

SALAMANDER

One day, when I was about 8 or 9, I was walking down an arroyo a mile or two from home looking for blue tails and watching the horned larks dart around, and I came across a large salamander walking slowly toward me. I realized that it had rained the day before, and that he must be a leftover from the gush of water that sometimes rushes down the arroyo. I picked him up, and he tried to bite a little, but more or less went calmly home with me where he lived for about a week in a pool I carved and filled in the backyard, after which I took him to a very large pond on the edge of town which was full of turtles, fish, tadpoles, ducks, and algae.

I think it was one of the most important events in my life, possibly because I was sitting looking at him one afternoon soon after I had brought him home, and I was watching him partly under water and partly above water, and touching him maybe very lightly, when I started thinking for the first time that I was thinking, and that it was me that was thinking, and that I was a kid, and I thought what it was like to be me, and I wondered how I came to think of myself, and what I was doing when I did that, and I couldn't turn around fast enough to see my own face (you can't see yourself blink in the mirror) and then I thought I might be dreaming, only what dreams itself? and what is it to think about yourself thinking? and what is this? and what is a salamander?

Everything had suddenly become everything, approximately, and I did not know where it came from, or who this me was, doing this job of thinking (thinking about me, about everything) but what I did suspect, and what I still slightly suspect, is that it was and is just that salamander.