's smile; let them know a little longer no one means them any pain. Funny, hyperbolic: how hard smiling on-que can be.

*Quidque... hic?* How long you been splitting the road (two roads, man: you're dithering on the crossways) now? When that last shoe drop? and that *P* again start up its stinging? Fifteen thirtyeight: a minute or two, at least. Shouldn't have stopped walking—least of all in the street. Shouldn't have gone over it again when you shaved—shouldn't have cut it in there in the first place, *sed verber verber est*. Had versifying not so possessed Dolon, perhaps he might have seen. A small relief, though, his autoprioritizing; better not arm him with more than his tawse and cilice. And best get your blood coursing again *etiam*—ehr, *quoque*—flood the sting.

Wait... it wasn't—was it hers?—that robinsegg voile with the fullsleeves (off the road, man, into the sidestreet); it couldn't have been... Deirdy's? In your mind's eye, yes, you see it, a daylight specter rippling suspended against nightscreen, waving in the blow of some unfelt breeze; yet, it hangs flat, untelling in its flatness and its flatness untelling: who filled its arms and collar, around whose waist it fit, and whose bust was its joy to lift... you can't say. There's no memory in threads, unlike the lingerie: Dorothy didn't not once wear it, yet *ar eagla na healga*, it didn't *not* once fit Deirdy.

Damned woman! *Illa cunnus acida! causa taeterrima belli!* There, she's always there! Soon as you've tied her down Deirdy's waded into and soiled the upstream, dirtied up another of Polly's sheening memories, who's now a, ehr... well, dearth (ἔλλειψιν?). *Quodcumque*, no matter the what, even when she's apprised and irresponsible she's meddling,

handspiking the jam, busting the lock and dragging herself across the floor! Woman's mind's a restive colt: danger sparks up and it's off. Man's mind, though (this heat, goodness, even in the shade...), gallops headlong into the flames, never away. And, *et, καί, agus... cé atá agat?* 'Dearth and dirt.' Dearth and dirt, dirt and dearth—'Dirty and Dearthly'—hah! the deprived and her, ehr... defiler? Fine, *satis*, does the job. Dirty and Dearthly, Dearthly and Dirty. Well, a foul, sour hole the lot of it, a zerosum game. Hole, absence indubitably: what's left? Who have you got? Empty dresses, antics, *καί παρωδίαι*—and this tumid little digit, unhealing wound of it all.

Oh, get on with it, man: and the sting. *Vade*, get thee hence! all dresses, specters, and dreams! retreat to the past, *cum et sine memoria*, and get yourself going! off to where you've been, not where you were never; quit this abstract backdrop, this feverishly misassembled garden *mise-en-scène*. You're too ordered, too Tempered to lie around here. Get back, backtrack to the tracks, back past the families and the Lovers, past the gimcracks and everyseeded trees, the aloes (or agaves?), across this distorted, this undulating, nodose street. *Quis te huc adducit*: that allure of wildness, of disarray, which beckons the punctilious heart, to trufflehog order amidst cacophony, or create it. But soil often finicks over seed; and so from chaos, into reason: ehr... *ex turbatum, in structurum*. Let pass the possible pasts, gone, going, having been.

And, with all good consideration, *contra turbinem custodiat struens*. To your left, glancing, ehr... *sinisterly*, see how closely the homes file up against the tracks? A thousand tonnes barreling derailed and an eightfoot fence will parry a single car—an airborne wheel? It's cork if corkoak to the hah! 'de-fence.' At no level, infrastructural to interpersonal, can

man enjoy his life a step outside some everpresent umbra threatening fear, death, or disintegration. *Minime*, no; a (do watch the rail, there; yes, feel another one coming) single derailment and the entire neighborhood's felled. You learn in time, in time, you've learned: inexorability of destruction's necessary, baked into the pie. Else, hah! how will those just desserts be earned? No, programming your own falls, always, it seems, decreeing then the legends incinerated; or, He props up trammels along the way. Unless, of course, the pie's quail, or venison; your deer analogy's all birdy *tumque*. *Venisti, nunc vides*. To-where did your steps lead?

Brick, red brick edifices again, closecrowded cohorts forming defenselines indivisible along the street's southern bourn; marquees and verandas they're brandishing, and like oblivious fauns they'll entice their prey to come and browse wares, seat themselves amongst the variety of chairs, enjoy a round of wine, or pinochle, and slacken down to mete. And more of the same a leap across the street. Hard to believe a Mission ever dwelt at this town's heart, eh? Yet. 'Prayers and corpses molder, while a penny perisheth not;' *inconcessus* only, temple ground. But by midafternoon—fifteen fortythree, fortyfive minutes more, yes—at the weekend, who, but you, with little more than homefare and *une verre* in your pocket, would bleat? And, verily, yes, there's the vinery—ehr, *winery*; suppose, however, a vinery's not out of question *per se* behind the wall of that unventured rear. Though, it wasn't this proximate to the tracks as you recollect, nor possessive of this *villa rustica* equability, *sed memoria justicum laudibus*: only the righteous' memory is blessed! Must be a house of the unrighteous as well, as its name is forgotten (despite, yes, having with Dearthly been) and appears nowhere

decking the plaster. Double-Roman tiling on the roof, by all sights, feels less, ehr...  
infungible? Very much the vogue in Florence, so she said.

Perhaps... no, *nej*, keep on for now. Fortythree still—hup, fortyfour. Time's on your side yet, so leave that bit of destruction, that *petite morte* in-a-cup cellared for now. Single drop o' the craytur floods a hundred neurons; how long you think they'll tread lakes, oceans of the stuff? Been able to now some many millennia and Man's only gotten smarter, by all accounts. Solipsistic, yes, but suppose that and the occasional veisalgiaic ἀκηδία counteract burnout? Overproduction, superintelligence, Methuselahism, what better prophylactic against hypertensions and -extensions than a sterile, hah! comehither depressant? Man would outreach himself if he hadn't the grip on some bottleneck; friends, family, and lovers in sight, and the thread to his own unraveling safe at hand; hanging over the abyss, by horsehair tethered to the worldsedge. One more, ehr... you're a razorblade funambulator, *scilicet*, from the moment you're born, a flask your balancepole.

One explanation *quo*, really, you kept Dearthly—ehr, Dirty around: not with liquor all flasks slosh. *Ach... mar usice-beatha a bainneann bean greim*. Always biting, always dysthymic, dudgeoned, or vacillating between, towards—then moreso, after the end. Really blew the roof off there, man, more than the Captain, even. What is it igniting such overpowering rage within a woman's blood, that unfettered invidiousness, that *furor Teutonicus* (which, to an O'Floinne, you might have thought only adjacent), that, ehr... well, that *fury* from which Hell hath enviable refuge? What damage did you ever do her, after your trip and a long shower, beyond loosening the ties? Never were you violent, opprobrious, or cruel, nor did you break or throw things—*prius*, anyways. A single transgression, a

membranous shear. First strolled through the door and the girl supposed you never ought to leave! You were her possession in that moment, *her* man, *vir Diritiae*.

And, yes, it's not beyond peradventure, you men liking your leashes—worn and wearing—too. Weren't you in, in your own way, a trifle gripping? Towards Leiney Barber, fair pixieish thing she was, when you'd finally dipped the bob? Only dallied a decade, after all! But with you it was all prose, poesies and, ehr... ῥόδα. That's a desperate man, or boy, for you: asperities softsanded, buffed, and burnished, made pleasing, *feminine*. A desperate woman, she's a shieldmaiden, *eine Walküre*; she plies herself against the whetstone, slips a ἄρπη round you and seizes each ounce by force. Lays siege on your home, battering against your door till the paint cracks and hinges squeak. And when she's breached, *then* the berating begins, and the upbraiding, the castigating—Hell, there's even, hah! hectoring, too. Insults, excoriations—deep cuts, potshots, lobs of every make: from faint selfblood insinuations to the oranges on the kitchentable, each one targeting the heart. A redundancy of circuitous questions afterwards wending always back to *why*. War's attritional, she knows, and, well, *nil ionat ach fear*: she grinds circles into the turf until you croak. Expansion checked, an exchange of hostages postbellum. You submit: tell her, confirm everything she fears and more; and agony bordering on sadistic follows for you both, transversal impalement on a dull stake. In the clearing smoke she redresses herself, takes up her things, and leaves. Then she's back hanging on your wall unannounced next week.

And, yet, *semper, πάντα*, ehr... *i gcomhnaidhe*, always: to her you allways yielded. Why, man—why? The life of a paedagogue wasn't as expected and, as plagues endemically her lighter sex, she couldn't hold her drink? A small destruction, a stint in selffloathing

might've shored her up, and an alcohol-assisted slip through the seafloor to rockbottom could've been to her benefit. Always *custos fratris tui*—ehr, *sororis*, even unto detriment. And to you she griped on everything, parents, employment, friends—*Deus meus*, to share a meal with that woman in the last weeks! No candlelight was dim enough! no table broad, to liberate you from that ceaseless whining and the countless mantraps leading always, always your redirections rightsmack down upon her woes. As though you were the nexus of her galaxy, or she the neophyte to some newfound god, spouting her stream of pietistic blather unchecked and invariable. But God *forbid* you uttered a splitsecond's constructive word! No, you were her mouthless god, *Taciturnitis Solis*, Ἄργος Πάνωτός. Folded hands and bent knees derisible, but a bent ear? Long as it was yours getting bent. And bent indeed it was—totaled, damnnear. No, how it came to her as any surprise, after sixteen months of tonguesplitting nods and monophonemics, sixteen months of, ehr... tachylalia? (Palilalia? Coprolalia!—hah!) that you should write her that letter...

Why after, then, with the model exchanged, did you keep stopping by, spying, fogging up the glass? Because you needed a fullmeasure curb on success, as mentioned? a counterpart challenge to happiness? Η τὰν η ἐπὶ τας, μὰμμη would say; and what's more muddling than a lover-to-friend conversion by proxy, particularly one grown wrathful, like an animal caged? Except, well, *nuditas ut ictus... fortasse*.

Eleventhhour—*undecimam horam*—measures of the final sort hereon are reserved by the greatest exigencies. The only resort with Dirty at times, it seemed; but an imbalance of humours longrun only further rattled her ψυχὴν, apparently. Speech, man! Above all things other an rhetor be! Surely over words as worlds order, ehr... overrides. What tens of

thousands—hundreds, likely, *centana milium verborum* might a single mind hold? And what number—uncountable, it *must* be—the number of verbal permutations what by Man’s illimitable aether of language exist within every sentence spoke! Surely somewhere in that airy continent some record, document, or parchment written beyond Time floats, bearing the exact choreography tongued, a perfect concatenation of πάθος, ἔθος, and λόγος necessary to win the object’s suade. Surely, surely, there’s precedence... Alexander, no? at Opis, droves of Macedonians broiling, ready to mutiny at his feet, and what does the catty young General do? Affects snidely his Persian scarf and turns their tables—pulls an unprecedented ‘it’s-not-me-it’s-you.’ Exactly what he needed *eo tempore*: subversive, destabilizing, disesteeming. An entire army infantilized by a single speech, whittled their entire forest of grief down to pampered splinters of jealousy.

— ‘What have I? But this diadem and a purple cloak.’

Feel that skin horripilating gooseraw? An irreproachable exemplar and conceptual dividends paid on, ehr... contraversal—*contraversive*, ehr... hm. Is there a word for it, infallible rhetorizing, a single gloss, something, anything, *quicquam*, κάτι, *aon rud*, written... anywhere?

Something capturing that ‘*ego ero in ore tuo: doceboque te quid loquaris*’... *linguae Latinae aeternae*? ‘*Caeliloquium*,’ perhaps? No, too widereaching, while ‘*fatiloquium*’ has sights too thin; ‘*confidentiloquium*’ sounds compensatory and ‘*dulciloquium*’ cloys too great; ‘*magnoloquium*’ stings the ear so far as ‘*obloquium*’ contradicts; ‘*pauciloquium*’ is too little and ‘*stultiloquium*’ far too late; and ‘*praelocutio*’ is an introduction at best, ‘*suaviloquium*’ a stirring of the pot, and ‘*blandiloquium*,’ though fruitful, merely a cincher of the date; or—



hah! out of *loq* with ‘*loquor*,’ to *perorate*. ‘*Fabulo*’ you may be and do, but fabulous isn’t what you’re reaching for, ‘*sermo*,’ ‘*oratio*’ neither: the former’s all words to the latter’s utility. In English, now? Anything at all? ‘Perlocution,’ ‘illocution,’ and ‘allocution’ all impertinent and Latinate, as are ‘diction,’ ‘oratory,’ ‘eloquence,’ and, ehr... ‘conversate.’ Nothing wrong with loanwords, downsprings, and cognates, but of course never far from the trunk falls the apple; and further only does ‘fluency’ from ‘articulation’ stem. Nearly any of these with a suffixed ‘-est’ or appended ‘most’ superlative in adjectival fettle might season the roast... Yet, what’s in a word—a single word—the names by which you learned things bitter or sweet? Only its every ancestor, millennia *historiae*! And sharpwitted and pithy though *na Éireannaigh* may be, their pith’s smallpitted and wit, unlike their constructions, brief. All *pater* or Re, for all their, ehr... para—their parautochthonous wordmastery, might offer? Beyond ‘*Is fearr*’ and ‘*is deise?*’ ‘*Urlabhraíocht?*’ ‘*Óráid?*’ ‘*Óráidíocht?*’ ‘*Friotal?*’ Abandoning construction when the roots rot and slapping a *deis* to your mouth for ‘*deisbhéalai?*’ Insufficient, *níl*, all of it, ‘*aitheasc*’—and ‘*caint*’ can’t either. Which leaves... yes, leaving ‘Ελληνική, the Greek. Of course there’s ‘φωνή,’ ‘εὐφωνία,’ and ‘ομοφωνία,’ ‘λαλιά,’ ‘ὀμιλία,’ and... ‘φωνομαχία?’ ‘*Machia*,’ no, no... ‘λόγος,’ of course, and then... ‘ἐπίλογος,’ ‘ἀντιλογία,’ and, ehr... hah, ‘ἄλογος’ as well. Hm. Forgetting, any of those have *καλλι-* variants? Ἄρι? And the term for, ehr...

Hm. Have to sharpen up your Greek next time you’re home. Ask *μάμμη*, or *Áine* when you... rather, ask *Áine* in the response you never wrote. Perhaps she of all people, knowing it least, the, ehr... ‘speech idealized,’ would, in the Greek anyways, know. Not like she’s practicing with her *beau*. Hope she’s overrun with studying, plucking, strumming...

Fortyseven now, man, ticks the titanbell-oh! plenty of time to buckle the apron and do a little smithing of your own! Absence is waiting and you're the Grand, the Insuppressible Fill'er. Something confluent, allencompassing and broadstrokes, potentiality of arousing translation far and wide, localizable, yet... sesquilingual, *almi patri tui*, but not some shorthand which might turn supralocal. An amalgamation, as with every ideal word, of modest, deliberate syllables. English, then, from the Latin, and, ehr... 'supra-', not a bad place to start, *etiam*—or 'super-' 'Hyper-' and 'preter-' would represent a step too far, overreaching, *de facto*, and 'magni-' might greet the ear as pretentious, or grandiloquent. 'Supra-, super-, yes: overhead—unreachably, damnigh—but theoretically attainable. And what was that word just sprinted by earlier? 'Confluence,' yes. Like that, a great fusion, a togetherness into which two unharnessable things flow. Marriagebed between objective and thought. Can't just, ehr... oh, you've heard this one before, it's... '*faire la service minimum?*' (Right article there, Fano? as if that loafer would know.) *Nihilominus*, can't sign off on 'supraconfluence;' they'll drop you in the river for that nonsignificance. No, stanch the '-fluence,' man, but keep the 'supracon-.'

'A joining beyond' of... well, words. 'Supraconverbial?' Euphonious, scholarly, even, a professor's midlecture recital—but what's the nominative? 'Supraconverbance?' 'Supraconverb?' *Minime*, atrocious, no. Perhaps your *loq*'s not run out yet? 'Supraconlocution,' activated as 'supraconlocute?' 'A joining beyond of speech,' *ita*, accompanied by the euphoniousness of a wooden cart dragged over gravel. Flowerbed supersaturated, a pristine example. 'Vox,' then? Be this not of formulation or speech unsurpassed, but 'voice?' 'Supraconvocal' *non malum*, but... 'supraconvocative' is a heady

determiner, and how does it noun? ‘Supraconvocation?’ Too imperialist, like legions marching down the earcanal, and the metre’s too sharp. ‘*Oratio*,’ then? ‘Supraconoration?’ ‘Supraconorate?’ Sounds like a forced succession of Conors, a misspelling, ehr... heterography, or a stentorian speech into the quim.

— Supracunoratory...

— Excuse me?

— Oh, damn, said that aloud, didn’t you? And this doll you’ve been sideeying, curlyhaired, fulllipped, and Venuscut, seated in the patio finally caught on. Pardon, ma’am; I’m engaged in a little, ehr... ‘auto-dialogue’—an ‘autologue,’ if you will. Good day...

Let off the spurs—see what you passed up there? ‘Optimal.’ Not a proper prefix, but why not size it on? ‘Opticonvocate?’ ‘Opticonvocation?’ No, no. ‘Opticonlocution?’ ‘Opticonlocute?’ ‘Opticonverb, -converbicate?’ ‘Opticonverbaahanablebleblach....’ Hm.

Hm. Not just conversation or discussion, discourse or speech, but ‘*sermo*’ does, *Latine*, also mean one’s language, or ‘manner of speech’... A broadstrokes term for your ranged intent, no?: ‘a joining beyond of speech, conversation, diction, and discourse.’ What were Alexander’s efforts at Opis—any oration, really—but conversational, after all? Singlesided, *ex tempore*, but in dialogue with his men, speaking to their anxieties, their struggle. And dialogue, being but alternating cogitations sonified? And do you not think—*nonne cogitas*, internally anticipating response? Is not every Man each conscious moment party to some dialogue ineluctable?

Not only have you bought this horse, you’re walking it out the stable. Say it, man; damn the *custodes*:

— *Supraconsermony*. Beautiful—or ‘super-.’ *Vere*, whichever you prefer...

‘Supraconsermony’ when the feat’s performed; to describe such a feat, ‘supraconsermonic’ or ‘supraconsermonical.’ Verbal might not pour like toffee, ‘supraconsermonize’ or ‘supraconsermonicate,’ but a ‘supraconsermize’ abbreviature, *fortasse?* ‘Contraversive superconsermony,’ Alexander’s persuasion, an instance of speech performed seemingly obliquely *to* yet in the interests *of* one’s objective, optimized. Returning to the thought that began this, ehr... this daisychain, yes: any amount, flavor, discreteness, *gustus, sapor, blas*, ehr... γένοϛ? contraversive, ironical, offensive—no small blessing of supraconsermony would’ve gone unwelcomed in fending Dirty off of Deirdy, and Dearthly Pol. The exact, the precise words were out there, upthere, somewhere, to retain them both. Deirdy *amica tuae*, Dorothy *tuae amor*. But... there eluded you words, and therefore the women.

A way of neither griming nor, ehr... ehr... *gouging* these girls. Of convincing them both to stay, all balanced, *tout de suite*—happy, each of you. *Cad atá agat anois, in ionad?* Lover and friend gone, gravesilent: dearth, and dirt.

Perhaps, well... for the unafflicted speaker, though, supraconsermony, for the, ehr... well, the *eloquent*. Intrinsicly, not yourself: *impeditioris et tardioris linguae sum*; not for *Moysi ignaro*, Aaronless, tonguetangled Sol. Not with this jaw. Yet, that’s how He made it, didn’t He... Perhaps, perhaps it wasn’t meant to work with them—either of them; just wasn’t in the cards, or stars, or whatever mess of mindblown auguries He entertains.

Fifteen fortynine. Fortyone to Mass; thirtyone for confession. How long you been walking the pavement now? Where's the winery? Nowhere over the shoulder, so: *ex oculis, ex mente*. Leave the glass for after Mass, suppose. It may only be a single glass, but your intention's bathing in it; what point is there, as Dolon said, in a bathing hastened? Back stiff (damn *anguis latet in herba*) and feet sore; those ailments need a soak, long and thorough. *In oculis, in mente* for now.

And, look at that: the *lupus in sermone*. Speak of wolves and cards and carded wolves, and all three appear. Aren't you just that, a 'little wolf' by name? stalking the storefronts and shopgates, watching townies hemmed in gorging themselves on early catches, late lunches, on cocktails, cordials, coffees, cakes, and teas? A gaggle of them ahead, women middleaged, soft as their mattresses and pale as the sheets, sunhats and dresses (one of them lingerie?), edgeseated around their table outside of—what's this place? tearoom, right, as you should've guessed (no name showing, though 'Little Madinah' might as well be, by the frantic teaware glazing and—what are these tablecloths, samite?)—a deck of tarot dealt between, glancing your way, snorting... *manere*—

'Cordial.' Yes, that was *her* name.

At their makeshift table, one they'd cobbled together out of bricks and plank, just outside their window, you approached them that night—six nights now? Five ago? Sleep, ehr... unwinnable on the floor, mind stuck in the grasseaten chapel, spinning, hounding *egressui* anydirectioned. Something overtook you—'Cordial,' painted eyes eating your every movement as you pulled in and unloaded, you avoiding the girl's hungered, familiar

gaze, like she saw each move's eventuation, knew where you were going. *Scivitque*, knew you'd come to her.

What song was it she sang? that reeled so fastly off and in such a stertorous, lovestarved shrieking down to a coo—then silence? Like an echoey neume, venerationally grateful and plaintively lost, by a circle of gypsies sung... She emerges from the beads in a blush, a dart of earthy fragrance shot from a patchoulinest, jangling wrists eyeing bodice buttons, a piercing each in her nose and ears, her dark eyes breathing you in. A fullstep keychange to girl from mother, overconscious and whiplashed without a word she seats herself.

Introductions are made. 'Dolon' you call yourself (as if the comacase upstairs would uncover), staying for the night, traveling with a mate, and looking for company. Not of *that* sort, no, you assert, and the, ehr... *benefacted* (βυζαπό?) one, equalpart hardiness and swart, unloads herself from the tabletop in a wobble and leans back with her poker heeled, eyes in a permanent squint, glossy hair held back in a tail. They're expecting a guest shortly, but, giggling she sideglances Cordial, they might play a few tricks until then. Seating yourself opposite her, she calls them by the names she'd given: Pneuma, an Ural, spitting prototonically her every word, vowels caught underpalate and covered in treesap; and Cordial, softspoken, pliant, somehow Cymric in her way. Pneuma wrangles her cards together, begins cutting, and explains:

— I read dhem in books someveres, dhese names. Do you get dhe joke?

— The joke, let's see, you say, eyes jumping to Cordial, hiding nervously her chest beneath a shawl. 'Pneuma' and 'Cordial,' 'breath' and—and, quite clever for a prost, actually—hah! both spirits!

— Very smart! says Pneuma, eyelids widening askance. Very smart dhis one! Yes, yes: baby 'Cordial' for when you vant somezhing sweet, dainty, and young. 'Pneuma,' she winks, for when you are really wanting dhe vind knocked out of you. A tumble, you know, somezhing to really *move* your soul—usually dhe older, darker fellows.

Three cards align, a card for every sentence spoke. An aged deck, ornate—chipped corners and creases, dulled at least a thousandfold.

— S'a smart one—gutter-minded, Cordial laughs, shifting, but most men, they don't get it unless she explains. Which I think makes them feel all inferior-like...

— If dhey are feeyling inferior, Pneuma presses herself into the ledge, I always say, dhen instead of dhe stallion dhey may ride dhe colt! then leans back, smiling sultry, holding the pokerstem to her lip. Go ahead! Ve draw first for order. As guest, you begin.

— And it's, you say, damaged hand making the pass for, then flipping the second: 'The Fool.'

— Oh, shame, meerkat Cordial grins. I'this version—

— In *my* version, Pneuma interjects, smoke billowing from her lips in bursts, ve call it dhe 'Sküs.' Ve play tarot dhe vay my uncles taught me, vchich is very different. Because I had many uncles, very, very many, ha-hah! So, last for you...

— Ah, so the, ehr... *Pneumatic* Tarot it'll be, then? Ταρό Πνεύματος: 'The tarot of the soul.'

Turnorder: Cordial, Pneuma, you. A partial deck is outdealt in four spurts of four, two cards set into *le Chien*—however Pneuma breezily named—between each round. Black suits seven to ten, *valets de rois*; reds the same and one to four. The curtained window continually draws your eyes throughout, each quartet spurt a spur, the question by the third round like breath itself uncontainable: ‘Arri,’ the boy’s name, after his father, and ten months old. An unpublicized foot, bare, sets to grazing your shoe soon after.

A *misère* in your hand, by Pneuma’s rules: an embarrassment of pips, a peppering of faces, yet not a single *atout*. A bonus, not grounds for *maldonne*, so you wager a *prise* and take half *le Chien* (no *atouts iterum*). Suspicions vapour when Cordial raises a *garde* and Pneuma *garde sans*, but nothing pecuniary thumbs the scales. No, the ladies—*puellae*, κόρα, *cailíní*, girls in susurrant, giggling confab settle the matter: in lieu of purse, the victor would compel either loser to perform any one action of their choice. Given the sidelong glance Cordial floats pulling away from Pneuma, the infant Arri’s gracious quietude, and the activity meanwhile afoot, your odds you figure favorable, and settle into your losing hand, ploy or not.

Quietly, wristwatch mechanical commences the first trick: Cordial a *roi de pique*, you an inverted seven, Pneuma an uninhibited XVII *atout*. When Cordial follows her *dame de coeur* with the first *oudler*—*Le Petit*—Pneuma, who’s been casting optics your direction, tracing your face with squidink eyes, perks up and irrupts the undertone of your shared idyl: — Vere you in a fight recently? She exclaims, pointing out your hand, then jaw, flailing on exasperation. I dhought dhe vas somezhing slant vit your jaw—dhen I noticed your hand. Well, ha-hah? Vhat vas it? Naughty boy, have you *killed* someone?



— What? you ask, an uncovering feeling swallowed down.

— *Vere* you in a *fight*? Pneuma insists, bitchamping.

— ...of sorts, momentarily selecting your words you say, dropping as you do a three *de coeur*. The hand and the jaw are unrelated, as can be. The other man, he had, ehr... carried a brick wall on his neck.

At this effectuation Cordial catches your eyes, exacting a kiss from her lips and applying it to your hand, taking as she does her conquered trick and laying down a nine *de pique*.

— Dhen...?

— ‘Dhen’ what? you lyrebird, Cordial liberating a cackle.

— Dhen what happened vit your jaw? Why is it kind of, she pesters, performing beneath her chin a helmsman’s quartersteer.

Like and of an acrid squall it smacks: a teenage roadside troll unpots you, breaks as she disentangles and exposes your overwatered roots. You clench your cheeks, minding the disproportionateness of either side’s catch and release.

— Took a tumble of another sort once, from a tree as a boy, you say, eyes dropped to your hand. Hit, ehr... a few branches along the way. There: ten *de pique*.

— It wasn’t a ghastly tree, by the dhe looks of it, Pneuma grins as over to Cordial she leans, and in overt discretion says, Not a bad looker, no? Not *my* type...

To which Cordial flushes deeply, bites her bottomlip and strongarms Pneuma off, Pneuma throwing down as she readjusts an inverted *roi*. She collects the pile, Cordial looking to you shamefaced, saying sincerely

— Ah, just off an inch. Sorry, dearie...

— Here, dhen; you can have dhis one—

Shallowly Pneuma's atonement winds down: a one *de coeur*, and the grazing migrates ankleward. The lefthand wall receives stoically your prayer of gratitude, before Cordial's IX *atout* and Pneuma's suit you punctuate with a languid four.

— Or not, haa! Pneuma barks, by *schadenfreude* consumed. My uncles, dhey would always play like dhis, teaming up on me—naughty, naughty boys! You dthink ve're having fun, geeeping you now, don't you? Ve aren't, ve aren't, I promise. But—toward Cordial Pneuma her entire heft swings—vhat say ve do, huh? Why not take him two-on-one? Vhat do *you* say? Are you man enough for two little girls?

— That'd be overkill, you say before Cordial, the litany of your impairments, hand, back, jaw quibbling in mind. Don't worry a wink over my winning; I'll be blessed to take a single trick.

— 'Nother round, maybe, Cordial assures, laying down squarely *La Monde: oudler* two. His cards aren't fairly dealt, 'seems. And he's a nice man, I can tell: he's got gentle eyes—really, you do, she turns, as if to herself—soulful, like my brother. S'been years since we went off, she lingers, returning to her cards, but his eyes you could never forget, always staring into you. You have any sisters you're close to, Mr...

— Sol—ehr, Dolon. Yes, you answer, forgetting yourself with a three *de carreau*, just, just one.

— Well, go on, Cordial insists, resting her head on woven hands. What's her name, then?

Pneuma responding with the V, advertising to the lamplight by a sigh her disappointed

boredom. She older or younger? Y'seem like the older one, I think, carry yourself like a big brothe'.

— ...Áine. And, yes: regrettably, I'm the oldest.

Cordial crosses her legs, loosens her shawl, smiles smartly at her cards as she next withdraws and deposits a one *de carreau*. Pinches like gnatbites prickle your calf. A stream of smoke from the aspirate Pneuma shoots forth and, accompanied by dithyrambic choral, you're lifted from your sudden lull.

— Ah! Pneuma flicks her four response onto the trickpile. Generous girl, letting him get on dhe board!

— Haven't a clue what you're on about, dear...

— Yes, you say, left hand on the trick, right boasting an upsidedown *valet*, no, ehr... trickery, no japing *conversation* going on here—just yet.

Twoandahalf points for the trick. Still no confidence in winning, but you'll not leave a complete fool—not like it's of concern to the pacesetter, what with her footwork and your eyes. Your second highest face—*dame de trèfles*—you play for good measure. Pneuma's *roi* appears to you as though in a memory, and Cordial straightens away, playing regalvestured, lightshunning, rosehanded, and wholly ignorant of the precipice he rides below the

— *Sküs!*

Fair play, you think: clever minx concealed a trinity from the very go. Objective's lower now, practically surfing the billows—

— Ah, I was wondering when you would... Pneuma turns her eyes, in singular motion heeling the poker and finding a hipflask, from which she sips and stows into your hand. You're going to want some brandy, seer; she's going to do—

— *A Fool A'Rovin'*. Not every time, middraught Cordial eyelit and ecstatically turns, but sometimes, when I play *Le Fou*, er—the *Sküs*, I mean, early enough, I like to make a story of him, and the rest of the *atouts*. You want to hear? D'you mind?

The flask, a glinting silver contour gripped in fine, musking leather you trade with Cordial, then Penuma, wiping your lip, noticing in the same moment your unstroked calf.

— Not like you will stop her by saying 'no,' Pneuma draughts again. Se'll just say it to herself, ozhervise. *And*, and, look at her: se wants to impress you, I think, *no*? Pneuma through her fat, handconed lips translates. Into her ribbing she leans, planktops amongst the lucre buried in her chest: I also think *se likes you*.

— Shut up, Eini! Cordial reddens, jerks forward and bacchantely yelps

then winces, immediately, having for her betrayal tasted the black of Pneuma's saurian eyes, and nearly felt the smart of clawtub brandy spat in her face. She settles, shielding herself behind her cards, Pneuma swallowing her venom and recoiling on her perch.

— Sorry, sorry, after a moment she chirps. I, I won't do it, Dolon, degraded in a flash, from girl to child spurned. Not unless you'd like, but...

From within the room an upset gurgle arises, a soloist, its disillusioned choir silenced, each groan an invasion into yours and the girls' hearts, armed with the deafening fear of some despotic, schismatic sequel. The defenses in time, however, hold, and the infant in a

hiccup prays comfort no more. Cordial shivers as you brace her elbow, tightening her shawl's embrace and turning on you eyes teared.

— Let's hear it, then, you say, cornering Pneuma in a glare. I'd like to hear her story, if you don't mind.

— Whatever the gentleman wants. Pneuma collects her trick, elevating the *Sküs* against the wall that it, too, may observe its errancy, and setting events off with the IV. Tell us the Fool's tale, Cor.

— There was a Fool, Cordial mantling a renewed smile initiates—an emperor, a king. A wise one, wealthy, blessed, beloved by many, but... she hovers, scanning her cards. *But*, and jumps, planting the X, a *subject*—s'a man still, this Fool—and to his weirds and the fortunes of his world powerless.

Seven *de piques* without hesitancy you play, admiring the *raconteuse*, who snatches up her trick and with the II replacing.

— *See*, she inclines, lips pursed blossomlike, he fell in love with the high priestess of his kingdom, a beautiful woman, and holy, a beacon to the Fool, of his 'life to be,' but—

— But already, Pneuma swings in, slapping down the III, already he had a Queen!

— Turn was mine—and it's her story to tell, you protest, a drossy four *de coeur* dropped. Let *her* tell it.

— No, no, s'alright, she can join in—long as she's not mean. Right, Pneuma: what about his Queen?

— Se vas beautiful, too, *of course*, Pneuma sneers, switching the trickpile for the VI. Very smart—brilliant—and a fair ruler, and to her Fool always loyal.

— ‘The Lovers.’ Hm... *yes*, the King’s love—that’s what made him wise, but a Fool nonetheless: he knew women were the key to everything—

— Damn right we are! Pneuma pauses from a drink, putting Cordial in a fit and Cordial putting her VIII in the center.

Your eight *de trèfle* follows, unseen.

— To *everything*, Cordial reeling down repeats. To life, the world, happiness, his Maker, himself, even—*everything*. He thought his Queen could be a key, to unlock the universe’s mysteries. But the Priestess, doll entered rooms the Queen couldn’t even see. It was like, like... like his entire world became a spiderweb, spun between two dreams. And when he tried to walk between them his strength failed, and he became caught on the strands, and...

Patiently their joint vision focuses on you. Drymouthed you stir, and with your nine *de trèfle* begin scraping up the barrelsides. In a waft of smoke it next descends, fully panoplied, waving a pennon, itself, ehr... bearing, yes, it was—wasn’t it?—the Fool’s stainless bloom, trouncing the land...

— *Death* follows. Or—her face on your sight curiously dismayed—or, a *change*, rather.

Death only in a sense, of-the-present-like. The death of his web, it became somehow shorn... Pneuma? Next card?

— It was the death, Pneuma with an explicatory XI states, of his *Justice*. He lost it, when the Rosy nation struck!

— And—no, later, that’n—*and*, Cordial countering with her XIV, seizing up the pile, and his Temperance! But it wasn’t the Rosy nation which took it exactly—though, they did invade.

‘Was caught between his two women, on that web spanning the Priestess and the Queen,

where his Temperance and Justice were lost. And seeing this, the wise king weakened—  
made the Fool, that *after* the Rosy nation pounced—

— Raping his Priestess and Queen! Pneuma growls.

— Oh, Cordial sighing dissents, you make it so dirty! Why don't the Roses just 'seize' or  
'carry them off?'

— '*Rapere.*' From the Latin, your interruption sounds reflexively, your ten *de trèfle* to  
Cordial forfeited. Synonymously, classically, it's the same, 'rape' or 'seize.'

— Vell, I like it better as 'rape;' dhis is more violent, more tragic—for our Fool.

— Horses' courses, another sigh from Cordial unbroken falls. Either way, the Fool lost 'em  
to the Rosy nation—lost 'em both.

Then... they kept at it, *sempiternum* ringing through your ears an openair  
slaughterhouse or slateshattering waterfall: the XIX from Cordial, the last of your *trèfles*,  
*valet*, and Pneuma the VII. Where was her mind then, glued to, ponderously wandering the  
cards? Why'd the girl confiscate her touch...

— '*The Sun*' and '*The Chariot*,' Cordial questioned. What'll be next, then? Pneuma?

— Hm... she drinks, stretching into the backlog of her impenetrably thick skull, raising there  
something from amidst its wigeaten tomes. He's a desperate man now, our Fool, yes? Lost  
his homes, his loves, his kingdom. *So...* he rides his chariot to dhe Hall of dhe Sun god, and  
he asks—*nem!* He *demands* to harness dhe Sun's power for a day, to reclaim his kingdom  
and his loves from dhe Rose.

— So epic, so, *mythical*... Cordial disheartened fawns. Love it, yes: he barter with the Sun  
god, promising, if he should fail to return the Sun, she pauses, adhering her XII betwixt them,

like a man hanged arse over tit, his... *eternal soul*: his feet in the sky, dragging an entire star behind him, his heart, his Love—his eternity, chained to the Earth below.

The *valet de coeur* you play, minding—remember, yes, such was your thought, though hopeless being any victory, to play that last *valet* in reverse, as you did the single time you won. *Prae fortuna*, ehr... *bono*? Then Pneuma laid down—lays down the XX.

— And what is his judgement? Pneuma, tricktaker, manipulator, foolfowler, grinning precognizantly asks, drawing in her vanquished, and with her XVI swapping: a tower, licked in flame, struck by lightning, raining corpses.

— ...a fall, Cordial admits, collapsing, screwing aside discontented lip, her own *valet de pique* falling in reverse. He was noble, our Fool... but a Fool yet. The Sun proved too powerful—

— Or our Fool too weak—

— ...yes, perhaps. Our Fool lost control, I suppose, and... got himself stuck in a storm. Thunderbolts rang, deafening him; lightning bolts fired, and he was blind. His entire world became dark, soundless, and, eventually... lingering here she paused, you watching her glaze the cards, asking yourself whom to her this Fool had become, who it was.

A smokering broke across Cordial's face. She awoke.

— Yes, sorry. He was struck, by a lightning bolt from the clouds, and fell from the sky's tower. Our Fool, the king, never regained any of it; he never made it home.

*Roi de coeur* you played last into the claw of that ventilating expropriator. She reclined and flung the final *atout* centertable like it were a lark.



— ‘Dhe Moon,’ sould be dhe last, yes? By my count, sucking her poker she exhaled. Se did not fit in anyvheres, so I dhought: ‘where else for dhe girl but dhe end?’

Cordial was the two *de coeur*, you her *cavalier*, defiantly reversed.

— Maybe, Cordial quietly, amidst the cicadas’ simmer, and below it a distanced windy or wolvern howl, so feebly against circumstance she suggested, maybe the Moon was there all along, watching-over-like. A guardian angel. Maybe, for our Fool, there’s still hope.

— Or not—vit dhat kind of fall? Se wanted to vatch him fail, I dthink—not just ‘fall.’

— It’s her game, fervently, dumbly unblinkingly you said. Give her the final call.

— But... who knows? Pneuma shrugging in her last wisps of spent tobacco relented. Maybe he’ll catch a few branches on dhe way down as vell! Let’s tote up; I know already vhat I vant done and to who...

A *valet* and two pips, your entire tote: twoandahalf points. Between themselves they quarreled, faulting the other’s count, challenging tricks, invalidating bonuses, Pneuma inflating her chest with each gesticulation, Cordial standing ground to a point—then waning apostatical; and Cordial subdued, ehr... *summatin* continued. Enraged you, didn’t it? their prolonged counting, the unfairness of an aleatoric hand, your prospective subjugation to that lacerative hellcat across the table. Every inch of her sharp, laugh, dress, eyes, tongue, and each nettlesome moment in her presence a sting or exacerbation of what stung already: hand, back, eyes, gritted jaw; everything, yes, but the scarry *P* (but you would repair that, wouldn’t you?). You could have stood and left, collected your things, emancipated yourself of her. But the satisfaction of seeing outrage? Of seeing her catspaw lead you through the beads? *Fuit fortior*.

And amidst their count again yet with tarrying touch the grazing resumed. Was a willow creature, wasn't she? visible when the shawl dropped midtussle. Tired-eyed, cheeks beneath the rouge gaunt, hips prematurely mangled. Developed, proportioned, bodice observably dampened under the bust, but she undernourished: a mother, a lover, but starved, of womanhood, of, ehr... of warmth. Down the breezeway Pneuma's laughter echoed; Cordial enshrouded herself, ashamed, hoping you hadn't already noticed. A flower, that girl, plucked and fallen amongst thorns.

Yet... *you* still wanted to; and had not the shiftless void behind you found some form, *would've*. *Et tenebrae erant super faciem abyssi: et spiritus Dei ferebatur super aquas:* and into the lamplight it strode, skin suntanned, loose, and suited, locks curlshort, eyebrows and moustache impossibly dark, Pneuma preceding his kiss with a squeal of his name, waking his junior indoors. '*Spiritus Dei.*' Septuagint: 'πνεῦμα.' Having received Cordial's desultory buss, he made your acquaintance, gauging, in the same, ehr... *cacikheavy* breath, your intent to purchase. Your reply negatory, it was his emphatic invitation that you enlist amongst the Bulgars. So you rose, thanked her, and left.

That phiz she sent you, stockings trudging in after them, what was it? Stepped through the beads and stopped, holding the screen back until he shouted the name she'd been labeled. Bittersweet valediction? Pleading intercession? A smile, a beseechment, for any shade of a fool's hope?

*Minime*, that vituperator on the train you gave the scare. Their looks, at the very last second, chirality their phizzes were, identical: burdened eyes, emptied hands; bereavement,

of something—or someone slain; an admission, a confession of humanity, of having been deprived...

Vituperator, that vixen, that, ehr... Vesta? Vernix? Valerian? *Vultus*? who said, on her shoe... could it have been? Could it have been *her* name? Oh—let off it, man; beads fall and the doors shut, both now longgone. Or far; *post te nunc est, posteaquam*. Fifteen fiftyeight. S'all in a day, and the needlelike stinging's coming on. On, on, *ut quo*—no, 'eo,' thither, on 'to that place we go.' What were you thinking? Were you at all? *Eo imus, imus eo...*

Another intersection. East the openworld, west the tracks, south wizening earth, north the church garden—ehr, 'hortatorium?' '*Hortorium*?' Intersections, crossroads, junctions, decussations, one after the other, life an endless succession of: birth the overlap of death and life; youth the overlap of birth and adolescence, and so on; 'now' the dialogue between 'past' and 'future;' man the middleground of boy and gaffer; woman the compromise between girl and crone; mother the... hm. Can't think of one for mother, can you? Father's simple, a greeting between professor and guardian—the 'warrior-philosopher.' But between what extremes rests motherhood? Pleasure, of love, of continuance, and incubational delight, nourishing a fledgling intersection her own; and... pain? The pain of worry, of loss, filial insult, estranged daughters and sons—failure, and humiliation. Constant, joyful stagger; a gash, reactive, benignant but unclosing. And... of Cordial, then? a girl transposed over woman into mother, from innocence coaxed *et in servitute rapitur*? How do you heal a wound you're wrenching apart? What could you have done for her? What could an illiterate

have done for any of them? What have you always? *Nihil*, or nothing right. The hortatorium, then.

— *Eo imus*... ‘thither we go’... deaf? Dumb? No; ‘blinded.’ ‘*Excaecum?*’ ‘*Oc-?*’ Ehr...

Best keep the ejaculations to a minimum, man; alone on the beach *fortasse*, but, ehr... urbanly you’re getting looks. More idlers, more streetwalkers this side of the tracks. Likely to send the orderlies after you, strap you down in the bin. Not a long tramp now, past the windows and walls. Clear, limpidshining each one of them, portals into stability or fraudlence, clean windows. What’s a covered window signify but two things, disgrace or privacy? What’s it signified when both? A wretched infant and his hapless mother.

Mixed child, what the Veds might deprecate ‘halfcaste.’ Name like ‘Arri,’ though, boy could’ve been anything—same for his father. A Bulgar himself, how elucidatory ‘Arri’ is—and Greek, for all you could see, Cypriot, Ionian; moreso, *forsitan*, than μάμμη. Inversion, parelaterally of that hellion at the Cove. The boy’s mother—if ‘mother’ she was *go firinneach*, young, older than Cordial, though younger carrying by the boy’s age (and if her boy he was)—mideastern, darkfeatured, transjordan possibly (and mother or sister, *utraque modo*: not so, ehr... *uncomely* herself), along with the old man (Vavi, was it? Babi?), of some relation himself, either father or grandfather (‘*patriarcha*’ in any sense), whereas the boy for all your Mediterranean minority was lighter than you and with hair fairer, sunbleached—Rhenane, even. But you were one of the halfgloams, ‘μισυσκότοι,’ *you* and μάμμη, special, different from paleskinned *pater*, Re and Áine, ehr... obnubilated? No; ‘cloudcloaked.’

The ‘*Ἰρλανδός Gréagach*’ she called herself, ‘the Irish Greek’—or ‘Greek Irish?’ Two peoples taming waves, destined for commingling—if they hadn’t already—two tongues old as night and day, she the, ehr... *funes decussandos*, the endstation longsailed. Switching between the two like left hand and right, then merging into common not an article lost. For all you knew, at least. ‘*Sua generatione, nec lingua sua.*’ Never could hold pace with her, could you? Never understood how others might, how they balance the words, keep them from piling up. You hyperextend, defer *latinae*, then lapse into English, omitting and blacking out the words too convoluted, too feral to, ehr... maxillate? That how you’re all meant to make it, the halfbloods and halfcastes? Subconscious omission of the self? or deletion *ωσμωτικός*, shedding exposed skin in sheets til you’re just friable enough to keep up at a brisk trot?

Or: there are *Χιμαίρας* and *χιμαίρας*, and you, well, man, perhaps you’re just one of the flock. Must have had it simpler, *pater*, being one thing only, no intrinsic discordancy of stormwinds, no words being picked up and thrown a mile off. No feeling yourself ploughshared, baffled on the lurch. Those boys, Arri and... ‘Sonny,’ yes, those little halfsteps dangling, already bewebbed, a prayer for them:

— God, bless those boys with minds and tongues to speak fluidly; put not confusion on them, straighteyed you whisper, but by your Love grant them Your mercy, to be only one thing. Let them be stars fullrisen, brilliant and sole.

‘Not seen you kneeling once’—there, Dolon, satisfied? *Crepitator*, like he could spot communion in the open, as if he’d ever humbled himself enough to try.

What'll they call them, what petnames, what, ehr... ὑποκορίσματα, right?  
'Hypocoristics?' We all have them, yes? infancy being the only thing Man catholically values—or, 'dotes on,' *saltem*. 'Seanduíne' in your *clann* and others, surely. Μάμμη gave us one, too, no? *Cad a bhí sé*... well, *Seanduíne*—*seandaoine*, you were, the entire brood of hairless wrinkled skinsacks, πρόγῆρας looking 'old men.' Do suggest that, outtheoven fresh, progeroid, miniature tottering old men, hard of sight, vision, continence, and hearing, don't they? Even as a boy *seanduíne* they called you in your most... inenubitable memories: old man piloting an infant's body, wise and maturated insubordinate to Time, what they meant. But you, for all that imputed precocity, how else but moribundly did you intuit? 'Ignorance of death born dying.'

Similar, isn't it? how Man used to think any child born progeroid or hyperaged or in any sense of abnormality, the mongols, the insane, and the Holy Fools like Giddy were *aes sídhe*. 'Changelings' moreless, larval fay swapped with the, ehr... prototype ('πρωτότυπος?') spirited on by elders to Faerie—*minime*, no; disqualifies Giddy (though, doesn't *pater* say he wasn't quite fastwitted either, before of course, he had his mind dashed 'gainst the wellbottom?); poor fellson wasn't born imprisoned. More than any one of us, *ita dicere*. Between consciousness of dispossession and lunacy what would you opt? Never that fate, Giddy's, permanent childhood immurement; make you so dysmorphed, so distorted, not a chance of fathoming what you were. They're better of idiots, them and you, thoughtless and mad.

Creamcolored, tall, cloistering bricktopped the Mission grounds: a wall, *murus* itself, asyluming in and warding off its gaspless refugee, the hollowed sandstone ruin rising rigidly

over. *Where* have you come to? And them, Dolon, ‘to-where’ do they go? Where can one, any of them, go in blinded stride, who can only be led? *Et quis fabricatus est mutum et surdum, videntem et caecum?* ‘*Caecum*’... ‘*caecatos*?’

— *Eo imus... caecatos—ut caecatos*, ‘thither we go, so that, having been blinded...’

Sixteen O’Four. Sixteen to confess, twentysix to service. Blinded, the old structure, or put to rest? A mummified statesmen put on display, more like, taxidermied, *panem et circenses* of the soulful. Can’t understand why postdesacralization it’s kept up; repurpose, redistribute the masonry! The Spirit’s departed, evacuated, shelledout—as much as any unhollowed, ehr—‘unhallowed’ ground. Irreliquidity of the tangible! ‘You see, you taste, you touch,’ you shank yours legs in dirt; *de terra facta sunt, et in terram pariter revertuntur*. A new haven stands, a new monstrance of God indwelling; has prospered the refugee, has born fruit and multiplied the land. Let her traverse the great divide, palate again native loam! Won’t even pause to gawk, scrutinize, let alone; a stroll through the hortatorium en route *basilicae* (βασιλικη?). Assuming, of course, you can unearth some eastern entrance...

— Where’s the bloody gate? Thought... I’d seen one *here* before...

Nothing looking on the westside down to the next road. Not a soul, a witness in sight... save the transept of a ruinous church. Not as though it’ll run singing for a harmless hop, an inoffensive, ehr... overring. Song’s not echoed across those transepts some twohundred year. And, hah! likely where they’d placed the choirstalls, the right arm. Not standardized, but you’ve enough attendance in your stock to nearlyknow. Couldn’t guess with the new building, though. You’d arrived postpenitential and the Priestess—ehr, Dirty—*Dearthy* (anxious of a faithplace’s permanence, no doubt; used to flyswatting, fanning, and

encamping, her ilk) kept unventured all but the narthex. Started fondling your hand as she does—or *did*, the lingered little cockerel, eventually pulled you into the daylight and the dark back home. Ehr—one of the *saepta*, likely, the basilica choirstalls; you'd pledge your glass on it.

Remember, man, those brief years in the stalls? Bashfulness unsurmountable and not a period mutual, into church their jogging skirttails you followed, ten months on looking as normal as you'd ever and of what extracurricular you'd spontaneously slinked into completely unknowledgeable. A year you hadn't spoken to her, and wouldn't yet another. But, anything, anything tholed seeing her upclose, just two pewlengths afar, marveling in the chestnut locks framing Leiney's soft Elsatian face, hearing the rasps and cracks of her girlish voice. Didn't matter if you couldn't carry a note then—hah! can't still; you were capturing beauty for the first, transcendent, aethereal. Drew from that font till it ran dry, till she grew bored and you sans drawcard fell away. But for all that and the eventual, ehr... ἄλωσις, it wasn't 'attraction' *per se* at the time, was it? 'Appreciation,' morelike—awe *voluptariam*; you thought—honestly, man, you did—you thought Leiney was some terrestrialized deity. A fallen angel, of sorts. 'Yet unfelled.' But—  
— Hm.

—you'd tug her down, wouldn't you?

Stone's out of sorts; nudge it back... *there*. When did it become... or was it always, even then, *carnalem*, bodily xenolalia? Or was it, joy, indulgence, delight, pleasure, admiration, delectation, magnetism—whatever to call it, was it then, in infantility, perfect, inaccostabile? Nothing could come of it, even if she'd seen you; you hadn't a clue after



compatibility. You simply didn't know. God, how blissful, nescience; what a barricade against stormwind! which, speaking of, good place, here, the heightdrop. No layabouts? No, no stragglers, and nothing sounding transmural... Right: foothold, hand (lefthand, *fatue*) locked? Right: onetwothree, Marymotherof—

— Hmmphf—ahh

—there you are, each piece intact. Little nudge of the boxer's break, but that throb will, ehr... decline. Undetected, so far.

Less than feels advertised by the road, isn't it? Path of peagravel runs north along the ruin until disappearing into whoknowswhere round the choirsaepta, and wends a ninety degrees west along the southern wall below and past the baptistery and belltower rubble, finding its visible terminus, by all sights, in the plaza hortatorium. 'Hortatory?' No, *minime*, must be 'hortorium' then. To the west, then, *ad hortorium*. 'Herbarium' moreso, by the dry desert flora creeping along this first slope, succulents, agaves, feathery sagebrush, efflorescent chaparral. Brings the thirst on a man, *tá tart air* just clocking them (they have likely drank more recently than yourself). Ehr... deergrass? planted by accident, dropped and left as is, it seems, from an overflowing wheelbarrow. And beyond... lupine? Lilac, ehr... silverishpurple, *pupura?* Πορφύρα. *Corcra*. Cacti menacing the lengths of wild grapevines and other craggilers only Dirty could name, an admixture of perennials, poppies yellow and white, purple irises whitetongued, languorous wild lavender and tomatoberried toyon. Fruittrees and citriculture standing over them all, peaches, pomegranates, apricots and dates, oranges and lemons. A juvenile live oak in the northwest corner, *fortasse*. An octagonal courtyard fount offright of the barred maingate. And all...

— *Fraxinus. Pro Iovem*, an Ash...

*Circum fraxinum*: around an ash all congregate. *An ash*. In this coastal terrain. Almost startling enough to seat you down—which, *do* anyway. Concrete bench here erected for the very purpose of, well, resting your sole. Been on your feet how long now?—but an ash tree, somehow, sprouted, took root, reached maturity, and thrives here... how? Only excuse—hah! must be legitimately hallowed ground, for an ash tree, here, like back home.

Ωραία. *Alainn. Bella. Bella. Belle*. Beautiful, admittedly, *this* variety, what the brothers cultivated here. Something astonishing, voluptuous in itself—disarrayed and, ehr... anachoretic... but, unadulterated. No intrusion or insistence or assertion of the human will. An erasure of it, selfeffacement neartotal, an artifact, attestation—*celebratio* of subservience to Natural effortlessness. Diachrony made synchronic in the inessence of worldly absence: Eden *praelapsus* (*prae... viso? apertus? aperto?*); or like the cultured thoughts of a child, shielded by innocence from the corruption of Time and iniquity—when sensuality was a vibrant, unsyncopated harmony, freeflowing awful voluptuousness, shielded from brute carnality, from pride and overthought. When to love was innocuous as a child's portrait of beauty. When Man needn't trouble himself over such worries. When expression needn't such complicacy. When Man simply *was*.

Can a Man be here? *Hacne fueris*, man? Thought something moved there, just beyond the treeshadow. Eyes, some missionagent tracking you? *Non insanus est*, considering you're likely trespassing. The gate, though, could have sworn you'd walked past an eastern gate with Dirty—no, *Dearthy*. Felt momentarily, earlier, like she could've been, as though she's had you glassed since this morning. But... no official here reprimanding, no perturbedly

shooing you out on the street. No one watching you, studying, observing, surveying, ehr... surveilling. You're just trespassing several homes in simultaneity; an intruder, an unwanted alien in contentious territory. No; only the walls, the flowers, and the trees surrounding. And, yet... that feeling. *Quid erat?*

— *Totumque pondus praelii versum est... in Saul.*

There, their shadows, something queer, something... seething. Not a current in the air, even the most marginally palliative breeze (why'd you choose a bench sunsoaked, *dála an scéil?*), yet... something about the shadows of them each, some quality: deathly, heartbrokenly still, but... shifting, moving preternatural.

Breathe, man; chest's tightened. Breathe, up from the lungs—how to describe this feeling, *how*... The illusion of movement, like... rundown prey: encirclement, foxhound snarls loudened. Like drowning, falling—like the height fell from seemingly moving farther, and farther from the fallen. The illusion of movement unreal and unstoppable. And fear, impotent, primitive fear of... what?

Impact. Impact, yes... of a lifetime of hope abruptly impounded. 'The Tower.' *Turris. Túr. Túr Bháibil.* When did her *Imperator* fall? Before the Sun? Or after? Advancing on you, arms hung wide, up from the ash's base, coalescence of the shade: *mare*, waking mare—  
— No, no. Ridiculous, sighing, exhaling relieved vatfuls, handling your breast you say. Just a figure, a statuette, only *dressed* in shade...

'Κοῦρος,' sonamed, right? One foot forward, prepubescent, plump, proportionally immaculate, thickly coiled tufts crowning his limestone head, dressed in... well, *nudus*, only shade. Carved midstep—chasing something, frolicking. Microphallic, poor fere, even for an

infant. Why would—*Domine dimitte me*, that dense, are you? Even know what planet you're on? Who else? Θεοτόκος probably lurking somewhere, too. Never see Her apart from Him infantile, as if even He could go without. Wonder... what they call this one? *Christus ludicer*, 'The Frolicsome Christ?' Jubilant namesigning tot, even for the Redeemer. Were you ever so winily as a child, so, ehr.... effervescent?

A father—or mother—a *parent*, the sculptor; children dearest always in their parents' eyes and commodious at best in all others. Like livestock, worth and age inversely proportional. Beautiful, most valuable, most darling at their most vulnerable, yet... more guarded than they'll ever again be. *Invulneribilis*, paradoxically. Had he fallen into Herod's claws the infant Christ couldn't have been crucified; would've floated down the Jordan and bided time till the chalice passed his way. Faultless, instinctively defended; unassailability of youth, Christ the inviolable child. And, ehr... '*infans aeternum*,' the child forever, Christ, unmolested by the cynicisms of experience, unstripped of innocence and beauty. He was the same, his honesty, gratitude, loyalty all inviolately raised, to the moment his head hanged.

*Aut... sic legisti.*

Immaculate, spiritually. Beautiful, infantilely. What sculpture, or any depiction, might capture such conceptual intangibility: what else, but an image of the child? Leiney's haut flicker; μάμμη glowing through the foyer twinbundled; a halfgloom crying out in a rented room: the nearest simulacra Man had before, or since, to divinity sublime. 'Sublunary divine.'

— Hm.

Initinerant prickling again. Any sight of... no, no winterbloom. Holy garden, man, not a coven. You're leadtoed and dehydrated: let it. Price of atonement, deformity. Price of the wrothful, as well. Some threemoon on and unhealed, how? Substitution with Dirty, *fortasse*—though aren't you always careful? Lasciviency's price, *videtur*, also. But... the condyle? Deformity, headaches, ehr... ineloquence, at the price of what? 'Probitas?' Unpassivity unchristlike? Deformity's unobfuscatable, voluntary, punitive, or inadvertent. What's stung *Aeterno* stings aeternal.

Ἐντελέχεια, how you ever went on, a rogue, sensationalist and grotesque, screeding, ehr... ehr, ἀκροαματικός about entelechy, perfection, when you *ipse es* the furthest from. Close as a—well, as Giddy. Yet, Giddy... isn't he the *infans aeternum ipse*, almost? Lesser, then. You're lesser: Giddy wearied, contorted and corruptible. Ehr... 'corrupted.'

If κοῦρος as a boy, no κοῦρος μέγιστος *te culpa*. No, fayling's all you are, a satyr: the changeling tradedfor. *Itaque qui resistit potestati, Dei ordinationi resistit*. Only when resisting is resistance felt. Never attains perfection, perhaps, Man, ehr... apoptotic. How could he? Seeking virtuousness, but finding vice? Seeking to help others, but helping himself—then harming all around? Seeking to rise above, but hurtling earthward. 'Apoptotic.' Απόπττικός. Falling away, designedly. Like... petals.

Calli down on the ashbole: recent pruning for the undergrowth.

Khachanov sizing up the ash that night. Saw him, didn't you? stopped feeling the bark barehanded, through the window. Re Hellenizing exhibitionistly with μάμμη, the grandstand. *Pater* entered after he'd left, greyhair ragged, pale and slouch, wiping his spectacles. His plate unmolested he took you from Dearth—*Dirty*, *Dirty*, right, and in

blindness you followed him to that dim, entropic study. And between slipshod draughting and schematic stacks he asked, so exhaustedly stoical, *pater*, if he could trust a young man like you, if but only a little older, or if he wasn't seeing some angle.

And you chuckled at him, didn't you? informing him he'd need to elaborate. Man was so forfairn, dawned on him he hadn't explained, and so he, ehr... he did: in *pater*'s leave Macsen had grown to despise the firm, and so he'd struck out on his own—that very afternoon, right—and after several, ehr... What's a Kyivan's poison? several *kvasy*'s encouragement came to him with the madcap plot of becoming partners. Always figured Macsen pegged him a relic, superannuated, 'an underachieved draughtsman twice his age doddering pointlessly after partnership,' as *pater* said. And in his reverberating silence you thought on it—concentrating on it, that one thing, only. For all your concentration, no angle existed that you could see; he wasn't a pawn, a scapegoat, some Croesian lark. He was your father, just your father. Naïve as it was, what you said, wasn't it? Macsen had the arithmetic, but not the words to speak it; he'd seen him, watched him, a man wise, noble, stapled, be overlooked in his, a literal abecedarian's, favor. Perhaps he thought *pater* a... Mentor. 'Paternal surrogacy.' Yes, what you said, *eratne?* then *why*, why ask your advice over μάμη's? But they'd spoken and she, she'd met the man—*boy*, at some gathering, and through her ruths saw the boy as offlaying, but not untrustworthy. But she was more... ehr, she's 'stronger,' yes; that's what *pater* says. Μάμη's stronger than him, more trusting, more faithful.

And he swallows, and looks to the carpet, lowers, shrinks several inches, it seems. Smaller, now, unbuttoned shirt collar, his rolled sleeves looser than you've ever seen. Says to

you, dryeyed and undistressed, from his carpetspot unshifting, that he thinks—‘believes, that in his life he’s achieved nothing.’ That he nearly did, once, when he was young—older than Macsen, but young still. That the first dam he’d designed failed under stormwaves, and from a flaw in his calculation. That they had, ehr... he’d buried himself in work as a distraction, began secondguessing. That he began wondering, if he had just been strong enough to make her—your mother, stay...

— But it was an error *I* made. Took me years—nearly a decade, to resurrect my career: years of scrambling. Years from you children, from my home away. Did I ever tell you, when the dam burst, that it killed two men? Two men dead—only by some miracle was I not gaoled—and the lives lost with my wife and children, all because I couldn’t hold it back then, the storm. Decades—the lifetime of this boy later, and... I can’t still. And all of this your mother knows, yet in spite of it has faith in the footing of young men, and in me. How do I trust her confidence, who would trust such *amadáin* as we?

Verbatim, to the letter it rings. And... choked, weren’t you? insisting he’d not begrudged any of you, that *a chlann* understood. That without him none would have been, not one. But your every comfort like a cliff face he repels. Your verdict, he apathetically requests, yes or no. And, ‘yes,’ you say, believing in him, in Macsen, in yourself and all young men so seriously, so... blind.

And... *cad a tharla? Quid accidit?* What happened? Another sister spirited away on your account, no changeling to supplant her.

And then Dearthly and Dirty, or Dirty and Dearthly—*quaecumque qua supposita est*. Wanted everyone happy, moorings stable and clean, no one hurting or, ehr... *croibhriste*,

ehr... can't finger on the Greek... 'brokenhearted.' No jealousy. For all your talk and efforts, your unremitting dousing, what'd you get? The entire sacristy *όλόκαυστος*. Dearth festering in her discontent and bloated on wine. Dirty a portal into positivity out of eight months lightdeprived. Or, was it...? But she was your intellectual equal in every way, psychal *ἀναληπτικός*, and... well, man, you'd been her first—taken something of hers, left her bereft, ehr... 'lugubrious.' Reasoned you'd return it piecemeal, that it? till all was reckoned up to friendly terms? But the requital became... became blurred, and... you started paying more than was owed. Started lying to bide the web over, lying on both. Neglected dirt for dearth—or, dearth for dirt. Left a candle burning under both ends of the stole.

Then she came, and the fibers caught. Wouldn't bed her down, and the flames crept up. Wouldn't sever Dirtylines, they leapt to the vestments, and... *pluit sulphur et ignem*. Ending... how? Writhing unhinged and seared amidst the ruin of a twoday firestorm, left hand recreantly clutched when in rebellion to the whole ruse your knuckle instead of Dearthly or Dirty or any agency over the entire mess at all found a stud. And... she got her rout, though highwayside, chasing her down, exposed before winnowing eyes hundredfold, where decimated, desolated, *devestato* imploding you told her—*cry* to her you love them both, and want neither now, knowing two lies were spoken.

And she... laughs. Laughs through her sobs, then sobs through laughter. Laughs from the absolute pit of her being. Laughs for pulling nothing but *brassière* on under her coat—though it's in lingerie you see her! Laughs at the bulging knot on your hand! Laughs at the scones you'd made her that morning as she packed. Laughs at herself for trusting you, for having come, for letting you taste her—for welcoming you into her family's home; at the two



weeks she'd spent luting your favorite song; at the remarks you'd made about Macsen, Gabriel, and 'the scheming men.'

— You? *You?! in the thick of her howls she's heaving her head. You, Sol? Ha-hah! You're worse than them all!*

Shouldn't have run crying to one when the other left. Should've stopped sending letters when you realized she'd never respond; God knows if she opened any, or if they'd only been burned. How... *alacriously*, doesn't it? Love's warmth turn cold.

Generations and you couldn't keep the storm braced either, could you? *A patre, ad filio*; recessive, supraconsermony, if possible, and patrilineal. *Fabula*, μῦθος, *eachtra*: useful as Éogan's spear that entire affair: you couldn't stick a castlewall. Or, absent, at least, within the Faolainn primogeniture. Eluded you your entire life, hasn't it? How was Daeirty any different? *Sicut erat in principio, et nunc, et semper* been this way for you: a descent, a droppingoff, a fall, into...

Ποινήν. *Poenam. Pían*. Pain. Comical, *beagnach*, ash, of all things. Ash saluting you running out the frontdoor; squeaking against your window in the springshowers; sougning in the southers; shading the summer horseplay; wirily imploring of the heavens some breach in the winter. First thing you saw, carried out the woodland home. Μάμμη's heartbeat at your ear. *Thumm. Thumm.*

*Cén aois a bhí tú?* How many revolutions? Seven? Eight? Old enough to shepherd the twins back, ehr... home, whatever it was. Was... was your *privilege* start of the new year, right? Been insisting you were man enough all autumn. Μάμμη and *pater* waved the whites, gave you afternoon escort. Executed two months irreproachable. Then... it was Re, little

*gensch* frisking ahead contumacious while you had Áine tethered tightly at the hand. And you were calling after, ordering him to slow down. Kept him in your sights the entire time, but he was, ehr... *gamboling* away further and farther, and the words, you hadn't the words, couldn't swike him. And—that *chit*, how many times, short of death or dying, had you said *never stop for a stranger?* Of course he didn't stop by your calling, but the older pair's, came lumbering out the trees—Goliathian creatures, uniformed, foreigners to the hometrail. And they... were circling him, talking, brusquing, snarling. And you were shouting, yanking Áine, warning. And you cried. And they were shoving, and kicking, and spitting, and howling. And you were tugging at their blazers, and they were throwing you off. And you were panting, fumbling in the ditch for rocks. And hurling them at their heads and faces and eyes and wiping your tears. And suddenly they were bleeding, nosegushing. And they were turning, gnashing, launching. And *run* you were screaming, *Run home!* running yourself opposite, baiting them off, watching Áine lift Re as you were spinning into the shrubs, spinning *in deciduam*.

Must have been a quarterhour you were dipping, ducking, clambering, squirming when you came across treelimb low enough. Ashy, barebranched. '*Zuqqum*.' And Zuqqum you were climbing, expecting they wouldn't follow, hoping with each bough hugged you'd become more and more unworthy. But near the top you looked down, and... they weren't budging: they were cackling. Jeering. Raising jagged sticks and showing you... showing you where they'd thrust them. Then... then you were panicking. Crying through the understory, piercing the emergence, *μάμμη*, screeching, *μάμμη, pater, Giddy, anyone*, until daylight failed and your voice rasped with it, and shadows sprawled across the ground. No one heard you.

None but them: Ὅρκοι, toppling, dashing across that... tenebrosity, or Hell, into which your sanctum slowly sunk; catching lightbeams in flashes; towing through leaves as nicker, then impossibly silent. And they were waiting as night swarmed, still waiting, indiscrete through the boughs. And you were waiting, shivering, praying discovery, that they would leave, or just come up and get you, for hours, hours—*fatue*, after they'd been gone. Breathe, man. Breathe; you're shuddering now.

How long? How long, *tempus*, ehr... *amittebatur? Deserebaris?* How long were you unknowing, offdrifting when seeing in the purblind moonlight your breath you kenned they'd left and decided you'd climb down? The *Aurorae*, were they anywhere near? Could they have seen? Or heard? If you had stayed, would they have found you frozen?

But you were descending, carefully, as carefully in caliginousness as one could, lowering feet first, then arms. Then... *ar ndóigh*, it was wildash, why would it have been pruned? Then that awkward spot, and you were wrapping your knees and grabbing ahold, but the branch was rotten... and... *ανάποδα, inversus, bunoscionn*, base over apex, heels over head, 'arse over tit,' limbs were jabbing, pummeling your arms, legs, chest, and head omnidirectional, the stars gyring, streaking across and from your eyes spiraling off, off...

Until your cheek snagged something nodular, and you struck the ground.

Remember? Remember? *Cuimhnigh. Memento. Ἐνθυμήσου.* Remember, you were thinking you'd cried enough, so you fought them off, fended back the tears? Then you were lifting yourself and the pain, fiercer than you'd ever imagined, of fracture, the complete sundering of something once whole, convulsed through your every nerve, and you retched... but your mouth couldn't open. Not without that pain reignited. So even though you'd

surrendered to the tears, you were swallowing back the shrapnel of each explosive sob. Smearing the blood from your nose. Wringing your hands. Muttering rockjawed *paternosters*. Thinking of Áine and Re safe in their beds, envying them. Picturing μάμμη and *pater*'s lanterns punching through the night, hearts each moment haemorrhaging hope.

Weren't going to make it harder on them, were you? Didn't know where you were, but you were walking, walking in whatever way you thought their lights shone. Walking below a black moon. Walking, and the dim Milky arm glinting overhead, telling you where were and reminding you it was nowhere. And walking until your knees shook and your ankles ached. And walking until your eyelids drooped, and you felt your bruises darken and discolorate. And... how long had you walked when it appeared? An hour? Hours? But it appeared, a foxhole, stretched its muzzle gaping; a spot, a macule, a rift in Creation darker, infinitely, than its purlieu, but with a warmth circulating, emanating *deintus*. And you were a cub on hands and knees penetrating its vacuum, curling inside your jacket, and cleaving to the wall of its earthrooten μήτρα, *matrix*, *broinn*. *Thumm*. And there you slept till dawn.

Arms, legs, face—entire being was sore when you delivered yourself out the hole, or swollen, or numb. Through the taste of iron and salt something sweetsmelling, you thought, brought you out, something... it, it was floral. But the world was all barrenness, muted and cold. Set off, then, whatever direction you guessed home. And... a crack, a crack rattled the thin air, beneath your shoe. You looked about you, seeing them sprung from the leafblown glade in a circle: sprouts of ice opaque and smooth blooming up from the earth, ribbons of ice folded exquisitely together like flowers, yes, like crystalline flowers—*crystallofolia*, ice roses... ice roses *ἀπόπτικός*... destined to melt... destined for supplantation, by the Sun...

— Sixteen twentyone, sixteen twentyone. You've missed it. You've missed it, you damned fool...

*Pater* yelling as he saw you breaks into a run. Wraps you in his coat, raises you up in μάμμη's arms. Sniffing, they sniffled the entire way and for a week after; you buried your head in μάμμη's breast, the beat of her heart *thumm* echoing through your mind *thumm* for months, your lips fixed *thumm*, weeping dumb. Only further burdened their hearts when you couldn't explain what happened; that the boys never came forward when you did; that their faces were clouds; that the break never healed quite right; that afterwards, in addition to being disfigured and slow of speech and tongue, you had to be a reminder, ὑπομνήσκω, of the previous child fallenoff.

All but vanished from Re's memory, of course! Just an abuser, afflictor. Wanton terrorizer. Sadistic overeducated freakshow. Brotherkeeping, courage, faith, ἀγάπη rewarded how? Fraternal resentment—*what else?* Acrophobia. Laughable Latin at best when unquoted. Irish and Greek a gulf short of colloquial. All of it tossed into the English vortex, superimposing or superimposed, blacklined, or sugarcube ephemeral. Caricatural raillery down every alley, and nausea in each reflection. Being the lesser—*being the least* of every family member, *pater*, μάμμη, Áine, Re, Giddy—and knowing that truth incontrovertible.

An ash! an ash to harass each time job's undone, no? Yet again, fayling Faolainn's failed his fall! And a cliff, what more suiting? Terrify yourself to the very end, very last of it all. And... *pater*, and μάμμη. Re and you out in the world, Áine taken; another child confiscated, no, they couldn't survive... but, '*Eo imus, ut caecatos.*'

Pain in the gut: barbed spike boring chestward. Breathe, damnit—stand! Would she have dug another shrine for you, her errant boy buried *extra ecclesiam*? And—

*Minime... minime*, no, it wasn't. No, no, no, no, *no*. How... *mocking*—  
— Hah!

—how sardonical! If you came across the shrine before—if the bitch'd had you cornered before you'd even known! Head, hand, nape, neck, gut, ankle, soul—allstinging, allremindful! *Damn* this place *ad petram, fatue*, you *fool*, what were you thinking? It'd prove remotely tonical? Lethan rinse, corpse eviscerated, brine seeping in skin bonesplit, mind shattered *smidirini* oceanfloor sunk off a threesecond plunge, anything—anything, Θεός, *Deus, Dia*, God—anything but this! *Videamus, venientes; venientes, videamus: hic est!* Hither you've come blind, so that arriving you may see! *Eo imus, ut caecatos, venientes videamus*: see only you've been blinded since the very start! See letters scrawled sanguinary 'cross canvas, the poison spat in your eyes, the falsefloor at every turn! The toyon!—...the toyon... that's always a bush of rose...

— *Ad petram. Ad petram...* no more, p-please, no, no more. What's that? Wipe your eyes, else someone might see. Where's that damned gate...

*Vade, vadeque in vinum*. Let it fill your every pore, *dissolvere, et... dissolvatur*. No blood, none more today. Spill as much as you might, you're logged on the slug, bursting already... *eo iberis*... there, there it is. Arborsculpture bafflingly occlusive. Good riddance, ash, so long. *Vale. Έρωσο. Slán. Ciao, arrivederci, au revoir, adieu. Auf Wiedersehen*, eyesore ἐκτόπιος, *bene ambula*: 'to-where we go' only the, ehr... 'tempieced' shows.

Eyes down: needn't see anything between here and the door but the, ehr... road. Think. Think, *putere, ceap*, ehr... think, think of anything. Think of your foot—not the ankle, *futue*, not the *P* in your sideeye, the foot. Think of, of... *pater*'s dream. Think of the dream he'd had of stomping his dog. Of the dog—*madra, canis, κῶων*—which slept in the understairs when the house was *seanathair* Manann's, before *pater*'s, and Ferial's who'd built it before them both. Think of the mongrel's name—*quid, quod nomen habuit?* Was a wolfhound, *pater* sketched it as a boy, plainly framed on the office wall; '*Cú*.' just call it *Cú*. Think about, in his dream *Cú* smiling always, trailing *pater* always through the house, smiling at him everywhere he'd go. He thought it silly, and *Cú*'s happiness enjoyed. But, think, *Cú*'s smiling in time grew old. All blessings that way. Agitated him, *Cú*'s smile, made him question why, ehr... *think*, why he wasn't smiling himself. Whether he was wrapped in his covers, bathing, or walking from school, *Cú* was there, *patersomni* surmised, smiling from his, ehr... malcontentment—mocking for his sadness with a smile. And, and... agitation gave over to spitefulness, gave over to anger, gave over to hate. And, *think*—its virulency was so potent, so—*coagulant*, that he took *Cú* into the backyard and lashed him to the well. First, he... he, yes, he *bashed* *Cú* over the head with a shovel, and *Cú* slumped to the ground—but continued smiling, not panting, not breathing, smiling happy eyeswide, eyes nitid blackpolished marble. And he *bashed* *Cú* again—but his smile only grew, and his eyes widened. He began stomping on him, with, with one foot first, then both. He was jumping on his, *caving* *Cú*'s chest, feeling his ribs snap beneath his weight, sweating he stomped so hard. But no matter how hard he stomped, *Cú* only smiled more. Smiled as *pater* took up his

shovel, and sank it into his neck. The beast's head, it was smiling yet, yes, even as he picked it up, and cast it down into and sealed up the well...

Giddy.

Giddy, *fatue, oblitus es*: it was Gideon. *Revertitur*: you, you'd complained of assisting him some way. Began aping hitched circles round the parlor. Jutting prognathic grins, pantomiming yardwork. *Pater* threw you into the yard yourself, put you to work. Hot that day—hotter than now, and you worked through the heat pulling turf shades past sunburned. And... Giddy came out unasked, brought you food and water. Dusk gloamed and *pater* came down, told you. Told you the dream he'd had several years after Giddy's fall. Told you he'd hated him for the ridicule he received, the extra responsibility Giddy brought. Told you he hated seeing him, disfigurement's daily exposure. Hated what Giddy'd become. Hated the reminding, how blessed he thought a free mind was.

But Giddy was better than them, asserted *pater*, fixedly gazing wellward, every one. He'd been rinsed of every digression when he fell, made uncompromisable.

You're a pair then, aren't you? Duad, Faolainn *gemini veri*: only two fools in the family—*Dioscuri Felani*. Closest thing to you. Confounded, entelechial parody. And... still, oftentimes, reins not doubleround constricting your wrists, your mind he's still... 'the mongol.' A fool, but a Holy one: *fatuus immaculatus... incorruptus*. Closer to κοῦρος, to *Christus ludicer* than you would ever be, then, and now.

No watchers down the tradepest rabbitrun, no *custodiae*: irreflective, inscrutable. Cuts around the back the venery? Take it. 'Vinery.' *Winery. In vinum* No one *vincens*, no, ehr... winking what you are. Nothing forespelled, nothing undone: no prodigious Babeldom



shading you over; no reckless lispling conservatorybound. Unreflected, unseen; therefore nought. They'd won the siblings' gauntlet *schelem*, all luckofthedraw. That why you put poor Re in the sickbay two weeks? Why you let Macsen flood through the door? Saw the promising look shared between them as opportune to cannibalize? Siblicide who next in seventoten years? Coffers run blooddry.

How'd you come out so divergent? Sixteen twentyfour of the tempieced: always this way, fatalized *in utero*, ehr... *Salomon Deciduum*, Σολομών Απόπτικός, meant to shrivel, incurl, break off and fall? Distance inward and downward, same as Time, infolded and unwound. Or... was it others, those philosophical waywards you'd companioned? Distortion *ex utero*, *corruptelam exteram*, by lovers and lusts, by atheists, lurdanes, and blackguards? Dolon and Fano, absolutely you know. Deviant osmosis: macular accrual by proxy, *linguae et ocularis* transmitted. And... look at yourself (not your reflection, man; nothing, ehr... mirrorsome), you roving involutionary wiltspiral involitional. Lambflesh patchwork coveredup, satin, burlap, and hairshirt. Amalgam of every way those wastrels made you lesser—'Solon Faolainno.' Too indulgent, vacillatory, or ungoverned to seat yourself down with the slate and chisel—'Nolos,' more *à propos*, how wantonly, ehr... wrackful you've been. Yes—yes, that's the truth, isn't it? how the table's or dyepool's efficacy is set by tincture and material. 'No-loss,' had you followed through...

But... what clarity that shine on Re? *why*, you... *Áine*...  
— Pluck something, *Áine*. Come to me, wherever you are, *who are you praying to, man?* come home and take up your harp. Let me hear music. I need something, a song—a lyric, even, a single lyric now's a downpour of Love...

No vinery, but a patio vinepergola'd, and a show of applause supermural. And... windows again—*ab*, ehr—*angelus verreris*, by the corner cornered. Vandalized, this one, trifold: three faces shaded hideous peripheral. Move on, man, keep moving: in time and distance they'll not follow.

Didn't look like this before, did it? Must've traded it out, last few months. Wear, though, already; must be artificially... matured? No, wear, wear... 'aged?' Nearing it... *Distressed*. It'll do. But, same door, very same as home, *nach ea*? Walnut, mahogany red stain, lacquered and polisheddown, older than the Faolainn name, floated overseas and hinged to countless walls. Funny, even the little scratches *SF RF ÁF* down at the ankle—ehr, heel. Foot. 'Base?' Something behind you, breathing down your shirt. Marveled too long. In in; turn the knob.

In in and under, under his smallframe spectacted gaze—goodness, man: those eyebrows. Coalcolored and coloredin, relflexively bounding and settling back to the paper at hand. And... still lingers that followfeeling, that shade, *crúth*, *umbra*. Σκιάν? then steps back, ehr... 'deponimitates.' Not much for words, this one by his looks; choke back that *ciao*. He's gone anyways, flown into the flurry fast enough for those coattails to tangle his hair. Don't know how you missed him sidling up behind you, hair that redbright enough to shoot in the dark. Couldn't miss him in this crowd: *Horti Lamiani*, *paene*, dining couches angled every which way, draped in the toga'd and torcasphixiated—each on their knees crying to be stained, amount of wine circulating white. Don't remember it being so, ehr... venal? Neronian? Some taste, something... palatable; akashic moisture, venting presexual off the

glistening foods, the soft, recumbent bodies. Lips smacked and bitten, eyes hovering.

Touches petting and lingersome. *Potus solus*, then you'll be on.

White: *bán*, λευκός, *candidum*. Worst wardrobe for a, ehr... winery. Venial vexation for a... vineyard? All the same: unconcealing, unsuppressed. No sign in sight of... vitriol.

— Say, you're a tall drink of water, the twin coallumps glint, lifting smoke off the newsprint from behind the bar. Why don't you scam? I've got people here trying to get sauced.

Fast talker, this one, even with that cigar pluming twixt the lips. Breath blenchingly garlicsharp—either his age or the dippingsauce. It's all you can think to say:

— I didn't know about the dress code. I wouldn't have left all my, ehr... *effects* with my man, had I.

— What, he says, casting optics about the hall, you don't sleep in a bed? Oh, don't worry about them, sir, don't pay them any mind: you don't have much mind to spare, by the looks of it. Don't let those deviants shame you. Why, by my reckoning, they don't have a single pair of drawers between them—and I count myself among their number. What can I get you, sir? Might I suggest, perhaps, something dry?

Out from his roomy coatpocket comes the stemware and off the shelves a bottle. He nips and bluewhales the cork in the air, catches it in his trousers, then levitates the bottle overrim, pouring nothing.

— Too dry for the gentleman, I see. You can't blame a guy for trying. But you can blame a Pollentian for selling that guy a crate of empty bottles. By the way, if you ever meet an Italian with a limp and no pinkies, tell him I've got two words and sixteen bottles for him. Let's see, what else have I got...

And down he goes, another one sidemarching the barstools now, arms overstuffed with bloodorange farebills, olivepress alpine overpeaking his ovibrown, ehr... curls? His discombobulation he parks bartop, catches his likeness in a silverspoon, breathes on, shines, then breastpockets it with a *staidéar* glare. The sommelier—his role here, presumably—pedestals into scene.

— Hey, you hear-a this? alpine starts.

— What, the horns? O’Juli told me they wouldn’t begin marching till five.

‘Horns?’ Oh, right: sure enough, there they are, reaching towards the ceiling, banging through the doors, someone’s dusted off the carnyxes. ‘Carnyces?’ Κάρνον? Κάρνω? Κάρνα? That right? Μάμμη? Áine? Áine...

— No, no, not-a the horns, the farebills. O’Juli, he got me working on the fares, write, explain, you know what I mean?

Sommelier doesn’t miss a beat. Tribal percussionist, this one, depockets another stem and pours himself a glass of the same *vinum, fion, κρασί* sedimentary suspension Daeirty bought. Or, Daierty, *erant?* Fills two stems *sine proportio*, sends that your way which clearly doth not overfloweth, extracts his cigar, swirls and noses ferment ethanol, then, ehr... he sips now. Drink, man: it’s what you can afford. What pagecorners lie flat and unsoaked in your sands or steps of Time? Drink. Πίνειν. *Bibe. Ól.*

— Well, congratulations. Isn’t that a fine how-do-you-do, facing you, now, rhetorically, yet with Alpine addressed, O’Juli giving you of all people the farebills. You know, I hear he’s got a housecat back there washing dishes.

— What's-a matter with O'Juli giving me the fares, eh? I'm a *maestre* of the words! I know many words. You tell-a me a word, and I tell-a you what that word mean, and the word it come from. Come on, rapt indignation eyechained to the floor pugilistically he's taunting, come on, any word you tell-a me, come on.

— 'Canine.'

— 'Canine,' he laughs, nearly colliding his head into yours, that's-a easy. Canine, what that is, it's-a 'dog.' What do you do when you sing, eh? You-a 'cant.' And-a who's always singing? The dog, so it's-a 'can'-in.' Another, another. I'm-a feeling real good here.

— 'Cap,' eyebrows draws.

— Cap, it come after the word 'kaput,' because when-a the wind blow—*kaput*, like a millmule he *slaps* his hands: it's-a gone! That easy one, easy. Come on, come on, one more.

— 'August.'

— August, August, why we-a callin' ... it th' August... *hey*: back to the wind, eh? What you-a wish for when it's hot out? 'A gust of wind,' no? And what's-a the time of year when it's so hot? 'August.' Ah, that's-a good, eh? Hey, I tell-a you what, if I'm no good for the job—bolt o' lightning strike me, right now.

— A bolt of lightning, is that so? Wait here while I get my galoshes...

— You no believe me? Here—

And the good shepherd rests his crozier, replacing it with a farebill, fingering through the pages like an Hungarian *virtuoso*. Eyebrows meanwhile depones an unnatural ninety degrees, asks passively:

— While this one's busy, why don't you give me the twenty *denarri* you owe—

— *Denarro*, alpine interrupts, slapping his sheetbook against the bar.

— Da'money, if you'd be so kind—

— Hey, just-a one minute, and he, ehr... what's that gesture there? He... 'projacidigitation?' projacidigitates on an *entrée*, tosses the farebill *sommelier* (*occipit quantum celeriter agit tantum*) and declaims: I tell-a you what's in the gnocchi, and you tell-a me it don't sound delicious the way I say.

— In that order? Because I can already tell you the gnocchi's awful. O'Juli, he asides, actually promoted that cat to chef.

— Let's see, alpine continues, folding a bloated hand over his eyes, no keys, that's obvious, it's in-a the name... potatoes... flour... in a *pesto genovese*. How about that, eh? Don't that-a sound good?

— I don't know, says eyebrows, traying his ashes, I don't speak Italian. Or gibberish.

They're all Greek to me: I can never get one straight from the other.

— *Custodi!* your purple *labiae* blurt. I know a dame or three who'd take umbrage with that.

— And I know a tailor who'd take umbrage with that shirt. She'd take it to the bridge and drop it from the bridge, he fires and drinks—swallows half the glass, in fact, his entire upperlip greasepainted with sucrol wine. Say, don't you owe me money?

The, ehr... Tyrolean's not through with greasepaint here—and *gratias Deo*. If you're reading the prices right, you shouldn't have afforded to walk through the door.

— Hey, you think-a me happy 'bout this? I used to be the maître d' of this place. Working on the farebills? I used to have-a the underlings!

— Didn't you hear what I said to the kid here? It's not like I haven't lost my underlings also. But think of what this place would have become without us! he swings apostrophically. What lie in store for our fair O'Timitay's? (there's a name for you) Why, if not for us this place would've run the risk of becoming reputable! God forbid, we might have won renown—eminence!

— Yeah, good thing I come-a back, too, 'cause I no like-a chocolate. That's-a why, when our guy, he left the strike, I walk. And when I finish my walk, I eat dinner. And when-a my dinner's done, I take-a nap. And when-a my nap's up, I come here askin' O'Juli for my old job. Then O'Juli, he say-a 'no,' and he give me the farebills instead.

Who's this O'Juli—*fatue, futue*, crimsoncurled harlequin's elbow appared! planted his, ehr... punim eyes popped, crossed, and yanked down, cheeks puffed out, hand around your waist, trying to... sneak a few *quo*... in your pocket? A philanthrope, or, ehr... well a — φιλος of some figure at the worst. Not in the handoutharboring habit—*non ab viris*, anyway.

— No, thank y—

— Scram! greasepaint—*gréisclí* yells, clapping a farebill. This place is for paying customers and turncoats. If you're not the first, you'd better be the second; and if you're the second you'd better be in uniform.

*Nec duo es nec... nec?* Black *wambasia* worn each of them, *gréisclí* and alpine. What color have you got on? Whose flag's flown, *caeli* or, ehr... σμάραγδου? In this lightening hard to discern... harlequin scuttles off into the dinery, bouncing from triclinium to triclinium, fondling fishheads, globi, and rolls. Somewhere amidst this ragman's roll his hand drifts into a plate of *capellini*, tears the backrest off a service chair, strings it with noodles,

and now *ipso facto* has himself a *crwth*. ‘Crwtho,’ no blackcoat on his back, it isn’t until he’s a minute into plucking the *strumento* that you realize every drop of sound in the room’s evaporated.

Plays long enough for that sneaking desire to reference the tempieced (*sed tempus periditur*) seizes you, yet, beautifully, beautifully enough for you to forget time or distance mattered at all. Gently, precisely, Áinesque enough to reason he’d strung that *crwth* with his own nerves...

But Crwtho’s never been one to need a crowd, and disappears beneath the everysided salvo of fruit eruptive *ad climace*, dinnerroll clenched beneath his wideyed gleam. *Et tu, Crwthon?*

— Hey, alpine toward *gréiscli* forward leans, lining his pockets in barnuts, you think-a the bossman’s happy?

— O’Juli? *gréiscli* asks, spitshining and treating to a smokefloat a flute. More money than he can count, a fleet of dineries, eateries, wineries at his command—not to mention the women! This one gets it, he says with your, ehr... pollication. Don’t you buddy? On second thought, maybe not: you do have a Gaulish look about you. Say, which sort are you, anyways? Dying, kneeling, or suicidal?

Σολομών Τρίπτυχος.

— I—

— Ah, forget it: I don’t like ‘em that tall. But a man like O’Juli, compensating for inadequacy, who wants more than he has? Insatiable? Why, there’s only one place you might find a happier man than our O’Jules.



— And where's-a that?

— A graveyard. He's a tyrant, a hoarder—he makes squirrels look generous. No, I don't think he's happy; he's a coveter.

— Hey, I dunno, alpine shrugs. A coveter's not such a bad thing in the winter.

— Now this is an explanation I'm dying to hear. Why is that?

— It keep-a you warm, you know? A 'coveter' on the bed.

Back *gréisclí* glibly leans, applies two fingers to his jugular for a fivecount, snaps his fingers and vexedly huffs: life in him yet. Misfortunate. Into grayscale discolors.

— Too bad. Next time, hopefully. Until then, let's pray nothing happens to O'Juli. Otherwise the manager or his nephew enter the picture.

— O'Antoni and O'Octavi? Why-a that?

— Tyranny I can handle, but at psychopathy I draw the line.

— Hey, I don't know why-a you do that! That's-a pretty good for riding the bikes, a 'psychopathy.'

— You know, I really think you missed your calling. I passed the loveliest ditch the other day that you'd have done a spectacular job filling. But we all miss our calling in some way, grayscale says lowering down to you, cigar pointed at Crwtho emerging from the crowd. Why, look at this one. A real deliberator, a devil of a dealmaker. He nearly convinced me to take partial rein of the strike when our man disappeared. Well, I say 'convinced'... 'whistled and groaned,' but the picture he painted was so *vivid*; an esteemed career in politics awaits him, no doubt. As for me, he pauses to drag and blow smoke in your face, I was plagued by misfortune from the very outset of our little revolution: wife died, got married, moved, got

divorced, moved back, and just when I'd come back to O'Juli and given up, wouldn't you know it? My daughter died of gout.

— Oh, that's—

— Fantastic, just a real squib. In fact, my writing's never been better.

Like bamboo alpine earing this upsprouts.

— You-a write? How do you was, eh! I'm a writer, too! How-a come we no talk about this?

— You're a writer? We're like ships in the night, you and I: a Spanish galleon, and a French poodle.

— Me, I'm-a great writer! Many books, I write. Many books, on-a the language, the cooking, the garden, the law—and the lawn. You-a name it, I write.

— Really? Why, I didn't know you were such a prolific Posidonius, a real man-of-the-arts.

Why haven't I read any of your books?

— I don't know, sheepishly alpine retracts, scratching his wool. They're-a lots.

— Well, I'm a fairly diligent reader if I don't say so (and I don't). I've no aversion to the voluminous, I'm no page-counting-poltroon.

— No, no, no, I mean 'they're-a lots,' like when you can-a no find.

Either back's turned now; opportune time to sneak more of that swill. Fast as speech, quick as taste; tip the bottle over and swallow another glass before. Whatever they were striking was wellmore than merited. Sweet, syrupy on the tongue, sugar, *siucra*, *sucre*, *zucchero*, *saccharum*, ζάχαρη, ehr... what's one more while they're still, ehr... bickersome. Cheque'll go unsettled anyway. What about 'leaves?' *Quidnunc?*

— You know, I think he turn around, he become-a one o'the honest men, alpine obsequiously sawing columlla of a *donn srón*.

— Oh, O'Juli's joined the honest men, you say? Good news and breaking! So, he's fired himself, then?

— How-a you gonna fire yourself, eh? That's impossible!

— With a piece of flint and oil, grayscale's spectacles droop, eyebrows waggling, anything's possible. By finger he tallies: You can get circumcised, self-immolate, and cook dinner for the in-laws all in one afternoon. I wouldn't recommend that order, but—

Background now, what's this? Brouhaha's gone bacchanal, and the bottles are flying—literally wingtaken, some of them. Up in the rafters there, *quid est?* A nest, one perching, regurgitating *fusilli* down the bottlenecks of a gurgling *piccolo* clutch. Another, a fullbodied centurion succumbs to avinerian cardiomyopathy midair and drops to the floor, shatters axially, and, with exception to the feathers sailing through that freshly formed *mare rubrum*, *fion mhaith*: man, wine's still necessary and potable. And—Crwtho! Dear old Crwtho, shallowpocketed old Crwtho, fere's there with a smile and a prop. Reaching into his overcoat pulls out of it and next week a tubule long enough to draw *liquor (liquidum? humor?)* sans altitudinal lower. And, Crwtho—how long you known Crwtho? Gentleman, statesman, allaroundhumanitarian Crwtho is, the tubule's offered up to you *sorbillari primum*. And, uh

— *Equum et ascensorum deiecit in mare...*

Busied, but give him some pollication himself, Crwtho, *smidiríni* gathering up in a wastebasket. And, maybe a little blood of his mixed with wine, pinching the shards

barefingered—but what’s wine already but lifeblood! Blood but the wine of life! or wine but the blood...? *Est enim, ehr... sanguine meo?* Extra blood in these two indisputably, interribimable praters.

— Hey, if you a writer, how-a come you not write about me? I’m a fascinating guy, got many stories, many great idea.

— Yes, you are a character, that’s for sure. But... that face! That physique! hamming on too hard, grayscale, tootoo hard—Why, to capture you between the covers of a book would be a disservice to the stage!

— When you gotta point you gotta point! My mamma, she always say, ‘Son, you’re not-a too smart, I’ve held eggs-a sharper than you, and’—

Where’s turning grayscale? missing the setup, cigar and all facing the blank eastern wall, leaning against the bartop, gesticulating snarelike that cigar, saying, again, to the wall: — If he figures that one out, I’ll eat my girdle. Then turns around, claps his hands cutting alpine short—*brevissimus quam est iam*, hah! and counteroffers: Say, how’s about this: the next book I write’ll be in your honor. Your name will be right under mine—undermind and undermined, as well—as a dedication from yours truly. Well, semi-truly; I’m sure my ghostwriter won’t whine.

— There you go, eh! Thank-a you very much, very, very. And for show of my preciation, I do-a the same for you. You and me, we gonna go down in the history books together!

— Abridged histories, I pray...

Crwtho, the vim in this one, *per vulgum navigat*, into patrician’s pockets insinuated, sowing unity amongst the elite while robbing them blind, silencing revolts and conspirators,

snipping sausages and answering ladily *enchantées* with a handed leg. Rushing suddenly up, Crwtho, from nowhere or everywhere or if O'Timitay's meant or was anything at all, urgently, wideyed he appears, eyes wide as dweomering, ehr... sinkholes, invested and enlightened, a courier chasing down, *quod*, what more than timely destination: 'where-to' he goes. But he knows, he knows, doesn't he, Dol? Where's he going, this bandylegged semicentenary ('quinquegenarian?') in a candycolor wig, running up to you overcoat fondled for whatever he's been tasked to cour. *Tumque*? What's a courier divested do? Cours again, suppose? and again, and again? What's the stride matter, Dolon, when the destination's known? *Quare*, unless, ehr... well, unless the package's undeliverable? Unless you break the rhythm, sever the chain, skip a note—depunctuate? Mindsloshed, headswum... But... *moritur doctus similiter ut indoctus*. But—then what good's the courier who doesn't deliver his parcel? Who trusts the unreliable courier, the fool? Who takes him into their home? Where does the cripple courier sleep? where else regardless, but on the earth? amidst the, ehr... amidst the crawling beasts and, ehr, ehr... the brambles.

Delivered now, Crwtho courier, message legible by his moistened eyes: a waddage of pilfered bills spilling from his twitching hands: *sue for pardon and repent to her* they read. — Which her, Crwpho? Which her?

Which her he doesn't know, his eyes mouthe; but a 'her' for sure even Crwpho sees. And the pile he's pushed in your hands. Out of instinct and the subtle, the indisputable yet scaling inebriative sway you resist, and here it is, those foreshocks for the first trembling through, forcing sweat out your pores, running your pulse up and escorting you to the last in line. *Sed*, ehr... *quis primus ibit*? Who's first in line you don't know, but he's not taking one

cent from Crwpho. But Crwpho's insistent; and you're resistant. He's shoving bills in the same pockets you're pulling them out of pacehold. Inoutinoutinoutinoutinoutinout this goes, ehr... it's extending on for more than a minute at least when he sweeps them up, organized in a beat of exasperation, sidling up to you all the while until you're sleevebrushed and hornlocked and calcomanie and he casts back that overcoat fingers pistoltwitched—then folds the bills and away they're stowed. And then he just... he's turning, walkedoff, leaves you grappling his most indignant yet somehow whimsical stare. It's not until he's stepped into centerroom, and—

— Fffffwieet!

loudest, *migrainous* whistle you've ever heard—entire forum freezing ritual strangulations, borderraiding, paedophilia, and usury—not until every lustful eye of the O'Timitay's' from out of its muck rolls to gaze on the burning form of beaconly Crwpho, that your winesac leather glove of a hand stumbles over the, ehr... billfold excrescency bulging from your breeches. 'Legerdemaestro,' this one. Good old Crwpho.

But... still, now. All is still. Where's the song, Crwpho? Show us where we're going, where you've gone, why you've come. *Quod est...*

With everyone turned on him, grayscale and alpine lumpedin—those mouths of theirs in stupefaction idled—Crwpho takes a bow. Comes up with the bread knife off the adjacent table, a copy of his *Soul* dropping to the floor as he swings the knife down and *screams*—  
*Jesus Christus!*

Hands and knees—*Jesus, Jesus, Deus meus*—hold it back, suppress, man! suppress every gag unloading and reloading dryheaves while a shriek, a cry, a *cheer*, what you're

hearing now—approval, an inciteful cheer? sounding off from the crowd, grayscale, alpine through the gelatinous mass of flesh tearing—*nuda*, now, naked every one! each of them riding death like some carnal aphrodisiac, their eyes—dizzying, dizzying, leave, man—grip the stool, getup! eyes swimming, praying for the innocent nudge or anonymous tug galvinizingly crucial, simpering, panting every one of them winedripping stuck with clotted mastication after grayscale and alpine’s signal kneel at Crwpho’s either side decompressed intestines—God, just let it be held back, just let you make it to the door—bursting from the footlong Isplit incision torn up his abdomen glistening, writhing like a mound of worms, strand by the limp hand still clutched, beatifying hand of his corpse.

— Why’d you do it, buddy, why? cries grayscale, shaking another foot—God—of intestine out Crwpho’s trunk. *De wafelen*, keep moving, room spinning though can’t let only meal you’ve eaten go—suck it down, grayscale carrying on: Why, pal, *why*? Don’t you know I’ll have to the clean this up?

— I know why, alpine now pulling fingers away contemplative snap. I heard-a this. What’s it called—right, right, yeah. It’s-a ‘the call to-a the void.’ He heard someone on the otherside, he figure this-a the fastest way get to’em.

— ‘Call to *the* void?’ Should have voided his locker and tab beforehand. Grayscale drops Crwpho’s hand, stands, bureaucratically widesteping past the bloodpool inspecting. Oh, this is a mess, a fine mess. Finest mess I’ve ever seen, and I was once married to a senator’s daughter. But this mess isn’t just fine, it’s offal. Say, on the jostling multitude he turns, shouting, anyone here an haruspex?

Spex, spex, ehr... *specere*? Damnit, man, it doesn't matter—move! But... 'Look at?'  
Look at what... *minime*, no—no more! Fogged railless bridge in the dark stumbling at the  
family door, grayscale clarifying for the jittering oblivious  
— I'm looking for a bowel-reader! Is there a bowel-reader amongst our number? he bends  
goosestepping. Bowel-reader! Bowel-reader! O, bowel-reader!

Until immediately almost—only a few steps more—slender middleaged boardchest  
creature goldbraceleted greenheaddressed nothing more officiously inserts herself  
— Yes, sir, I am bowel-reader, as you say. How may I be serving you?  
— Took you long enough—now, I have a matter of grave importance for you to settle,  
madame. I *need* you to tell me: did this man eat my carp?  
— Hold quiet one minute, into the pile, subaudi she lowers, while I divinate...

Reaching towards the corpse, crowd's wildfire impatience dancing eyetoeye,  
figuretofigure, lips smacking, breath shallowing, precoital perfume—yes, there *again*,  
wetting sick the ionizing air. Don't look, don't listen: like a locusts' nest, grabbing now,  
hundreds of brushes and your fingertips brushing, squeezing painfully the knob, grayscale  
*gréiscli* greasepaint eyebrows alpine witlessly on  
— You know, I could have never guessed this from him, he being such a Stoic.  
— 'Stoic?' What-a you mean 'stoic?' I don't see-a no wings—and no feathers! How can man  
be-a stoic if he don't have-a no feathers?  
— Do me a favor, above the groaning he responds, why don't you check your skull? Surely  
you'll find some there. Wait... *you!*—stop that man! He hasn't paid his tab!



Disemboweling slippery bloodspill slickness—*vade*, man, trackguards watching you!  
Saturninely pine squishing suction flailloom slapslapslap inescapable inching on the door—  
get gone! Orgiastic drawnandquarter! hepatoscopic bald *hyaenarum in proscaenio* wrestled  
shimmered ripping κακόφωνή soundchamber undershade scraggling dripdrip torturous  
cerebral overcrowd asphyxiation exoderm! Quick, quickness, away! the westwall *sub murrus*  
round. Lightsped darkener on a clearblue—didn't see a thing, right? Remember? Didn't even  
run out on the tab—never there! Never a watchtower letting happen, never a witness  
selfblood participant—

— Hmphf—

your feet, *fatue, vide!* Might still observing, timewards, glimpse you fawnling fayling  
fleysome feyly vulnerable. Mousetoed movement *murium circum murum e vino*. Water,  
acquare, need water, not oceanspray stinging, stinging myosotis razorslicked, *sed buonam*  
*dor*, good water flushing baptismal injected bloodwine. Water the wheezing—breathe,  
breathe! yet soft becoming nonexistence, silent, sightless, tasteless, touchless, nonolfactory  
invisible.

Place here round back Daierthy nimblehanded gripped you, Zoar impregnable—  
breathe, breathe—lips softpetal. Calm, *calm* now, backstraight as then against fingers curled  
palms scraping wallplaster. Lift, lift your mind *ex memorisensu*, elsewhere direct. Hands  
offyanked, neck of fingering relinquished little temptress sent packing home. Her home, you  
the invader—no, *alibi*: inessence *praesens*, criminal. Breathe, breathe stable, sensefocused.  
Footsteps ambling. Followers?

Applauding climbs, slips through pergola trelliswork and skyward falls, falls, exponential decay *ad astra* vacuousness. Breathe, man. Breathe, breathe *per aspera*. Breathe *prope sandalia*, stoollegs concretely raked. Breathe, of lutestrings tenor strummed twang of an autumn raindrip awning, note mellifluousness of a voice feminine, of *adagio* fourfour signed. Of single lyric prayedfor...

... 'neath the cover of October skies

*And all the leaves on...*

Longcross his beard *a sonnc, a sonnc, eurichinne behaffen* inwardly soars. Daeirthy—Polymourph'd! *I want to learn play it for you death follows nothing taxing week perhaps maybe death of justice two like it you Sol lost control you like it won't you Rosy nation calluses worse easier done a guardian angel wish she and I could just talk when they've formed a fall fingers raw feel my heart's pulse worse worse there's still hope worse than them all along was there the Moon dancing of course like fools stumbled—*  
— Huh—no, not h—hooahyach! Hyaaaaauch! Hyauh—God—hoaaaaach! Hyaaaauuuuuch!

Dizzying. Wallsplattered. Downtrickling. Eyetwitch. Gatepound *thumm*—God, *obsecro*, no more! On your—move them, *fatue*, stain, it'll stain you loafers already flecked, speckled. Dolon's napkins when you need them, where? Leghair messed, droplets clinging to. Music? Wipe it down. The hands. Thornstung the hands wiped against the wall... Music?

Lute lyric song? Broken, unstrung, murmuration climbing, clouding above. Footsteps again—run, *run!*

Open road *bangcreakthummoaning* at the Faoldoor. Let them see, let the watchers watch! Overwatching scrutinizers everlong, glasseyes bulbing envious veinous niveous bloodshot. Noflow followers yet—check, *check again*. None overshoulder—keep it *diem sabbati, ut sanctifices eum* up! Wine or blood or bloodwine wineblood lipclung—ferrous or sucrose either way relaxant ironical. Wring thin, surfacecoat spread nigh perceptible palmwide, ramifications, knuckles—damnit, man! *Fatue*, the knuckle! Widespread extensively much area covered against scrutinous glances hideable; just see mandible cantangled, not, ehr, ehr, ehr, ehr, ehr, ehr, ehr... *imbruement*... but the messpile left behind? Soaked into the sand, into poororous plaster, unthinly enough unspreadable, stained forever, ineradicable... deathwish maybe, but catchwish never. *Et servabitis eum*; hidehole—fleetsomely find! Where *es ubi* you? ‘Where-to your stride’s brought you so’ *excaecatos*: mainstreet defenselines, no allies—‘alleys,’ crotches, unpierceable. Sneering facadal repulsivenesses, Great Wall repelling βάρβαρος dissolute Mongols—windowed! Away, away, to the brick!—no windows, you’re not in the ground, cold, cold, unrequited in the warm sky, waxing gibbousness whitehot—that smell, that *smell*...

*Rosewater!* Ζουλάπιν! rosewater *memorisentiens* scenttongued! *Esne oblectata* glaring lazylidded and careless down! Putrid rosewater sinusal suffusive! Emetic rosewater always again roynish cloyesome! Leave you ever? Leave, *leave!* Ever you be given peace? *Occaecatos* what are you thinking! Go somewhere! *Ocule maxime!* shake its opacified grasp! But—where’s the hideaway? Rosewater lunar spigot’s outpoured, effusion through the

streets streaming, soaking each breath miasmal! lurking, darting through the shadows—  
dormant furious sicklehand of the shade!

Pulsing, pulsing every foot eyecornered, like all things earth, sky, Sun, moon, grass,  
brick, glass anchored umbilically, inflated, vibrating *thummthumm* beehive violence with  
each beat. *Thumm. Thumm.* Breathe! Oxygenation tanninbitter tongue infused *thumm*,  
breathing nosessealed: hoarsethroat gustation, ehr, ehr... *urlacan* odorous nosetaste sweeter  
now than *thumm* neck, hair, breasts rosewatered *ollam. Ollam, hola, allons*, ‘allo—*alley*.  
*Alley apparet*—go, go, down! *Thumm. Thumm. Thumm.*

Nothing no *thumm* alley here of *thumm* the last time *thumm* offstreet deadend *thumm*  
no, applecrate walls (duck *thumm* down, duck here breathe *thumm* downward) abnormal  
everything *thumm* were you here once *thumm* did you ever watch her *thumm* did you ever,  
ever *thumm* Daeirthy, Daierty, either of her *thumm* did you ever climb down? Are you  
*thumm* are you still looking down wishing *thumm* dreaming you would are you *thumm* still  
up there, praying they’ll go *thumm* are you here now? mice *thumm* scurrying through the  
drainwater *thumm* nibbling at crumbs, the silt greasy *thumm* oilwet between your fingers  
smells of *thumm* buttered urine walls and concrete hosesdown. Here *thumm* are you here,  
man? Are you unseen *thumm* are you unfutured? You believe so *thumm* a Man touring  
wandersome, behind himself or *thumm* ahead untruthful, you going anywhere, present  
anywhere *thumm* undestinationed? at sea adrift, or, or *thumm transcaelum*, steerage  
worthless. Nothing *thumm Eo imus, ut caecatos, venientes, videamus thumm* gone right.  
Where have you gone *thumm* keeps calling you backwards *thumm* foxhole whispering

glossolalic, peace subtidal *thumm* what you reap, fayling failure, *pater*, μάμη, *thumm* Re, Áine, and ashes, death, and heckling, real, *thumm* real, any of it? deathstroke, the wreathing limbs *thumm* heartless termagant, towheaded virago, pushing you back, culling *thumm* prying, pressing, as if you were even a Man, as though *thumm* as though you'd ever really been here at all just *thumm* wanted to castrate you, castigate and cannibalize *thumm* what else would you expect from her, from the name *thumm* from the name on the canvaswhite of her shoes written...

Soundlessness unpattered, voices casualcausal skiffing over and down appplewall. Down the streetdays a rhythmic *thumm* thumping woodhollow, but all *aliae* unsounding. Alleywindow's grimed, obstruction internal: tarpedover un beholdable. Debouqueted, lunary tidalwave down the grates, wastevapour, sewerage. Depolluted; air again, again breathable. Urinated, but breathable. Breathe, breathe, as the beachved: breathe breath unburthened, *hala halitum*. Breathe sweet crispness, tightred tegumentary puncture... *hala mala*. No; fruitcrates commuted, somehow *thumm*: rubyred, ehr, ehr, ehr... epicarp? pericarp? untoothesome inedible, pomegranates, *mala punica*. Pomegranate pretensive, *malorum* odorible. Overmask. *Pearsa. Persona*.

— *Prósopon*.

Πρόσωπον.

Cratecrutch: upraise yourself. Topspun world stabilizing, stabilizing, stabilizing—stable *thumm*. Unfollowed, undogged—not a cur incurred. Centered, eyequiet *tempestatis*. Negligible thorn, windstorm petar. Turnaway prey... all clear. Yet—

— *Futuere*...

Where next, man? Where you going? Where you leading you blindly? Stride delivers unautomatic, steps issuances, mindmandates, directives of the soul. Been you goading you *thumm* all along, you of the alleywindow (recess—oneway *exibis*), neck severed at the transom, encased, mullioned. Or—*siste*, no. No, not *thumm* not you, glass through the grime something, someone still reflecting another *persona*, another person, longhaired, face dimshown, but... shapes, features facially tangible. Soft, fullsome unwrinkled. Lips thin applepeels. Eyes shining *thumm*, impossible refulgence, pewtergray, like... Áine. Hair, though, hair unlike the Faolainn women, not fairwaves longspilling, but... curled, dense springs leaping otherwise Athenic backtied and hairlid, like the Υπόνερος matrons, like Ely, Rhea, and *thumm* μάμμη. Μάμμη coevally, somehow? But, μάμμη's eyes nutbrown... cheekbones, nosebridge dissimilar, more after your own. Only thing, ehr, ehr... *phenomimic* between them's the jaw...

Not you sexskewed, then. Couldn't be, wouldn't. Unlopsided, unwayward perfectly. Model that decollation, bare its teeth, make it blink, wrinkle its nose: moves with you, she does *thumm*. Not μάμμη, but... μῦμος, synchronicitous unerrantly, but... different. Darkly visible, but beautiful *thumm* incomparably. Aeonfar of her conductor. Face thinner, healthier. Jaw *thumm* uncanted, superregular, like μάμμη, like Áine, Re, *pater*. Like everyone *thumm* but you—*vide*, see that hand she's raised caressing hers! Hand *thumm* unbroken, responsive, mobility undamaged, free and untethered under filthy glass! *thumm* And you: unbudging, stung at the trying thought!

Entire corpse *thumm* unscarred, impeccable! Eloquence beloved, *thumm* unthorned ankle not unthroned! no guilt compulsory, *thumm* no razorbrandishing shame! No anguisher

of women, *thumm* no Saturn's thegn! *thumm* Acerbate eyes *thumm* nighttipped greylances—  
back! *Away!*

No *thumm*, the left—!  
— *Futue me!* God! retract, hurry—heard? God, God, *futue me!* no bypassers, tarp muffled  
glassfall—*quiet*, quiet, man! quiet, underbreath. *Fatue*—you *idiot*—you worthless idiot, you  
*damned* fool!

No, *vade*—*get gone*. *thumm* Gashed posterior—bloodbeads boiledup. Pocket it,  
pocket it *now*, man. *thumm* Pain kilnburning, hot searing fleshroast shaking deadnumb. Out  
*thumm* the recess—*walk*, walking normal. Round *thumm* this corner, then north the next,  
eyes *thumm* blinded, blinded everyone. No one's caring, *thumm* luminary not even; no one's  
noticed *thumm* her place's stolen...

Somewhere, anywhere—anywhere *thumm* you're untraceable? Blood's seeping into  
fibers already, *thumm* crimsoning them. Begin spotting through in splotches soon *thumm*  
when you put on white smallclothes? Yestermorn, hours *thumm* and miles removed. Thought  
they were *thumm* noire, or, ehr... *dúghorm*. Can't remember, mind's frizzing *thumm* not the  
venery, door's three nails from unholding *thumm* heavydrilling on the walnut,  
massivebawdied wavepulse. No, somewhere *thumm* somewhere else, somewhere sanctuary  
from this daymare *thumm sancta sanctorum*, ἀγάπη... asylum, place where not *thumm* being  
the heart of the world μάτριχώρ, matrichor overbeaten *thumm* lassitude of trying to  
oxygenize it all, not at the center of *thumm* something, moorlines detaching, stormwalls  
closing *thumm* swirling neckround or swirledaround, accelerating faster and faster, bollards  
*thumm* uprooted or blurred, but a navelstone, shelter apart from Ἐρινύες. Know *thumm*

yourself where. You're already headed there, you're already *thumm* crosst the road north. Not too late to sidle in, *precare*...

Followfeeling still *thumm* nothing follows nothing wanted; nothing wanted never was. Why then you feel *thumm* followed? Why then seethe the shadows hypermetropic, distensive, swelling with breath *thumm* and expiring, jumping from darkpatch to dark, circumpassing the buildings, through the windows racing circles *thumm* around you, an ouroboric nightmouth rotating dizzyingly your axis, either sucking you in *thumm* or spitting you out. Wonder, dizzying, wonder was there ever a myth... what happened, if a changeling ever, *thumm* unlucky sod, put eyes on his prototype...

How behindhand are you? Can't get a beat on the tempieced, moving too *thumm* phasing inandout, overlapping itself. *Crack*, now, earthtrembling woodsplinter down the road, hazyfrom (you're not frightened, though, are you? *thumm* or even surprised, seeing) outspilled into the bricksea, shimmering, coruscating crimsony unguent, bodyparticles twisting inward, swarming undulative, shuddering, *thumm* crying, and moansome the Mass swerves its throng, oozing your direction. Likely, he disappears, unmasked changeling, vanishing back, back *thumm* back to *Tír na nÓg* through the faeriemound, by smokeplume disapparated, back into the void where he was formed. *thumm* Changing, now: μεταμόρφωσις; limbs, hair, feet, hands, arms, shanks, napes, members, concavities, haunches shrivel, dereify into... what are they? *Petals*, tonguely, bedewed morning petals, *thumm* shifting, slathering over one another, selfagitating mucilaginous—κατομμύριοφυλλο. Lefthand the olivewood handle, remember... best thing about a basilica: aye lowlight. Move on, *thumm* and perhaps the Mass'll not behind you follow...



No esonarthex of lasttime. Thought, wasn't arcade standing south, uninitiated  
navescreen? Must've renovated it out; vestibule, now, communicating communicants right  
in. Where are you brought? Everything changed in a threemonth. What you scouring down?  
Shrivening booth, find the confessional—*there*, end of the pews: pinkened cedarboard,  
cubicles incommunicable, vegetation, palmtrees, cherubim pinked and golden inlaid. But...  
doors closed: penitent, contrite heart indwells. Wonder how long they've... cross the fir aisle  
outflow where the font before stood. Wait it, wait it out endpew, then, backcornered, blind to  
the seated congregation. *Hand*, watch the hand—none back here, luckily: only you. Pew's fir,  
too, lacquered fir growing up from the floor, curved impossibly solid, singlepieced—  
unseamly, unjointed, no gold emblazon. Meeting of floorfir and cedarwall near inscrutable,  
inlays gold and overlays: exorbitant ornamentality, religious overcompensation. Ακόλουθοι  
first met uneasily, caved and hoveled, doorbarred and shuttered. Now their praise, how sings  
it? metallurgic, hammered and touchcold. Votives overlabored garishly  
insupraconsermonical. And you're no exception. Sol unexceptional.

Hopeless, tempieced divination—all nearsight's flown. How long they been  
confessing—and what? Whose village they burn? Interior entire's engraved same, palmtrees  
reaching at olivewood rafters, over doorposts stooping, cherubim twoheaded interlacing their  
trunks, soaring through the forest, ascending, descending, whiffing, and a choir—*no* choir...  
no *saepa* either chancel side flanking... guess you were wrong again. Solways wrong. No,  
box's all, Sol's boxed, rectangular prism, above underlit in opposing narrow slit aperture rows  
rimlighting the peopled aisles rowing upnave towards the alter, its goldbordered acacia

empty, unutilized. Heaving *retalbo* raised stories behind it a glinting citygate, submeridian presbyter albed red intercepting, homilizing idly the laity. Accent, though... not intuiting a word said... how's he going to hear your... oh.

— 'Homilizing.' 'Homily.' Ομιλία, eyes rattling exhausted you rub. *Fatue*... what—?

Swollen up against, lifting the leftthigh material like a quadrilateral welt. Crwpho— Crwtho's billfold. How...? How much here? Quietly, withdrawal quietly: giant echochamber, isn't it? Slightest deviation might send the whole place ringing. Girthsome— hundreds here, must be. Numbers moving, wavering stormwind random. Righty keep pocketed, no point assaying an essay—ehr, *contrarium*. Hundreds, hundreds undoubtedly. Enough for the homejourney. Enough, more than, to drink... for eleemosynous giving...? Could figure the ten percent, but can't see, can you...

Enough, restitutively? How much Emil spend on her early trip home? You think, restored, he'd put a good word in with Daierdhy? Entrance to a daughter's heart's under father's lockandkey. Stuff it in a letter, frame it in a note of apology, for your actions end of May, the spate of missives you've already rained... and, not once, not once you'll solicit him—not a, ehr... *scintilla* of adjuration. That's how you'll win her back, you'll see, you'll see, you'll see. Just a humbled miscreant... wielding supraconsermony. You'll need it, won't you? Assemblage lethalprecise, assure the walls' reconstitution, remediate the damage done blowing through...

*To the Honorable Emil Damm—*

No, pandering, obvious, may well say 'to the merciful.' Pare down

*To Mr. Emil Damm—*

would be too formal, too formal. Earnestness, *fatue*, sincerity—frank, humbled, but not...  
undeservingly. Speak to the mentor he once was, the inlaw he *could* still be:

*Emil,*

*Find enclosed the sum of———, a meager amount, figuratively, considering  
what a minor drop in the ocean it represents, in terms both of what you are  
owed, and of my misery—*

pathetic, δραματικός, unabashedly

*...and of my remorse—my compunction—*

'compunction,' guilt edifying, good, preventative, proactively

*...my compunction at the (ehr) disgraces imparted on our beloved Daierdhy—*

Dearthly! Deirdy!—*Dorothy, fatue!* backturned pierfaced worstthanthe mall last you'll have seen of her, *lapsus* like that! Irreproachable, flawless—it has to be flawless! Flawless as... flawless as *you* can be, and... 'Polly,' man, not 'Dorothy;' girl's his daughter, not a... reject, not just the state's forsaken name...

...our beloved Polly. A child is a... precious—priceless thing... a thing... a soul... unblemished, steering homeward a ruptured vessel...

And... you think a few hundred will wipe his memory bare, *tabula rasa*? Forget it, *fatue*, *futuitur*...

'*Tabula*,' on the wall—whose veneration? Harldy all drawing legibly together now... 'Hippolytus?' 'Ἰππόλυτος?' Hippolytus.... which one? Roman, must be, by the presbyter's reds. *Sanctus... equorum*, yes: saint of horses... dragged by them to heaven, battered, roadrashed, and cold. What was it he recorded? threethousand psalms—by his count—to your namesake attributable... psalms numbering threethousand and songs even more—fivethousand, *fortasse*. You'd read them, you read Hippolytus... read anything you can grasp... but could you write a fraction, evenone? Not with that ἀμαρτία staining your thigh handshaped... but... maybe only one matters. Only one of the, ehr... *eponym*'s rose above them all. And... why? Because it was the most lyrical? the flower above the thorns?

*Non... non fuit, et... non es*, neither are you, you know. You know: you're not a flower above the field, you're not even... not even Cordial, fallen or thrown in amongst

them. You're nothing more than *the thorn*, the bramble itself. A spinecluster, marring the garden of... of...

Over the placard, chiseled *ex chryso*... down a cherub floats, cups carefully its opened bulb, its petals with its beastly snout noses. Everywhere... a sea churning them across every corner of the globe, a network of agents depositing them at every turn—a conspiracy, unwitherable, insidious! hanging their banner on citywalls, on flags, on flesh, on shields, in every art, on scents, sights, tastes, touches, smells diurnal and circadian, insinuating themselves into the impressible everything you perceive! Icy snares plaguing the forestfloor, snapping, scraping! fouling the foxhole, your haven—a shrine to them, as you still lived! Their name by that miserable little gensch through the parlor carried—he knew, he'd known—he must've seen! And in the kitchen! by the lavatories, on the tables, the mantles, dessicating, shriveling odious in the sink! Corsages pinned to her dress, its odor in her neck and cleft—coursing below her very skin, so toxic you can hardly breathe, so sickening you couldn't sleep! Proselytizing and isling—entire towns, missions, and islands they invade, crosspollinate, and conquer, by Death's hand waved *παγκόσμιος*: the Rosy Nation! plummeting from the Moon, drowning the brain, suffusing your every scent, coaxing you into love—then spiriting it away! hunting you down as you try to run, a crippled prey, pushing you towards every height, pulling you down every bough—over their knee breaking you, snapping you, tossing you into the sea! Everpresent, ubiquitous at your every breath, assaulting your best days and staining irredeemable your worst! In every corner, down every alley, into every glass seen! Through every sleeve, under every hat, on every shoe, its oils clawing up your nostrils, shaking, shouting, berating, winding! Bursting out back of the

*retalbo* like wings! Here, here! *even here its horror ensues*—she's found you! squeezing through the doorcracks, mouseholes, and embossments, lolling across the flir—pouring smotes now from the windows, blocking out the Sun! Disintegrating every corse, congregant and priest! clicking, slicking, salivating, worming towards your feet! The Rosy Nation! The rustling rose millionleaved! It's here, tongues redsore millionfold, a voice susurrating maddened babel every leaf! Erosrosesore *thumm* cyclone rosy—  
— Rose... she came to tell me. Yes, they're *thumm* coalescing now, man! nipping! Yes, *thumm* that was her name. 'Thither we go, being blinded, *thumm* so that arriving we may see.' See... what—breathe, *thumm* man, breathe!—what can be seen? *thumm* What can be seen?!

Hurricaneic your mouth thrashing *thumm* whipping down your throat *thumm* flown!  
Choking! Tearing *thumm* tearing! Breathe *thumm*, cannot *thumm* breathe! Away! *thumm*  
shied where *thumm* you are *thumm* unseen!

\* \* \*

*Says Solomon:*

Hapless is he in his days, meandering and piteous, how suddenly like a stubborn child he collapses at any seat, eyes like the wanderstars ceaselessly spun and breathing the thin air of mountaintops, the journeyman who rejecting assistance and aid lacks destination. Despair is his honey, and misery his

meat. From his heights he will plummet, by the waves will he discover himself washed away, alone, sinking fastly mid-sea, should he not collect his bearing. The Maker's guidance proceeds unparalleled; his is a torch blazing in the blackest night, a map through forests winding and treacherous, a grapple over stronghold walls, and a stoppage against discord and unreason! Only may He direct the weary Man, though, when his own lips confess where he has been. What is your confession, journeyman? I am His emissary, His Earthly ears and yours; do not tremble below me.

*Says Solsat:*

I come—come begging asylum from the tempest which beyond this door rages, refuge, protection, ehr—sanctuary! I have nothing to confess which He has not seen, no offense for which I seek hearing. Please, permit my safeguarding until Time subdues—breath flies from my very reach!!

*Says Solomon:*

Heavily does it hang around the neck, the chain of sin. It constricts the throat and a barrier to needful breath it enacts, depriving Man of the Maker's sweet oxygen. The Maker's

mercy is a blade of gleaming steel to unbind your chains, but you must stand before him, naked and unclean. Wretched are your eyes and red through misconception; through resentment your guilt has festered into rage. Reveal the scarlet of your hand before me and remain, and remaining like the newest snow you shall be made clean. Speak.

*Says Solsat:*

I—I see no eyes to behold, nor ears to hear behind that black screen! But... but if only to stay my sentence, I—I shall speak.

*Says Solomon:*

Then as His agent His merciful ears I shall be also. Know, however, that He will answer if you gather words false. Speak soothly.

*Says Solsat:*

I do—I *will*, I—I am. I... on my tongue I taste a knowledge which bounds seas. Through the letters of commentators pure and lewd I have traveled many lands, of my forebears, my idols, and fiends. I've drunk from the Amazon and—and dined with the Saracens; I've visited the Holy Sepulcher and sailed



across the Ganges. But for all my instruction and mindly sustenance, for the wisdom I practiced and gained, my Temperance I neglected, my Fortitude I starved. These virtues leant on their spears, my heart grew weak, and vulnerable. I... I loved two women, a Priestess, and—and a Queen. Their loves I poised as best I could, but... in a day I, I was with them both, and in that day trespassed them both irrevocably. For this... for this I am heartily sorry.

*Says Solomon:*

You are absolved, and tasked a penance of one *paternoster* for this sin.

*Says Solstruck:*

One? That—that can't be—

*Says Solomon:*

But tell me: there is a dozen-headed bird which has never touched ground. Its dozen heads entangle its entire form, so that not even wise Men who hunt it may know its beginning from its end. No border might restrain it, nor may a hundred guards or hundred thousand enchain its untiring gaze. With its

left wing it summons Death and Hatred, sows War and Famine,  
and with its right rains Peace and Prosperity, Life and Love.  
Have you seen it in your wanderings, journeyman? Could you  
call it by its name?

*Says Solsat:*

I don't know—only vaguely does my vision hold, and hardly  
can I hear for the rain—do you not hear it?—like a thousand  
sharpened heartbeats pounding at my door! They'll break  
through, they'll, they'll devour me... moisture rises even now,  
each breath thicker, harder-earned. And a flash! a noiseless hiss  
of spark and... whispers, whispers—do you not hear? Please,  
you must—

*Says Solomon:*

Another offense has eluded your grasp, perhaps? I wonder,  
what impieties have gone unchecked?

*Says Solsat:*

What is it you want to hear—what failings have gone  
unadmitted? That I'd been with them and others since I was  
little more than a boy? That I've been a vicious, a rapacious,

insatiable fool? That by—that while I watched the Priestess  
pack I was already tasting her predecessor? That after nearly a  
day's worth arguing over it—when I told her I was through,  
when she had resolved to leave, and the weight of planting  
another perishable seed in the world was lifted—that I was  
happy—*relieved*? Or that when her ruse was up, and she asked,  
asked if it was about my sister—*my precluder*, and she dropped  
her things in tears, trying to break my crossed arms, that  
breaking them, I pinned her 'gainst the wall and swung at her?  
Do you see my disfigurement in the strobing lights? Can you  
hear me above the battering rain? I am sorry, heartily,  
heartily—*damnit* you don't know how much!

*Says Solomon:*

Into these errancies Man easily falls. You are absolved, three  
*paternosters* for your penance.

*Says Solstood:*

What is this...? Wetness, flat, velvety, stuck waxen to the  
cut—the petals—*the petals*! A weakness in the ceiling—  
they're cascading in! Melting—yellowing as they fall, at the

floor turning aqueous, wiltwater pooling! Do something—  
*please!*

*Says Solomon:*

Tell me: a mother gives birth to twins—

*Says Solsoakt:*

I don't know, *I don't know!* I can't, I—stop the leak! Let me  
out, I want to leave!

*Says Solomon:*

—gives birth to twins. One dies in the birthbed, while the other  
lives a full life and outlives her as thankfully the Maker so  
often intends, having grown to be fortunate, diligent, and pious.  
She brings honor to her mother, her family, and name. From  
glory and grace she never slips. Her mother, however, for *both*  
of them weeps. Why is this?

*Says Solstressed:*

They're rising! Above the *P* risen! How the battering with it so  
discordant soars—like dented horns, or a thousand hymns sung  
simultaneously! All of it liquefying, falling—shouting,

trickling, screaming! I'll drown—It'll drown! Please, I can't breathe!

*Says Solomon:*

*Omne trium perfectum:* Is there not one sin else you are forgetting?

*Says Solstraint:*

What do you want to hear?! What do you want me to *say*? That I cared *only* for the Priestess and *nothing* of my friend? That I'm a *coward*? That I so *abhorred* another failure that if it weren't for being seen I would've *thrown myself away*? You know it—you know what you want to hear! You and He have seen everything—just tell me what to say! What is it?! What—what is *that*—a *fist*, a single fist hammering, hammering—

*Says Solomon:*

Do you truly not know?

*Says Solsinking:*

Just—just say it! Say it, and free me! The petals rain fiercer, urinous rosewater's kneedeep!

*Says Solomon:*

Only one existed: one, which precipitated everything—

*Says Solsinking:*

Say it, then! Say that I sought out a child to bed and left her a slave! Say that for months I've led the Queen through the mud on a leash! Say that I made an unwanted girl feel abandoned all over again! That I'd been with the Queen—that I wrote Polly by day, and ruffled her rugs inbetween! Say it! Say that I'd done the same to Deirdy! That I drooled over the letters we sent behind her back, that I pictured *her* between the covers atop of me! And say—say that I prayed for help! that beneath the showerhead I *fell to my knees* and cranked the heat! And that I felt no guidance—nothing, but searing punitive rain! Say that I toyed with them all—Polly, Deirdy, Dolon, Fano, my siblings, all of them as I pleased! That *pater* I pointed towards Macsen to feel some superiority—*anything* next to Re! Say how small I constantly feel! Say how much better he is—all of them, than me! Say that I've sought only to pleasure myself since I was a boy! That I hounded and chased and like a fleeced wolf stalked Leiney until she gave! That I wasn't a

good enough brother to Áine or Re! That I never, no matter how much I studied, the hours I spent awake memorizing, reading, hoping—that I could never speak like them! Say that words dive at me so quickly, so densely that they're stacked—like towers, unscalable, impossible to read! That I frustrated μάμμη and *pater* intentionally! That I envy my idiot uncle! That I beat—that I beat poor Re for making me feel small by saying *her* name! That I—that I had ever followed μάμμη into the forest instead of staying amongst the living... that I can hear her heartbeat even now, even *now*, *thumming* in my ear... that I made her cry, her and *pater*, when they thought they'd lost another... when I fell from the tree... that I'd let Re run ahead, that I'd had a free hand, that I even *thought* myself worthy enough to shepherd them... that I've been scared, afraid, and alone... that I've never had a true friend... that I've feared His silence, that I've questioned if He cares, or exists... that Rose, that my sister, *my sister* and two men died... that I might live Her life instead...

*Says Solomon:*

You sorry fool: it was none of them—not *one* of those things.

*Says Solsinking:*

What... what was it... the fluid, it's... before it... please... tell  
me...

*Says Solomen:*

It was simple. At any time this stone was yours to dislodge, all  
of it. You were so, so close: you dropped, and failed to raise,  
your given rod.

*Says Solsinking:*

...

*Says Solomon:*

Will you say nothing?

*Says Solsunk:*

It's... it's at my lips now... I... Deirdy, Polly... Μάμμη...

Rose... I can't speak... forgive me... forgive me...



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## I

Open thy doors, Father! Hear thee not his rapping?  
 Willst thou not before thee deem Phaethon, thine sprout'd seed?  
 Haste descend from thy throne, loosen the bolted door  
 And cast wise blazened eye on facsimile, son,  
 He who in Clymene germinated but sev'n  
 Months, lusty to declare, b'fore all, divinity,  
 Rightly imputed to him by thee, *knowing* Phoebus!

Inured to obloquies and slanders unjustly,  
 A progeny thine own, of holy nature,  
 Cursed by the very boon which Jupiter-given  
 In part alone derived Heracles, Perseus,  
 Helen, and Bacchus, heroes, some even gods  
 Like yourself, Sol, Sun-Lord, each a germ of Jove's tree,  
 Each famed or oft-revered, unlike he, thy first-born.

Doth he deserve not love? Is he consigned etern'l  
 To beat pate and fist in moil, as not those within  
 Whom flow ichor, blood d'vine—blood consanguineous  
 To mine? Look not in pity upon thy genesis  
 As twere he a laméd hound or forgotten parcel  
 Lost in egress; thy seed devoid of deserved care  
 Flowered ere nurture of rain nor liefer ray given  
 Other divine, his kin, could produce such glory.  
 It is not love tendered nor trained supplication  
 Imbued in human kind that directed him here;  
 Thy love is epicene, thy feigned pity misplaced,  
 And thy supplications purloined from nations  
 Pious. So do not waste such theatrics upon  
 A wiser soul as his; no less would they him move  
 Than Tithonous Olympus, Polyphemos Scylla,  
 Juno Jupiter—or yourself wanton Daphne!

So now, coxcomb pater, before thine halls he stands,  
 Demanding expiations nor conciliations,  
 But that which by birth unrightly be rightly his,  
 Gift to the deities, authority—namely task;  
 Power man doth worship, with oblation, orison,  
 These realms of absolute manipulation which  
 Without our humble inferiors would not subsist.

And so dazzle thy visage upon thy forgotten,

Humbled or discountenanced, in capitulation,  
Or remonstrance; either way, see him in!

## II

There thou languor, Phoebus, too otiose now even  
To answer double-doors which with mere impulse  
Thou couldst well apart cast as twere silver gossamer  
But. Eke, thou hath Year, slowest spirit to pass,  
Who by thy side with Month and Day duly reside,  
Answer his call in thy stead, of which he observes:  
Encumbered reply speaks effete business.

As meager tributary doth unto mighty river  
Flow, so do thine actions in minutiae bespeak  
The crippling foibles of thy greater comport,  
And company conscripted do fall before battle  
When ephemeral and inconstant as their king.  
On thy dais remain and ridges of thy bow  
Gird shut; thine influence in two-thirds proportion  
Metes itself out upon the day already in  
Lethargy unearnéd; its presence appended  
Is undesirable now. No; speaketh Phaethon!

‘As hears Luna with wonder in the night  
    The gentle paeans of all fairer sex;  
    As dreary eyes become them a lulling hex,  
Her crown two-horned showering its wan light;  
    As to women doth she a blessing give,  
    So Sol-given doth man boon receive.

‘Over starry night Luna doth preside,  
    But thy breadth is superior to her’n  
    And so it boggles mind and matter learned  
Knowing with ought scruple nor modicum of pride  
    Apollo did one-third his day bequeath  
    To a creature weaker so far him beneath.

‘Therefore what good a blessing is from he,  
    Who in slothful uxury call refused?  
    His province not seized nor perforcéd loosed,  
Nay, relinquished by act of sovereignty!  
    Such in him do amount as grains of sand  
    Qualities unbecfit of god nor man.

‘How soars the kite in air with fall of wing;  
    So give speed to the tongue and he shall fly,  
    Through the unpinioned gusts of verbose skies  
Thusly servant of profligacy sings.  
    Now each surrendered ear shall glean defamed,  
    Sooth and true, the failures of his Phoebled name.

‘Yea, by Orpheus he gave man power,  
    To glorify their lives with written word,  
    In metre structured, profane, and florid,  
Essaying to bolster their living dour;  
    Yet though patron of knowledge he may be,  
    Each hath acted wiser amongst his seed.

‘Was not the bard, by Felicity’s grace,  
    Calliope’s child, euphonious Muse,  
    And Aristaeus too of Phoebus fused,  
To one already blessed in rural face?  
    Manifold, such offspring great do adduce:  
    Greatness his heav’nly ride sole can’t produce.

‘And recall the raven, with pearlescent plume,  
    Surveying on post Coronis’s bed,  
    Tasked to take wing should not Phoebus be fed?  
Was not his reward a black scorched doom?  
    For he informs his lord of lover’s defect,  
    Though order to pluck out her eyen neglects?

‘What probity inspires one who spurns  
    Then entreats to render impetuous wrath  
    Diane, too weak him self in waters bath—  
Conjoined by him, who from imprudence learned  
    Her emwombed child hewn from within the pyre  
    Was progeny of his own loins’ desire?

‘Summer, Winter, Spring, Autumn—seasons all!  
    Women there are more whom with ought consent  
    He partook—when tastes were not queerly bent—  
To disport and consummate treach’rous fall,  
    And even those who suffered bleak, endless dark  
    As sentence unjust for his uncouth r’mark.

‘For there was Daphne, sylvan virgin pure,

Whom Phoebus, gilded-stung, with outstretched hands  
Rapine importuned of her foreign lands,  
Impelled blind by rankles of Cupid's lure.

On enchanted strides he did her pursue,  
Whom by Venus' curse could not be wooed.

'Her fate was the price for his churl contempt  
When Peneus-hemmed she sank to her knees  
And adjured distraught her father's retrieve.  
Answering her prayer and with ought exempt:  
Peneus encased her in wooden shield,  
In laurel tree form, that Phoebus might yield.

'Bruited amongst nymphs and spirits of copse,  
That when from the forest he found her there,  
Imprisoned in bark, no arms, breasts, nor hair,  
He grasped her bosom in crestfallen hopes.  
But to spy his intent, bear this recourse:  
Believe not his fingers felt for remorse.

'See upon his crown rests trophied wreath,  
Wrought of her branches in pretense of love?  
None but the gullible heav'ns above  
Could honor such lies contrived through his teeth.  
Shed not this offense, for pride would not listen;  
Better should wreath remind him of her pris'n.

'Saving for last perhaps his greatest sin,  
Hecuba's daughter, fair Trojan Treasure,  
Made votive for Achilles' displeasure.  
Sol in vain sealed the fate of own child's kin,  
When for Troilus' death guided Paris' shaft,  
Heedless Achaeans smote her breast to haft.

'Aye, these events were revealed but to one  
Whom the spotless victim at heart adored,  
Ceaselessly devout to him hers call 'Lord.'  
The Delphic foreseer knew all to come;  
Implacable pride again being cost,  
For this was vestal Polyxena lost.

'At prolixity's risk, words shant be waste;  
As in reaching mountain's peak are we told  
Accomplished kite shall his wings enfold,

For troth mine invective hath proved this case:  
As under womanly hands is he tame,  
So Sol Invictus hath perjured his name.'

Hours might pass were I to continue vindictive,  
But iniquities enough are surfeit produced  
That all who have hearkened canst contest nor dismiss  
Not claims antecedent, now what candor follows:  
Far from Olympic heights hath knowledge stumbled  
Into the snares of flesh and material affairs,  
Where Pride rules in place of Prudence; Sloth, Fortitude;  
Lust, Temperance; and Wrath, Justice. What comes of this?  
Hear now: such tainted Light infects the men upon  
Which he falls, as Python in dying bite poisoned  
His victor—or so we shall assume, gallantry  
And virtue remote now to the dauntless god who  
In youth raised arms and slew the impertinent beast,  
He who now imparts plague in lieu, ere blesséd health.

This cad mine mother sought out, whether in penance  
Or concupiscence I know not, but that son's presence  
Be entreated before him, that in benevolence  
Self-proclaimed he intends to grant any request  
His son implores. No boon may sponge out these affronts,  
Nor ameliorate, nor brim the chasms of Time  
Lost, affections dulled numb. But chance begets fortune;  
As one motion upon two dissimilar spheres,  
Alike in form, in fettle divers, gives one speed  
Where other obdurate remains, sunken in loam,  
So do father and son, as oil and water mixed,  
Inevitably separate, crude elements  
Eschewed by the purer—though below, beneath not.

Attend now mine demand: To pilot the Sun, once,  
Yea, to steal back the night, to reclaim providence  
Over all spectra of light, but once. Videlicet:  
To empow'r, to inspire, to restore Jupiter's  
House from lapsed privation to erstwhile sanctities,  
All in the revolutions of singular flight.

Scoff not! Withhold the stings of thy tongues' prolepsis;  
Better-suited are they to be berthed than assail.  
For any derisions cast will in hundredfold  
As humility be returned when the palace

Gates are flung open and fi'ry car which all warned  
Tempestuous steers in under tenacious  
Grip, golden-rimmed wheels ere spotless from the tired  
Ruts of Phoebus' daily trail, then bespattered with  
The dirt of audacity, leaving Aurora  
And her winds wroth to make haste, ashamed of their lag.

Grant this opportunity once, give Luna rest,  
And see how thy son fares in illuming Terra.  
Should he succeed, know, father, who rightfully should guide  
These wheels. And all those here, consider this final  
Admonition: continue these dispensations,  
License his torpor and scortation, and surely  
A day shall come when the Sun refuses to rise.

### III

'All futures doth he foresee?  
One who chary must agree  
Submits to son with he'vy mind,  
Though shrewder wish he would plea.

'And so in port willst thou find  
Car raised on spokes silver-twined,  
Where Hours fleet array thine steeds  
Restive for this flight malignd.

'An fatal yen shant concede,  
Draw consult ere dang'rous deed;  
Permit master course propose  
That might thy goal not impede.

'Scale above celest'al throes  
Where Bull, Crab, nor Lion pose  
To ward back the i'spired few  
Who'd fain surmount their sta'ry lows.

'Veer the light from wonted view  
But 'gainst the poles aye askew;  
Dogged heat be needed not,  
And piqued current will undo.

'Of all to come he is wot,



Who knows else will manage fraught.  
In hope, he consent reveals:  
Thine own hand designs thy lot

‘With hu’ris, flak, and narrow zeals.  
Thy steeds are fired; make thee steal,  
Last attending one decree:  
Grasp alone guides not those wheels.’

Such is his riposte!  
Better silence, better spiteful lour,  
Better Janus’ ports fastened for ever  
Than open for but one ignoble chirp!

Seek Knowledge where he dwells upon the breeze,  
Or below Rosy depths of saline seas,  
Or shrouding fallen as resting leaves,  
But not from he, not from he;  
Knowledge hears his moment,  
Doth not as stone plant  
Trunks in mud at ambushade;  
Doth not as calf bear  
Costard for assassin’s blade;  
Doth not as fool repel  
With twig the rapier-arrayed.

Whilst Tethys broaden’d her gates  
And Night rushed down,  
So spurious Knowledge remained,  
Even to forsake his crown,  
Aye resolved to break the torrent,  
Final words as darkened picture  
Reflecting off every terminus of Memory,  
Brilliance of chance eluded.

Ennui pillories he who but offers his neck;  
He who ruled the day lost by ‘ventured night,  
As with stripped crown, so provinced light!  
Words defanged deliver no poison,  
The attacked soaring away in impunity,  
The abandoned, the serpent,  
In solitude amongst prattling heads  
Left lamenting his inaction,  
Lamenting usurpation awry,

Lamenting pasts untried and impossible futures,  
The aging cock and the resilient hen,  
The tangled sheets and the gloomy den;  
‘What are these distances, but dwindling sand?’  
Behold, the reins tighten in hand,  
Tides turn back on themselves,  
Eddied swells painting well their master  
A portrait knowing no model,  
Or teacher, but the countenance  
And eye which on the surface  
Glimpse back through mercurial troughs,  
Tempered strokes evincing no dauber.  
See o’er crest and peak this visage  
Thrust inviolately ‘gainst the hastening  
Waves his coursers, wingéd  
And brazen, to slake their  
Thirst for bravura unimpaired.

Now these reins shall know no slack!  
The feat of ascension beckons at hand,  
Conveyors four shant abate,  
Lead in pairs by perfervid Love  
And her brother, odious Hate.  
As his horses guide and he returns,  
One steered ever by and ever steered,  
Caught in the veneer of spirit’s grate,  
So allow these passions like control,  
Casting aside Knowledge vitiate  
To pierce music’s songs untold!

Vanities and obsessions,  
Flotsam and jetsam of the mind,  
Let these be cast off as well,  
And break fixation’s reflective spell,  
Ocean’s floor a place fitting more  
For thus and other detritus.

Unburdened now, we rise beyond the wake,  
Borne by Fiery, Scorcher, Dawnsteed, and Blaze,  
Burning to impress their newfound commander  
By their speed, by their vigor, bygone weight  
No longer their puissance suppressing.  
Their Sun in-tow divides the waters this night—  
Or prolonged day, one might say—  
At speeds unprecedented; auspicious augur,  
Benison to the unattended dome,

Scuds past nimbul blankets and  
Revives illumination benign.  
Yea, so heav'nly fire smiles still,  
And man, fragile man,  
    Who grows only under yellow rays,  
    Who warms his chilled flesh in our heat,  
    Who feeds his sow from this mouth  
        And reaps him in the tiring year,  
    Who, to conduct his till,  
        Must needs this undying aide,  
    Will in Alacrity's sway  
        Welcome these new hours as largesse,  
Laud his glad supplanter.

Thro' the westerly clouds these pilgrims  
Reveal their states, wretched and discontent:  
    The bedraggled masses, I see, fall along  
    Harrowed and unkempt roads  
        Consuming the weary, the aged, the hopeless,  
        Laying tracks upon their stilted mouths;  
I see prostrate crowds bending  
To the charms of soothsayers and  
    Corsairs, cloaked insidious grins, wielding  
    Tolerance and loathly prejudice alike,  
And their misguided champions,  
Spreading death through unbridled speech,  
    Latching in desperation unaware  
    To retard their abysmal plunge;  
I see the crippled brave, wresting  
Onslaughts of unflappable blind,  
    Forsake the Elysian verdure  
    To repose, to cower in the shades of Eternity;  
I see children, abject and objected,  
The bar of precocious hurdles leaping,  
    Spurred underground by rapacious  
    Philistines who spare not the goad;  
I see the bevvies of men, fathers  
And brothers all, receiving their marks  
    As sanguine lashes upon their backs,  
    File down as lines of ants,  
Overflow coliseums, view the devastation  
Of their own, of mine people,  
    Who bartered lawful devotion  
    For but mere passes at Second's splendor;

I see mothers unwed renege on  
Their oaths, misled by the hollowed,  
    And by the like deserted to  
    Drown in teary pools of contrition,  
Arrested spirits left to scour the crags;  
To nip at the heels of their makers;  
    To hang as baggage from their necks,  
    Barred from charity, warmth, and rest.  
These hapless beings below, I see, all trade  
In talents of flesh and of soul, all sedate,  
    All subdued worries and struggles  
    By acts of vending off themselves.

These peoples at their corps must step  
After hymns better rung:  
Must reroute their brooks and burns,  
And dreads of holocaust discard;  
Must welcome change  
In metamorphic state,  
Always is, isn't always...  
    ...but who canst inspire?  
    Who canst labor with endless tire?  
    Who will drive them to their peak  
    And gift their wise men truth to speak?  
    Yea, the gods do little care,  
    Ensconced in far and feckless lairs  
    And, forging powers men extol,  
    Allow devils more control  
    To translate Earthly sound and sight  
    And pasture vicious appetite!  
    Man must search amongst himself  
    If ever he's to find his wealth.  
    Perhaps his savior now turns to be  
    His own on high who clearly sees,  
    Who clearly sees...  
    ...Deirdy?

What curse besets? What afflicts? What  
Sticks this sickly sweat about mine skin,  
Hoars mine hands beyond their hale,  
As twere her vermillion skeins  
Fast begirt?

Do they assay to wrench the Sun

From his sky?— No, gypsy mind!  
Back to thy borders retreat;  
Depart these fruitful soils  
For thy glowering rains, thine indurate peat.

Grip relaxed near betrayed our reign,  
And forced us steep from safety's lane.  
Impetus of thought digits behoove,  
Bring us back to lofty truth—  
She took another?

Sable crop and snow-white pelt,  
On mounted glade these souls espied  
Entwine, to share a raiment one the same,  
Posture as crooked beast,  
Mock erewhile's vestige name.

But their sins are par to yours afore—  
Stamp these demons against the floor!  
Bury them deep from wand'ring sight!  
Wicked mares weight thy breath;  
They scrawl no weal upon this flight.

But ai, quick doth Mnemosyne provoke  
Incisive thicket about mine hide  
That siphon all courage from the skull,  
And thorny brambles within the gut,  
Leave a star in vacuum's cull.

Now misstepped mind hath staggered far,  
And reached abode of monster's strut,  
Beyond the course of welkin's bar

The heavens cast these off whom pride misleads,  
And Scorpio perturbed must guard his den;  
So immasculate cart betrays his creed.

Prosperous farms pull and scorch the weed;  
Like arid fields renounced by fallow men,  
The heavens cast these off whom pride misleads.

When Lover's new rapture replants the seed,  
And submerges voyeur in murky fen,  
So immasculate cart betrays his creed.

To dire tack the captain unnerved proceeds  
    To right astray vessel ever as when  
The heavens cast these off whom pride misleads.

The current is strong; he cannot succeed;  
    Waves suck him swift under and yet again:  
So immasculate cart betrays his creed.

    Their advocate dooms them, mountain and mead,  
        For Scorpio's attack hath made him wend!  
The heavens cast these off whom pride misleads;  
So immasculate cart betrays his creed!

The world soul's force draws us in,  
The driven  
And their master, no master,  
No king, no commander,  
To trip disaster,  
To whip the Fates, brace Fortune and Favor,  
And assumed their hame,  
Topple Destiny's colonnade.  
'Such is Fear, whose covered screed  
Enslaves thy mind,  
Shakes thy limbs,  
Shatters once impervious lead;  
'Hold this cretin back, crying maw remiss,  
And sooth shall veil rise above dozing strength!'  
Foolish prods prick at idle and vapid air;  
Enquirers their how bely  
    Whom pinch at thorns in neighbor's eye.  
Human will cannot repulse force unseen,  
    As loadstone binds the lustrous rings.  
    'To-where I go, I've ever been?'  
Olympus hath to her bench dragged her toes;  
'Let this *corpus* for himself fend;  
Opera dig their heels about the roots,  
Eye with globes athwart scant horizon,  
Beg to learn '*quae simulatum est?*'  
Chaos, meanwhile, winds the sails;  
Who knows what gusts beneath prevail,  
But that man touches base to find basic way;  
I pray the Father knew this day,  
Knew thrust which turns the sphere;

Could his vehicle persevere?  
 For currents grab and shudder, and conspire to fail,  
 To sunder the chariot in twain,  
     To set the Sun free, to sever  
 Vulcan's chain, and pepper his corpus  
 With hirsute debris.  
 Here such demons must live, loath to welcome travelers stray,  
 Bodies of air and timeless souls  
 Whose evil claws squeeze their fingers round the nape  
 And consume aught breath thy chest.  
 Pressure, yea, inexorable strain,  
 Torments the coursers; though immortal they remain,  
 Gnash and cry, issue upset neighs,  
 As if sudden dive doused their etern'l flame!  
 What harm I bespoke them!  
 What suffering they endure at divert's cost!  
 Could that I by manna, tonic, or chant, succor their pain—  
 Yet clamped and damp mine hands—  
     Aye clamped they screw around the reins—  
 Cannot shed garland, wreathed taut about the head  
     That burrows boughs within mine brain!  
 Could I extirpate the roots were I free to strike?  
 Were they ever-present, biding time for bale,  
     To swell at perfect moment,  
     In sight of dolor's grail?  
 Fill for sorrow's grace?  
 Lots for morrow's place?  
 No: from hither to thither canst trace no solid line;  
     Bridles have been made,  
     Rudders that are mine—  
         MINE!  
 None have known this alley,  
 Nor stept a foot in private valley;  
 Over, under, upside-down,  
 The eyen which see this path are mine!  
 And see! the crash of waves decline;  
 Some fitness appears as pressures relax;  
 Steeds fly straight, hooves gallop adroit,  
 And beneath the clouds again I make the land.  
     The powers canst assay decollate  
     The keen and headstrong man!

Lo, there a light now flickers at the rim  
 That about his world illumines

As a rose, petals of saffron setting  
Environs all aglow—

Fabled pharos—could this be the shine?  
Which broadcasts Alexandrian pride  
To Phrygian mounds and waters of Arcady,  
Dancing torch in the annals  
Of antiquity?

The Plough ahead rests—this could not be,  
The beacon watching over Helen's sea,  
That stoic guards the darkly realms of Meridy,  
Dancing torch in the annals  
Of antiquity...

And in every bearing this light extends,  
Unlike the turning of Egypt's lens;  
No—too far behind, this could not be  
Dancing torch in the annals  
Of antiquity.

Antiquity—where's the seam?  
What is now and what was then,  
There in the babbling flow, only distends—  
Damn this troubled antique dream!  
For last I gaze on rose's land,  
And though sight confirms no candle stands,  
Strength again departs mine hands;  
Mine mouth is veiled by trembling hands;  
Tears wash streaks oblique these soot-stained hands:

The twin-peaked goddess, climbing sentry,  
Whom guards the reach of Latium's entry,  
Hath flame overcome,  
And stripped her of her faultless vesture;  
Hath assumed her place and pilfered her snows—  
Her snows pearl-pale!—  
And down her sides flows an esurient blaze,  
Led in van by boiling waves,  
Which man and village alike both raze,  
Whom wail alike, and scream,  
And howl and bay,  
And pray, and pray, and pray, and pray:  
'Give us respite! Give us love!



Show us mercy, aegis above!  
Hath man his cities built to steps too close,  
The stairways to your sacred homes?' forlorn choir belts;  
Prayer's answer bestows but a Hellish fire.

Eyen cannot this terror brook; they must away,  
Must this death and ruin shake,  
Must onward hare, should steeds allow,  
From this embouchure of pitch and wallow—  
But Rose's petals give chase and follow!  
How quick they flit about the lush and verdant racks,  
And hew a kiln from Atlas' back!  
And as on wheels turn  
    They run along the haunting track,  
Trode atop a mirrored scene:  
    As image smotes upon the lid  
    Who nags his press, and in  
    Time's caress resists dissolution;  
This image, this horror, enkindles aught corner beneath the Sun,  
A thousand nations, and a thousand fires,  
A thousand mountains all the same,  
Each engulfed by Rose of flame,  
Firmament choked by acrid vapours:  
Ida, where thunder clapped first in his cave,  
    And Cynthus, where favor Jove  
    To son and daughter returned,  
Reduced to tinder in the spread;  
Cithaeron, where men, Pentheus and Actaeon,  
    And Oedipus too, received  
    The gods' draconic scourge undue;  
And Helicon alight just as well,  
    Where Muses laved their lissome figures,  
    And sang for man from Harmony's dell,  
Their home, Parnassus, and the dwell  
    Of Orpheus too, where Apollo to my brother  
    Gave his honeyed winsome lute—  
    Did you know? Did you even  
    At that time see the leas afire,  
    The bane devouring grass and kine?—  
And Pelion and Ossa, as blazing tower,  
    Could not equal Olympus' tenebrous spew,  
    Her brooding glower;  
And Athos, which shaded once the humble  
    Eremites, now makes an inferno

Of their docile lives!;  
 There, there the ravenous flames,  
 As if by Phoenix's wing scattered,  
     Emblazon more than but the Aegean mere—  
     She jumps and wreathes entire sphere!:  
 To the slopes of Dacia's pride,  
 Where now ghoulish soldiers weary  
 Stride upon an infernal battlefield  
     A neverending struggle for liberty, winds away;  
 To her north she leapt,  
     And over Kekes reigns—or ere  
     Did she sweep across those famished bourns—  
         Do I make the surge or doth she make me?;  
 To the Great Bell, which in the heat  
     Now smelts, and hurls tide after molten tide  
 Upon the prostrate Celts,  
 A people fearsome now but figurines;  
 To their highest peaks, where Teutates,  
 And Tuisto too, forsook their mores,  
 Trading imperious mounts for diminutive prowls,  
     Mingled limes showing now but ashen streaks  
 Which forking halt under northern plains,  
     And Lugdun shoals,  
 Brittonic waters retreating at the heat,  
     Pulling back their blackened foam;  
 Where seeking shelter Teutates hath run,  
 And as Lugus reemerged, tripartite strung,  
 On the shores of the Caledonian Isle,  
     Where Nevis did his asylum beguile,  
     And where Nevis betrayed him;  
 For not even he could stop conflagration  
     Of his home, his throne,  
 He now plunged beyond the dearth,  
     With other nameless gods,  
     To evanesce, to shirk off the blaze  
     In irredeemable worth.

A thousand Roses envelop the Earth;  
 A thousand pyres spouting smoke;  
 A thousand gyring peoples choked;  
 A thousand rivers, now haze or soon become,  
     Fault alone ascribed to one:  
     To the Sun,  
     To the son...

SOL, THIS IS ALL YOUR FAULT

Yet the cart hies on!  
And whether by effluvial air, fuming heat,  
Or by mine dripping palms,  
All strength to guide these wheels hath gone,  
Each combusting mount a grievous cry,  
An echoing shout begging gods' reply:  
'Why?'

Yet the cart compasses on,  
And aught underneath perishes  
Before mine passing...

In mounted glade, on Uolunti slieve,  
This smoking blaze can't mask the scene:  
Familiar green Gullion in devastation,  
Where minutes past in gloaming mist,  
Secret lovers dallied at their tryst,  
Lied in wintry heath, enclosed by  
Ash, Rowan, and Cherry trees;  
Now, I clearly see,  
I clearly see—

They in forge together meld!; Heaven joins  
Above as one precious metals alike,  
Elements rare, welded at the loins;  
Fires before transformed askew lovers,  
Much as this fateful gambade on the pike,  
When his vengeful quarrel steeped the covers  
Of the stolen bed, diff'rent bloods made run  
By reckless acts of an arrogant son!  
'Whose are these sins, the father's or the son's?'  
The wise men know when Echo doth respond—  
She yearned your favor, ever persisting  
Dying coals; but you, silent in the garth—  
The idylls faded—ever resisting,  
Drove her yearnings toward a warmer hearth.  
And for no offence but ego's marring  
Didst she with two lives her groundless fine pay;  
Narcissus adored himself in the fray  
Whilst venturing Echo lost all, barring  
Her voice, which even now resounds with lust;  
His visage, ages gone, withered to dust.

Failing faolán strides afore a fi'ry wall!  
 Untamable flames spilling from his teeth  
 Setting ablaze below the bleating sheep  
 In the furze SOL, YOU ARE WORSE THAN THEM ALL!  
 Grieve the thirsty nomads who laid their lives  
 Before the knees of Fate, in lanterned bands,  
 Left home behind, and when at last arrived,  
 Shone their lights on cold and stoic sands,  
 On the barren face of specious sands,  
 And on the walls of Dis and his deceived;  
 In the gloomy den, by tangled sheets, gay  
 Thoughts lapsed and to furious ones gave way  
 Which dear Polly took—NO, I WILL NOT SAY—  
 But that your back was turned and still she fought  
 To break your crossed arms, succor in your lap;  
 To still the choler of your heart and wrap  
 Her arms about; to take the pain you wrought,  
 Revoke your curse and wish her nary leave;  
 But in her amends you refused to weave,  
 And her pleas as water washed through the sieve.  
 'Implacable pride again being cost;  
 For this was vestal Polyxena lost.'  
 He whom played aright now be loosely strung,  
 Whom held himself esteemed in e'ry fashion  
 And thought himself hero, men among,  
 Lost humility to curb his passion,  
 And prescribed his sentence by his own tongue.  
 'Watch about you, the scheming men.' 'What gall!'  
 Returned she, 'SOL, YOU ARE WORSE THAN THEM ALL!'  
 Glowing Rose arised, stay thy changeling suits;  
 For thorn and beauty both stem from thy roots!  
 Terra a gale upon turns the petals  
 Skyward, which about smoke whirl, and wattle  
 A wall, recoiling on every border  
 —THE WALL HAS YOU, SOL—that as oil'd wheel turns  
 Faster, and faster, and so faster yet—  
 Her flames now descend on me as a net!—  
 Laurel about the skull begets but burns,  
 And fetid fumes fain inflame disorder,  
 Suffuse his lungs—Father, child cannot breathe!—  
 But dizzy, through the veil reflections seethe,  
 Phaethon—or Phoebus, or is he Sol  
 (Could the careening cad make one in all?)—  
 Renton, and Áine, in chariots too,

Flanked at either side, towing stars the same;  
 Polly, Deirdy (dead?), the mothering youths,  
 Μάμμη, *pater*—Find the man's Christian name!—  
 Dolon, and Fano, who flies, yea, in sooth,  
 Much as I, soul enfolded seven times  
 To weakness, aye pursuing facile climes;  
 Each a smold'ring wreath runs their heads around,  
 Their stolid eye (how do they stand the pain?),  
 Fixed ahead, mimic every drop and bound  
 As didst a bind these thousand cars enchain!  
 Peccant alike is each who spurred her squall;  
 Each who vainly seizes the reins shall fall  
 From grace, but SOL, YOU ARE WORSE THAN THEM ALL.  
 Where once within the sky the warblers sang  
 Dulcet tunes, naught but smoke oppressive hangs.  
 But lo! There an angel breaks past the sheets,  
 Scales and sword at hand, and taking wing, beats  
 A column through the reek, so Phoebus' gaze  
 Might witness the world's wanton stroke, and meet  
 With clement eye, prime mover of the blaze.  
 'Father, hear this mine entreaty and reprise  
 Your role; relieve me of this malady,  
 The oceans dry, the land consuming seas,  
 Countless cries burgeoning son's agony.  
 Forsooth, you knew what mess this fool would make—  
 The fell and dev'ous doth less danger stand  
 Than the lout what disregards reprimand!  
 Deliver your child and car and retake  
 Your position; I relinquish this guise!  
 Restore your pilgrims' bright and hallowed skies!  
 Silence, silence now, and nothing but returns.  
 A noiseless air, which neither flows nor churns,  
 Swathes the halting globe; What betides? What bends  
 Shocks of blinding light through mouth of tunnel's!—

Ends the life of son of man,  
 No tomb, no plot, no burial plan,  
 World by thunderbolt freed;  
 Though high were his love and his daring,  
 Low is he brought by his deeds.

Wherefore do my steeds chase, to foreign zones  
 Dragging behind them cloven wreckage?  
 Oh, that premier grips had governed her reins...

All faols fall under the Sun!  
Each fails and flails as they've fallen,  
An apple to each Adam,  
And every Atum's ἀπόλλυμ'!

*Fatuus* Phaolothainn do not mourn:  
For flame of light arrogate lived  
    So quick and dimly burns.  
His own he hath designed, demise and fetters—  
    Something happened while I was asleep,  
    torn letters—

## APPENDIX A

### THEE SYBYLLE UNKENDE / THE UNKNOWN SIBYL

#### PARTIAL TRANSLATION

[Yeff audyens] and let it be known of you that this is an examination the like being anent that subject which is the essence of the relation of Man unto Woman, videlicet the kind of Man and Woman, and how that kind informs those two essences differ unto one another.

In the understanding of this speculation, let her first reckon to you that in the unfolding of everyday life, you will notice of your wit a manner of happening the like which you may call natural, which is the typical manner of things. And believe you this manner typical certainly sweet, for it makes the tribulations and pains of life most easy to endure, as what you might predict you may heed against advance of the time in which such a thing is likely to happen. Thus you must accord with her that such condition rules over this life, that a wonted disposition keeps the order of things and permits these happenings not hindrance nor degeneration.

It therefore belongs that you must observe how this reasoning fares with all you who abide alive on Earth. And being such an inhabitant to that world you are divided into two groups by the quality that is sex, which is unbegotten in those essences, which are Man and Woman. Yet being of one essence, that is the essence of Mankind, Man and Woman have [atwixt]

them differently prerogatives, which best are suited to them alone. For verily do Man and Woman differ in manifold ways, so too differ those roles and responsibilities, which are adapted specially to Man and Woman in ways contrarious.

It is her desire then to settle for you those disputations regarding the matter of Man and Woman, as long has this subject, those prerogatives which in parts to Man and Woman belong, been to her consideration. For perforce must these thinkings enter the mind of the aught person whom but momentarily considers the relation of Man to Woman and Woman to Man, what is their [proporcione] to one another and to the world entire.

Thus shall she state that which is the object of her brief tract in several senses particular, which are this reasoning's task to illustrate, how it is, without [lenynge] to her granted sex, that whereas Man is generic, Woman is exceptional. Of the senses propounded by this argument there are two. Being such that this sense the first is one which firstly is most accessible to your intellection, she shall begin this her argument with it here forth, that is, in the [essencyone] of mankind [tochyng] firstly with [generacyone], of which this first [predycamente] might be further [skyfted atwynne].

And that first of two predicaments of generation is the sensual, that has also been [cleped] the [bodelyche].



And so on [tochyng] of this [predycamente] she acknowledges that which before everyone is seen most clearly, namely that [generacyone] which is the conceiving and birthing of a human, is possible not but that Man and Woman both participate in the act. For though it has been ere proposed that woman in such regard holds greater importance, and thus will such belief be confirmed, she first needs confess [bihofelynes] of Man in that process which begets mankind. For the seed of [spermatyk] Man is even much as vital for the [spedeful propogacyone] of mankind, as much be the womb of Woman. In fact, it might be said that which is [myster] unto [fleshly] life resides within the seed of Man; for though much is given from the Woman, that which is housed of the sperm is needful to quicken the germ of Woman. And much as [lyfhede ynryseth] of the Man as his contribution, so that [lyfhede] may not form without Woman's germ, as Nature has ordained in ways mysterious that her womb be the ideal container to construe their parts for to nurture and gestate that life which they have formed. Therefore, to create life without either the Man or the Woman, or them both, would be not [Erethly]; so Nature, which presides over life on Earth, does command.

If Nature then is the [uttreste] decider of those necessities which minister mankind's physiologies, for Nature has formed organically the bodies of Man and Woman to fasten and propagate, then those [lorris] which [ben] of Nature govern over Man and Woman, and therefore unto Man and Woman are [enhaunced] above all others.

[Acordyng] that it is Nature's [heste] wherefore mankind submits, it [nedys] that Nature does invest unto being [certys] tasks specific only of their kind. Thus those beings for trust of

Nature's [adwysemente] must needs be regarded the ideal recipients of aforementioned responsibilities, and not those others besides them. For [clenely] does she [awyse thee] that the fishes of the sea do not fly, their bodies [ben] of a making [corpulent] and they possessing not wings for which they might glide through the firmament, nor should they possess lungs for which they might breathe the firmament's air. So likewise may trees not walk, for their anatomy consists of neither bone nor muscle, but is rigid, that they might not be [scathen] to draw their sustenance from deep within the earth. These abilities, which formerly be that of flight and latterly be that of ambulation, are reserved for those beings which Nature has superiorly equipped for such [aventuris].

Understand you then that Man therefore was not invested of Nature with the ability to bear life, for Nature deemed that woman was the [trewe] recipient of such capacity. Indeed Woman [ben] as Man made [efnlyk] necessary for the making of human life, but remember you well Woman in her essence was granted [wythal] prerogative to house and nourish that life. She [woude thou wete] then thus, that Nature by allotting Woman with more physical duties in [generacyone] did deem her more important to that process.

She [woude thou wete] then also that if Woman is most vital in the process of [generacyone], then she is most [prynspal] also to that period which is the child's [bredyngetyme].

Yes it may be that Man outside of Woman's womb might [fostren ande feden] the [embryon]. [Forsothly] might Man provide a home wherein Woman shall live, and he may

make that place warm and comfortable to her needing, and he may give Woman [vytaylis ande whyt-mete], that neither she nor their [ynfaunte] shall starve. But Woman these things may do also. She may oversee her own home. She may supply her own comfort and her own [metis]. For Nature endowed her [euene] to move and to work as does Man, despite her condition. Many will be the instances you may look into the world and regard Woman [gronyng ande stoupyng], [swellen], [nye redy] to [brast] and yet [trawaylyng] still. For Nature has made her in her condition ayet perseverant for to [dure] her [dystourbaunce] alone. And Nature has given her also voice to speak, that she might conduct business and secure the necessities of her [greteneſſe]. Therefore this shows truly that Man is not necessary during this the period of Woman's [concyvyng], and again Nature has deemed Woman here superior, for Nature demands no absolute need of Man at such a time.

If Woman [shewes] herself [ouerlyng] in [generacyone] and [grawydcyone], then she must needs also [shewe] herself [superyalle] in that stage of life-giving which is [ybornenes], that is also called [natyfyté].

For yea, if you should say that Man proffers his aid [nye] the hour of [berthyng], she would confess you have spoken [semely]. However, while verily Man may aid Woman at so grave an hour, and he may also comfort during her [womannis pronge], and he may assist the [chyllderer] with delivery and [chyldebed], he is but [superfluyté]. For there is nothing which he might contribute at these hours that might not a woman also. Wherefore [spedely] Man would lend his knowing to the birth, yet might another Woman make a better [mean] unto the

birth, for birth is [ympropried] to her nature, and therefore might Woman experienced thereof prove most [dereworthy]. But another Woman's experience in the art of [berthyeffynge], the child may die and the mother also. For Woman educated in this art is of the mother's pain knowing, and has felt the child which stirs within her and knows when it may be fraught with [dysease] [forschappen], and may hasten the child's birth and the mother's [welthe]. She [rekeneth] of that reason that Woman is superior also in [natyfyté].

And but that the child be born and begins to grow does Man's role grow in importance with it. [An] the [babe] be begotten a son, and he born not of [basartdye], then there is no person better from whom he may learn the ways of [mannhede] than his father. And if the child bet a daughter, she may learn from him, and be [awysed] of the ways of Man and what of their [myschyf]. [Wete thou thowe] he be [adyghte] unto his son for such purpose, it [nedeth] not of his prerogative for Man to be unto his daughter. For be the [babe] a daughter her mother will [moneste] better of Man's ways than he, and shall [rede] her best for finding a [macche]. And know you well that a mother cannot instruct her son [al yholyché] of the ways of [manlyhede], still she may teach him of Man's ways, for being Woman she does reside yet in a Man's world, and therefore knows much also of how to raise Man [cheualrous]. This fathers cannot for their daughters do also, for no Man is wise of the ways of Woman as Woman is wise to the ways of Man.

Such be the first [predycamente] of [generacyone] that is [sensualyté], of which is proven in letters too few the exceptionality of Woman, whereby Woman might gestate, deliver, and

[norysche] a child by her own [sauns] the [medlynge] of Man, but for the aid of his sperm which does of Nature's [domynyone] carry within the child's life.

And now the second of those two [predycamentis] of [generacyone], which [ben specyale] not [ylong on] Nature. And that second [predycamente] is by some [cleped] thee Goostly, which is also the Will.

Though mankind must [trawayle] of the [cordemente] of Nature's [lore], the [soffreynté] of Nature [steueth] upon the body, which is fleshly only, and beyond the ways of mankind's flesh, Nature can not govern mankind. Nature may produce mankind and the world for them, and Nature does also maintain the conditions for which they may thrive and does thus sustain them in doing so, but [wete hir wel] that Nature [doth ne] animate [ne] steer mankind.

What steers mankind is that which is [cleped] the Will, and by some doctors also [thee soule]. If governance over the construction of mankind's body is prevailed over by the powers of Nature, then it must [nedys] that all which [yndwelleth] outside of Nature, Nature cannot of authority [peculyare] produce. Thus [meny] doctors say that forces there are many which prevail over the world: forces which cause the [blake] night and [assure] day; forces [dywers] there are also which enable sound and the other [outewarde wyttis]; and forces which inspire the appetites numerous of mankind. And she will remind thee that these forces [mygleth] not. The force which creates sound may not [lykwyse] cause in Man hunger,

[houeso] the forces which enable sight and smell may, as they are tied directly to hunger, and the force which causes hunger causes not the night nor the day, nor does adorn their color. Therefore, she asserts that the forces which breed life, which is called Nature, and the force that creates the Will of mankind be considered [unlaccht].

Mankind, which [bet] called also *humanum genus*, is comprised of two [partis], that are [mankynde wythyne ande mankynde wythoute]. Mankind [wythoute] is the mankind of Nature, or that of mankind's body. This is that substance of mankind's form which he moves and handles, what simply is [sauns] effort. Mankind [wythyne] is the mankind of Will, that has being inward and outward. The Will of mankind which is mankind [wythyne] is that force which moves mankind [wythoute] which is mankind natural. Therefore all that mankind chooses and actuates by choice is the Will, which though being [wythyne], has [eke] a [twyfoldly] being. It is said that the being is [twyfoldly] for it [bicloseth] two [partis]. For while [ynwardly] might mankind's [corse] be [plyed], so too may it [outewardly]. [Wete thou wel] that the Will [woneth] outside of mankind singly, yet singly mankind might [wone] not outside of the Will. For [sauns] Will mankind surrenders their [sapyens] and shall live only in the state of Nature, which is a state of [safagenes], [werousnes], and [unwisdomnes], [threhede] which unto mankind's composition [bet unacordyng]. And as mankind does come by their Will through birth only, Man or Woman unborn therefore [hath] not a Will. For the unborn child is contained inside the mother's womb, and does not stir itself, nor may it be stirred because of containment. [An] it be stirred it may be [mysborne], and mankind

which is [ded] hath not Will either. She says unto you then that mankind unborn and mankind [lyfles bet of lykyng] similar, for Will of the body has the neither.

If mankind may be [sheden insonder], then those two parts of mankind singly be like that [bynarye] which does dominate all beings in Nature, which [bet] the sexes two, [masculyne ande thee femynyne], or Man and Woman also. Of mankind [wythyne] and mankind [wythoute], she asserts that mankind [wythyne] does [syttyngly] [acord] of the qualities of Woman. For as she has proven, much like the Will Woman might exist [sauns] Man. However, but Woman, Man like a body shall cease to live. For [pryfen] of Woman Man may not be born. And [pryfen] of Woman Man's house shall go unpopulated, and his name shall pass with him. A body must needs be possessing the Will to form mankind complete, just as Man must needs possess Woman to beget heirs. So should you know by this reason then that the Will of mankind is feminine in essence, for it is capable of much that which the body is not and that it may exist [outewarde] of the body, and that it is produced not of Nature, the body thereby of quality masculine, as the origins thereof are [wythoute], not [wythyne]. Bereaved of Woman, Man, like the body bereaved of the Will, [adedeth]. Man would in such case find his purposes restricted to them capable through Nature, which is through those ways that are purely generative, a situation again [unacordyng] to mankind's composition.

It may [bysye] you that if the Will [bet] feminine and the body masculine, and if mankind cannot free of these two parts exist, whence then joins the Will to the body. For the Will is

given children at the moment of their bearing, it is not instilled of them from that first moment of begetting, as a child unborn cannot be said to possess Will.

So it may be said such is further proof the Will is feminine in essence. For if the Will is instilled from no other place and can be at no other time imparted to the child than the moment of birth, so the Will must bear itself from the Will of the mother, and must therefore originate from the mother's Will, meaning the Will of the child was severed at that instant from the mother, who is Woman. Or it was the mother's Will which formed naturally the child's Will, and thus impregnated the child's body with Will from the child's first breath. Thus, understand you that the sum Will finds origin in Woman, and [procedeth] from her only. You may find this fact proven by that a child stillborn may not be declared having possession of Will, and therefore might never receive a Will, for those things which have not life can not have Will, just as those vessels which are broke can not hold water. Thus, reasons she that Will either broken away from or crafted by the mother's Will shall again be [oned] to that Will. And thus may it be said that that Will exists still, for whether [ynwarde othir outewarde] naught may [forspyll] nor [bylymye) the Will. And as body of child stillborn may not rejoin mother, but yet the child's Will [oneth] back to the Will of the mother, she concludes therefore surely that Will in this aspect being feminine is again exceptional to the masculine counterpart.

Such be the second [predycamente] of [generacyone] that is the [goostly], of which is proven in letters too few the exceptionality of Woman, whereby the Will of mankind [ben] likened



feminine in construction and mankind's body masculine, for the powers of the Will do exceed in ways manifold those powers of the body. Thus [dyffyneth] the two [predycamentis] of the first sense of Woman's exceptionality unto Man, which is the sense of [generacyone generallyche].

The second sense of truth which [sheweth] Woman's exceptionality be not that which concerns with the composing of mankind, but what mankind has through their intellection composed, which is the truth of language. For a mode of [telynge] [shewe] not only what is said, but of the manner [telynge] [sheweth] why it is said and after what meaning, as a Man that does ask 'how this might be?' says not those words only, but in his speaking [descloseth] of himself why for also he wishes to know. Thus as do your tongues [naken] feelings which are unsaid, so do languages entire do in kind.

There is many languages of mankind what has been called the base form of words, that is also [cleped] the generic. These generic words are commonly referred to as being masculine, for they describe an object as it appears in its organic form or the natural. You might think of this as indicator of superiority, for this implies that what has been called masculine most abundantly populates the world, but she would enjoin you first to consider [otherlyker]. For in languages many, far and near, does such [acountynge] make He [efnlyke] to It, meaning He and It of this reason possess not qualities unique of themselves. Wherefrom such happening appears she cannot say exactly, but would submit this [entencyone] springs form the common belief among mankind in a singular creative force, which is a creator of the

world. This creator, which is better called a force, mankind quickly assigned characteristics of humankind, though such force could not be said human of [construccyone] and clearly therefore dispossessed any sex. Yet mankind deemed such a force human, and for being needed a name. Man, who then saw the world fully more than Woman, and being larger, stronger, and faster beings took it upon themselves the right of [arretynge] his own peculiar qualities to that being, thusly saw fit that such [wyghte] of creation, which [bet] more a [generatyf] force than aught else, should liken unto a father, deciding unequivocally this force should be a He. And therefore did He and It thus become [consubstancyalle].

From thus she follows that all those things which He crafted specially, and those which neither came into being through a first effort or He [yshapped] automatically of the natural world, mankind could not assign generic. And so it reasons that Man, for it was Man who devised such distinctions in his effort of explaining the world and how it and the world's [cetyseynis] come of being, turned within himself. And gazing upon himself sought that such things in the world [sauns] primary [ymagynacyone] must be unlike what was bred or created in Nature first, or generically, and that they were most unlike Man. Thence Man decided these things should be figured feminine in their construction. Therefore is the Will or [thee soule] in many tongues considered a creature feminine, for it [cummeth] not of Nature.

Thus in this tongue which is the method of speech for many persons will you see these designations of the masculine and of the feminine present in everyday talkings and writings. And thus she proposes unto you that such designations apply further than the wielding of our

words, but into their very [faschyonynge]. And here she speaks of the [materyale] substance of words, which speakers of tongues call letters. For if there are many parts of things and [wyghtis] material and even of time which doctors may call [attomis], and if these parts have them qualities of their own distinctions bodily, it [behofeth] then that letters may [forthshewe] such qualities also. [Nedefuly] it [auayleth] then that these genders which are the images of generic and exceptional manifest to the speaker in two letters primarily, which are the Y, which is the masculine, and the E, the feminine.

[Yeme thou] then in this understanding that Y after the fashion of masculinity may represent but a small number of sounds to the ear, and effects the [sounyngis] of also but few letters other. It is for such reason that she would say that Y is a generic or common letter after the tendency of masculine use, for the uses of Y [althowe] common and [wulger] are [fewe]. For while Y may be generic and therefore more exactly used, there are letters other such as I, which in the right [setyng] might some person fashion, creating sounds [semblyng] Y. So Y may be called [commytable]. The letter E, however, while in many instances silent and of use less frequent than Y, may be said also functioning more diversely within the words of our tongue. Yet it may in those cases cause no sound, when applied to divers words, like Sad or Bad, E forms words entirely new, which are sounded differently also, as Sade or Bade [partyculer]. But Y cannot perform these same alterations of [heryng], for its use is restricted by its generic essence, and therefore does it lack the variety [auayled] E for to beget new words in like manner, much as Man lacks the ability to beget offspring of themselves whereas Woman with but small aid might produce anew.

In despite of what [hath] been [latly] said, she would however remind you that in this world you will find the sexes both working in tandem for the world's [wele], as you will often find the two letters Y and E working in tandem to create sounds which they may not of their own [poste] make. And so too will you see Man and Woman [althowe] different and possessing qualities not [efnlyke] conspiring together to beget children. And therefore let these letters Y and E remind you truly of Man and Woman when you see them working together in words, reminding you [partyculare] that Man and Woman though proportioned ability [unlyke] must service the purpose of those granted abilities, doing so in accordance to their essence. All beings must conform to their essence, be they Man or Woman regardless. For the forces Natural and Goostly sit aloft in [besynes], and would it be [folye carpynge qwat thei hath feffed].

For in what world might you find yourself, wherein fyre suddenly became fery, fyry, or fere? Or wherein body might exist beyond Will? Or such a world wherein Woman, though she need him not afterwards, might conceive without Man?

So should this [tracte] all too briefly come to the end upon this, the [shewyng] of the second sense of truth [weryfyng] Woman's exceptionality to Man, which was how mankind's language has proven this truth [kyndelyche]. And [wete thou wel] that but for the [pressyng] of time would she have [sermonyed ouerblyfe], for the object of her [tracte] is one of important matter upon mankind, yet for that object and because of her sex has she been

[stylled]. Yet for her [perlouris ande sklauderis] will she be [lettyned] not [ouerlonge], but shall of some [tyde] declare all [forseyde] and more [ywys] before much greater [audyens] for the [wele] of this world and Woman [oueral].

*Her for thy delectacyone folowyth thee incountre off thee damesell, and off hir rebukyng  
somme Charle*

\* \* \*

W.R.  
Ah, there the Charle sits now, with an open seat across.  
I will let my [bicycle] rest and seat myself apart,  
To raise my questions against his heart,  
And learn what ails him, villainy or loss.

Villainy, I reason, must it be  
For with but a look upon this man's face,  
How in sooth its structure emanates disgrace,  
I deem that it cannot greet with dignity;  
For through the pane of glass he rests his bitter gaze  
And bows he not, nor wishes he 'good day,'  
But glances on at the passing city and far away  
As though it were this damsel obscured by haze.  
See that mouth which bares a crooked snarl?  
Wreaks it no god's wealthy design!  
I reason, therefore, that what is body is of mind,  
And so name this knavish fellow 'Charle'

So should I speak! Vertues guide my tongue,  
Grace me the craft to light this Charle aflame  
To speak unto him a reprehension like-same  
As if the words had by you been sung!

Excuse my interruption, sir, but a question burdens my thought. May I ask it of you?

THE CHARLE

O, sister, pardon me, but no. A question so burdening such that you must ask it of a stranger I cannot answer.

W.R.

O brother, feel that I do you no worry. It is a burdensome query, but a one that even your shoulders may bear.

THE CHARLE

Maiden, do you entreat on it?

W.R.

I do not retreat from it. No, sir, I demand it.

THE CHARLE

I see I will have no peace from you without it. Ask your question, maiden, then give me release.

W.R.

And as a 'sir' indeed the Charle pretends  
Who would disdain a maidenly question...

Remember you your seat at the station?

THE CHARLE

I remember my station in the seat, and not much else do I recall.

W.R.

It would be fitting that you should say. Remember you no thing else? Remember you two maidens, a mother and her daughter by their make, standing at your side?

THE CHARLE

Yes, I remember the maidens' makes. For why?

W.R.

So would a Charle see to their makes and nothing else;  
Now I shall see how much further he I might repulse

My question to you, good sir, is this: if you knew of your seat at the station, and to their standing station beside you were wot, why did you not rise from your longsome seat and to the gentlewomen relinquish?

THE CHARLE

Sister, that I should translate was not bidden of me.

W.R.

That it should would lend all reason to madness!

THE CHARLE

Madness, you speak? And why is this?

W.R.

Sir! Have you not taken the order of chivalry?

THE CARLE

I have sworn neither oath, nor allegiance to any man—but one.

W.R.

To follow the guidance of chivalry is not simply to swear an oath to lord or liege, but to live one's quotidian life, if not in knightly manner, then, in knightly way. The chivalry of a man is vital to his spirit; he cannot live well his life without the matter of its substance.

THE CARLE

And what is the substance of chivalry?

W.R.

Why, the substance of chivalry is the substance that wins men the greatest desire of their souls. Hight: deference, or obeisance, to they of the maidenly kind.

THE CHARLE

On what faith do I trust this declaration, from whom such assize firstly benefits?

W.R.

It is a surprise, is it not, he knowing who is who?  
He who watches the world with eyes shut yet open,  
Hearing a voice, but not who has spoken.  
Conceit of thought, is it not?  
A Charle, seeing as womenfolk do

Tell to me, sir, have you a daughter, or are you not of age? Surely a mother you must have, and a sister peradventure also?

THE CHARLE

Yes, the two do I possess, mother and sister, and father and brother also. Without the two formers this latter could not be.

W.R.

Had the maiden pair been kin your own, mother and sister, would you give up the seat? Or would you make them stand?

THE CHARLE

Lord me bless, I would give up my seat forthwith anon if you but asked! The gentlewomen did not essay to ask, and therefore it was in my thinkings they wished to stand. My mother and sister must stand, too, if they yearn not to ask.

W.R.

And did you desire not to ask them, would they like the place to rest?

THE CHARLE

It did not pass my mind to query, I suppose. Cursed are my thoughts of late with matters great and troublesome.

W.R.

The matters of charity and of kindness to those of gentle sex are not great? Troublesome, I say, is that unto me for to hear.

THE CHARLE

There are things about our world far more noisome than the murmur of my transgression. You are but young—

W.R.

Sir, I am ten-and-ten years, without one!

THE CHARLE

And by my days is that young. Please, sister, desist, and leave me to my [storm].

W.R.

Cowardly, this Charle is, to pick up and run  
When tested by reasonings of 'a child'  
A termagant to other foe of seeming mild  
Yet I shall not leave his chastening undone!  
For where shall our world be without reproof?  
Where else, but clutched in the grasps of men ill-turned  
The like whom this lout might become, un-spurned.  
No, this fellow cannot be let aloof!

The day is clear, sir, and the heavens be wonderfully blue. The only [storm] to which you speak is that in the mind your own, and what of it you unleash unto the Earth. Such are my mother's words. She learned me thus, and my brother, that men unto women should be courteous, and irreverent never. For in his days of youth a man is indebted to his mother for her gift of life, and thus her and all mothers he must revere. This must a daughter do also, until she is wed. But when a man comes of age much like you his reverence must change also; for all women to him become like his bride, and them he must defend and serve, until



wedded he is, too. When he is wedded his reverence must change again; for only one woman is he to be given, and thus either motherly or daughterly are changed all the others, until in old age his mother has passed. Then are all maidens without her his daughters, and so he shall love and serve them in kind. A man then must always to gentlewomen be kind and chivalrous, for always is he a father, a groom, and a son.

And so thither maidens—look you about and you will see we ride among them—though mother and daughter, were to you like your bride. For a bride your own, good sir, would you not have given up the seat, free of enquire?

THE CHARLE

By your reasoning, then, would you be my bride?

W.R.

I cannot, good sir, for a groom I am taken. Mother or daughter—a sister, like you said—might you make me. But do answer my question.

THE CHARLE

O yes, I understand. Regarded you the bench upon which I sat?

W.R.

I saw such a bench, but you not first sat upon it. When first I saw you lay reposed.

THE CHARLE

For much time did you watch me, if such vision you saw. And if indeed you watched, you saw how I sat upright when our fellow sojourners collected.

W.R.

Did I this spectacle observe, yes.

THE CHARLE

And so you glimpsed from what space I removed, for the seating of my any brides or sisters, or brothers? And sooth, you saw that not a one took the space. Was there not space enough on the bench for two more? Ah—ah, no, I see it now.

W.R.

What is it you have seen?

THE CHARLE

The pair did not sit besides  
Because that would make two brides.

*Et Domino non placemus,*  
For we would all be bigamists

W.R.

So unto good sophistry the Charle makes jest,  
And no reverence unto marriage does he profess.  
But this day Villainy shall not possess!  
I shall another route of reason test!

A japing remark, I take? Good cheer, and a lordly wit have you, sir. Might I, if you do not protest, another query pose?

THE CHARLE

The clouds do seem to have abated the estate of our together-speaking. You make ask again, as indeed you have put me in good cheer.

W.R.

Do I speak truth when I say that I have of recent made note of taking 'a groom?'

THE CHARLE

This, sister, you have said.

W.R.

Not like yourself, I jest not in my speech. I have taken a groom, forsooth, and within this twelvemonth, though I now vesture darkly, a gown I shall wear, whiter [emblaunchen] than the canvas about my feet. Aldus my groom is hight, and a handsome groom he is, and brawny and doughty like a bear. Yet unto me is this man meek, and modest. Never before me does he walk through a door, nor does he let my hair dampen in a shower. He is pious and patient, yet valiant in hours of even little need. I will hold him as though he were a rabbit, and he will defend me like a lion. But ours is no perfect romance; we dispute, and at times my lion will turn on me. But he would not bear his fangs, nor bite with them. He does like any great beast hold his place, until certainty assures it is safeguarded. And I would not have him, nor would I love him, another way.

THE CHARLE

All such is good in your life, but your words reveal not where your question lies. Unless such words reveal you lie in questioning...

W.R.

Pardon me, good sir, you have reason. I question of you, have you a bride?

THE CHARLE

Why do you ask this of me?

W.R.

The 'what' of my asking is my 'why,' good sir.

THE CHARLE

And what of your 'what'?

W.R.

Why, my 'what' beseems my 'why.' I ask, sir, have *you* a bride?

THE CHARLE

I do not. At the least—no, sister, I do not now upon this tide in any wise.

W.R.

Ah, what vanity does such admission prove  
That a truant man should be found [unthriven],  
As an oyster fish sole and not [wiven]!  
Such loneliness might uxury behove!  
Such desolation of the mannish soul  
That might he unto the weakest maker  
Undo of [wythnymynge] her forsaker  
And remedy this half-hewn sculpture whole!  
Therefore unto woman must man relent  
To find his hours much more fruitful [yspent]

A place of entry  
Hath I found  
Beyond his walls  
Into his town

This matter I shall press  
Even unto distress;  
For to make this sinner  
To-morrow suitable lover  
Demands a Charle  
Must to-day suffer

You said what, good sir? I fear I have misheard you. Would it trouble you greatly to refrain your words?

THE CHARLE

I have said, I am without a maiden at this [sythe].

W.R.

To be 'without now' is to be 'afore with,' no? Is it my right thinking, that you had you a maiden then in some brief [sythe]?

THE CHARLE

Sister, yes. Speak you sooth...

W.R.

Not of some surprise, a fellow great and handsome as yourself, good sir! We shall say then that she needed the seat, but ask for it she would not. Would you without hesitation offer it unto her?

THE CHARLE

Yes, sister, would I that. For that maiden would I offer up my world entire.

W.R.

If for the comfort of that one maiden you would give up the place, then for all in maidenhood should you do the same. For all maidens by their birth can give a man the entire world; and so should a man give every woman likewise. It is like my previous saying, sir: each maiden is unto you now bride or sister, so that when you take one in matrimony she becomes honored above all others, but one.

THE CHARLE

And who be that one above exception?

W.R.

Why, that one maiden whom without your world could be none other.

THE CHARLE

And who be that? Haste, speak her name.

W.R.

Why, who else, but thy mother?

THE CHARLE

And there could be none other?

W.R.

Sir, who else?

THE CHARLE

Forget it; it is not of thy worry, sister. I beg of you, end your interview now and leave me be.

W.R.

We have not yet made my stop, brother. I shall worry you no more, but with a final question last.

THE CHARLE

And then we would sit in silence?

W.R.

This, sir, I [trothe].

THE CHARLE

Do your diligence and ask.

W.R.

This maiden to which refer you, what did become of her? Teach me thus and I shall give thee peace.

THE CHARLE

I know not why I dispense this information, but for the desire of such a peace, or that I bear not its weight alone, I shall tell you this. The maiden whom I love would say to me now no words, nor would she even think to gaze in my way. And my world burns for her, as I wish for naught else but to hear that she might forgive me, or withstand my presence.

W.R.

Sir, what trespassed, and what was her name?

THE CHARLE

I know you not, but that you are a sister, and are a bride, but not one unto me. I tell you what I would tell no sister living. For but this conversation we are strangers unto one another. And thus I will not answer. Beside-forth, your questioning is fulfilled.

W.R.

Does not over the Charle fall a [runish] change  
One which [maketh] his being another strange?  
My form, too, does now feel out of sway...  
As I had lost all strength, a puppet become,  
Serviced to the whims of a madman's play.  
What be this odd newfound impulse I feel  
Which stripping away thought's order and reason,  
Imposes desires of another's will?  
Verteues, be that you, commanding the hull?  
Wherefore does this body commit treason  
Against the constant thirsting of the soul?  
I speak, though words come not from my lip,  
But from the scourge of some master's whip!

You have done some violence or pain to her, have you not? She has suffered by your hands?

THE CHARLE

Sister, I beg of thee: leave off this path. Do not me provoke.

W.R.

And such is it your yearning, that you might make her amends. Such is for why you ride this train? No, that it cannot be, for the grievous expression upon thy [vise] speaks otherwise. It says you have met her already, yet your apology she rejected. Or worse, you sought her out and she would speak to you not. For such a cause you have joined this train, no?

THE CHARLE

Sister, I plea for your mercy. Rebuke me no further.

W.R.

I would do as the Charle commands  
If I but governed my own hands!

But these failings walk the ways of days behind. No, you ride not from one encounter, but to another. Speak I [falsdom] or [trothe]?

THE CHARLE

Sister, you [trothe].

W.R.

Refrain not! I know not what I say!

And wherefore do you ride?

THE CHARLE

I ride whence I have come.

W.R.

And where, brother, be that?

THE CHARLE

Thither towards the end.

W.R.

And of what liking end?

THE CHARLE

The end of all things, all which be good and holy.

W.R.

Impetuous dastard, you abandon me now?

Brother, I fear what you [adiecte]. Whence came you?

THE CHARLE

Do I your heart [gerste]? *Noli timere*, sister.

W.R.

Answer me, brother. Whence came you?

THE CHARLE

My sorrow if these my words your heart [distroubeth]. I have travelled here as you say, for the penance-doing my sin against a maiden fair. But this maiden, her eyes so green—I feared that they might devour me whole! That she would refrain again what I wished least from her to hear feared I, too. And so it became my desire, though it be as if another grabbed me ahold and moved my [corse] thence while I watched from within a dream, that I [disturnen] I should look upon her eyes again!

W.R.

Brother, what has [itiden] you?

THE CHARLE

O, God me bless, shun me not! Forgive that [grevoushede] which late I have taken for as idol above! Lies many and great have I told, friends—O, Dolon—friends I have abandoned!

W.R.

Brother, cry not! We will speak no more. [Tostire] you not my soul!

THE CHARLE

No, for my speech you press. I shall give you such deliverance! I heard a voice after which my [corse] beguiled, and deserting my companion I it followed along the sea. So [incouthe] a voice it was which unto me like a siren called. Wherefrom rose such a voice, dear sister?

W.R.

Please, brother, I know not...

THE CHARLE

Know not I either, but that such a voice I heard, or felt, for it was by me [kennen] in stead of heard, and such was my [corse] like a rogue horse beneath my hand, bearing me I knew not where. Or, yet, believed me I knew not, but an [aulde] knowledge which dwelled within that darkest pitch of my soul drove me there, answering that voiceless call, that I turn me within the [throsing]. Therefrom, peradventure, that call too came. Notwithstanding its origin, or my [corse] it [liffaesten], I sought it.

W.R.

And where took it you, brother?

THE CHARLE

It took me over many sands. And when I bestirred and I knew myself again, I [oncnawen] where I came.

W.R.

And where was it?

THE CHARLE

To a cliff, dear sister. They [ylede] me to my [Dume].

W.R.

He [yoede onyenes] atop a cliff; god say not!

Brother, why?

THE CHARLE

There we [rioten] in [reverie], sinning the sins of the young and foolish... Sister, how easy I give me over to [coragenesse]. If you knew what treachery I did lend me over to in but this seven-night, how much more greatly you would me rebuke! All which you think I am and worse!

W.R.

Whatfore were your intentions atop yonder cliff? Chase away the demons of my [angwisshe]!

THE CHARLE

I knew then for why as do I now for where my steps me [yleden]: I know not, but that I know and yet I cannot tell me. I cannot reach me in the pitch wherein my fey-some part resides.

W.R.

What failing is it of Man's quintessence  
Which takes a structure of perfect design  
And removes one part of conscious presence  
And doing so makes his soul malign?  
Why might man or woman [flisten] to act  
Against the better judgment of the mind  
As though they were dumb as [hertes or hinde]?  
What be it that our [commaundaunce] has lacked?  
Proof it be, 'gainst our witted creation  
That we doth [faire] in such [deuiacion].  
And as I speak of fair so [unrightli],



My [discessyoun cometh] now untimely  
For the engine wheels hath but slowly turned,  
Making my deliverance soon [y-erned].

Brother, the hour of my egression is but soon at hand. Speak [glouminge] to me not longer,  
but comfort me, that you shall not make to [yoede] such a cliff again, nor [miren] in such a  
pitch, not this day, nor on your last!

THE CHARLE

How, sister, do I seek to overcome such power [unmethli], when it like another being I  
cannot [wythere ayen]?

W.R.

Vow upon my name!

THE CHARLE

But sister, I know your name not!

W.R.

I must go—but, look! It is upon my feet!

THE CHARLE

[Stounde]! Will you forgive me, sister? Peradventure I might not obtain the forgiveness of  
some, and so I beg of thee, for my transgressions, for the pains I have dealt upon myself, and  
for those against my brothers and my sisters, but my sisters most greatly, pardon these my  
[immonesis]! I know not why, but this thy forgiveness I most dearly [mystier]. Will you  
grace my [destynacyone] with thy blessing?

W.R.

Though you have my pity, I cannot, for it lie not in my power to these things forgive! Please,  
brother, I must away, for this [paynlynes] I can bear no longer.

THE CHARLE

Upon thy name, sister, I swear it! Forsooth, I swear it [steorliche]! [Faire thee wel]!

*Exit* THE CHARLE

W.R.

From the station at which I stand I gaze  
Watching yonder train slowly disappear  
Though [dwynyng] away not from my fear  
That might this count amongst his final days,  
I knowing beyond a mystic's [deynyng]  
I have this Charle's life [som wayes] affected.

In what wise hath my speaking neglected  
That nobly [imened] I deal such [waenyng]?  
How be this life a one for [fre-wylyng]  
If times befall when choice leaveth the [corse],  
Replaced by some will of external [fors]?  
What defense be this, gainst death, or killing?  
What remains upon this lonely plank, I see,  
Standeth naught but free will's [ypocrisy].

Fie on you, Vertues! You gave this ship sail  
Knowing it would in its endeavor fail!

O, that I had spoken not! That I had let him go without so little a word!

*Exit W.R.*

## VITA

The details of D. E. Hynes' life are of little consequence.

The date of his birth was December 10, 1994.

The date of his death shall go undefined.