

# HS 213

# LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

## Instructors

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Sharmishta Saha*



**Part I**  
Instructor: *Ratheesh Radhakrishnan*

The first half of the 2016-17 edition of HS 213: ‘Language and Literature’ foregrounds the ways in which ‘language’ operates in the everyday. Bracketing off the concerns around language that animate debates in linguistics and cognitive science – the ‘sciences’ of language, the set of readings chosen for this course allows us to think through the possibilities and limits language impose upon us. We do this by reading literary texts – poems, short stories, essays and even the odd interview.

Language is often imagined to be the medium through which pre-existing thoughts and ideas are expressed – a passive structure awaiting human deployment. The readings listed here are expected to impute a more crucial role to the status of language in our lives. It would suggest that language sets the conditions under which consciousness emerge and that language makes possible worlds that we inhabit. On the one hand language is a resource for mobility, while on the other it is an instrument that demands constant re-fashioning. It allows for communication and thus engagement with others and often forms the basis for communities, friendships, romance and estrangement. Language functions through and within institutions, aided by creative action for furthering its horizons. It provides the condition for our very being as ‘human’.

The course is a window – a small window that promises a big wide world outside – an invitation to look through, to escape.

Classes will have a lecture-discussion format. It is absolutely necessary that you should have done the required readings before you come to class; and that you bring the text(s) to class.

**Schedule:**

(subject to minor changes)

4 January: Introduction

6 January: Habitations  
Kamala Das. ‘An Introduction’  
Agha Shahid Ali. ‘The Editor Revisited’

11 January: Our English, their English  
Nissim Ezeikkel. ‘The Professor’, ‘Goodbye Party for Miss Puspa T.S’  
Arundhati Roy. Selections from *The God of Small Things*

13 January: Speaking to each other.  
K. Satchidanandan and Gita Hariharan in Conversation with Mini Krishnan. ‘Why not live more than one life?’

18 January: Who speaks?  
C Ayyappan. 'Ghost Speech'

20 January: Does one have language?  
Kumud Pawde. 'The Story of my Sanskrit'

25 January: Some history, some politics  
Thomas Babington Macaulay. Selections from "Minutes on Indian Education"  
M. Madhava Prasad. Selections from 'Language, education and political existence'

27 January  
Quiz/ In class test

1 February: Language, a system  
Jorge Luis Borges. 'Funes, The Memorious', 'The Analytical Language Of John Wilkins'

3 February: Absence/Silence  
Zadie Smith. 'Speaking in Tongues'

8 February: Reality?  
Herman Melville. 'Bartleby, the Scrivener: A Story of Wall Street'

10 February:  
Lewis Carroll. Selections from *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass and What Alice Found There*'

15 February: Speaking from someplace else  
Franz Kafka. 'A Report for an Academy'

17 February  
Round up

#### Evaluation:

Quiz/In class test: 15 marks  
Mid Semester Examination: 30 marks  
Class participation/Attendance: 5 marks

## An Introduction

*Kamala Das*

I don't know politics but I know the names  
Of those in power, and can repeat them like  
Days of week, or names of months, beginning with Nehru.

I am Indian, very brown, born in Malabar,  
I speak three languages, write in  
Two, dream in one.

Don't write in English, they said, English is  
Not your mother-tongue. Why not leave  
Me alone, critics, friends, visiting cousins,  
Every one of you? Why not let me speak in  
Any language I like? The language I speak,  
Becomes mine, its distortions, its queernesses  
All mine, mine alone.

It is half English, half Indian, funny perhaps, but it is honest,

It is as human as I am human, don't  
You see? It voices my joys, my longings, my  
Hopes, and it is useful to me as cawing  
Is to crows or roaring to the lions, it  
Is human speech, the speech of the mind that is  
Here and not there, a mind that sees and hears and  
Is aware. Not the deaf, blind speech

Of trees in storm or of monsoon clouds or of rain or the  
Incoherent mutterings of the blazing  
Funeral pyre. I was child, and later they  
Told me I grew, for I became tall, my limbs  
Swelled and one or two places sprouted hair.

When I asked for love, not knowing what else to ask  
For, he drew a youth of sixteen into the  
Bedroom and closed the door, He did not beat me  
But my sad woman-body felt so beaten.  
The weight of my breasts and womb crushed me.

I shrank Pitifully.  
Then ... I wore a shirt and my  
Brother's trousers, cut my hair short and ignored  
My womanliness. Dress in sarees, be girl  
Be wife, they said. Be embroiderer, be cook,  
Be a quarreller with servants. Fit in. Oh,  
Belong, cried the categorizers. Don't sit  
On walls or peep in through our lace-draped windows.  
Be Amy, or be Kamala. Or, better  
Still, be Madhavikutty. It is time to  
Choose a name, a role. Don't play pretending games.  
Don't play at schizophrenia or be a  
Nympho. Don't cry embarrassingly loud when  
Jilted in love ... I met a man, loved him. Call  
Him not by any name, he is every man  
Who wants. a woman, just as I am every  
Woman who seeks love. In him ... the hungry haste  
Of rivers, in me ... the oceans' tireless  
Waiting. Who are you, I ask each and everyone,  
The answer is, it is I. Anywhere and,  
Everywhere, I see the one who calls himself I  
In this world, he is tightly packed like the  
Sword in its sheath. It is I who drink lonely  
Drinks at twelve, midnight, in hotels of strange towns,  
It is I who laugh, it is I who make love  
And then, feel shame, it is I who lie dying  
With a rattle in my throat. I am sinner,  
I am saint. I am the beloved and the  
Betrayed. I have no joys that are not yours, no  
Aches which are not yours. I too call myself I.

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## The Editor Revisited

*Agha Shahid Ali*

You still haven't called me a poet, Dear Sir,  
and I've been at it,  
this business of meanings, sometimes delayed,  
selling words in bottles, at times in boxes.  
I began with a laugh, stirred my tea with English,  
drank India down with a faint British accent,  
temples, beggars, and dust  
spread like marmalade on my toast:  
A bitter taste: On Parliament Street  
a policeman beat a child on the head.  
Hermaphrodites walked by in Saffron saris,  
their drums echoing a drought-rhythm.  
The Marxists said,  
In Delhi English sounds obscene.  
Return to Hindi or Bengali, each  
word will burn  
like hunger.

A language must measure up to one's native dust.  
Divided between two cultures, I spoke a language foreign even to my ears;  
I diluted it in a glass of Scotch.

A terrible trade, my lip service to Revolution  
punctuated by a whisly-god.

Now collecting a degree in English,  
will I embrace my hungry country  
with an armful of soliloquies?

This trade in words continues however as  
Shakespeare feeds my alienation.

Please note, Dear Sir, my terrible plight  
as I collect rejection slips  
from your esteemed journal.

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### The Professor

*Nissim Ezekiel*

Remember me? I am Professor Sheth.  
Once I taught you geography. Now  
I am retired, though my health is good. My wife died some years back.  
By God's grace, all my children  
Are well settled in life.  
One is Sales Manager,  
One is Bank Manager,  
Both have cars.  
Other also doing well, though not so well.  
Every family must have black sheep.  
Sarala and Tarala are married,  
Their husbands are very nice boys.  
You won't believe but I have eleven grandchildren.  
How many issues you have? Three?  
That is good. These are days of family planning.  
I am not against. We have to change with times.  
Whole world is changing. In India also  
We are keeping up. Our progress is progressing.  
Old values are going, new values are coming.  
Everything is happening with leaps and bounds.  
I am going out rarely, now and then  
Only, this is price of old age  
But my health is O.K. Usual aches and pains.  
No diabetes, no blood pressure, no heart attack.  
This is because of sound habits in youth.

How is your health keeping?  
Nicely? I am happy for that.  
This year I am sixty-nine  
and hope to score a century.  
You were so thin, like stick,  
Now you are man of weight and consequence.  
That is good joke.  
If you are coming again this side by chance,  
Visit please my humble residence also.  
I am living just on opposite house's backside.

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### Goodbye Party for Miss Pushpa T.S.

*Nissim Ezekiel*

Friends,  
our dear sister  
is departing for foreign  
in two three days,  
and  
we are meeting today  
to wish her bon voyage.  
You are all knowing, friends,  
What sweetness is in Miss Pushpa.  
I don't mean only external sweetness  
but internal sweetness.  
Miss Pushpa is smiling and smiling  
even for no reason but simply because  
she is feeling.  
Miss Pushpa is coming  
from very high family.  
Her father was renowned advocate  
in Bulsar or Surat,

I am not remembering now which place.

Surat? Ah, yes,

once only I stayed in Surat

with family members

of my uncle's very old friend-

his wife was cooking nicely...

that was long time ago.

Coming back to Miss Pushpa

she is most popular lady

with men also and ladies also.

Whenever I asked her to do anything,

she was saying, 'Just now only

I will do it.' That is showing

good spirit. I am always

appreciating the good spirit.

Pushpa Miss is never saying no.

Whatever I or anybody is asking

she is always saying yes,

and today she is going

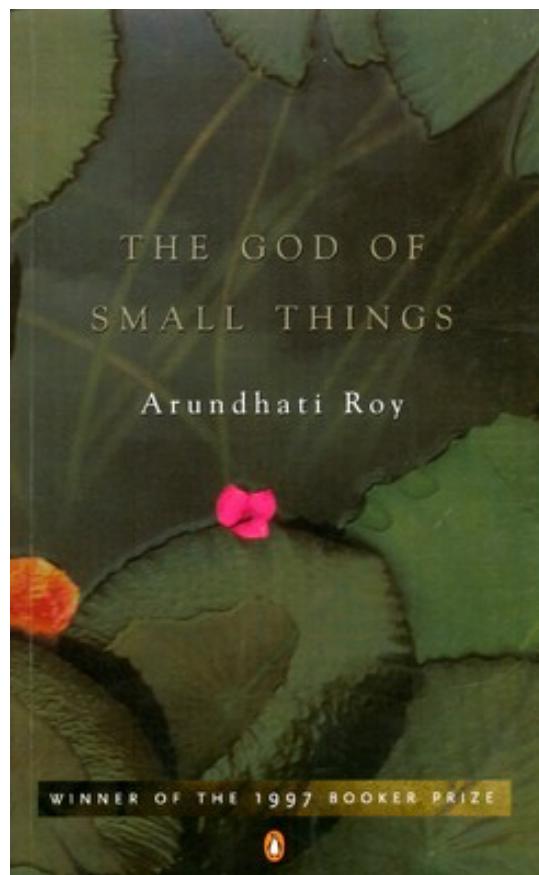
to improve her prospect

and we are wishing her bon voyage.

Now I ask other speakers to speak

and afterwards Miss Pushpa

will do summing up.



THE GOD OF  
SMALL THINGS

Arundhati Roy

WINNER OF THE 1997 BOOKER PRIZE



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## Cochin Kangaroos

At Cochin Airport, Rahel's new knickers were polka-dotted and still crisp. The rehearsals had been rehearsed. It was the Day of the Play. The culmination of the *What Will Sophie Mol Think?* week.

In the morning at the Hotel Sea Queen, Ammu – who had dreamed at night of dolphins and a deep blue – helped Rahel to put on her frothy Airport Frock. It was one of those baffling aberrations in Ammu's taste, a cloud of stiff yellow lace with tiny silver sequins and a bow on each shoulder. The frilled skirt was underpinned with buckram to make it flare. Rahel worried that it didn't really match her sunglasses.

Ammu held out the crisp matching knickers for her. Rahel, with her hands on Ammu's shoulders, climbed into her new knickers (left leg, right leg) and gave Ammu a kiss on each dimple (left cheek, right cheek). The elastic snapped softly against her stomach.

'Thank you, Ammu,' Rahel said.

'Thank you?' Ammu said.

'For my new frock and knickers,' Rahel said.

Ammu smiled. 'You're welcome, my sweetheart,' she said, but sadly.

*You're welcome, my sweetheart.*

The moth on Rahel's heart lifted a downy leg. Then put it back. Its little leg was cold. *A little less her mother loved her.*

## COCHIN KANGAROOS

The Sea Queen room smelled of eggs and filter coffee.

On the way to the car, Estha carried the Eagle vacuum flask with the tap water. Rahel carried the Eagle vacuum flask with the boiled water. Eagle vacuum flasks had Vacuum Eagles on them, with their wings spread, and a globe in their talons. Vacuum Eagles, the twins believed, watched the world all day and flew around their flasks all night. As silently as owls they flew, with the moon on their wings.

Estha was wearing a long-sleeved red shirt with a pointed collar and black drainpipe trousers. His puff looked crisp and surprised. Like well-whipped eggwhite.

Estha – with some basis, it must be admitted – said that Rahel looked stupid in her airport frock. Rahel slapped him, and he slapped her back.

They weren't speaking to each other at the airport.

Chacko, who usually wore a mundu, was wearing a funny tight suit and a shining smile. Ammu straightened his tie, which was odd and sideways. It had had its breakfast and was satisfied.

Ammu said, 'What's happened suddenly – to our Man of the Masses?'

But she said it with her dimples, because Chacko was so bursty. So very happy.

Chacko didn't slap her.

So she didn't slap him back.

From the Sea Queen florist Chacko had bought two red roses which he held carefully.

Fatly.

Fondly.

The airport shop, run by the Kerala Tourism Development Corporation, was crammed with Air India Maharajahs (small medium large), sandalwood elephants (small medium large) and papier-mâché masks of kathakali dancers (small medium large).

### THE GOD OF SMALL THINGS

The smell of cloying sandalwood and terrycotton armpits (small medium large) hung in the air.

In the Arrivals Lounge, there were four life-sized cement kangaroos with cement pouches that said USE ME. In their pouches, instead of cement joeys, they had cigarette stubs, used matchsticks, bottle-caps, peanut shells, crumpled paper cups and cockroaches.

Red betel spit stains spattered their kangaroo stomachs like fresh wounds.

Red-mouthed smiles the Airport Kangaroos had.

And pink-edged ears.

They looked as though if you pressed them they might say 'Ma-ma' in empty battery voices.

When Sophie Mol's plane appeared in the skyblue Bombay-Cochin sky, the crowd pushed against the iron railing to see more of everything.

The Arrivals Lounge was a press of love and eagerness, because the Bombay-Cochin flight was the flight that all the Foreign Returnees came home on.

Their families had come to meet them. From all over Kerala. On long bus journeys. From Ranni, from Kunnili, from Vizhinjam, from Uzhavoor. Some of them had camped at the airport overnight, and had brought their food with them. And tapioca chips and chakka velaichathu for the way back.

They were all there – the deaf ammoomas, the cantankerous, arthritic appoopans, the pining wives, scheming uncles, children with the runs. The fiancées to be reassessed. The teacher's husband still waiting for his Saudi visa. The teacher's husband's sisters waiting for their dowries. The wire-bender's pregnant wife.

'Mostly sweeper class,' Baby Kochamma said grimly, and looked away while a mother, not wanting to give up her Good Place near the railing, aimed her distracted baby's penis into

## COCHIN KANGAROOS

an empty bottle while he smiled and waved at the people around him.

'Sssss . . .' his mother hissed. First persuasively, then savagely. But her baby thought he was the Pope. He smiled and waved and smiled and waved. With his penis in a bottle.

'Don't forget that you are Ambassadors of India,' Baby Kochamma told Rahel and Estha. 'You're going to form their First Impression of your country.'

Two-egg Twin Ambassadors. Their Excellencies Ambassador E(lvis), Pelvis, and Ambassador S(tick), Insect.

In her stiff lace dress and her fountain in a Love-in-Tokyo, Rahel looked like an Airport Fairy with appalling taste. She was hemmed in by humid hips (as she would be once again, at a funeral in a yellow church) and grim eagerness. She had her grandfather's moth on her heart. She turned away from the screaming steel bird in the skyblue sky that had her cousin in it, and what she saw was this: red-mouthed roos with ruby smiles moved cemently across the airport floor.

### *Heel and Toe Heel and Toe*

Long flatfeet.

Airport garbage in their baby bins.

The smallest one stretched its neck like people in English films who loosen their ties after office. The middle one rummaged in her pouch for a long cigarette stub to smoke. She found an old cashew nut in a dim plastic bag. She gnawed it with her front teeth like a rodent. The large one wobbled the standing up sign that said *Kerala Tourism Development Corporation Welcomes You* with a kathakali dancer doing a namasté. Another sign, unwobbled by a kangaroo, said: *emocleW ot eht ecipS tsaoC fo aidnI*.

### THE GOD OF SMALL THINGS

Urgently, Ambassador Rahel burrowed through the press of people to her brother and co-Ambassador.

*Estha look! Look Estha look!*

Ambassador Estha wouldn't. Didn't want to. He watched the bumpy landing with his tap-water Eagle flask slung around him, and a bottomless-bottomful feeling: the Orangedrink Lemon-drink Man knew where to find him. In the factory in Ayemenem. On the banks of the Meenachal,

Ammu watched with her handbag.

Chacko with his roses.

Baby Kochamma with her sticking out neckmole.

Then the Bombay-Cochin people came out. From the cool air into the hot air. Crumpled people uncrumpled on their way to the Arrivals Lounge.

And there they were, the Foreign Returnees, in wash'n'wear suits and rainbow sunglasses. With an end to grinding poverty in their Aristocrat suitcases. With cement roofs for their thatched houses, and geysers for their parents' bathrooms. With sewage systems and septic tanks. Maxis and high heels. Puff sleeves and lipstick. Mixy-grinders and automatic flashes for their cameras. With keys to count, and cupboards to lock. With a hunger for kappa and meen vevichathu that they hadn't eaten for so long. With love and a lick of shame that their families who had come to meet them were so . . . so . . . gawkish. *Look at the way they dressed! Surely they had more suitable airport wear! Why did Malayalees have such awful teeth?*

And the airport itself! More like the local bus depot! The birdshit on the building! Oh the spitstains on the kangeroos!

*Oho! Going to the dogs India is.*

When long bus journeys, and overnight stays at the airport, were met by love and a lick of shame, small cracks appeared, which would grow and grow, and before they knew it, the

GOGHIN KANGAROOS

Foreign Returnees would be trapped outside the History House, and have their dreams redreamed.

Then, there, among the wash'n'wear suits and shiny suitcases, Sophie Mol.

*Thimble-drinker.*

*Coffin-cartwheeler.*

She walked down the runway, the smell of London in her hair. Yellow bottoms of bells flapped backwards around her ankles. Long hair floated out from under her straw hat. One hand in her mother's. The other swinging like a soldier's (lef, lef, lefrightlef).

*There was  
A girl  
Tall and  
Thin and  
Fair  
Her hair  
Her hair  
Was the delicate colourov  
Gin-nnn-ger (leftleft, right)  
There was  
A girl -*

Margaret Kochamma told her to Stoppit.

So she Stoppited.

Ammu said, 'Can you see her, Rahel?'

She turned around to find her crisp-knickered daughter communing with cement marsupials. She went and fetched her, scoldingly. Chacko said he couldn't take Rahel on his shoulders because he was already carrying something. Two roses red.

Fatly.

Fondly.

### THE GOD OF SMALL THINGS

When Sophie Mol walked into the Arrivals Lounge, Rahel, overcome by excitement and resentment, pinched Estha hard. His skin between her nails. Estha gave her a Chinese Bangle, twisting the skin on her wrist different ways with each of his hands. Her skin became a welt and hurt. When she licked it, it tasted of salt. The spit on her wrist was cool and comfortable.

Ammu never noticed.

Across the tall iron railing that separated Meeters from the Met, and Greeters from the Gret, Chacko, beaming, bursting through his suit and sideways tie, bowed to his new daughter and ex-wife.

In his mind, Estha said, 'Bow.'

'Hello, ladies,' Chacko said in his Reading Aloud voice (last night's voice in which he said, *Love. Madness. Hope. Infinate Joy*). 'And how was your journey?'

And the Air was full of Thoughts and Things to Say. But at times like these, only the Small Things are ever said. The Big Things lurk unsaid inside.

'Say Hello and How d'you do?' Margaret Kochamma said to Sophie Mol.

'Hello and How d'you do?' Sophie Mol said through the iron railing, to everyone in particular.

'One for you and one for you,' Chacko said with his roses.

'And Thank you?' Margaret Kochamma said to Sophie Mol.

'And Thank you?' Sophie Mol said to Chacko, mimicking her mother's question mark.

Margaret Kochamma shook her a little for her impertinence.

'You're welcome,' Chacko said. 'Now let me introduce everybody.' Then, more for the benefit of onlookers and eavesdroppers, because Margaret Kochamma needed no introduction really, 'My wife, Margaret.'

Margaret Kochamma smiled and wagged her rose at him. *Ex-wife, Chacko!* Her lips formed the words, though her voice never spoke them.

## COCHIN KANGAROOS

Anybody could see that Chacko was a proud and happy man to have had a wife like Margaret. White. In a flowered, printed frock with legs underneath. And brown back-freckles on her back. And arm-freckles on her arms.

But around her, the air was sad, somehow. And behind the smile in her eyes, the Grief was a fresh, shining blue. Because of a calamitous car crash. Because of a Joe-shaped hole in the Universe.

'Hello, all,' she said. 'I feel I've known you for years.'

*Hello wall.*

'My daughter, Sophie,' Chacko said, and laughed a small, nervous laugh that was worried, in case Margaret Kochamma said, 'Ex-daughter.' But she didn't. It was an easy-to-understand laugh. Not like the Orangedrink Lemondrink Man's laugh that Estha hadn't understood.

'Hello,' Sophie Mol said.

She was taller than Estha. And bigger. Her eyes were blue-greyblue. Her pale skin was the colour of beach sand. But her hatted hair was beautiful, deep red-brown. And yes (oh yes!) she had Pappachi's nose waiting inside hers. An Imperial Entomologist's nose-within-a-nose. A moth-lover's nose. She carried her Made-in-England go-go bag that she loved.

'Ammu, my sister,' Chacko said.

Ammu said a grown-up's Hello to Margaret Kochamma and a children's Hell-oh to Sophie Mol. Rahel watched hawk-eyed to try and gauge how much Ammu loved Sophie Mol, but couldn't.

Laughter rambled through the Arrivals Lounge like a sudden breeze. Adoor Basi, the most popular, best-loved comedian in Malayalam cinema, had just arrived (Bombay-Cochin). Burdened with a number of small unmanageable packages and unabashed public adulation, he felt obliged to perform. He kept dropping his packages and saying, '*Ende Deivomay! Eee sadhanangal!*'

## THE GOD OF SMALL THINGS

Estha laughed a high, delighted laugh.

'Ammu look! Adoor Basi's dropping his things!' Estha said.  
'He can't even carry his things!'

'He's doing it deliberately,' Baby Kochamma said in a strange new British accent. 'Just *ignore* him.'

'He's a filmactor,' she explained to Margaret Kochamma and Sophie Mol, making Adoor Basi sound like a Mactor who did occasionally Fil. 'Just trying to attract attention,' Baby Kochamma said, and resolutely refused to have her attention attracted.

But Baby Kochamma was wrong. Adoor Basi *wasn't* trying to attract attention. He was only trying to deserve the attention that he had already attracted.

'My aunt, Baby,' Chacko said.

Sophie Mol was puzzled. She regarded Baby Kochamma with a beady-eyed interest. She knew of cow babies and dog babies. Bear babies – yes. (She would soon point out to Rahel a bat baby.) But *aunt* babies confounded her.

Baby Kochamma said, 'Hello, Margaret,' and 'Hello, Sophie Mol.' She said Sophie Mol was so beautiful that she reminded her of a wood-sprite. Of Ariel.

'D'you know who Ariel was?' Baby Kochamma asked Sophie Mol. 'Ariel in *The Tempest*?'

Sophie Mol said she didn't.

"Where the bee sucks there suck I?" Baby Kochamma said.

Sophie Mol said she didn't.

"In a cowslip's bell I lie?"

Sophie Mol said she didn't.

'Shakespeare's *The Tempest*?' Baby Kochamma persisted.

All this was of course primarily to announce her credentials to Margaret Kochamma. To set herself apart from the Sweeper Class.

'She's trying to boast,' Ambassador E. Pelvis whispered in Ambassador S. Insect's ear. Ambassador Rahel's giggle escaped

## COCHIN KANGAROOS

in a blue-green bubble (the colour of a jackfruit fly) and burst in the hot airport air. Pfffft! was the sound it made.

Baby Kochamma saw it, and knew that it was Estha who had started it.

'And now for the VIPs,' Chacko said (still using his Reading Aloud voice).

'My nephew, Esthappen.'

'Elvis Presley,' Baby Kochamma said for revenge. 'I'm afraid we're a little behind the times here.' Everyone looked at Estha and laughed.

From the soles of Ambassador Estha's beige and pointy shoes an angry feeling rose and stopped around his heart.

'How d'you do, Esthappen?' Margaret Kochamma said.

'Finethankyou.' Estha's voice was sullen.

'Estha,' Ammu said affectionately, 'when someone says How d'you do? You're supposed to say How d'you do? back. Not "Fine, thank you." Come on, say How do YOU do?"

Ambassador Estha looked at Ammu.

'Go on,' Ammu said to Estha. 'How do YOU do?"

Estha's sleepy eyes were stubborn.

In Malayalam Ammu said, 'Did you hear what I said?"

Ambassador Estha felt blugreyblue eyes on him, and an Imperial Entomologist's nose: He didn't have a How do YOU do? in him.

'Esthappen!' Ammu said. And an angry feeling rose in her and stopped around her heart. A Far More Angry Than Necessary feeling. She felt somehow humiliated by this public revolt in her area of jurisdiction. She had wanted a smooth performance. A prize for her children in the Indo-British Behaviour Competition.

Chacko said to Ammu in Malayalam, 'Please. Later. Not now.'

And Ammu's angry eyes on Estha said, *All right. Later.*

And Later became a horrible, menacing, goose-bumpy word.

THE GOD OF SMALL THINGS

Lay.Ter.

Like a deep-sounding bell in a mossy well. Shivery, and furred. Like moth's feet.

The Play had gone bad. Like pickle in the monsoon.

'And my niece,' Chacko said. 'Where's Rahel?' He looked around and couldn't find her. Ambassador Rahel, unable to cope with see-sawing changes in her life, had unravelled herself like a sausage into the dirty airport curtain, and wouldn't unravel. A sausage with Bata sandals.

'Just ignore her,' Ammu said. 'She's just trying to attract attention.'

Ammu too was wrong. Rahel was only trying to not attract the attention that she deserved.

'Hello, Rahel,' Margaret Kochamma said to the dirty airport curtain.

'How do YOU do?' the dirty curtain replied in a mumble.

'Aren't you going to come out and say Hello?' Margaret Kochamma said in a kind-schoolteacher voice. (Like Miss Mitten's before she saw Satan in their eyes.)

Ambassador Rahel wouldn't come out of the curtain because she couldn't. She couldn't because she couldn't. Because Everything was wrong. And soon there would be a Lay Ter for both her and Estha.

Full of furred moths and icy butterflies. And deep-sounding bells. And moss.

And a Nowl.

The dirty airport curtain was a great comfort and a darkness and a shield.

'Just ignore her,' Ammu said, and smiled tightly.

Rahel's mind was full of millstones with blugreyblue eyes.

Ammu loved her even less now. And it had come down to Brass Tacks with Chacko.

## COCHIN KANGAROOS

'Here comes the baggage!' Chacko said brightly. Glad to get away.

'Come, Sophiekins, let's get your bags.'

*Sophiekins.*

Estha watched as they walked along the railing, pushing through the crowds that moved aside, intimidated by Chacko's suit and sideways tie and his generally bursty demeanour. Because of the size of his stomach, Chacko carried himself in a way that made him appear to be walking uphill all the time. Negotiating optimistically the steep, slippery slopes of life. He walked on this side of the railing, Margaret Kochamma and Sophie Mol on that.

*Sophiekins.*

The Sitting Man with the cap and epaulettes, also intimidated by Chacko's suit and sideways tie, allowed him in to the baggage claim section.

When there was no railing left between them, Chacko kissed Margaret Kochamma, and then picked Sophie Mol up.

'The last time I did this I got a wet shirt for my pains,' Chacko said and laughed. He hugged her and hugged her and hugged her. He kissed her bluegreyblue eyes, her entomologist's nose, her hatted redbrown hair.

Then Sophie Mol said to Chacko, 'Ummm . . . excuse me? D'you think you could put me down now? I'm ummm . . . not really used to being carried.'

So Chacko put her down.

Ambassador Estha saw (with stubborn eyes) that Chacko's suit was suddenly looser, less bursty.

And while Chacko got the bags, at the dirty-curtained window Lay Ter became Now.

Estha saw how Baby Kochamma's neckmole licked its chops and throbbed with delicious anticipation. *Der-dhoom, der-dhoom.* It changed colour like a chameleon, Der-green, der-blueblack, der-mustardyellow.

THE GOD OF SMALL THINGS

*Twins for tea  
It would bea*

'All right,' Ammu said. 'That's enough. Both of you. Come *out* of there, Rahel!'

Inside the curtain, Rahel closed her eyes and thought of the green river, of the quiet deep-swimming fish, and the gossamer wings of the dragonflies (that could see behind them) in the sun. She thought of her luckiest fishing rod that Velutha had made for her. Yellow bamboo with a float that dipped every time a foolish fish enquired. She thought of Velutha and wished she was with him.

Then Estha unravelled her. The cement kangaroos were watching.

Ammu looked at them. The Air was quiet except for the sound of Baby Kochamma's throbbing neckmole.

'So,' Ammu said.

And it was really a question. So?

And it hadn't an answer.

Ambassador Estha looked down, and saw that his shoes (from where the angry feelings rose) were beige and pointy. Ambassador Rahel looked down and saw that in her Bata sandals her toes were trying to disconnect themselves. Twitching to join someone else's feet. And that she couldn't stop them. Soon she'd be without toes and have a bandage like the leper at the level crossing.

'If you ever,' Ammu said, 'and I *mean* this, EVER, ever again disobey me in Public, I will see to it that you are sent away to somewhere where you will jolly well learn to behave. Is that clear?'

When Ammu was really angry, she said Jolly Well. Jolly Well was a deeply well with larfing dead people in it.

'Is. That. Clear?' Ammu said again.

Frightened eyes and a fountain looked back at Ammu.

## COCHIN KANGAROOS

Sleepy eyes and a surprised puff looked back at Ammu.

Two heads nodded three times.

Yes. It's. Clear.

But Baby Kochamma was dissatisfied with the fizzling out of a situation that had been so full of potential. She tossed her head.

'As if?' she said.

*As if!*

Ammu turned to her, and the turn of her head was a question.

'It's useless,' Baby Kochamma said. 'They're sly. They're uncouth. Deceitful. They're growing wild. You can't manage them.'

Ammu turned back to Estha and Rahel and her eyes were blurred jewels.

'Everybody says that children need a Baba. And I say no. Not *my* children. D'you know why?'

Two heads nodded.

'Why. Tell me,' Ammu said.

And not together, but almost, Esthappen and Rahel said: 'Because you're our Ammu and our Baba and you love us Double.'

'More than Double,' Ammu said. 'So remember what I told you. People's feelings are precious. And when you disobey me in Public, everybody gets the wrong impression.'

'What Ambassadors and a half you've been!' Baby Kochamma said.

Ambassador E. Pelvis and Ambassador S. Insect hung their heads.

'And the other thing, Rahel,' Ammu said, 'I think it's high time that you learned the difference between CLEAN and DIRTY. Especially in this country.'

Ambassador Rahel looked down.

'Your dress is – was – CLEAN,' Ammu said. 'That curtain is DIRTY. Those kangaroos are DIRTY. Your hands are DIRTY.'

### THE GOD OF SMALL THINGS

'But you don't even know me,' Sophie Mol said. 'And anyway, I don't love you.'

'But you will, when you come to know me,' Rahel said confidently.

'I doubt it,' Estha said.

'Why not?' Sophie Mol said.

'Because,' Estha said. 'And anyway she's most probably going to be a dwarf.'

As though loving a dwarf was completely out of the question.

'I'm not,' Rahel said.

'You are,' Estha said.

'I'm not.'

'You are.'

'I'm not.'

'You are. We're twins,' Estha explained to Sophie Mol, 'and just see how much shorter she is.'

Rahel obligingly took a deep breath, threw her chest out and stood back to back with Estha in the airport car park, for Sophie Mol to see just how much shorter she was.

'Maybe you'll be a midget,' Sophie Mol suggested. 'That's taller than a dwarf and shorter than a... Human Being.'

The silence was unsure of this compromise.

In the doorway of the Arrivals Lounge, a shadowy, red-mouthed roo-shaped silhouette waved a cemently paw only at Rahel. Cement kisses whirred through the air like small helicopters.

'D'you know how to sashay?' Sophie Mol wanted to know.

'No. We don't sashay in India,' Ambassador Estha said.

'Well in England we do,' Sophie Mol said. 'All the models do. On television. Look – it's easy.'

And the three of them, led by Sophie Mol, sashayed across the airport car park, swaying like fashion models, Eagle flasks and Made-in-England go-go bags bumping around their hips. Damp dwarves walking tall.

## THE GOD OF SMALL THINGS

Rahel was frightened by the way Ammu said CLEAN and DIRTY so loudly. As though she was talking to a deaf person.

'Now, I want you to go and say Hello *properly*,' Ammu said.  
'Are you going to do that or not?'

Two heads nodded twice.

Ambassador Estha and Ambassador Rahel walked towards Sophie Mol.

'Where d'you think people are sent to Jolly Well Behave?' Estha asked Rahel in a whisper.

'To the Government,' Rahel whispered back, because she knew.

'How do you do?' Estha said to Sophie Mol loud enough for Ammu to hear.

'Just like a laddoo one pice two,' Sophie Mol whispered to Estha. She had learned this in school from a Pakistani classmate.

Estha looked at Ammu.

Ammu's look said, *Never Mind Her As Long As You've Done The Right Thing*.

On their way across the airport car park, Hotweather crept into their clothes and dampened crisp knickers. The children lagged behind, weaving through parked cars and taxis.

'Does Yours hit you?' Sophie Mol asked.

Rahel and Estha, unsure of the politics of this, said nothing.

'Mine does,' Sophie Mol said invitingly. 'Mine even Slaps.'

'Ours doesn't,' Estha said loyally.

'Lucky,' Sophie Mol said.

*Lucky rich boy with porkettmunny. And a grandmother's factory to inherit. No worries.*

They walked past the Class III Airport Workers' Union token one-day hunger strike. And past the people watching the Class III Airport Workers' Union token one-day hunger strike.

COCHIN KANGAROOS

And past the people watching the people watching the people.  
A small tin sign on a big banyan tree said *For VD Sex Complaints contact Dr O. K. Joy.*

'Who d'you love Most in the World?' Rahel asked Sophie Mol.

'Joe,' Sophie Mol said without hesitation. 'My dad. He died two months ago. We've come here to Recover from the Shock.'

'But Chacko's your dad,' Estha said.

'He's just my *real* dad,' Sophie Mol said. 'Joe's my dad. He never hits. Hardly ever.'

'How can he hit if he's dead?' Estha asked reasonably.

'Where's *your* dad?' Sophie Mol wanted to know.

'He's . . .' and Rahel looked at Estha for help.

' . . . not here.' Estha said.

'Shall I tell you my list?' Rahel asked Sophie Mol.

'If you like,' Sophie Mol said.

Rahel's 'list' was an attempt to order chaos. She revised it constantly, torn forever between love and duty. It was by no means a true gauge of her feelings.

'First Ammu and Chacko,' Rahel said. 'Then Mammachi -'

'Our grandmother,' Estha clarified.

'More than your brother?' Sophie Mol asked.

'We don't count,' Rahel said. 'And anyway he might change. Ammu says.'

'How d'you mean? Change into what?' Sophie Mol asked.

'Into a Male Chauvinist Pig,' Rahel said.

'Very unlikely,' Estha said.

'Anyway, after Mammachi, Velutha, and then -'

'Who's Velutha?' Sophie Mol wanted to know.

'A man we love,' Rahel said. 'And after Velutha, you,' Rahel said.

'Me? What d'you love me for?' Sophie Mol said.

'Because we're firstcousins. So I have to,' Rahel said piously.

## COCHIN KANGAROOS

Shadows followed them. Silver jets in a blue church sky, like moths in a beam of light.

The skyblue Plymouth with tailfins had a smile for Sophie Mol.  
A chromebumpered sharksmile.

A Paradise Pickles carsmile.

When she saw the carrier with the painted pickle bottles and the list of Paradise products, Margaret Kochamma said, 'Oh dear! I feel as though I'm in an advertisement!' She said Oh dear! a lot.

Oh dear! Oh dearohdear!

'I didn't know you did pineapple slices!' she said. 'Sophie loves pineapple, don't you, Soph?'

'Sometimes,' Soph said. 'And sometimes not.'

Margaret Kochamma climbed into the advertisement with her brown back-freckles and her arm-freckles and her flowered dress with legs underneath.

Sophie Mol sat in front between Chacko and Margaret Kochamma, just her hat peeping over the car seat. Because she was their daughter.

Rahel and Estha sat at the back.

The luggage was in the boot.

*Boot* was a lovely word. *Sturdy* was a terrible word.

Near Ettumanoor they passed a dead temple elephant, electrocuted by a high tension wire that had fallen on the road. An engineer from the Ettumanoor municipality was supervising the disposal of the carcass. They had to be careful because the decision would serve as precedent for all future Government Pachyderm Carcass Disposals. Not a matter to be treated lightly. There was a fire engine and some confused firemen. The municipal officer had a file and was shouting a lot. There was a Joy Ice Cream cart and a man selling peanuts in narrow cones of paper cleverly designed to hold not more than eight or nine nuts.

## THE GOD OF SMALL THINGS

Sophie Mol said, 'Look, a dead elephant.'

Chacko stopped to ask whether it was by any chance Kochu Thomban (Little Tusker), the Ayemenem temple elephant who came to the Ayemenem House once a month for a coconut. They said it wasn't.

Relieved that it was a stranger, and not an elephant they knew, they drove on.

'Thang God,' Estha said.

'Thank God, Estha,' Baby Kochamma corrected him.

On the way, Sophie Mol learned to recognize the first whiff of the approaching stench of unprocessed rubber and to clamp her nostrils shut until long after the truck carrying it had driven past.

Baby Kochamma suggested a car song.

Estha and Rahel had to sing in English in obedient voices. Breezily. As though they hadn't been made to rehearse it all week long. Ambassador E. Pelvis and Ambassador S. Insect.

*RejOice in the Lo-Ord Or-Orlways  
And again I say re-jOice.*

Their Prer NUN sea ayshun was perfect.

The Plymouth rushed through the green midday heat, promoting pickles on its roof, and the skyblue sky in its tailfins.

Just outside Ayemenem they drove into a cabbage-green butterfly (or perhaps it drove into them).

## "Why not live more than one life?"

### K. Satchidanandan and Githa Hariharan in Conversation with Mini Krishnan



Image courtesy Scroll.in

Mini Krishnan began a **newspaper column** with two profound questions in the context of translations in India. She wrote, "Why not live more than one life? And through writers who lead us to the language-experiences of which we know so little?"

Mini Krishnan sources and edits fiction, plays, autobiographies and biographies from 14 Indian languages into English for Oxford University Press. She was formerly with Macmillan India where she edited the series *Modern Indian Novels in Translation*.

Writers K. Satchidanandan and Githa Hariharan, editors of *Guttugu*, spoke to Mini Krishnan about some critical questions on translations in the Indian context.

#### On a hierarchy of languages in translation

K. Satchidanandan: Do you believe in a hierarchy of languages when it comes to translations? For example, “vertical” translations from a “global” language, or even a “national” language into a “regional” or “local” language; or “horizontal” translations, say between two “regional” languages – say from Tamil to Malayalam, or Punjabi to Marathi?

Mini Krishnan: I think this language hierarchy keeps shifting. At one time in our country, Bengali not only led the scene of into-English-translations but dominated it. Reasons: heads of publishing lists were Bengalis and the Bengal Renaissance, and a certain culture of literary values pushed that region into high relief. Hindi and Marathi also had their publishing strengths; but most of all, there was an academic Eng-Lit mafia from those regions (I mean this in a gentle sense!) who crowded out other languages. So yes, I recognise this hierarchy but do not believe in it. I feel great works in fiction and poetry, as well as important sociological documents like memoirs and journals, are lying about everywhere, but publishers cannot reach them, nor can the texts reach the publishers. An exception, which made me wonder about how many other such works may be “hidden” from us, was *The Sharp Knife of Memory* (2015) published by Zubaan. The book is a translation of Kondapalli Koteswaramma’s memoirs. (Her husband Seetharamaiah was the founder of the Maoist movement in South India.)

Then there is the hierarchy created by prizes and awards. A writer who has not been translated into English cannot even hope to be considered for a literary prize. As for horizontal translations, I don't know enough. But shared experiences and proximity to understanding the landscape of a bordering region might make people sit up and think, "Let's see what is happening in Tamil Nadu among educated women and the difference their lives have made," or some such thing. A gap I have never been able to understand is why that great and sweet language Telugu has lagged so far behind the other three South Indian languages. And then there is Tulu. I have the most marvellous novella from Tulu, all translated and edited, but I simply cannot get that horse out of its box. Likewise Oriya – why hasn't anyone other than Manoj Das and Gopinath Mohanty got the kind of attention that the language and region should be getting?

tion into English as a sort of overall "link language" with translations to and from the other Indian languages? Then, as a second step, how do we foreground the latter, the horizontal exercise, as the natural expression of our multi-lingual literary culture? Can this ever happen? Would shedding a neo-orientalist view of translation help? Would tweaking the education system to use translations from one Indian language to another, and not English, make a difference?

Mini Krishnan: First — if the primary education system was more supportive of our languages and culture, it would certainly strengthen translations and translation study. But there is a traditional mistrust of translation as a hybrid genre not worth studying. In fact, this section of education isn't paying attention to any language — not even English which may be the medium of study. The "sponge" time of a child's years are spent memorising and attempting to understand subjects for which his or her vocabulary is not yet developed. Coming to the second part of your question — a translation into English always pushes the same work into other languages. Sharan Kumar Limbale's *Akkarmashi* in English (OUP) fired its movement into Malayalam and Tamil. The same thing happened with Sarah Joseph's books, and Bama has probably moved into more languages than any other woman writer. It all came from English as the decoding language.

The difficulty is that the author has no way of checking the quality in the regional language into which her book moves, whereas there

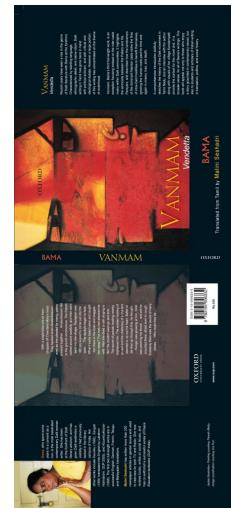


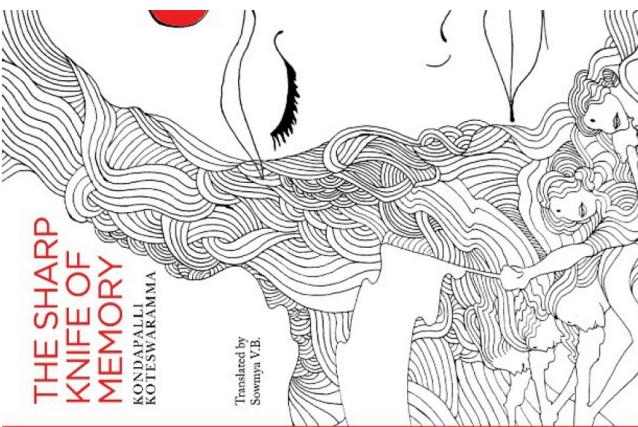
Image courtesy Oxford University Press

**Githa Hariharan: The question seems to be:  
How do we, as a first step, balance transla-**

are always three of four persons she can depend on to give her an accurate assessment of the English translation. Perhaps if there was more coordination between academia, the regional language publishers and the English press, this machinery would be better oiled. To come back to translation in education — some women's colleges have taken bold decisions. The Ethiraj College (Chennai) prescribed Chellappa's *Vaadivosa* translated from Tamil by Kalyan Raman (OUP) for their Foundation English course; Stella Maris, also in Chennai, has gone a step further and prescribed Na D'Souza's *Dweepa* translated from Kannada (OUP) for their Foundation English course. I think it is the first time a translated work from a language other than that of the region has been prescribed for the whole college. Two years ago the Thiruvalluvar University adopted a textbook outlining the basics in translation for undergraduate students.

*With reference to "horizontal" translations:*

Read an extract from Koogai in Tamil and in Malayalam.



Translated by  
Sowmya V.R.

Image courtesy Zubaa Books

*On the ideal reader for translations*

K. Satchidanandan: Who is the ideal reader you have in mind when you edit translations from an Indian language into English: an Indian reader who does not follow the original language, or a Western reader who does not even know the culture and ethos behind that language? How do you find a means — if there is one — by which both these kinds of readers can be satisfied?

Mini Krishnan: My ideal reader is a committed and emotional person who is willing to take a flight from her armchair. My primary target reader is the Indian language orphan who

can speak, maybe even function well, in the language and culture, but cannot read her language. It is worthwhile getting a headache and damaging my eyes for that reader. I also always, always hope that I will catch the eye of the researcher and academic reader who might take that text into an Indian classroom. The non-Indian reader is welcome to the feast but I'm not going to reduce the chili for him!

Githa Hariharan: I am struck by your phrase "the Indian language orphan". Can we extend this to include not just those who are no longer bilingual, but also those who have to go to English to read texts in a language they do not know rather than reading it in the Indian language they know?

I also have a question about the chili. How do you translate, for example, colourful swearing into English? I remember my disappointment when I read two translations of one of Mahasweta's stories — there was an old woman in the village who could curse seven generations of a bullying policeman. In English, the more faithful one sounded both quaint and ridiculous; the better translation used "Fuck" all over the place but lost out on **the old woman's imaginative variety.**

Mini Krishnan: Swearing is abusive as well as exaggerated — go sleep with a donkey, may your food turn to menstrual blood etc. And oh, English is quite muscular in that department and can handle a lot of swearing. When the special ethos of a place comes up, such as the bad luck associated with rites gone

wrong, or what's considered a bad omen, then you have a problem. "May you wake to the hoot of an owl!" has a special significance which the non-Indian is unlikely to know. Not just swearing: think of a phrase like "ghee in a frog's belly". Now ghee is a precious commodity in India. Someone who grew up in the West may not grasp that straightforward. I admit that it would be tedious to have to explain that.

#### *On footnoting in translations*

K. Satchidanandan: Does footnoting really help in such situations? How much can we footnote after all? I am asking this question keeping in mind two facts: one, there is an increasing tendency to avoid/ reduce the number of footnotes. Two, with the Internet, a lot of information can be accessed by the responsible reader, making such notes superfluous.

Mini Krishnan: In this regard I'm very cautious and traditional. Never mind what the worldwide trend is. But if you are using up resources and printing x number of copies of a translation, and the author and translator are hoping to see their child run, you shouldn't cripple that child, tie its hands and say, now let's see you run. If words like irrikapindam or shaligramam appear, you darn well tell your reader what they are. How can we destroy the pleasure and flow of reading by expecting a reader to break off and check the net for information which may not even be right or complete? Let us gloss or die. I think it is both

laziness and arrogance to leave words tucked so deeply into a text that one cannot extract their meaning as one reads. Who is important in the exercise of reading? Is it not the reader? So when there are so many other distractions competing for attention, you have to make the road comfortable, not strew it with stones.

**Githa Hariharan:** Ah, I can see we are in dangerous waters now. Even those of us who write in English but happen to be Indian, fought for the right to not have a glossary. There are ways in which the meaning can be embedded in the text, not just for foreigners, but other Indians. I really hate footnotes in a work of fiction. I suppose you could have some Notes at the end, but only if it is unavoidable. Maybe an Introduction or Afterword if it is really important? After all, we read so much from elsewhere and sort of figure out new words and cultural practices in context. Why should we continue to museumise our work?

**Mini Krishnan:** Well, everything is important if you want the whole picture. Indians who write in English are safe because you can translate your ethos with delicate explanations as you go along. Food for instance. The preparation of, say, idiyappam, or the way a paan is assembled, can provide a nice cultural filler if you are arranging the setting for a scene in a novel in English. So also wedding or puja rites. You can, magus-like, construct the setting before turning to your characters. Just describing the door of an old house or

the scent of those hanging thattis, or the way books stored in a wooden cupboard through many monsoons smell, would be so evocative for an Indian writing in English. Let me give you an example of the difficulty when the opposite is the case. In U.R. Ananthamurthy's *Bharathipura*, when Jagannatha decides to rebel openly, he enters the puja room to grab the shaligram from its casket:

"The priest was horrified to see the way the master had polluted the room the way he had entered it." What was that pollution? He hadn't taken off his shirt. Now not even every Indian knows that it is disrespectful for a man to keep his shirt on in a temple. If URA were an Indian writing in English he would have slipped in something about pollution and purity rules, but since he was writing in Kannada he didn't have to inform his readers.

What's so irritating about glosses? I think it would be more irritating to have to dig about and guess. To readers who have never visited India or read anything connected with the country, except perhaps a menu in an Indian restaurant, or a novel in English set in New Delhi (which has already translated itself), an Indian language translation certainly has linguistic tics folded into it. To add to the reader's difficulties, sometimes explanations are wrong or only partially right, or they blithely presume that another Indian word would make this one fly. What's the use of explaining pottu as bindi? In a recent translation of a novel set in Varanasi, the footnotes are, at best, lazy. A deva is a celestial being, not a god, and a yogini is a powerful female spirit,

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not necessarily a goddess. She could be part of Durga Devi's retinue, but she could also be a witch. Tricky, right? The book which carries these blurred meanings also includes a foot-note describing puja as a religious ritual, when the more accurate explanation could be a ritual of worship. In a translation of a *Ki Rajanarayanan* novel that reads beautifully (to me, because I don't need the region-specific explanations), words like brahmastram, kadukkan, Ezhumalaiyaane and udan kaadu are left unexplained.

#### *On translating specificities of dialect*

K. Satchidanandan: How do we translate dialects and slang and community inflections, kinship terms, the names of flora and fauna, tones and modulations that abound in Indian fiction and now also in poetry, especially with the rise of Dalit and Nativist kinds of poetry?

Mini Krishnan: We can't. These words come from the land, which cannot be replicated efficiently, so all the more reason to run glosses and perhaps even illustrations as I did in *Anthaaranam* (2012), Devaki Nilayamgode's memoirs of a time long gone, or C.K. Janu's *Mother Forest* (Women Unlimited, 2003). A project I've tooted for about 15 years without success is a retelling of our classics in the form of supplementary readers for children, supported by artwork/ sketches done by regional artists. These could be used as non-detailed readers in English language classrooms in India.

Githa Hariharan: I see your point entirely, but I am also a little nervous of the ethnographic project or even the didactic project overshadowing the literary one.

Mini Krishnan: I hate to agree with you even partially, but let me quickly turn this around and say that the voice is what locates the literary work, isn't it? Why is Basheer's Kerala more convincing than Arundhati Roy's? I feel that this voice has to be served and serious readers would want to know everything. Entering another culture should be done with respect.

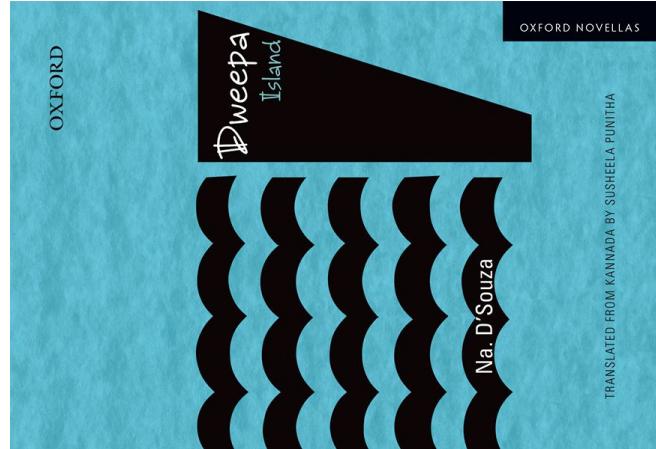


Image courtesy Oxford University Press

### *On the politics of translation*

K. Satchidanandan: Is there a politics to the editing of translations as there surely is for translation per se – reflected in the selection of texts as well as the contexts and modes of translation?

Mini Krishnan: Like everyone else, I too am carrying baggage, so I tend to keep close to the shore of a certain standard English that developed in India over the 1950s and 60s, which is when I studied the language. But having worked on many translations, I know that at least 20% of the words covering the material aspects of our culture have no equivalents at all, so my key to that door is just a footnote or a gloss. After all, do we know what jollof rice is in texts that come to us from Nigeria? No. But give me a description and I would be happy to look at jollof rice through that lens. But I have some other concerns. One is the unthinking use of Latinisms. Even very experienced translators tend to use "assuage" instead of "satisfy" without checking whether the speaker or the context can take the weight of "assuage". No uneducated or partially educated person would use that word in real life. So that is an erasure I apply quite regularly. I also look carefully for bombast because Indians tend to be melodramatic and introduce rhetoric where none existed in the original! We like fine-sounding words, don't we? I understand the instinct but it would be wrong to let it go. Then there is structure, where I meddle quite

a lot. For example, I would move the translator's "Dipu di was hurt" and "Apala was embarrassed" to the end of the sentences about them, with the advice that the translator should avoid, as far as possible, add-ons like "he said" and "she answered":

Dipu di was hurt – "Apu, are you leaving?" **Dipu di was hurt.**

Apala was embarrassed – "I have to Dipu di, you know how it is, don't you?" **Apala was embarrassed.**

I keep reading translations into English from languages other than ours to see how they achieve their rhythms. I equip myself before I start the day's work. Then I put down that book and read a contemporary work published in the UK. Then I read something published 50 years ago. Then I read a page or two of Macaulay, then Nehru's *Glimpses of World History*, switching from simple to literary, to a non-native speaker's use of the language in letters to a young girl. Call it a sort of tuning! I discourage the use of other foreign words and terms (usually French) and encourage the translator to stay with formal language in the narration and experiment but to take risks when it comes to dialogue. I often think of what Frances Pritchett once said: "I want to give the reader an agreeable double experience."

Here are some variants Devika and I worked on a few years ago, when she was translating Sarah Joseph:

"Please look at a revision of the opening sentence. I want to keep the sense of

your ‘bizarre’ but a wolf’s howl is never that. It is haunting, it is eerie...”

— Along with the howl of the lone wolf, a terrible gale rose up in the desert and came tearing out.

— Accompanied by the howl of a lone wolf a terrible storm roared out of the desert.

— A terrible storm roared out of the desert accompanied by the eerie howl of a lone wolf.

— Accompanied by the eerie howl of a lone wolf came a terrible storm.

Githa Hariharan: Yes, this is where I too feel it's worthwhile to be traditional, and not make the English translation so literal that it again museumises, and intrudes into the pleasure of the reading experience. But I think Satchidanandan's question needs more by way of response. Why do you pick this text and not the other? An accident? The theme? The author? It's important to address this, particularly in the context of translation into English. In our power structure, this would mean taking the chosen text into a wider world, not just of readership, but also “representation”. And, as you have said yourself, into a world of wider recognition and rewards.

Mini Krishnan: It is impossible to stay in touch with everyone everywhere! Some books suggest themselves. Quite often friends, translators, academics, or even pub-

lishers from the regional languages send word, or write, or call to discuss an important work. Sometimes when I read interviews with authors, a book catches my attention. Though the best and the latest are usually sought out by publishers, I also look out for someone who has not got his or her due. One such writer was Johny Miranda, the first Paranki novelist who wrote a sort of Creole Malayalam. His community (Portuguese descendants in Kerala) is a minority within the Christian minority. One of my ambitions has been to record through translation a way of life that has either faded completely or is on its way out — both in rural and semi-urban India. Hence my interest in memoirs and autobiographies as well as fiction. We need these records of our social history and the struggle pre-modern societies went through to reach where they have. A large section of India is still in near-medieval conditions and we must not forget that. I always feel amused when there are discussions about “working women” as if it were something recent. Perhaps it is, for the moneyed classes? Women from the poorer classes of India have always worked. They have not had a choice. That too is in the many stories that lie untranslated. The unique Indian Muslim experience is something I would like to do justice to. It's very difficult to find the right translators.

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Pillai and V.P. Siva Kumar] have appreciated my work . . . but on the whole it has simply been ignored. Nobody says anything, either good or bad. My colleagues did not even know I was a writer until they saw the fact mentioned in a review of another writer! In 2000, fourteen years after his first collection appeared, Sunny M. Kapikkad wrote a piece about it in *Bhashaposhini*. 'I was surprised by that article,' says Ayyappan. 'I doubted whether there was all this much to write about my stories.' The *Madhyamam* weekly carried an interview with Ayyappan in 2006, and a couple of his stories have been translated into English and published in *Indian Literature* and *The Little Magazine* (both in 2007).

Yet, from his high schooldays in the 1960s, Ayyappan has written stories, poems and songs. He has nine plays (all of which have been performed), two novels and several theoretical essays. None of these have been published. If he has not written more, he says it is not out of laziness or avoidance. 'How can one speak to an empty auditorium? When one feels that the speech is unidirectional, you become bored . . . The audience is the cause, both of enthusiasm and dejection.' He adds, 'I first heard about dalit literature in the mid-1980s. Someone sent me an essay titled "What is Dalit literature?" I remember T.K.C. Vaduthala [Ayyappan's father-in-law and an important early writer] reading it and commenting. "I have been writing dalit literature for thirty years and here they say there is no dalit literature in Malayalam!"'

### GHOST-SPEECH

*Translated by Udaya Kumar*

Hark, give ear to my words. I will speak to you and separate the grain from the chaff in your mind. I alone remain here to speak with you, as you lie in chains. I will tell you the truth and the truth alone. I am not interested in the puny pleasures that lies can buy. You know why: I am only a ghost, or an accursed soul, now. It is my restlessness and a little selfishness that make me prattle. At

this point, you still have the lamp of sanity. The sun's infancy is the youth of your awareness. It is when the sun shatters and sinks into the dark that madness, like the moon, creeps into you.

Not knowing the truth of a murder and a suicide—is that not what preys on your wakeful hours, hunting you down to exhaustion? Relax now. I am about to paint your eyelashes with the nudity of truth. Do not blink! Do not move your head! What if my fingernail brushes against your eye?

First, about my suicide. I had thought that you all understood why I did it. What a shame it is that I have to teach you the grammar of my mind! This is an unpleasant task; I am doing it only because there is no other way.

I don't have to tell you that I was your darling brother's secret lover. Between your brother and me, there was all that can be between an adult male and a female. That habit began when I was fifteen; or should I say mis-habit?

I'd come to your home, one monsoon day, to tend to the paddy that had been spread out to dry on the attic floor. I moved backwards, bent over, stirring the grain, and found myself in your brother's arms. I was confounded at first, then excited as I realized Kunjakko's hands were finding their way through to their goals. Soon, I blossomed red between his lips.

Descending the attic stairs, Kunju said: 'Now, now, don't tell this to anyone!' I got a bit scared. I was a fool even then. The same foolishness made me ask him, six or seven years later: 'Kunju, will you marry me?'

The response to that was a sincere counter-question. 'How can I marry you?'

I was pained by the helplessness of that question. Surely, no Christian—even if he happens to be a primary school teacher—can marry the daughter of the pulaya woman who comes to work at his house.

I got a real fright one evening; as I reached home after meeting Kunju, my mother was whispering to my father how my cousin had become a fallen woman. Will I also be a fallen woman? I felt suffocated. But that was quite unnecessary. Even at that young age, Kunjakko was a clever man. He procured certain precautionary

measures from town with the help of Pathrose who carried betel leaves from the village to the Thrissur market. But those precautions too were unnecessary. He was incapable of giving any woman that indigestible gift. It was only when I began to long to have his child and to bring it up and to live and to die thus that I slowly realized this. When he learnt about my dream, he said he felt like puking and he cleared his throat and spat at length. Then he slapped me full on the face with the back of his hand and fretted to make me say that I didn't love him. But he failed there. Finally, he threatened to commit suicide, and then suddenly burst into laughter. It was then that I began to consider this: killing myself.

On no front did I have any respite. Everyone knew about the goings-on between me and Kunjakko. My father battered me the way the thick *inchā* bark is pounded into the strands of the body scrubber at home. Some nights, after calling me out and fulfilling his need, your brother also pummelled my chest. Even more insufferable were the antics of Gopi sir, a teacher who lived in the neighbourhood. After I'd failed the English paper in the pre-degree examinations, he gave me tuition lessons for a brief while. Apparently, he began to love me then. From my own caste, not bad to look at and, above all, a good man. But when I got to know he was in love with me, I was reminded of the moment when, while playing with paddy saplings in the field with my mother, a leech—fat with blood—had clung on to my thigh. Staring at the leech, not daring to pull it out, shaking my limbs in disgust, I had cried out aloud.

Once, trying to hide his embarrassment in an artificially jocular voice, Gopi sir said: 'I am considering whether I should fall in love with you?' I said harshly, 'No way!' Angrily he replied: 'You won't be pregnant on that count.' I felt stunned, as if someone had hit me. I could not get away without telling this man the truth: 'There is someone else . . .' 'I know,' he interrupted, 'but that guy doesn't have a darn thing for you.' I walked away quickly, trembling inside. And I bumped into Kunjakko. I asked him: 'Kunju, do you love me?' He shouted out an entire range of obscenities, and then grinned maliciously. I broke down crying. I cried not because he had abused me for the first time; I cried because he did not love me.

I cried and cried, and my neck ended up in a rope's knot.

Now, about your dad killing your brother: I feel the old man did a good thing. But when alive, I could never think anyone would kill him. Let that be; your grief is about why your dad did this. I will now break open the swollen tears of that grief.

On the sixteenth day after my burial, I came out of my grave.

I came straight to your home. Kunjakko was not there. He must've gone to the movies for the late night show, I guessed. I decided to wait. I came to your room to see you. You'd fallen asleep, not remembering to turn off the light. Looking at the way you lay on the bed, my curiosity was aroused. Hugging a pillow, you were on your side, and your white skirt had curled up to your knees. In came Kunjakko at that moment. Perhaps because the light was on, he peeped into your room. When he looked at you, you were smiling in your sleep. He stood transfixed for a moment. Looking around anxiously in a flutter and then at your face, he approached your bed. Suddenly, your body shook with laughter. He stepped back in shock, and observed your expression. Then with a sigh of relief and with a flaming face, he turned off the light. It was at that moment that a light pierced sharply into me. Was it fear or helplessness? I screamed out loud. Your sleep was shattered. You hugged Kunjakko. When you were scared, I entered your body through that fissure. Then I began to laugh. Your dad, and you—in your waking moments—began to cry. The villagers were all fingers on noses, crying shame. Your walk and talk were so unusual. Night and day, you followed Kunjakko with no respite. You had no peace without his touch. When he beat you up, in your howl the melody of laughter began flapping its wings.

Everyone but your brother knew that it was my ghost in your body. He simply thought you were mad. He believed in madness and rationalism, and not in ghosts and spirits and demons. Many people advised that I should be taken secretly to the temple at Chottanikkara, nailed on a piece of *kanjiram* wood. But your dad did not agree. When his relatives called him out and asked him why, he replied with the bitterness of the helpless: 'This might cure Rosikkutty's sickness; but once she is cured and recalls what happened, what if she does something untoward?'

My fears were different. Would Kunjakko do something unwise to himself? If he dies, how will I enjoy the smell of his sweat as I do now? Then I consoled myself with a thought. If he dies, he too will become an accursed soul. He's not the type to rest peacefully in the church graveyard. Then we can gallivant together with ease. But even at that time, I didn't think that he would meet with a sinful death.

Your dad is a saint; when he found your brother sleeping with you in his arms, as you lay in chains, he killed him in one stroke. But like all saintly deeds, his too is hard to grasp. Why did he do this? Is it because Kunjakko took advantage of your illness? I'm not quite sure. I can only give you my opinion.

He did this not because your brother loved you, but because he loved me. Your dad is my father too. I came to know this only after my death. My mother too was not sure. Your dad's younger brother also used to approach my mother, a servant at your house, for fun and flirtation; perhaps that's why she couldn't be sure. It was God who revealed my parentage. He called me a sinner whose nakedness was uncovered by her own brother. I did not cower. Intrepid, I gave him a mouthful on his face and asked: 'Old fool, how can a Christian have a pulaya girl as his sibling?' Suddenly God couldn't speak, as if he had swallowed a whole plantain. His eyes bulged, and he bowed his head. Let that be. Rosikkutty, your dad believed I was your sister. To use God's language, he didn't know that his brother too had unveiled my mother's nakedness before she was married off. You may ask why he didn't prevent the relationship between Kunjakko and me then. Well, he had tried. Kunju himself had told me. Your dad had once called him aside and reprimanded him, with the devil on his face: 'You must stop this thing with that pulaya slave-girl.' Shocked by the look on his father's face, the son told him the truth: 'But I'm not going to marry her.' At that point, a plantain got stuck in your dad's mouth too.

Now you know everything. It was my nudity that Kunjakko unveiled—when he took you in his arms, you were me. It was to me, to me alone, that he did wrong. It was that wrong that your dad made right. That's why he is serving a life term in prison now.

Now, about my selfishness in these events: I am moving away from you. I was afraid that if I leave you without telling you everything, some disaster would befall you. You should live. But before that, you must do me a favour. Call our Kannan parayan and ask him to put three measures of mustard seeds in my grave. Once that's done, I will not be able to get out. A ghost can leave its grave only after it counts all the seeds with precision. No night is long enough for three measures of mustard to be counted.

I know your doubt: why am I not yearning to romp around with your brother, who has become an accursed soul like me? Oh, I see your doubt has vanished—there's a glow on your face now. Aren't you thinking that your elder brother is my brother too? Sister, but you are mistaken there! That's not the only reason.

It was with great hopes that I watched Kunjakko die. I waited with bated breath for his soul to separate from his body: I wanted to rush in and close its eyes from behind. But the moment he died, the truth finally dawned on me: Kunjakko did not have a soul. All he had was mere breath, mere life. What could be the reason? Perhaps because he was a rationalist who did not believe in the human soul. Or, on account of that wailing, tooth-gnashing God who speaks in the language of the Bible. Perhaps.

So, I don't have any choice but to return to my grave. Don't forget the mustard seeds. I give you my freedom. Now look at your feet; there's the proof that I've left you. Where, oh where, is that chain?

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#### ~~GUARDIAN SPIRIT~~

*Translated by Udaya Kumar*

~~Devi, it is me. The self same evil spirit who has just quit your body, according to your parents and the jewelled shaman they summoned. But I cannot leave you. In occupying your body and~~

## The Story of My ‘Sanskrit’

Kumud Pawde

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A lot of things are often said about me to my face. I've grown used to listening to them quietly; it's become a habit. What I have to listen to is praise. Actually, I don't at all like listening to praise. You may say that this itself is a form of self-indulgence. But that isn't so. I mean it sincerely. When I hear myself praised, it's like being stung by a lot of gadflies. As a result, I look askance at the person praising me. This expression must look like annoyance at being praised, for many misunderstandings have arisen about me in this connection. But it can't be helped. My acquaintances get angry with me because I am unable to accept compliments gracefully. I appear ill-mannered to them, because there isn't in me the courtesy they are expecting.

Now if you want to know why I am praised—well, it's for my knowledge of Sanskrit, my ability to learn it and to teach it. Doesn't anyone ever learn Sanskrit? That's not the point. The point is that Sanskrit and the social group I come from don't go together in the Indian mind. Against the background of my caste, the Sanskrit I have learned appears shockingly strange.

That a woman from a caste that is the lowest of the low should learn Sanskrit, and not only that, also teach it—is a dreadful anomaly to a traditional mind. And an individual in whose personality these anomalies are accumulated becomes an object of attraction—an attraction blended of mixed acceptance and rejection. The attraction based on acceptance comes from my caste-fellows, in the admiration of whose glance is pride in an

impossible achievement. That which for so many centuries was not to be touched by us, is now within our grasp. That which remained encased in the shell of difficulty, is now accessible. Seeing this knowledge hidden in the esoteric inner sanctum come within the embrace, not just of any person, but one whom religion has considered to be vermin—that is their victory.

The other attraction—based on rejection—is devastating. It pricks holes in one's mind—turning a sensitive heart into a sieve. Words of praise of this kind, for someone who is aware, are like hot spears. It is fulsome praise. Words that come out from lips' edge as filthy as betel-stained spit. Each word gleaming smooth as cream. Made up of the fragility of a honey-filled *shirish*-blossom. Polished as marble. The sensation is that of walking on a soft velvety carpet—but being burnt by the hot embers hidden in someone's breast, and feeling the scorching pain in one's soul. The one who's speaking thinks the listener can't understand—for surely a low-caste person hasn't the ability to comprehend. But some people intend to be understood, so that I'll be crushed by the words. 'Well, isn't that amazing! So you're teaching Sanskrit at the government college, are you? That's very gratifying, I must say.' The words are quite ordinary; their literal meaning is straight-forward. But the meaning conveyed by the tone in which they are said torments me in many different ways! 'In what former life have I committed a sin that I should have to learn Sanskrit even from you?' 'All our sacred scriptures have been polluted.' Some despair is also conveyed by their facial expressions. 'It's all over! *Kaliyug* has dawned. After all, they're the government's favourite sons-in-law! We have to accept it all.'

There are some other people I know, who have a genuine regard for me. They are honestly amazed by how I talk, by my clean, clear pronunciation. They speak with affectionate admiration about my mode of living. The food I cook is equated with ambrosia. They detect a Brahminical standard of culture in my every thought and action—enough to surprise them. They constantly try to reconcile the contradiction. It's my good luck that I'm not always being asked to account for my antecedents, like Satyakam Jabali. The main point is that they are trying to

understand my evident good breeding in the context of my caste, and that is what makes everything so novel for them.

The result is that although I try to forget my caste, it is impossible to forget. And then I remember an expression I heard somewhere: 'What comes by birth, but can't be cast off by dying—that is caste.'

Beyond the accepters and the rejecters lies yet another group. In wholeheartedly welcoming the admiration of this group, every corner of my being is filled with pleasure. This group consists of my students. Far removed from hostile feelings. Without even an iota of caste consciousness. Away from the prejudices of their elders. Pure, innocent admiration, prompted by the boundless respect they feel, fills their eyes. Actually these girls have reached the age of understanding. The opinions they hear around them should by rights have made an impression on their mind. But these precious girls are full to the brim with the ability to discriminate impartially. And they keep their admiration within the limits of their gaze; they do not allow it to reach their lips. And that's why I yearn for that admiration. The occasional forward girl who has suppressed her timidity makes bold to express her feelings. 'Madam, I wish your lesson would never end!' And I answer her woodenly: 'But the college doesn't feel that way.' She feels snubbed, but I don't wish to encourage her admiration, in case it becomes a habit.

If the admiration had stayed limited to this individual level, I would tolerate it, but it goes beyond the prescribed boundaries. In other words, it starts to be blazoned even at the official level. As usual they start beating the drum of my caste, and tunes of praise of my knowledge of Sanskrit begin to mingle with the drumbeat. On the Vijaya Dashami day of 1971, the Maharashtra State Government arranged, at Nagpur, a felicitation meeting to honour scholars of the Vedas. According to the wishes of the Honourable ex-Minister of Education, Shri Madhukarao Chaudhary, I was to introduce these honoured scholars. Of course the inspiration was that of Dr Kolte. The introduction was to be made in Sanskrit. 'In the times of the Aryans it was noted down, and moreover impressed on the minds of the common

Indian people, from the Himalayas to the tip of the peninsula, that my ancestors should consider themselves guilty of a crime if they even heard the sound of this language. And that is the language in which I have to speak.' My God! How I was I going to manage? My heart began to beat rapidly. My mind was dark with anxiety, and I was drowned in feelings of inferiority. A conflict of emotions—and once again a confrontation with public praise. 'Whereas our traditional books have forbidden the study of Sanskrit by women and Shudras, a woman from those very Shudras, from the lowest caste among them, will today, in Sanskrit, introduce these scholars. This is the beginning of a progressive way of thinking in independent India.' A thunder of applause. I look towards the sound of the applause. Most of the people here are from the government offices. Looking at them through an artist's eyes, I see what looks like a wild disco-dance of different emotions. The frustration of the defeated, the fury of the traditionalists, the respect of some acquaintances, the hostility and disgust of others, are obvious to my experienced eye. Some gazes ask me, 'Why did you need to make the introductions in this manner? To humiliate us?'

In response to these hissing of wounded pride, I experience a mixture of emotions. Seeing this hostility and disgust, I slip into the past. This disgust is extremely familiar to me. In fact, that is what I have grown accustomed to, ever since I was old enough to understand. Actually, I shouldn't have any feelings about this disgust, and if I do have any feelings at all, they should be of gratitude. For it was this disgust that inclined me towards Sanskrit. It so happened that the ghetto in which there stood my place of birth, the house where I was welcome, was encircled on all sides by the houses of caste Hindus. The people in our ghetto referred to them as the splendid people. A small girl like me, seven or eight years old, could not understand why they called them 'splendid'. And even as today's mature female with learning from innumerable books, I still cannot understand it. That is, I have understood the literal meaning of the word 'splendid'. But not why it should be applied to them, or whether they deserve to have it applied. The girls who studied along with me were

Brahmins or from other higher castes. I had to pass their houses. I paused, waiting casually for their company. Right in front of me, the mothers would warn their daughters, 'Be careful! Don't touch her. Stay away from her. And don't play with her. Or I won't let you into the house again.' Those so-called educated, civilised mothers were probably unconscious of the effect of this on my young mind. It wasn't as if I could not understand them.

Every day, I bathed myself clean with Pears soap. My mother rubbed Kaminia oil on my hair, and plaited it neatly. My clothes were well-washed and sparkling clean. The girls of my own caste liked to play with me because it enabled them to smell some fragrance. For my father himself was fond of toiletries. So there was always a variety of oils, soaps and perfumes in the house. The other girls in my class (except for those who lived near my ghetto) also liked to sit next to me. So why should these women have talked like that?

What's more, if one were to compare houses, our house was cleaner than theirs. My mother daily smeared the floor with fresh cowdung. The white-powder borders were delicately drawn. The courtyard was well-sprinkled, and decorated with *rangoli* designs. Almost every fortnight, on the occasion of a festival, the house was whitewashed from top to bottom. Every scrap of cloth was boiled in a solution of soda bicarb before it was washed. The metal vessels were scrubbed to gleaming. On the other hand, one could see water stains and a greasy film on even the drinking-vessels those girls had. In fact, it was I who didn't like to sit next to those girls. For, from my childhood, my sense-organs had been sharp and vigorous. My sense of smell, in particular, had sharpened beyond limit. Though, of course, the nose that conveyed it was broad and misshapen. The sour smell, like buttermilk, that rose from the bodies of those girls! I couldn't bear the smell of *shikakai* mixed with the smell of their hair. Their bad breath, too, was unbearable. And, in spite of all this, *they* found *me* disgusting? So, even at that young age, this emotion of disgust taught me to think. It inspired me to be introspective. At an age which was meant for playing and skipping around, these thoughts would rouse me to fury.

One event outraged my self-respect. There was to be a thread-ceremony for the brother of one of my classmates. I had not actually been invited but my restless curiosity would not let me sit quiet. I stood outside the *pandal* looking in at the ceremony going on inside. The sacrificial fire was lit; the air all around was filled with the smoke and fragrance of incense and the grain burnt-offering. The reverberations of the Vedic chants threatened to burst through the cloth walls of the *pandal*. I was lost in watching the head-movements that accompanied the chant of 'Svaha!' each time a libation was poured. All this was extremely new, unknown, never seen before. I was totally engrossed, at one with the chants and the incense.

My concentration was suddenly broken. One voice: 'Hey, girl! What are you staring at? Can you make head or tail of it? Here, take a *ladoo*—and be off!' A decked-up woman past her prime, dripping with gold and pearls, stood in front of me, adjusting the *pallav* of her heavily-brocaded sari. Her nose was wrinkled in disgust, like a shrivelled fig. 'What do you take me for—a beggar? Giving me a *ladoo*! Can you see injuries on anyone just because I watched them?' I retorted, and briskly walked away.

Words followed me: 'These Mahars have really got above themselves.' The intonation was the typical superior nasal tone of the Pune Brahmin.

My young mind thought, 'Why was I so wrapped up in watching? What had that ceremony to do with me? And why should that woman behave so bitchily with me?' There was definitely some intimate connection between me and those Vedic mantras. Otherwise why should that woman have noticed my innocent absorption? Why should she have taunted me disgustedly? She must have been unwilling to let those chants enter my ears. I used to ask my father, 'What language are the Vedic mantras composed in?' He used to say, 'They're in Sanskrit, my girl.' 'Is Sanskrit very difficult? Can't we learn it?' My father used to answer, 'Why shouldn't we? After all, we're independent now. Those days are gone. Learn Sanskrit. Don't I too know the Gayatri mantra?' And he used to say 'Om' and begin to recite the Gayatri mantra. In simple delight, I used to

tell my neighbours, ‘I’m going to learn Sanskrit.’ The educated people next door used to poke fun at me. ‘Is Sanskrit such an easy language? It’s very difficult. Did our forefathers ever learn it?’ Hearing this, I would be discouraged. Seeing my crestfallen face, my father would start cursing those people, sometimes obscenely, sometimes more elegantly. He used to encourage me, and the encouragement would make me glow with confidence once again.

After I entered High School, I took Sanskrit as an elective subject in class nine. The school where I went supported Brahminical prejudices. All sorts of indirect efforts were systematically made to prevent me from learning Sanskrit. ‘You won’t be able to manage. There will be no one at home to help you. Sanskrit is very difficult,’ etc., etc. But I was as firm as a rock. Seeing that no form of persuasion had any effect on me, the persuaders stopped persuading. But how to remove the prejudice in their minds? I did not want to pay heed to every single opinion. I just wanted to keep my teacher, Hatekar, happy. He had been full of praise of me since I was in class six. ‘How can this little slip of a girl give answers so fast in every subject?’ I asked him, ‘Sir, I should take Sanskrit, shouldn’t I?’ ‘Do take it. But you’ve taken all the Arts subjects, though you’re good at maths. Take science and maths, along with Sanskrit.’ ‘But sir, I don’t enjoy maths.’ ‘But you can become a doctor, can’t you?’ ‘I don’t want to be a doctor. I can’t bear suffering.’ He laughed and said, ‘On the contrary, it is precisely those who can’t bear suffering, who are fit to become doctors. Won’t you be able to help the afflicted? That’s what’s needed among your people. But it’s your decision.’

With great eagerness and interest, I began my study of Sanskrit. As I learnt the first-declension masculine form of the word ‘deva’, I picked up the rhythm of the chant. I must make special mention of the person who helped me to learn by rote the first lesson about aspirates—my teacher Gokhale. If I omit to do so, I shall feel a twinge of disloyalty in every drop of my blood. Gokhale Guruji. Dhoti, long-sleeved shirt, black cap, a sandalwood-paste mark on his forehead. The typical robust and clear pronunciation of the Vedic school. And an incredible

concern for getting his students to learn Sanskrit. At first I was afraid. But this proved groundless. What actually happened was the very opposite of what I had expected.

I had been sent by the Bhide Kanya Shala to take part in some essay competition or the other. The centre for the competition was the Bhonsale Vedic School. No part of the Mahal area was familiar to me. I timidly explained my difficulty to Gokhale Guruji. He said, ‘Why don’t you come to my house?’ He never addressed us in the second person singular; it was always a respectful plural ‘I’ll take you along.’ And he gave me his address. I reached the address asking for directions repeatedly in the lanes and alleys of the Mahal area. My teacher’s house was in fact a sprawling mansion. A huge, well-swept courtyard with a *tulsi vrindavan* and a well, and a small Shiva temple within it. All looked as antique as a well-preserved old Benares brocade. I hesitantly entered. ‘Welcome,’ he greeted me in friendly tones. Two boys, aged about ten or eleven years old, came out to see who had arrived. From their general appearance—the dhoti, shirt, top-knot and sandalwood mark, as well as their features—they appeared to be Guruji’s children. After a while, on being called by Guruji, his wife came outside. She was dressed in silk for ritual purity. Her face brimmed with godliness. Every movement of her body was eloquent with hospitality. The formalities of introduction were completed. She hurried inside, and after a while, the older boy came out bearing plates full of cooked *poha*. I became nervous, fear crept over my mind. Suppose this lady were to find out my caste? Along with sips of water, I swallowed the lump in my throat as well as mouthfuls of *poha*. I couldn’t concentrate on what anyone was saying. My only worry was when and how I could escape from there. Suppose someone from the Buldy area were to come there?

‘God deliver me from this ordeal!’ I kept praying to the Almighty. But nothing terrible happened. For those people were indeed very kind. Open and relaxed in their conversation. My teacher, for one, definitely knew my caste. But I was not made to experience any feeling of inferiority. And I felt a profound respect for him. The broadmindedness of this Brahmin incarnate, with

his old-fashioned upbringing, remained constant even towards a student of the very lowest caste. Needless to say, it was evidence of his high thinking and his generous heart. It became my aim to study faithfully as my teacher instructed me and never to anger him by inattention to studies. You can never tell who will become a shining light to whose life. Guruji was probably unaware that he had the power to add a touch of glory to the life of an insignificant being. After I matriculated, I did not meet him again. Perhaps he won't even recognise me. But I wish to lighten my load of respect by paying back a fraction of my sacred debt with the fee of words. For if Guruji had not shown me that warmth, but had instead shown the base feelings appropriate to his orthodox nature, would I have learnt Sanskrit?

Against all obstacles, I at last matriculated. On seeing the marks I got for Sanskrit, I announced, 'I shall do an M. A. in Sanskrit.' Our enlightened neighbours laughed as they had before. Some college lecturers and lawyers also joined in the joke. 'How can that be possible? You may have got good marks at Matric. But it isn't so easy to do an M. A. in Sanskrit. You shouldn't make meaningless boasts; you should know your limitations.' The discouragers said what they usually do. The point was that the people who discouraged me were all of my caste. But their words could not turn me from my purpose. I didn't reply—I wanted to answer them by action. For that, I needed to study very hard. In order to take an M. A. in Sanskrit, I would have to go to the famous Morris College. I had heard so many things about the college from my friend's sister. About the learned professors with their cultivated tastes, about the mischievous male students, the beautiful girls, and the huge library. My interest was limited to the professors who would teach me, and to the library. And I joined the college.

The Hindus from the high-caste areas used to taunt me. 'Even these wretched outcastes are giving themselves airs these days—studying in colleges.' I pretended to be deaf. I had begun to have some idea of what Savitribai Phule must have had to endure on account of her husband Mahatma Jyotiba Phule's zeal for women's education.

I went through some mixed experiences while I studied. I would call my lecturers' even-handed fairness a very remarkable thing. I was never scared by the prejudice of which repute and rumour had told me. What is more, praise and encouragement were given according to merit. Some people may have felt dislike in their heart of hearts, but they never displayed it. One thing alone irked me—the ironical comments about the scholarship I got. 'She's having fun and games at the expense of a scholarship. Just bloated with government money!' From the peons themselves to the senior officials, there was the same attitude. I couldn't understand. Was it charity they were dispensing from their personal coffers? They were giving me government money, and if that money was going from them to the government in the form of taxes, then equally, a tax was being levied on the public to pay their salaries. And that tax was collected in indirect forms even from the parents of the scholarship holders. So who paid whom? When the Dakshina Prize Committee used to give stipends, there was no complaint of any kind from any level of society. Then why now? Oh, well.

I passed my B. A. The figures in my B. A. mark-sheet were worthy of high praise. I had got good marks without falling behind in any way. Not only did I have respect for my teachers' fairness, but it made me happy too. But in human life, no joy is unmixed. It can't be attained fully without some little blemish. So now, the story of my M. A.

In the second year of our M. A. we went to the Postgraduate department in the university. Very well-known scholars taught us there. The head of the department was a scholar of all-India repute. He didn't like my learning Sanskrit, and would make it clear that he didn't. And he took a malicious delight in doing so. The sharp claws of his taunts left my mind wounded and bleeding. In a way, I had developed a terror of this great pundit. His manner of speaking was honeyed and reasonable, but filled with venom. I would unconsciously compare him with Gokhale Guruji. I couldn't understand why this great man with a doctorate, so renowned all over India, this man in his modern dress, who did not wear the traditional cap, who could so eloquently delineate

the philosophy of the Universal Being, and with such ease explain difficult concepts in simple terms, could not practise in real life the philosophy in the books he taught. This man had been exposed to modernity; Gokhale Guruji was orthodox. Yet one had been shrivelled by tradition, the other enriched by it, like a tree weighed down with fruit. Days go by; you survive calamities; but the memory of them sets up its permanent abode in you. In the inmost recesses of your inner being. I survived even through such a difficult ordeal. I got my M. A. with distinction.

A congratulatory bouquet of colourful, fragrant flowers came from Professor (Dr) Kolte, the former Vice-Chancellor of Nagpur University. I stared at it unblinkingly. In those flowers, I could see Dr Kolte's heart blossoming, petal by petal, with pride. And smell the sweet fragrance of unalloyed joy, thrilling my senses and arousing my self-confidence.

And now I would be a lecturer in Sanskrit! My dreams were tinted with turquoise and edged in gold. The images I nursed about myself were taking strange shapes in my mind.

A high-paid job would come to me on a platter from the government. For I must have been the first woman from a scheduled caste to pass with distinction in Sanskrit. Every nook and cranny of my mind was filled with such hopes and expectations. But those ideas were shattered. My illusions proved as worthless as chaff. I became despondent about the efficiency of the government. I started attending interviews in private colleges. And that was a complete farce. Some said, 'But how will you stay on with us, when you've passed so well?' (In other words, they must have wanted to say, 'How will you work for less pay?') In other places, the moment I had been interviewed and stepped out of the room, there would be a burst of derisive laughter. I would hear words like sharp needles: 'So now even these people are to teach Sanskrit! Government Brahmins, aren't they?' And the ones who said this weren't even Brahmins, but so-called reformers from the lower castes, who considered themselves anti-Brahmin, and talked of the heritage of Jyotiba Phule, and flogged the mass of the lower castes for their narrow caste-consciousness. And yet they found it distasteful that a girl

from the Mahar caste, which was one of the lower castes, should teach Sanskrit. When people like these, wearing hypocritical masks, are in responsible positions in society, it does not take even a minute for that society to fall.

Two years after my M. A., I was still unemployed. There must be many whose position is the same as mine. In my frustration I took a bold step to get out of the trap. I presented my case in writing to the Honourable Shri Jagjivan Ram, the noted Minister in the Central Cabinet. I condemned the flimsy pretence of the state government and the administration that flouted the Constitution. My words had all the power of a sharp sword. For they were a cry from the heart of a person being crushed to death under the wheels of circumstance—like the screeching of the eagle Jatayu in his last struggles.

The Honourable Minister Jagjivan Ram placed the letter before Pandit Nehru, who was astonished by it, and sent me an award of Rs 250, telling me to meet the Chief Minister of Maharashtra. Accordingly the Chief Minister of that time, Yeshwantrao Chavan, sent me a telegram asking me to meet him. Within a day or two, one wire after another had electrified me into wondering who I'd suddenly become. Getting past the ranks of spearmen and macebearers at the government office was quite an ordeal. But finally I got to see the 'Saheb'. Now, I thought, I would get a job at once—as a clerk in the government office, at least. A naive expectation. The Chief Minister made me fulsome promises in his own style. 'We'll definitely make efforts for you—but you won't get a job in minutes; it'll take us some time. We'll have to give thought to it; have to hunt out something.'

And with this assurance came a fine speech that qualified as an example of literature. 'A student of Sanskrit is intoxicated with idealism. It is a deeply felt personal desire. You shouldn't run after a job. Involve yourself in research. Pursue your studies.' Now the controls of endurance that restrained me started to break rapidly, and the words that had been bound within me broke out. 'Saheb, if you can't give me a job, tell me so, clearly. I don't want promises. Promises keep false hopes alive. Research is the fruit of mental peace. How do you expect me to have mental peace,

when I am starving? And I'm tired of speeches.' I was fed up with life. Otherwise in A.D. 1960 it would have been impossible for a wretch like me even to stand before a dignitary like this, with all the power of *kartumakartumanya-thakartum*, 'to do, omit to do, or do in another way', let alone speak out to him.

Waiting for a job, I passed the first year of an M. A. in English Literature. It was just an excuse to keep myself occupied. That year I got married—an intercaste marriage. That is a story by itself—a different glimpse of the nature of Indian society. Let that be the subject of another story. The surprising thing is that two months after my marriage, I got an assistant lecturership in a government college. Deputy director Sahastrabuddhe, who was on the interview board, was amazed. 'How did this girl remain unemployed for two years?' Dr Kolte's good will remained a constant support here, too. Today, I am a professor in the famous college where I studied, whose very walls are imbued with the respect I felt for that institution. But one thought still pricks me: the credit for Kumud Somkuwar's job is not hers, but that of the name Kumud Pawde. I hear that a woman's surname changes to match her husband's—and so does her caste. That's why I say that the credit of being a professor of Sanskrit is that of the presumed higher caste status of Mrs Kumud Pawde. The caste of her maiden status remains deprived.

*Translated by Priya Adarkar  
An extract from Antasphot*

## Lord Macaulay's Minute on Education 1835 (Excerpt)

*Excerpted from: M. Edwards. 1967. British India 1772-1947. New Delhi: Rupa Press.*

We have a fund to be employed as government shall direct for the intellectual improvement of the people of this country. The simple question is, what is the most useful way of employing it?

All parties seem to be agreed on one point, that the dialects commonly spoken among the natives of this part of India contain neither literary or scientific information, and are, moreover so poor and rude that, until they are enriched from some other quarter, it will not be easy to translate any valuable work into them. It seems to be admitted on all sides that the intellectual improvement of those classes of the people who have the means of pursuing higher studies can at present be effected only by means of some language not vernacular amongst them.

What, then, shall that language be? One half of the Committee maintain that it should be the English. The other half strongly recommends the Arabic and Sanskrit. The whole question seems to me to be, which language is the best worth knowing?

I have no knowledge of either Sanskrit or Arabic. But I have done what I could to form a correct estimate of their value. I have read translations of the most celebrated Arabic and Sanskrit works. I have conversed both here and at home with men distinguished by their proficiency in the Eastern tongues. I am quite ready to take the Oriental learning at the valuation of the Orientalists themselves. I have never found one among them who could deny that a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia. The intrinsic superiority of the Western literature is, indeed, fully admitted by those members of the Committee who support the Oriental plan of education. It will hardly be disputed, I suppose, that the department of literature in which the Eastern writers stand highest is poetry. And I certainly never met with any Orientalist who ventured to maintain that the Arabic and Sanskrit poetry could be compared to that of the great European nations. But, when we pass from works of imagination to works in which facts are recorded and general principles investigated, the superiority of the Europeans becomes absolutely immeasurable. It is, I believe, no exaggeration to say, that all the historical information which has been collected from all the books written in the Sanskrit language is less valuable than what may be found in the most paltry abridgements used at preparatory schools in England. In every branch of physical or moral philosophy the relative position of the two nations is nearly the same.

How, then, stands the case? We have to educate a people who cannot at present be educated by means of their mother-tongue. We must teach them some foreign language. The claims of our own language it is hardly necessary to recapitulate. It stands pre-eminent even among the languages of the West. It abounds with works of imagination not inferior to the noblest which Greece has bequeathed to us; with models of every species of eloquence; with historical compositions, which, considered merely as narratives, have seldom been surpassed, and which, considered as vehicles of ethical and political instruction, have never been equalled; with just and lively representations of human life and human nature; with the most profound speculations on metaphysics, morals, government, jurisprudence, and trade; with full and correct information respecting every experimental science which tends to preserve the health, to increase the comfort, or to expand the intellect of man. Whoever knows that language has ready access to all the vast intellectual wealth, which all the wisest nations of the earth have created and hoarded in the course of ninety generations. It may safely be said that the literature now extant in that language is of far greater value than all the literature which three hundred years ago was extant in all the languages of the world together. Nor is this all. In India, English is the language spoken by the ruling class. It is spoken by the higher class of natives at the seats of government. It is likely to become the language of commerce throughout the seas of the East. It is the language of two great European communities which are rising, the one in the south of Africa, the other in Australasia; communities which are every year becoming more important, and more closely connected with Our Indian Empire. Whether we look at the intrinsic value of our literature, or at the particular situation of this country, we shall see the strongest reason to think that, of all foreign tongues, the English tongue is that which would be the most useful to our native subjects.

The question now before us is simply whether, when it is in our power to teach this language, we shall teach languages in which, by universal confession, there are no books on any subject which deserve to be compared to our own; whether, when we can teach European science, we shall teach systems which, by universal confession whenever they differ from those of Europe, differ for the worse; and whether, when we can patronize sound Philosophy and true History, we shall countenance, at the public expense, medical doctrines which would disgrace an English farrier - Astronomy, which would move laughter in girls at an English boarding-school — History, abounding with kings thirty feet high, and reigns thirty thousand years long — and Geography, made up of seas of treacle and seas of butter.

It is said that we ought to secure the co-operation of the native public, and that we can do this only by teaching Sanskrit and Arabic.

I can by no means admit that, when a nation of high intellectual attainments undertakes to superintend the education of a nation comparatively ignorant, the learners are absolutely to prescribe the course which is taken by the teachers. It is not necessary, however, to say anything on this subject. For it is proved by unanswerable evidence that we are not at present securing the co-operation of the natives. It would be bad enough to consult their intellectual taste at the expense of their intellectual health. But we are consulting neither — we are withholding from them the learning for which they are craving; we are forcing on them the mock-learning which they nauseate.

This is proved by the fact that we are forced to pay our Arabic and Sanskrit students, while those who learn English are willing to pay us. All the declamation in the world about the love and reverence of the natives for their sacred dialects will never, in the mind of any impartial person, outweigh the undisputed fact, that we cannot find, in all our vast Empire, a single student who will let us teach him those dialects unless we will pay him.

It is said that the Sanskrit and Arabic are the languages in which the sacred books of a hundred millions of people are written, and that they are, on that account, entitled to peculiar encouragement. Assuredly it is the duty of the British government in India to be not only tolerant, but neutral on all religious questions. But to encourage the study of a literature admitted to be of small intrinsic value only because that literature inculcates the most serious errors on the most important subjects, is a course hardly reconcilable with reason, with morality, or even with that very neutrality which ought, as we all agree, to be sacredly preserved. It is confessed that a language is barren of useful knowledge. We are told to teach it because it is fruitful of monstrous superstitions. We are to teach false history, false astronomy, false medicine, because we find them in company with a false religion. We abstain, and I trust shall always abstain, from giving any public encouragement to those who are engaged in the work of converting natives to Christianity. And, while we act thus, can we reasonably and decently bribe men out of the revenues of the State to waste their youth in learning how they are to purify themselves after touching an ass, or what text of the Vedas they are to repeat to expiate the crime of killing a goat? It is taken for granted by the advocates of Oriental learning that no native of this country can possibly attain more than a mere smattering of English. They do not attempt to prove this: but they perpetually insinuate it. They designate the education which their opponents

recommend as a mere spelling-book education. They assume it as undeniable, that the question is between a profound knowledge of Hindoo and Arabian literature and science on the one side, and a superficial knowledge of the rudiments of English on the other. This is not merely an assumption, but an assumption contrary to all reason and experience. We know that foreigners of all nations do learn our language sufficiently to have access to all the most abstruse knowledge which it contains, sufficiently to relish even the more delicate graces of our most idiomatic writers. There are, in this very town, natives who are quite competent to discuss political or scientific questions with fluency and precision in the English language. I have heard the very question on which I am now writing discussed by native gentlemen with a liberality and an intelligence which would do credit to any member of the Committee of Public Instruction. Indeed it is unusual to find, even in the literary circles of the Continent, any foreigner who can express himself in English with so much facility and correctness as we find in many Hindoos. Nobody, I suppose, will contend that English is so difficult to a Hindoo as Greek to an Englishman. Yet an intelligent English youth, in a much smaller number of years than our unfortunate pupils pass at the Sanskrit college, becomes able to read, to enjoy, and even to imitate, not unhappily, the composition of the best Greek authors. Less than half the time which enables an English youth to read Herodotus and Sophocles ought to enable a Hindoo to read Hume and Milton.

To sum up what I have said: I think it is clear that we are free to employ our funds as we choose; that we ought to employ them in teaching what is best worth knowing; that English is better worth knowing than Sanskrit or Arabic; that the natives are desirous to be taught English, and are not desirous to be taught Sanskrit or Arabic; that neither as the languages of law, nor as the languages of religion, have the Sanskrit and Arabic any peculiar claim to our encouragement; that it is possible to make natives of this country thoroughly good English scholars, and that to this end our efforts ought to be directed. In one point I fully agree with the gentlemen to whose general views I am opposed. I feel, with them, that it is impossible for us, with our limited means, to attempt to educate the body of the people. We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect. To that class we may leave it to refine the vernacular dialects of the country, to enrich those dialects with terms of science borrowed from the Western nomenclature, and to render them by degrees fit vehicles for conveying knowledge to the great mass of the population.

I would strictly respect all existing interests. I would deal even generously with all individuals who have had fair reason to expect a pecuniary provision. But I would strike at the root of the bad system which has hitherto been fostered by us. I would at once stop the printing of Arabic and Sanskrit books; I would abolish the Madrassa and the Sanskrit college at Calcutta. Benares is the great seat of Brahmanical learning; Delhi, of Arabic learning. If we retain the Sanskrit college at Benares and the Mohamedan college at Delhi, we do enough, and much more than enough in my opinion, for the Eastern languages. If the Benares and Delhi colleges should be retained, I would at least recommend that no stipend shall be given to any students who may hereafter repair thither, but that the people shall be left to make their own choice between the rival systems of education without being bribed by us to learn what they have no desire to know. The funds which thus be placed at our disposal would enable us to give larger encouragement to the Hindoo college at Calcutta, and to establish in the principal cities throughout the Presidencies of Fort William and Agra schools in which the English language might be well and thoroughly taught.

I believe that the present system tends not to accelerate the progress of truth, but to delay the natural death of expiring errors. I conceive that we have at present no right to the respectable name of a Board of Public Instruction. We are a Board for wasting public money, for printing books which are of less value than the paper on which they are printed was while it was blank; for giving artificial encouragement to absurd history, absurd metaphysics, absurd physics, absurd theology; for raising up a breed of scholars who find their scholarship an encumbrance and a blemish, who live on the public while they are receiving their education, and whose education is so utterly useless to them that, when they have received it, they must either starve or live on the public all the rest of their lives. Entertaining these opinions, I am naturally desirous to decline all share in the responsibility of a body which, unless it alters its whole mode of proceeding, I must consider not merely as useless, but as positively noxious.

## Language, education and political existence (Excerpt)

*M. Madhava Prasad*

So there is no militant class backing the Constitution with its iron will. In such a context, only structural changes brought about by political means and sustained against the resistance of entrenched class interests will provide any hope of success. It is clear now that from the very beginning of our free existence, policy has always been vulnerable to being commandeered to serve the colonial bourgeoisie's class interests. There is ample evidence to suggest that this class subverted the democratic project in order to safeguard its own position of privilege, which was under threat in the new order.

In the field of education – and the future of higher education cannot be treated separately from education in general – the perpetuation of the linguistic divide was the instrument by which this was accomplished. And after all these years, I believe the time has come, once again, to renew the demand for a radical change in the language of education. It is customary to call for a renewed debate rather than straightaway demand a change, but a review of the accumulated literature of past debates shows that all the necessary arguments have already been made by some very competent people. It would be mere sophistry to reopen the debate on the language of education. The only thing that needs to be discussed thoroughly is the history of the suppression of all the universally accepted ideas on the subject, in the service of narrow class interests.

It was not for lack of ideas that Indian democracy got hijacked by a privileged minority. The colonial bureaucracy and sections of the university, composed primarily of the traditional mandarin castes and fearful of the proposed changes, fought the new ideas by simply refusing to fall in line, by ignoring the pleas of the political classes for cooperation, and by ridiculing the vernacular languages. As M.P. Desai, a Gandhian, put it:

It is this class that mainly holds the reins of Government and controls education. The class supplies Government servants, ministers and public men, teachers of higher education and so on – the personnel that count for everything in the present order. In this way, English holds the field rendering itself into a vested interest for the classes. Therefore, removal of English and introduction of the use of Indian languages instead is not a mere linguistic or academic question; it is socio-political and cultural.

...it must be obvious to any unprejudiced mind that the first language of study will be the student's own regional language, then his country's common language Hindi, and if he

studies further, a third modern language like English. This is quite obvious and natural. The fundamental law of the land, I mean the Constitution, upholds it. But unhappily, as I said earlier, forces of reactionary conservatism born of a century of English education seem to be too strong for the obvious to be accepted and I fear an insidious movement is afoot in the educational world to stem the tide of the demand for recognizing this obvious principle of priority...<sup>4</sup>

This conflict between democratic and status-quoist forces continued throughout the 1950s and upto the mid-1960s when the anti-Hindi agitation in the South provided a convenient excuse for letting this important aspect of democratic political existence disappear from public discourse. The political leadership did by and large remain committed to a new language policy (though divided over the place of Hindi). But their position was compromised by the fact that while they favoured changes in conformity with republican ideas, they showed an overall tendency to give greater importance to *coexistence* than *existence* in deciding matters of vital public interest: it was always a question of the sacrifices people had to make, the things they had to give up, in order to stay together. Gandhi, otherwise a staunch supporter of a change over to Indian languages, is a good example. He was, like others in the Congress, irrationally obsessed with what language states would employ to communicate with each other and appeared to find this a far more life-defining problem than that of how people might best lead meaningfully democratic lives.<sup>5</sup>

The three language formula is the product of precisely such an other-induced Indian nationalism which privileged the compulsions of coexistence over the more basic requirements of sheer political existence. Not too long ago, an advertising film maker and a musician collaborated to produce a television plug for Indian nationalism in which a large crowd of people lifted a gigantic flagpole adorned with the tricolour and planted it in a desert landscape. The three language formula imposed a compulsion on North Indians to learn an Indian language other than Hindi, ‘preferably from the South’ as Gandhi once recommended, as a way of reciprocating the other’s gesture of learning Hindi. These instances, separated by several decades, are revealing of the character of Indian nationalism, which has always demanded ideological corvee labour from the people to nourish an elite fantasy, the ‘idea’ of India, at the cost of already existing India. As V.V. John, whose reflections on the question of language and education are as apposite today as

they were forty years ago, put it, ‘It is irrational to oblige children to learn languages to satisfy a political formula and to solve the difficulties that grown-ups have created.’<sup>6</sup>

A simple alternative to the three language formula was available all along: education and administration at state level in the language of the state and a choice of Hindi or English as second or link language, and English once again for purposes of specialized higher education. But its acceptance would have required that (i) the nationalists abandon the idea that India’s primary need was a *single* link language (or inter-language/*antar-bhasha*) and (ii) the colonial bourgeoisie accept the dilution of its privileges and a temporary devaluation of its cultural capital.

The demand for a single link language (rather than a pragmatic provision of choice between Hindi and English) was strange: all the while that Congress leaders kept declaring that the link language was a functional necessity and not a substitute for the various modern languages, their insistence on a single link language (Hindi) seemed to place an unnecessary ontological burden on a functional tool, a burden which was really for the languages of the nationalities of India to carry. But in the end it was not this but the colonial bourgeoisie’s recalcitrance, that proved to be the really insurmountable obstacle. Like the cat that profited from the quarrel between two monkeys, this class pushed its case for a socially significant (and therefore continuous with colonial rule) presence of English in the new order while the political leadership, in their overestimation of the link language, sank into incoherence.

And so we have an education system which, at all levels, devalues the only resource held in common by rich and poor, high and low in any community: language. What can a poor, landless, socially oppressed and devalued person bring to the common ground of republican existence that s/he can share with others (without loss), and through which s/he can debate and argue with them and secure political existence? What apart from language?

The ultimate expropriation of the vast Indian majority was achieved by denying their languages any public worth, by devaluing them by comparison with English. The student who learns in a language known to him/her would not remain untouched by what s/he learns. Anglophone education has eliminated understanding from the list of desirable skills and turned knowledge into information. In classrooms, students are able to repeat quite competently the arguments even of difficult philosophers. But it is all information. It

does not make a difference to how the person thinks. Here I am not talking only of the disadvantaged students; even those with the best possible school education are often unable to turn knowledge into a way of thinking, of acting, of understanding the world.

[....]

The case for public and universal education in the national languages supplemented by English for specialized scholarly needs and for employment opportunities has been convincingly made before and only needs reiteration. English in India also needs to be emancipated from its role as a marker of aristocratic privilege before it can become available as a specialized tool for advanced knowledge production. But it is also a fact that the matter does not seem as clear cut to everybody. There is, on the one hand, a demand for exclusive English medium schooling from the corporate sector anxious to ensure a steady and plentiful supply of labour for the IT-based service sector.<sup>8</sup> On the other hand, a new demand for expanded access to English education for dalit and OBC children has been voiced by many intellectuals.<sup>9</sup>

The demand is based on an accurate diagnosis of the true source of the upper castes' continuing domination of Indian society. But the remedy, universal access to English (medium) education, is once again dependent upon the same change of mind-set and sudden expansion of goodwill that has proved elusive in the past. In addition it accepts the dominant classes' understanding that India can be a *society* only by *representation*.

Practically speaking, after the master's departure, the quality of English taught in India has been steadily declining, as the ideological motivation has faded. The market is simply not able to meet the demand.

The English language's power to bestow distinction and social rank is dependent upon its scarcity. Universalization of English education for economic needs is an altogether different issue. Assurance of political existence to all by using the available linguistic commons is a political, economic, social and intellectual necessity. It is the minimum guarantee that any serious democratic republic should be able to give its citizens. By what means this can be achieved is an open question but there are indications that more and more people today experience lack of English as an annoying hindrance to personal dignity and public recognition. This does not necessarily lead in one direction, i.e., towards attempts to acquire English. It may also lead in the other direction, towards greater assertion of autonomy from this English-based system of inequality.

The second factor that will play an important role here is global capital. Unlike Indian capital whose compromise with brahminism is deep-rooted, global capital still retains a disruptive, if not revolutionary, character: in its wake, all that is solid may still melt into air. Already, the compulsions of capitalist consumerism have led to substantial revival of the fortunes of regional languages. The federal government, in such a situation, would do well to take the initiative to enhance the freedoms of the population by proactive measures, rather than await the eruption of conflicts and then demonize the protagonists. That, however, seems an unlikely development given the polarizations that characterize Indian society today.

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4. M.P. Desai, *The Problem of English*. Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, 1964, pp. 116-7 and 118-9.

5. The Anglophiles had their own melodramatic arguments. M.C. Chagla apparently claimed with a straight face that he had 'nightmarish visions of interpreters being needed in a high-powered conference to interpret what one Indian is saying to another!' V.V. John, p. 20.

6. V.V. John, p. 18.

9. Kancha Ilaiah and Chandrabhan Prasad among others have raised this demand in various places. Ilaiah, however, now argues for a two language solution while insisting on the need for English as a means to the attainment of self-respect.

read as a direct narrative of novelistic events, and also in another way.

The heterogenous census of the authors whom I continually reread is made up of Schopenhauer, De Quincey, Stevenson, Mauthner, Shaw, Chesterton, Léon Bloy. I believe I perceive the remote influence of the last-mentioned in the Christological fantasy entitled "Three Versions of Judas."

Buenos Aires

August 29, 1944

—J. L. B.



## FUNES, THE MEMORIOUS

I remember him (I scarcely have the right to use this ghostly verb; only one man on earth deserved the right, and he is dead), I remember him with a dark passionflower in his hand, looking at it as no one has ever looked at such a flower, though they might look from the twilight of day until the twilight of night, for a whole life long. I remember him, his face immobile and Indian-like, and singularly *remote*, behind his cigarette. I remember (I believe) the strong delicate fingers of the plainsman who can braid leather. I remember, near those hands, a vessel in which to make maté tea, bearing the arms of the Banda Oriental;\* I remember, in the window of the house, a yellow rush mat, and beyond, a vague marshy landscape. I remember clearly his voice, the deliberate, resentful, nasal voice of the old Eastern Shore man, without the Italianate syllables of today, I did not see him more than three times; the last time, in 1887. . . .

That all those who knew him should write something about him seems to me a very felicitous idea; my testimony may perhaps be the briefest and without doubt the poorest, and it will not be the least impartial. The deplorable fact of my being an Argentinian will hinder me from falling into a dithyramb—an obligatory form in the Uruguay, when the theme is an Uruguayan.

*Littératur*, *slicker*, *Buenos Airean*: Funes did not use these insulting phrases, but I am sufficiently aware that for him I represented these unfortunate categories. Pedro Leandro Ipuche has written that Funes was a precursor of the super-

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\* The Eastern Shore (of the Uruguay River); now the Orient Republic of Uruguay.—*Editor's note.*

man, "an untamed and vernacular Zarathustra"; I do not doubt it, but one must not forget, either, that he was a countryman from the town of Fray Bentos, with certain incurable limitations.

My first recollection of Funes is quite clear. I see him at dusk, sometime in March or February of the year '84. That year, my father had taken me to spend the summer at Fray Bentos. I was on my way back from the farm at San Francisco with my cousin Bernardo Haedo. We came back singing, on horseback; and this last fact was not the only reason for my joy. After a sultry day, an enormous slate-gray storm had obscured the sky. It was driven on by a wind from the south; the trees were already tossing like madmen; and I had the apprehension (the secret hope) that the elemental downpour would catch us out in the open. We were running a kind of race with the tempest. We rode into a narrow lane which wound down between two enormously high brick footpaths. It had grown black of a sudden; I now heard rapid almost secret steps above; I raised my eyes and saw a boy running along the narrow, cracked path as if he were running along a narrow, broken wall. I remember the loose trousers, tight at the bottom, the hemp sandals; I remember the cigarette in the hard visage, standing out against the by now limitless darkness. Bernardo unexpectedly yelled to him: "What's the time, Ireneo?" Without looking up, without stopping, Ireneo replied: "In ten minutes it will be eight o'clock, child Bernardo Juan Francisco." The voice was sharp, mocking.

I am so absentminded that the dialogue which I have just cited would not have penetrated my attention if it had not been repeated by my cousin, who was stimulated, I think, by a certain local pride and by a desire to show himself indifferent to the other's three-sided reply.

He told me that the boy above us in the pass was a certain Ireneo Funes, renowned for a number of eccentricities, such as that of having nothing to do with people and of

always knowing the time, like a watch. He added that Ireneo was the son of María Clementina Funes, an ironing woman in the town, and that his father, some people said, was an "Englishman" named O'Connor, a doctor in the salting fields, though some said the father was a horse-breaker, or scout, from the province of El Salto. Ireneo lived with his mother, at the edge of the country house of the Laurels.

In the years '85 and '86 we spent the summer in the city of Montevideo. We returned to Fray Bentos in '87. As was natural, I inquired after all my acquaintances, and finally, about "the chronometer Funes." I was told that he had been thrown by a wild horse at the San Francisco ranch, and that he had been hopelessly crippled. I remember the impression of uneasy magic which the news provoked in me: the only time I had seen him we were on horseback, coming from San Francisco, and he was in a high place; from the lips of my cousin Bernardo the affair sounded like a dream elaborated with elements out of the past. They told me that Ireneo did not move now from his cot, but remained with his eyes fixed on the backyard fig tree, or on a cobweb. At sunset he allowed himself to be brought to the window. He carried pride to the extreme of pretending that the blow which had befallen him was a good thing. . . . Twice I saw him behind the iron grate which sternly delineated his eternal imprisonment: unmoving, once, his eyes closed; unmoving also, another time, absorbed in the contemplation of a sweet-smelling sprig of lavender cotton.

At the time I had begun, not without some ostentation, the methodical study of Latin. My valise contained the *De viris illustribus* of Lhomond, the *Thesaurus* of Quicherat, Caesar's *Commentaries*, and an odd-numbered volume of the *Historia Naturalis* of Pliny, which exceeded (and still exceeds) my modest talents as a Latinist. Everything is noised around in a small town; Ireneo, at his small farm on the outskirts, was not long in learning of the arrival of these anomalous books. He sent me a flowery, ceremonious letter,

in which he recalled our encounter, unfortunately brief, "on the seventh day of February of the year '84," and alluded to the glorious services which Don Gregorio Haedo, my uncle, dead the same year, "had rendered to the Two Fatherlands in the glorious campaign of Ituzaingó," and he solicited the loan of any one of the volumes, to be accompanied by a dictionary "for the better intelligence of the original text, for I do not know Latin as yet." He promised to return them in good condition, almost immediately. The letter was perfect, very nicely constructed; the orthography was of the type sponsored by Andrés Bello: i for y, j for g. At first I naturally suspected a jest. My cousins assured me it was not so, that these were the ways of Ireneo. I did not know whether to attribute to impudence, ignorance, or stupidity, the idea that the difficult Latin required no other instrument than a dictionary; in order fully to undeceive him I sent the *Gradus ad Parnassum* of Quicherat, and the Pliny.

On February 14, I received a telegram from Buenos Aires telling me to return immediately, for my father was "in no way well." God forgive me, but the prestige of being the recipient of an urgent telegram, the desire to point out to all of Fray Bentos the contradiction between the negative form of the news and the positive adverb, the temptation to dramatize my sorrow as I feigned a virile stoicism, all no doubt distracted me from the possibility of anguish. As I packed my valise, I noted that I was missing the *Gradus* and the volume of the *Historia Naturalis*. The "Saturn" was to weigh anchor on the morning of the next day; that night, after supper, I made my way to the house of Funes. Outside, I was surprised to find the night no less oppressive than the day.

Ireneo's mother received me at the modest ranch. She told me that Ireneo was in the back room and that I should not be disturbed to find him in the dark, for he knew how to pass the dead hours without lighting the candle.

I crossed the cobblestone patio, the small corridor; I came to the second patio. A great vine covered everything, so that the darkness seemed complete. Of a sudden I heard the high-pitched, mocking voice of Ireneo. The voice spoke in Latin; the voice (which came out of the obscurity) was reading, with obvious delight, a treatise or prayer or incantation. The Roman syllables resounded in the earthen patio; my suspicion made them seem undecipherable, interminable; afterwards, in the enormous dialogue of that night, I learned that they made up the first paragraph of the twenty-fourth chapter of the seventh book of the *Historia Naturalis*. The subject of this chapter is memory; the last words are *ut nihil non iisdem verbis redderetur auditum*.

Without the least change in his voice, Ireneo bade me come in. He was lying on the cot, smoking. It seems to me that I did not see his face until dawn; I seem to recall the momentary glow of the cigarette. The room smelled vaguely of dampness. I sat down, and repeated the story of the telegram and my father's illness.

I come now to the most difficult point in my narrative. For the entire story has no other point (the reader might as well know it by now) than this dialogue of almost a half-century ago. I shall not attempt to reproduce his words, now irrecoverable. I prefer truthfully to make a résumé of the many things Ireneo told me. The indirect style is remote and weak; I know that I sacrifice the effectiveness of my narrative; but let my readers imagine the nebulous sentences which clouded that night.

Ireneo began by enumerating, in Latin and Spanish, the cases of prodigious memory cited in the *Historia Naturalis*: Cyrus, king of the Persians, who could call every soldier in his armies by name; Mithridates Eupator, who administered justice in the twenty-two languages of his empire; Simonides, inventor of mnemotechny; Metrodorus, who practised the art of repeating faithfully what he heard once. With evident good faith Funes marveled that such

things should be considered marvelous. He told me that previous to the rainy afternoon when the blue-tinted horse threw him, he had been—like any Christian—blind, deaf-mute, somnambulistic, memoryless. (I tried to remind him of his precise perception of time, his memory for proper names; he paid no attention to me). For nineteen years, he said, he had lived like a person in a dream: he looked without seeing, heard without hearing, forgot everything—almost everything. On falling from the horse, he lost consciousness; when he recovered it, the present was almost intolerable: it was so rich and bright; the same was true of the most ancient and most trivial memories. A little later he realized that he was crippled. This fact scarcely interested him. He reasoned (or felt) that immobility was a minimum price to pay. And now, his perception and his memory were infallible.

We, in a glance, perceive three wine glasses on the table; Funes saw all the shoots, clusters, and grapes of the vine. He remembered the shapes of the clouds in the south at dawn on the 30th of April of 1882, and he could compare them in his recollection with the marbled grain in the design of a leather-bound book which he had seen only once, and with the lines in the spray which an oar raised in the Rio Negro on the eve of the battle of the Quebracho. These recollections were not simple; each visual image was linked to muscular sensations, thermal sensations, etc. He could reconstruct all his dreams, all his fancies. Two or three times he had reconstructed an entire day. He told me: *I have more memories in myself alone than all men have had since the world was a world.* And again: *My dreams are like your vigils.* And again, toward dawn: *My memory, sir, is like a garbage disposal.*

A circumference on a blackboard, a rectangular triangle, a rhomb, are forms which we can fully intuit; the same held true with Ireneo for the tempestuous mane of a stallion, a herd of cattle in a pass, the ever-changing flame or the innumerable ash, the many faces of a dead man during the

course of a protracted wake. He could perceive I do not know how many stars in the sky.

These things he told me; neither then nor at any time later did they seem doubtful. In those days neither the cinema, nor the phonograph yet existed; nevertheless, it seems strange, almost incredible, that no one should have experimented on Funes. The truth is that we all live by leaving behind; no doubt we all profoundly know that we are immortal and that sooner or later every man will do all things and know everything.

The voice of Funes, out of the darkness, continued. He told me that toward 1886 he had devised a new system of enumeration and that in a very few days he had gone beyond twenty-four thousand. He had not written it down, for what he once meditated would not be erased. The first stimulus to his work, I believe, had been his discontent with the fact that “thirty-three Uruguayans” required two symbols and three words, rather than a single word and a single symbol. Later he applied his extravagant principle to the other numbers. In place of seven thousand thirteen, he would say (for example) *Máximo Perez*; in place of seven thousand fourteen, *The Train*; other numbers were *Luis Melián Lafinur*, *Olimar*, *Brimstone*, *Clubs*, *The Whale*, *Gas*, *The Cauldron*, *Napoleon*, *Agustín de Vedia*. In lieu of five hundred, he would say *nine*. Each word had a particular sign, a species of mark; the last were very complicated. . . . I attempted to explain that this rhapsody of unconnected terms was precisely the contrary of a system of enumeration.

I said that to say three hundred and sixty-five was to say three hundreds, six tens, five units: an analysis which does not exist in such numbers as *The Negro Timoteo* or *The Flesh Blanket*. Funes did not understand me, or did not wish to understand me.

Locke, in the seventeenth century, postulated (and rejected) an impossible idiom in which each individual object, each stone, each bird and branch had an individual name;

Funes had once projected an analogous idiom, but he had renounced it as being too general, too ambiguous. In effect, Funes not only remembered every leaf on every tree of every wood, but even every one of the times he had perceived or imagined it. He determined to reduce all of his past experience to some seventy thousand recollections, which he would later define numerically. Two considerations dissuaded him: the thought that the task was interminable and the thought that it was useless. He knew that at the hour of his death he would scarcely have finished classifying even all the memories of his childhood.

The two projects I have indicated (an infinite vocabulary for the natural series of numbers, and a usable mental catalogue of all the images of memory) are lacking in sense, but they reveal a certain stammering greatness. They allow us to make out dimly, or to infer, the dizzying world of Funes. He was, let us not forget, almost incapable of general, platonic ideas. It was not only difficult for him to understand that the generic term *dog* embraced so many unlike specimens of differing sizes and different forms; he was disturbed by the fact that a dog at three-fourteen (seen in profile) should have the same name as the dog at three-fifteen (seen from the front). His own face in the mirror, his own hands, surprised him on every occasion. Swift writes that the emperor of Lilliput could discern the movement of the minute hand; Funes could continuously make out the tranquil advances of corruption, of moisture. He was the solitary and lucid spectator of a multiform world which was instantaneously and almost intolerably exact. Babylon, London, and New York have overawed the imagination of men with their ferocious splendor; no one, in those populous towers or upon those surging avenues, has felt the heat and pressure of a reality as indefatigable as that which day and night converged upon the unfortunate Ireneo in his humble South American farmhouse. It was very difficult for him to

sleep. To sleep is to be abstracted from the world; Funes, on his back in his cot, in the shadows, imagined every crevice and every molding of the various houses which surrounded him. (I repeat, the least important of his recollections was more minutely precise and more lively than our perception of a physical pleasure or a physical torment.) Toward the east, in a section which was not yet cut into blocks of homes, there were some new unknown houses. Funes imagined them black, compact, made of a single obscurity; he would turn his face in this direction in order to sleep. He would also imagine himself at the bottom of the river, being rocked and annihilated by the current.

Without effort, he had learned English, French, Portuguese, Latin. I suspect, nevertheless, that he was not very capable of thought. To think is to forget a difference, to generalize, to abstract. In the overly replete world of Funes there were nothing but details, almost contiguous details. The equivocal clarity of dawn penetrated along the earthen patio.

Then it was that I saw the face of the voice which had spoken all through the night. Ireneo was nineteen years old; he had been born in 1868; he seemed as monumental as bronze, more ancient than Egypt, anterior to the prophecies and the pyramids. It occurred to me that each one of my words (each one of my gestures) would live on in his im- placable memory; I was benumbed by the fear of multiplying superfluous gestures.

Ireneo Funes died in 1889, of a pulmonary congestion.

1942

—Translated by ANTHONY KERRIGAN

## The Analytical Language of John Wilkins

Jorge Luis Borges, from *Otras Inquisiciones*

*Translated by Will Fitzgerald*

I have checked, and the fourteenth edition of the Encyclopaedia Britannica has dropped its article on John Wilkins. This makes sense when you think of how trivial the article is — 20 lines of purely biographical facts: Wilkins was born in 1614, Wilkins died in 1672, Wilkins was chaplain for Charles Louise, Elector Palatine; Wilkins was named rector of one of the colleges at Oxford, Wilkins was the first Secretary of the Royal Society of London, etc. It is wrong, though, if we consider Wilkins's speculative work. He was abundantly curious: he was interested in theology, cryptography, music, the fabrication of transparent beehives, the orbit of an invisible planet, the possibility of traveling to the moon, the possibility of, and the principles underlying, a universal language. To this last problem he dedicated his book *Towards a Real Character and a Philosophical Language* (600 pages in quarto, 1668). Our National Library does not have a copy of this book; I have consulted, to write this note, *The Life and Times of John Wilkins* (1910), by P.A. Wright Henderson; the *Wörterbuch der Philosophie* (1924), by Fritz Mauthner; *Delphos* (1935) by E. Sylvia Pankhurst; and *Dangerous Thoughts* (1939), by Lancelot Hogben.

Everyone, at some time, has had to endure one of those never-ending debates with someone, who, with copious interjections and locutions, insists that—say—the Spanish word "luna" is more (or less) expressive than the English word "moon." Apart from the obvious observation that the monosyllabic "moon" is perhaps more apt to represent such a simple object in contrast to the bisyllabic "luna," there is nothing one can add to these debates—discounting invented words and their derivations, all of the languages of the world (not excepting Johann Martin Schleyer's Volapük and Peano's Interlingua) are equally inexpressive. There is no edition of the Royal Academy's *Gramática* that does not ponder "the enviable treasure of picturesque, felicitous and expressive voice of the rhythmic Spanish language," but this is mere swagger without support. Still, this self-same Royal Academy every few years produces a dictionary that defines how Spanish sounds—In the universal language that Wilkins invented at the beginning of the 17th century, every word contains its own definition. Descartes, in a letter dated November 1629, had already noted that, by means of a decimal numbering system, one could learn in a single day to name every quantity up to infinity and write them in a new language made up of figures<sup>1</sup>; he also proposed the creation of an analogous language which would be general, organizing and including every human thought. John Wilkins, about 1664, undertook to complete this enterprise.

He divided the universe into forty categories or genera, subdivided into differences, each subdivided into its own species. To every genus he assigned a monosyllable of two letters; for every difference, a consonant; for every species, a vowel. For example: *de*, that is, an element; *deb*, the first of the elements, fire; *deba* a part of the element of fire, a flame. In the analogical language of Letellier (1850), *a*, that is, animal; *ab*, mammal; *abo*, carnivore; *aboj*, feline; *aboje*, cat; *abi*, herbivore; *abiv*, equine, etc. In the language of Bonifacio Sotos Ochando (1845) *imaba* means building; *imaca* palace; *imafe*, hospital; *imafo*, lazaretto; *imela*, house; *imego*, a post; *imede*, a pillar; *imego*, floor;

*imela*, ceiling; *imogo*, window; *bire*, a bookbinder; *birer*, bookbinding (I owe this final list to a book printed in Buenos Aires in 1886; *El Curso de lengua universal*, by Dr. Pedro Mata).

The words in the Analytic Language of John Wilkins are not awkwardly created arbitrary symbols; every one of its letters is significant, just as the cabalists treat the letters in Holy Scripture. Mauthner observes that children could learn this language without knowing it is artificial; later, in school, they would discover that it is also a universal key and a secret encyclopaedia.

I have defined Wilkins's method without examining a problem that is impossible or at least difficult to postpone: the value in the quadragesimal table that forms the basis of the language. Let us consider the eight category, that of *minerals*. Wilkins divides these into *common* (silica, gravel, slate), *useful* (marble, amber, coral), *precious* (pearls, opals), *transparent* (amethyst, sapphire) and *insoluble* (coal, chalk and arsenic). Almost as alarming as the eight category is the ninth. This describes metals that could be *imperfect* (cinnabar, quicksilver), *artificial* (bronze, brass), *recremental* (lime, rust) and *natural* (gold, tin, copper). **Beauty**<sup>2</sup> The whale figures in category sixteen; it is a viviparous, oblong fish.

These ambiguities, redundancies and deficiencies recall those that Dr. Franz Kuhn attributes to a certain Chinese dictionary entitled *The Celestial Emporium of Benevolent Knowledge*. In its remote pages it is written that animals can be divided into (a) those belonging to the Emperor, (b) those that are embalmed, (c) those that are tame, (d) pigs, (e) sirens, (f) imaginary animals, (g) wild dogs, (h) those included in this classification, (i) those that are crazy-acting (j), those that are uncountable (k) those painted with the finest brush made of camel hair, (l) miscellaneous, (m) those which have just broken a vase, and (n) those which, from a distance, look like flies. The Bibliographic Institute of Brussels practices this chaos: they have partitioned the universe into 1000 subdivisions, number 262 corresponds to the Pope; #282, to the Catholic Religion; #263, the day of the Lord; #268, to the dominical schools; #298, to Mormonism; and #294 to Brahmanism, Buddhism, Shintoism and Taoism. It doesn't mind heterogeneous subdivisions, for example, #179: "Cruelty to animals. Prevention of cruelty to animals. Duels and suicide from the moral point of view. Vices and various defects. Virtues and various qualities."

I have catalogued the arbitrariness of Wilkins, of the unknown (or apocryphal) Chinese encyclopaedia writer and of the Bibliographic Institute of Brussels; it is clear that there is no classification of the Universe that is not arbitrary and full of conjectures. The reason for this is very simple: we do not know what kind of thing the universe is. "The world," writes David Hume, "is perhaps the rudimentary sketch of a childish god, who left it half done, ashamed by his deficient work; it is created by a subordinate god, at whom the superior gods laugh; it is the confused production of a decrepit and retiring divinity, who has already died (*Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, 1779)." But we can go further than that, to go on to suspect that there is no universe in a unified, organic sense, denoted by this ambitious word. If this is the case, it fails to support its intention; it fails to supply the words, the definitions, the etymologies, the synonyms out of the secret dictionary of God.

The impossibility of penetrating the divine scheme of the universe does not, however, dissuade us from planning human schemes, even though we know they must be

provisional. The Analytic Language of Wilkins is not the least admirable of these schemes. The genera and species that compose it are contradictory and vague; the artifice that the letters of the language indicate subdivisions and divisions is, without a doubt, ingenious. The word *salmon* tells us nothing, *zana*, its corresponding word, defines (for one well-versed in the forty categories and the genera of these categories) a scaled, fluvial fish of rose-colored flesh. (Theoretically, it is not inconceivable to have a language in which the name of each being indicates all of the details of its destiny, both past and future).

Dreams and utopias apart, the most lucidly anyone has written about language are in these words by Chesterton: "He knows that there are in the soul tints more bewildering, more numberless, and more nameless than the colours of an autumn forest... Yet he seriously believes that these things can every one of them, in all their tones and semitones, in all their blends and unions, be accurately represented by an arbitrary system of grunts and squeals. He believes that an ordinary civilized stockbroker can really produce out of his own inside noises that denote all the mysteries of memory and all the agonies of desire (G.F. Watts, p. 88, 1904)."

<sup>1</sup> Theoretically, there are an unlimited number of numeration systems. The most complete system (to be used by divine beings and angels) registers an infinite number of symbols, one for each number; the simplest only requires two. Zero is written 0; one 1, two, 10, three 11, four 100, five 101, six 110, seven 111, eight 1000, etc. This was invented by Leibniz, who was (it seems) motivated by the secret hexagrams of the I Ching.

<sup>2</sup> It's been pointed out a couple of times to me that, in Borges' original, the word translated as "whales" here is 'bellena' (whale), not 'belleza' (beauty), and so I correct it. Thanks to Justin Bur (who first pointed it out—in 2005!—and Douglas Crockford, who prompted me to make the change (Translator's note).

[Entish.org](http://entish.org) Will.Whim

in Turkey. You tell yourself that if you traveled alone to Europe this summer you could surely do the same thing next year and the year after that. Of course, you don't, though, and the next thing you know you're an aging, unemployed ~~et~~, so desperate for love that you spend your evenings mooning over a straight alcoholic.

The closer we got to New York the more miserable I became. Then I thought of this guy my friend Lili and I had borrowed a ladder from a few months earlier, someone named Hugh. I'd never really trusted people who went directly from one relationship to the next, so after my train pulled into Penn Station, and after I'd taken the subway home, I'd wait a few hours, or maybe even a full day, before dialing his number and asking if he'd like to hear a joke.



ZADIE SMITH

~~Then I thought of this guy my friend Lili and I had borrowed a ladder from a few months earlier, someone named Hugh. I'd never really trusted people who went directly from one relationship to the next, so after my train pulled into Penn Station, and after I'd taken the subway home, I'd wait a few hours, or maybe even a full day, before dialing his number and asking if he'd like to hear a joke.~~

## Speaking in Tongues

FROM *The New York Review of Books*

*The following is based on a lecture given at the New York Public Library in December 2008.*

### 1

HELLO. This voice I speak with these days, this English voice with its rounded vowels and consonants in more or less the right place — this is not the voice of my childhood. I picked it up in college, along with the unabridged *Clarissa* and a taste for port. Maybe this fact is only what it seems to be — a case of bald social climbing — but at the time I genuinely thought *this* was the voice of lettered people, and that if I didn't have the voice of lettered people I would never truly be lettered. A braver person, perhaps, would have stood firm, teaching her peers a useful lesson by example: not all lettered people need be of the same class, nor speak identically. I went the other way. Partly out of cowardice and a constitutional eagerness to please, but also because I didn't quite see it as a straight swap, of this voice for that.

My own childhood had been the story of this and that combined, of the synthesis of disparate things. It never occurred to me that I was leaving the London district of Willesden for Cambridge. I thought I was *adding* Cambridge to Willesden, this new way of talking to that old way. Adding a new kind of knowledge to a different kind I already had. And for a while, that's how it was: at home, during the holidays, I spoke with my old voice, and in the old voice seemed to feel and speak things that I couldn't express in college,

and vice versa. I felt a sort of wonder at the flexibility of the thing. Like being alive twice.

But flexibility is something that requires work if it is to be maintained. Recently my double voice has deserted me for a single one, reflecting the smaller world into which my work has led me. Willesden was a big, colorful, working-class sea; Cambridge was a smaller, posher pond, and almost univocal; the literary world is a puddle. This voice I picked up along the way is no longer an exotic garment I put on like a college gown whenever I choose — now it is my only voice, whether I want it or not. I regret it; I should have kept both voices alive in my mouth. They were both a part of me. But how the culture warns against it! As George Bernard Shaw delicately put it in his preface to the play *Pygmalion*, "many thousands of [British] men and women . . . have sloughed off their native dialects and acquired a new tongue."

Few, though, will admit to it. Voice adaptation is still the original British sin. Monitoring and exposing such citizens is a national pastime, as popular as sex scandals and libel cases. If you lean toward the Atlantic with your high-rising terminals you're a sellout; if you pronounce borrowed European words in their original style — even if you try something as innocent as *parmigiano* for "parmesan" — you're a fraud. If you go (metaphorically speaking) down the British class scale, you've gone from cockney to "mockney," and can expect a public tarring and feathering; to go the other way is to perform an unforgivable act of class betrayal. Voices are meant to be unchanging and singular. There's no quicker way to insult an expat Scotsman in London than to tell him he's lost his accent. We feel that our voices are who we are, and that to have more than one, or to use different versions of a voice for different occasions, represents, at best, a Janus-faced duplicity, and at worst, the loss of our very souls.

Whoever changes their voice takes on, in Britain, a queerly tragic dimension. They have betrayed that puzzling dictum "To thine own self be true," so often quoted approvingly as if it represented the wisdom of Shakespeare rather than the hot air of Polonius. "What's to become of me? What's to become of me?" wails Eliza Doolittle, realizing her middling dilemma. With a voice too posh for the flower girls and yet too redolent of the gutter for the ladies in Mrs. Higgins's drawing room.

\*

But Eliza — patron saint of the tragically double-voiced — is worthy of closer inspection. The first thing to note is that both Eliza and *Pygmalion* are entirely didactic, as Shaw meant them to be. "I de-light," he wrote, "in throwing [*Pygmalion*] at the heads of the wise-acres who repeat the parrot cry that art should never be didactic. It goes to prove my contention that art should never be anything else."

He was determined to tell the unambiguous tale of a girl who changes her voice and loses her self. And so she arrives like this:

Don't you be so saucy. You ain't heard what I come for yet. Did you tell him I come in a taxi? . . . Oh, we are proud! He ain't above giving less-sons, not him. I heard him say so. Well, I ain't come here to ask for any compliment; and if my moneys not good enough I can go elsewhere . . . Now you know, don't you? I'm come to have lessons, I am. And to pay for em too: make no mistake . . . I want to be a lady in a flower shop instead of selling at the corner of Tottenham Court Road. But they won't take me unless I can talk more genteel.

And she leaves like this:

I can't. I could have done it once; but now I can't go back to it. Last night, when I was wandering about, a girl spoke to me; and I tried to get back into the old way with her; but it was no use. You told me, you know, that when a child is brought to a foreign country, it picks up the language in a few weeks, and forgets its own. Well, I am a child in your country. I have forgotten my own language, and can speak nothing but yours.

By the end of his experiment, Professor Higgins has made his Eliza an awkward, in-between thing, neither flower girl nor lady, with one voice lost and another gained, at the steep price of everything she was and everything she knows. Almost as an afterthought, he sends Eliza's father, Alfred Doolittle, to his doom, too, securing a three-thousand-a-year living for the man on the condition that Doolittle lecture for the Wannafeller Moral Reform World League up to six times a year. This burden brings the philosophical duster man into the close, unwanted embrace of what he disdainfully calls "middle class morality." By the time the curtain goes down, both Doolittles find themselves stuck in the middle, which is, to Shaw, a comi-tragic place to be, with the emphasis on the tragic. What are they fit for? What will become of them?

How persistent this horror of the middling spot is, this dread of

the interim place! It extends through the specter of the tragic mulatto, to the plight of the transsexual, to our present anxiety—disguised as genteel concern—for the contemporary immigrant, tragically split, we are sure, between worlds, ideas, cultures, voices—whatever will become of them? Something's got to give—one voice must be sacrificed for the other. What is double must be made singular.

But this, the apparent didactic moral of Eliza's story, is undercut by the fact of the play itself, which is an orchestra of many voices, simultaneously and perfectly rendered, with no shade of color or tone sacrificed. Higgins's Harley Street high-handedness is the equal of Mrs. Pierce's lower-middle-class gentility; Pickering's kindhearted aristocratic imprecision every bit as convincing as Arthur Doolittle's Nietzschean Cockney-by-way-of-Wales. Shaw had a wonderful ear, able to reproduce almost as many quirks of the English language as Shakespeare. Shaw was in possession of a gift he wouldn't, or couldn't, give Eliza: he spoke in tongues.

It gives me a strange sensation to turn from Shaw's melancholy Pygmalion story to another, infinitely more hopeful version, written by the new president of the United States of America. Of course, his ear isn't half bad either. In *Dreams from My Father*, the new president displays an enviable facility for dialogue, and puts it to good use, animating a cast every bit as various as the one James Baldwin—an obvious influence—conjured for his own many-voiced novel *Another Country*. Obama can do young Jewish male, black old lady from the South Side, white woman from Kansas, Kenyan elders, white Harvard nerds, black Columbia nerds, activist women, churchmen, security guards, bank tellers, and even a British man called Mr. Wilkerson, who on a starry night on safari says credibly British things like, "I believe that's the Milky Way." This new president doesn't just speak for his people. He can speak them. It is a disorienting talent in a president; we're so unused to it. I have to pinch myself to remember who wrote the following well-observed scene, seemingly plucked from a comic novel:

"Man, I'm not going to any more of these bullshit Punahoa parties."  
"Yeah, that's what you said the last time . . ."  
"I mean it this time . . . These girls are A-1, USDA-certified racists. All

of 'em. White girls. Asian girls—shoot, these Asians worse than the whites. Think we got a disease or something."

"Maybe they're looking at that big butt of yours. Man, I thought you were in training."

"Get your hands out of my fries. You ain't my bitch, nigger . . . buy your own damn fries. Now what was I talking about?"

"Just 'cause a girl don't go out with you doesn't make her a racist."

This is the voice of Obama at seventeen, as remembered by Obama. He's still recognizably Obama; he already seeks to unpack and complicate apparently obvious things ("Just 'cause a girl don't go out with you doesn't make her a racist"); he's already gently cynical about the impassioned dogma of other people ("Yeah, that's what you said the last time"). And he has a sense of humor ("Maybe they're looking at that big butt of yours"). Only the voice is different: he has made almost as large a leap as Eliza Doolittle. The conclusions Obama draws from his own Pygmalion experience, however, are subtler than Shaw's. The tale he tells is not the old tragedy of gaining a new, false voice at the expense of a true one. The tale he tells is all about addition. His is the story of a genuinely many-voiced man. If it has a moral it is that each man must be true to himself, plural.

For Obama, having more than one voice in your ear is not a burden, or not solely a burden—it is also a gift. And the gift is of an interesting kind, not well served by that dull publishing-house title *Dreams from My Father: A Story of Race and Inheritance* with its suggestion of a simple linear inheritance, of paternal dreams and aspirations passed down to a son, and fulfilled. *Dreams from My Father* would have been a fine title for John McCain's book *Faith of My Fathers*, which concerns exactly this kind of linear masculine inheritance, in his case from soldier to soldier. For Obama's book, though, it's wrong, lopsided. He corrects its misperception early on, in the first chapter, while discussing the failure of his parents' relationship, characterized by their only son as the end of a dream. "Even as that spell was broken," he writes, "and the worlds that they thought they'd left behind reclaimed each of them, I occupied the place where their dreams had been."

To occupy a dream, to exist in a dreamed space (conjured by both father and mother), is surely a quite different thing from simply inheriting a dream. It's more interesting: What did Pauline Kael

call Cary Grant? "The Man from Dream City." When Bristolian Archibald Leach became suave Cary Grant, the transformation happened in his voice, which he subjected to a strange, indefinable manipulation, resulting in that heavenly sin generis accent, neither West Country nor posh, American nor English. It came from nowhere; he came from nowhere. Grant seemed the product of a collective dream, dreamed up by moviegoers in hard times, as it sometimes feels voters have dreamed up Obama in hard times. Both men have a strange reflective quality, typical of the self-created man — we see in them whatever we want to see. "Everyone wants to be Cary Grant," said Cary Grant. "Even I want to be Cary Grant." It's not hard to imagine Obama having that same thought, back-stage at Grant Park, hearing his own name chanted by the hopeful multitude. *Everyone wants to be Barack Obama. Even I want to be Barack Obama.*

## 2

But I haven't described Dream City. I'll try to. It is a place of many voices, where the unified singular self is an illusion. Naturally, Obama was born there. So was I. When your personal multiplicity is printed on your face, in an almost too obviously thematic manner, in your DNA, in your hair, and in the neither this nor that beige of your skin — well, anyone can see you come from Dream City. In Dream City everything is doubled, everything is various. You have no choice but to cross borders and speak in tongues. That's how you get from your mother to your father, from talking to one set of folks who think you're not black enough to another who figure you insufficiently white. It's the kind of town where the wise man says "I" cautiously, because "I" feels like too straight and singular a phoneme to represent the true multiplicity of his experience. Instead, citizens of Dream City prefer to use the collective pronoun "we."

Throughout his campaign Obama was careful always to say "we." He was noticeably wary of "I." By speaking so, he wasn't simply avoiding a singularity he didn't feel, he was also drawing us in with him. He had the audacity to suggest that, even if you can't see it stamped on their faces, most people come from Dream City, too. Most of us have complicated back stories, messy histories, multiple narratives.

It was a high-wire strategy for Obama, this invocation of our collective human messiness. His enemies latched on to its imprecision, emphasizing the exotic, un-American nature of Dream City, this ill-defined place where you could be from Hawaii and Kenya, Kansas and Indonesia, all at the same time, where you could give talk like a street hustler and orate like a senator. What kind of a crazy place is that? But they underestimated how many people come from Dream City, how many Americans, in their daily lives, conjure contrasting voices and seek a synthesis between disparate things. Turns out, Dream City wasn't so strange to them.

Or did they never actually see it? We now know that Obama spoke of *Main Street* in Iowa and of *sweet potato pie* in northwest Philly, and it could be argued that he succeeded because he so rarely misspoke, carefully tailoring his intonations to suit the sensibility of his listeners. Sometimes he did this within one speech, and we don't like federal agents poking around our libraries in the red states.<sup>2</sup> *Awesome God* comes to you straight from the pews of a Georgia church; *poking around* feels more at home at a kitchen table in South Bend, Indiana. The balance was perfect, cunningly counterpoised and never accidental. It's only now that it's over that we see him let his guard down a little, on *60 Minutes*, say, dropping in that culturally, casually black construction "Hey, I'm not stupid, *men*, that's why I'm president," something it's hard to imagine him doing even three weeks earlier. To a certain kind of mind, it must have looked like the mask had slipped for a moment.

Which brings us to the single-voiced Obamanation crowd. They rage on in the blogs and on the radio, waiting obsessively for the mask to slip. They have a great fear of what they see as Obama's doubling ways. "He says one thing but he means another" — this is the essence of the fear campaign. He says he's a capitalist, but he'll spread your wealth. He says he's a Christian, but really he's going to empower the Muslims. And so on and so forth. These are fears that have their roots in an anxiety about voice. *Who is he?* people kept asking. *I mean, who is this guy, really?* He says *sweet potato pie* in Philly and *Main Street* in Iowa! When he talks to us, he sure sounds like us — but behind our backs he says we're clinging to our religion, to our guns. And when Jesse Jackson heard that Obama had lectured a black church congregation about the epidemic of absent black fathers, he experienced this, too, as a tonal betrayal;

Obama was "talking down to black people." In both cases, there was the sense of a double-dealer, of someone who tailors his speech to fit the audience, who is not of the people (because he is able to look at them objectively) but always above them.

The Jackson gaffe, with its Oedipal violence ("I want to cut his nuts out"), is especially poignant because it goes to the heart of a generational conflict in the black community, concerning what we will say in public and what we say in private. For it has been a point of honor among the civil rights generation that any criticisms or negative analyses of our community, expressed, as they often are, by white politicians, without context, without real empathy or understanding, should not be repeated by a black politician when the white community is listening, even if (*especially* if) the criticism happens to be true (more than half of all black American children live in single-parent households). Our business is our business. Keep it in the family; don't wash your dirty linen in public; stay unified. (Of course, with his overheard gaffe, Jackson unwittingly broke his own rule.)

Until Obama, black politicians had always adhered to these unwritten rules. In this way, they defended themselves against those two bogeymen of black political life: the Uncle Tom and the House Nigger. The black politician who played up to, or even simply echoed, white fears, desires, and hopes for the black community was in danger of earning these epithets—even Martin Luther King was not free from such suspicions. Then came Obama, and the new world he had supposedly ushered in, the postracial world, in which what mattered most was not blind racial allegiance but factual truth. It was felt that Jesse Jackson was sadly out of step with this new postracial world: even his own son felt moved to publicly repudiate his "ugly rhetoric." But Jackson's anger was not incomprehensible, nor his distrust unreasonable. Jackson lived through a bitter struggle, and bitter struggles deform their participants in subtle, complicated ways. The idea that one should speak one's cultural allegiance first and the truth second (and that this is a sign of authenticity) is precisely such a deformation.

Right up to the wire, Obama made many black men and women of Jackson's generation suspicious. How can the man who passes between culturally black and white voices with such flexibility, with

such ease, be an honest man? How will the man from Dream City keep it real? Why won't he speak with a clear and unified voice? These were genuine questions for people born in real cities at a time when those cities were implacably divided, when the black movement had to yell with a clear and unified voice, or risk not being heard at all. And then he won. Watching Jesse Jackson in tears in Grant Park, pressed up against the varicolored American public, it seemed like he, at least, had received the answer he needed: only a many-voiced man could have spoken to that many people.

A *clear and unified voice*. In that context, this business of being biracial, of being half black and half white, is awkward. In his memoir, Obama takes care to ridicule a certain black girl called Joyce—a composite figure from his college days who happens also to be part Italian and part French and part Native American and is inordinately fond of mentioning these facts, and who likes to say:

I'm not black . . . I'm multiracial. . . . Why should I have to choose between them? . . . It's not white people who are making me choose . . . No—it's black people who always have to make everything racial. They're the ones making me choose. They're the ones who are telling me I can't be who I am.

He has her voice down pat and so condemns her out of her own mouth. For she's the third bogeyman of black life, the tragic mulatto, who secretly wishes she "passed," always keen to let you know about her white heritage. It's the fear of being mistaken for Joyce that has always ensured that I ignore the box marked "biracial" and tick the box marked "black" on any questionnaire I fill out, and call myself unequivocally a black writer and roll my eyes at anyone who insists that Obama is not the first black president but the first biracial one. But I also know in my heart that it's an equivocation; I know that Obama has a double consciousness, is black and, at the same time, white, as I am, unless we are suggesting that one side of a person's genetics and cultural heritage cancels out or trumps the other.

But to mention the double is to suggest shame at the singular. Joyce insists on her varied heritage because she fears and is ashamed of the singular black. I suppose it's possible that subconsciously I am also a tragic mulatto, torn between pride and shame. In my conscious life, though, I cannot honestly say I feel proud

to be white and ashamed to be black or proud to be black and ashamed to be white. I find it impossible to experience either pride or shame over accidents of genetics in which I had no active part. I understand how those words got into the racial discourse, but I can't sign up to them. I'm not proud to be female either. I am not even proud to be human—I only love to be so. As I love to be female and I love to be black, and I love that I had a white father.

It's telling that Joyce is one of the few voices in *Dreams from My Father* that is truly left out in the cold, outside of the expansive sympathy of Obama's narrative. She is an entirely didactic being, a demon. Obama has to raise up, if only for a page, so everyone can watch him slay her. I know the feeling. When I was in college I felt I'd rather run away with the Black Panthers than be associated with the Joyces I occasionally met. It's the Joyces of this world who "talk down to black folks." And so to avoid being Joyce, or being seen to be Joyce, you unify, you speak with one voice.

And the concept of a unified black voice is a potent one. It has filtered down, these past forty years, into the black community at all levels, settling itself in that impossible injunction "keep it real," the original intention of which was unification. We were going to unify the concept of Blackness in order to strengthen it. Instead we confined and restricted it. To me, the instruction "keep it real" is a sort of prison cell, two feet by five. The fact is, it's too narrow. I just can't live comfortably in there. "Keep it real" replaced the blessed and solid genetic fact of Blackness with a flimsy imperative. It made Blackness a quality each individual black person was constantly in danger of losing. And almost anything could trigger the loss of one's Blackness: attending certain universities, an impressive variety of jobs, a fondness for opera, a white girlfriend, an interest in golf. And, of course, any change in the voice. There was a popular school of thought that maintained the voice was at the very heart of the thing; fail to keep it real there and you'd never see your Blackness again.

How absurd that all seems now. And not because we live in a postracial world—we don't—but because the reality of race has diversified. Black reality has diversified. It's black people who talk like me, and black people who talk like Lil Wayne. It's black conservatives and black liberals, black sportsmen and black lawyers, black computer technicians and black ballet dancers and black

truck drivers and black presidents. We're all black, and we all love to be black, and we all sing from our own hymn sheet. We're all surely black people, but we may be finally approaching a point of human history where you can't talk up or down to us anymore, but only to us. *He's talking down to white people*—how curious it sounds the other way round! In order to say such a thing one would have to think collectively of white people, as a people of one mind who speak with one voice—a thought experiment in which we have no practice. But it's worth trying. It's only when you play the record backward that you hear the secret message.

## 3

For reasons that are obscure to me, those qualities we cherish in our artists we condemn in our politicians. In our artists we look for the many-colored voice, the multiple sensibility. The apogee of this is, of course, Shakespeare: even more than for his wordplay we cherish him for his lack of allegiance. Our Shakespeare sees always both sides of a thing; he is black and white, male and female—he is Everyman. The giant lacunae in his biography are merely a convenience; if any new facts of religious or political affiliation were ever to arise we would dismiss them in our hearts anyway. Was he, for example, a man of Rome or not? He has appeared, to generations of readers, not of one religion but of both—in truth, beyond both. Born into the middle of Britain's fierce Catholic-Protestant culture war, how could the bloody absurdity of those years not impress upon him a strong sense of cultural contingency?

It was a war of ideas that began for Will—as it began for Barack—in the dreams of his father. For we know that John Shakespeare, a civic officer in Protestant times, oversaw the repainting of medieval frescoes and the destruction of the rood loft and altar in Stratford's own fine Guild Chapel, but we also know that in the rafters of the Shakespeare home John hid a secret Catholic "Spiritual Testament," a signed profession of allegiance to the old faith. A strange experience, to watch one's own father thus divided, professing one thing in public while practicing another in private. John Shakespeare was a kind of equivocator: it's what you do when you're in a corner, when you can't be a Catholic and a loyal Englishman at the same time. When you can't be both black and white. Sometimes in

a country ripped apart by dogma, those who wish to keep their heads—in both senses—must learn to split themselves in two. And this we still know, here, at a four-hundred-year distance. No one can hope to be president of these United States without professing a committed and straightforward belief in two things: the existence of God and the principle of American exceptionalism. But how many of them equivocated, and who, in their shoes, would not equivocate, too?

Fortunately, Shakespeare was an artist and so had an outlet his father didn't have—the many-voiced theater. Shakespeare's art, the very medium of it, allowed him to do what civic officers and politicians can't seem to: speak simultaneous truths. (Is it not, for example, experientially true that one can both believe and *not believe in God*?) In his plays he is woman, man, black, white, believer, heretic, Catholic, Protestant, Jew, Muslim. He grew up in an atmosphere of equivocation, but he lived in freedom. And he offers us freedom: to pin him down to a single identity would be an obvious diminishment, both for Shakespeare and for us. Generations of critics have insisted on this irreducible multiplicity, though they have each expressed it different ways, through the glass of their times. Here is Keats's famous attempt, in 1817, to give this quality a name: "At once it struck me, what quality went to form a Man of Achievement especially in Literature and which Shakespeare possessed so enormously—I mean *Negative Capability*, that is when man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason."

And here is Stephen Greenblatt doing the same, in 2004: "There are many forms of heroism in Shakespeare, but ideological heroism—the fierce, self-immolating embrace of an idea or institution—is not one of them."

For Keats, Shakespeare's many voices are quasi-mystical, as suited the Romantic thrust of Keats's age. For Greenblatt, Shakespeare's negative capability is sociopolitical at root. Will had seen too many wild-eyed martyrs, too many executed terrorists, too many wars on the Catholic terror. He had watched men rage absurdly at rood screens and write treatises in praise of tables. He had seen men disemboweled while still alive, their entrails burned before their eyes, and all for the preference of a Latin Mass over a common prayer or vice versa. He understood what fierce, singular cer-

tainty creates and what it destroys. In response, he made himself a diffuse, uncertain thing, a mass of contradictory, irresolvable voices that speak truth plurally. Through the glass of 2009, "negative capability" looks like the perfect antidote to "ideological heroism."

From our politicians, though, we still look for ideological heroism, despite everything. We consider pragmatists to be weak. We call men of balance naive fools. In England, we once had an insulting name for such people: trimmers. In the mid-1600s, a trimmer was any politician who attempted to straddle the reviled middle ground between Cavalier and Roundhead, Parliament and the Crown; to call a man a trimmer was to accuse him of being insufficiently committed to an ideology. But in telling us of these times, the nineteenth-century English historian Thomas Macaulay draws our attention to Halifax, great statesman of the Privy Council, set up to mediate between Parliament and Crown as London burned. Halifax proudly called himself a trimmer, assuming it, Macaulay explains, as

a title of honour, and vindicat[ing], with great vivacity, the dignity of the appellation. Everything good, he said, trims between extremes. The temperate zone trims between the climate in which men are roasted and the climate in which they are frozen. The English Church trims between the Anabaptist madness and the Papist lethargy. The English constitution trims between the Turkish despotism and Polish anarchy. Virtue is nothing but a just temper between propensities any one of which, if indulged to excess, becomes vice.

Which all sounds eminently reasonable and Aristotelian. And Macaulay's description of Halifax's character is equally attractive: "His intellect was fertile, subtle, and capacious. His polished, luminous, and animated eloquence . . . was the delight of the House of Lords . . . His political traits well deserve to be studied for their literary merit."

In fact, Halifax is familiar—he sounds like the man from Dream City. This makes Macaulay's caveat the more striking:

Yet he was less successful in politics than many who enjoyed smaller advantages: Indeed, those intellectual peculiarities which make his writings valuable frequently impeded him in the contests of active life. For

he always saw passing events, not in the point of view in which they commonly appear to one who bears a part in them, but in the point of view in which, after the lapse of many years, they appear to the philosophic historian.

To me, this is a doleful conclusion. It is exactly men with such intellectual peculiarities that I have always hoped to see in politics. But maybe Macaulay is correct: maybe the Halifaxes of this world make, in the end, better writers than politicians. A lot rests on how this president turns out—but that's a debate for the future. Here I want instead to hazard a little theory, concerning the evolution of a certain type of voice, typified by Halifax, by Shakespeare, and very possibly the president. For the voice of what Macaulay called “the philosophic historian” is, to my mind, a valuable and particular one, and I think someone should make a proper study of it. It's a voice that develops in a man over time; my little theory sketches four developmental stages.

The first stage in the evolution is contingent and cannot be contrived. In this first stage, the voice, by no fault of its own, finds itself trapped between two poles, two competing belief systems. And so this first stage necessitates the second: the voice learns to be flexible between these two fixed points, even to the point of equivocation. Then the third stage: this native flexibility leads to a sense of being able to “see a thing from both sides.” And then the final stage, which I think of as the mark of a certain kind of genius: the voice relinquishes ownership of itself, develops a creative sense of disassociation in which the claims that are particular to it seem no stronger than anyone else's. There it is, my little theory—I'd rather call it a story. It is a story about a wonderful voice, occasionally used by citizens, rarely by men of power. Amidst the din of the 2008 culture wars it proved especially hard to hear.

In this lecture I have been seeking to tentatively suggest that the voice that speaks with such freedom, thus unburdened by dogma and personal bias, thus flooded with empathy, might make a good president. It's only now that I realize that in all this utilitarianism I've left joyfulness out of the account, and thus neglected a key constituency of my own people, the poets! Being many-voiced may be a complicated gift for a president, but in poets it is a pure de-

light in need of neither defense nor explanation. Plato banished them from his upright and annoying republic so long ago that they have lost all their anxiety. They are fancy-free. “I am a Hittite in love with a horse,” writes Frank O'Hara.

I don't know what blood's  
in me I feel like an African prince I am a girl walking  
downstairs  
in a red pleated dress with heels I am a champion taking a  
fall.  
I am a jockey with a sprained ass-hole I am the night mist  
in which a face appears  
and it is another face of blonde I am a baboon eating a  
banana.  
I am a dictator looking at his wife I am a doctor eating a  
child  
and the child's mother smiling I am a Chinaman climbing a  
mountain.  
I am a child smelling his father's underwear I am an Indian  
sleeping on a scalp  
birches,  
and I've just caught sight of the Nina, the Pinta and the  
Santa Maria.  
What land is this, so free?

Frank O'Hara's republic is of the imagination, of course. It is the only land of perfect freedom. Presidents, as a breed, tend to dismiss this land, thinking it has nothing to teach them. If this new president turns out to be different, then writers will count their blessings, but with or without a president on board, writers should always count their blessings. A line of O'Hara's reminds us of this. It's carved on his gravestone. It reads: “Grace to be born and live as variously as possible.”

But to live variously cannot simply be a gift, endowed by an accident of birth; it has to be a continual effort, continually renewed. I felt this with force the night of the election. I was at a lovely New York party, full of lovely people, almost all of whom were white, liberal, highly educated, and celebrating with one happy voice as the states turned blue. Just as they called Iowa my phone rang and a strident German voice said: “Zadie! Come to Harlem! It's wild here.

I'm in za middle of a crazy reggae bar—it's so wonderfu! Vy not come now!"

I mention he was German only so we don't run away with the idea that flexibility comes only to the beige, or gay, or otherwise marginalized. Flexibility is a choice, always open to all of us. (He was a writer, however. Make of that what you will.)

But wait all the way uptown? A crazy reggae bar? For a minute I hesitated, because I was at a lovely party having a lovely time. Or was that it? There was something else. In truth, I thought: But I'll be ludicrous, in my silly dress, with this silly posh English voice, in a crowded bar of black New Yorkers celebrating. It's amazing how many of our cross-cultural and cross-class encounters are limited not by hate or pride or shame, but by another equally insidious, less discussed emotion: embarrassment. A few minutes later, I was in a taxi and heading uptown with my Northern Irish husband and our half-Indian, half-English friend, but that initial hesitation was ominous; the first step on a typical British journey. A hesitation in the face of difference, which leads to caution before difference and ends in fear of it. Before long, the only voice you recognize, the only life you can empathize with, is your own. You will think that a novelist's screwy leap of logic. Well, it's my novelist credo and I believe it. I believe that flexibility of voice leads to a flexibility in all things. My audacious hope in Obama is based, I'm afraid, on precisely such flimsy premises.

It's my audacious hope that a man born and raised between opposing dogmas, between cultures, between voices, could not help but be aware of the extreme contingency of culture. I further audaciously hope that such a man will not mistake the happy accident of his own cultural sensibilities for a set of natural laws, suitable for general application. I even hope that he will find himself in agreement with George Bernard Shaw when, he declared, "Patriotism is, fundamentally, a conviction that a particular country is the best in the world because you were born in it." But that may be an audacious hope too far. We'll see if Obama's lifelong vocal flexibility will enable him to say proudly with one voice, "I love my country," while saying with another voice, "It is a country like other countries." I hope so. He seems just the man to demonstrate that between those two voices there exists no contradiction and no equivocation but rather a proper and decent human harmony.

## Prediscovering Central Asia

FROM *The Wilson Quarterly*

IN A.D. 998, TWO YOUNG MEN living nearly two hundred miles apart, in present-day Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, entered into a correspondence. With verbal jousting that would not sound out of place in a twenty-first-century laboratory, they debated eighteen questions, several of which resonate strongly even today: Are there other solar systems out among the stars, they asked, or are we alone in the universe? In Europe, this question was to remain open for another five hundred years, but to these two men it seemed clear that we are not alone. They also asked if the earth had been created whole and complete, or if it had evolved over time. Time, they agreed, is a continuum with no beginning or end.

In other words, they rejected creationism and anticipated evolutionary geology and even Darwinism by nearly a millennium. This was all as heretical to the Muslim faith they professed as it was to medieval Christianity.

Few exchanges in the history of science have so boldly leapt into the future as this one, which occurred a thousand years ago in a region now regarded as a backwater. We know of it because a few copies of it survived in manuscript and were published almost a millennium later. Twenty-sixty-year-old Abu al-Rayhan al-Biruni, or al-Biruni (973–1048), hailed from near the Aral Sea and went on to distinguish himself in geography, mathematics, trigonometry, comparative religion, astronomy, physics, geology, psychology, mineralogy, and pharmacology. His counterpart, Abu Ali Sura, or Ibn Sina (c. 980–1037), was from the stately city of Bukhara, the great seat of learning in what is now Uzbekistan. He made his mark

# Bartleby, The Scrivener: A Story Of Wall-street

Herman Melville

from  
*The Piazza Tales*  
1856

I AM a rather elderly man. The nature of my avocations for the last thirty years has brought me into more than ordinary contact with what would seem an interesting and somewhat singular set of men, of whom as yet nothing that I know of has ever been written:—I mean the law-copyists or scriveners. I have known very many of them, professionally and privately, and if I pleased, could relate divers histories, at which good-natured gentlemen might smile, and sentimental souls might weep. But I waive the biographies of all other scriveners for a few passages in the life of Bartleby, who was a scrivener of the strangest I ever saw or heard of. While of other law-copyists I might write the complete life, of Bartleby nothing of that sort can be done. I believe that no materials exist for a full and satisfactory biography of this man. It is an irreparable loss to literature. Bartleby was one of those beings of whom nothing is ascertainable, except from the original sources, and in his case those are very small. What my own astonished eyes saw of Bartleby, *that* is all I know of him, except, indeed, one vague report which will appear in the sequel.

Ere introducing the scrivener, as he first appeared to me, it is fit I make some mention of myself, my *employées*, my business, my chambers, and general surroundings; because some such description is indispensable to an adequate understanding of the chief character about to be presented.

Imprimis: I am a man who, from his youth upwards, has been filled with a profound conviction that the easiest way of life is the best. Hence, though I belong to a profession proverbially energetic and nervous, even to turbulence, at times, yet nothing of that sort have I ever suffered to invade my peace. I am one of those unambitious lawyers who never addresses a jury, or in any way draws down public applause; but in the cool tranquility of a snug retreat, do a snug business among rich men's bonds and mortgages and title-deeds. All who know me, consider me an eminently *safe* man. The late John Jacob Astor, a personage little given to poetic enthusiasm, had no hesitation in pronouncing my first grand point to be prudence; my next, method. I do not speak it in vanity, but simply record the fact, that I was not unemployed in my profession by the late John Jacob Astor; a name which, I admit, I love to repeat, for it hath a rounded and orbicular sound to it, and rings like unto bullion. I will freely add, that I was not insensible to the late John Jacob Astor's good opinion.

Some time prior to the period at which this little history begins, my avocations had been largely increased. The good old office, now extinct in the State of New York, of a Master in Chancery, had been conferred upon me. It was not a very arduous office, but very pleasantly remunerative. I seldom lose my temper; much more seldom indulge in dangerous indignation at wrongs and outrages; but I must be permitted to be rash here and declare, that I consider the sudden and violent abrogation of the office of Master in Chancery, by the new Constitution,

as a—premature act; inasmuch as I had counted upon a life-lease of the profits, whereas I only received those of a few short years. But this is by the way.

My chambers were up stairs at No. — Wall-street. At one end they looked upon the white wall of the interior of a spacious sky-light shaft, penetrating the building from top to bottom. This view might have been considered rather tame than otherwise, deficient in what landscape painters call “life.” But if so, the view from the other end of my chambers offered, at least, a contrast, if nothing more. In that direction my windows commanded an unobstructed view of a lofty brick wall, black by age and everlasting shade; which wall required no spy-glass to bring out its lurking beauties, but for the benefit of all near-sighted spectators, was pushed up to within ten feet of my window panes. Owing to the great height of the surrounding buildings, and my chambers being on the second floor, the interval between this wall and mine not a little resembled a huge square cistern.

At the period just preceding the advent of Bartleby, I had two persons as copyists in my employment, and a promising lad as an office-boy. First, Turkey; second, Nippers; third, Ginger Nut. These may seem names, the like of which are not usually found in the Directory. In truth they were nicknames, mutually conferred upon each other by my three clerks, and were deemed expressive of their respective persons or characters. Turkey was a short, pursy Englishman of about my own age, that is, somewhere not far from sixty. In the morning, one might say, his face was of a fine florid hue, but after twelve o’clock, meridian—his dinner hour—it blazed like a grate full of Christmas coals; and continued blazing—but, as it were, with a gradual wane—till 6 o’clock, *p.m.* or thereabouts, after which I saw no more of the proprietor of the face, which gaining its meridian with the sun, seemed to set with it, to rise, culminate, and decline the following day, with the like regularity and undiminished glory. There are many singular coincidences I have known in the course of my life, not the least among which was the fact, that exactly when Turkey displayed his fullest beams from his red and radiant countenance, just then, too, at that critical moment, began the daily period when I considered his business capacities as seriously disturbed for the remainder of the twenty-four hours. Not that he was absolutely idle, or averse to business then; far from it. The difficulty was, he was apt to be altogether too energetic. There was a strange, inflamed, flurried, flighty recklessness of activity about him. He would be incautious in dipping his pen into his inkstand. All his blots upon my documents, were dropped there after twelve o’clock, meridian. Indeed, not only would he be reckless and sadly given to making blots in the afternoon, but some days he went further, and was rather noisy. At such times, too, his face flamed with augmented blazonry, as if cannel coal had been heaped on anthracite. He made an unpleasant racket with his chair; spilled his sand-box; in mending his pens, impatiently split them all to pieces, and threw them on the

floor in a sudden passion; stood up and leaned over his table, boxing his papers about in a most indecorous manner, very sad to behold in an elderly man like him. Nevertheless, as he was in many ways a most valuable person to me, and all the time before twelve o'clock, meridian, was the quickest, steadiest creature too, accomplishing a great deal of work in a style not easy to be matched—for these reasons, I was willing to overlook his eccentricities, though indeed, occasionally, I remonstrated with him. I did this very gently, however, because, though the civilest, nay, the blandest and most reverential of men in the morning, yet in the afternoon he was disposed, upon provocation, to be slightly rash with his tongue, in fact, insolent. Now, valuing his morning services as I did, and resolved not to lose them; yet, at the same time made uncomfortable by his inflamed ways after twelve o'clock; and being a man of peace, unwilling by my admonitions to call forth unseemly retorts from him; I took upon me, one Saturday noon (he was always worse on Saturdays), to hint to him, very kindly, that perhaps now that he was growing old, it might be well to abridge his labors; in short, he need not come to my chambers after twelve o'clock, but, dinner over, had best go home to his lodgings and rest himself till teatime. But no; he insisted upon his afternoon devotions. His countenance became intolerably fervid, as he oratorically assured me—gesticulating with a long ruler at the other end of the room—that if his services in the morning were useful, how indispensable, then, in the afternoon?

"With submission, sir," said Turkey on this occasion, "I consider myself your right-hand man. In the morning I but marshal and deploy my columns; but in the afternoon I put myself at their head, and gallantly charge the foe, thus!"—and he made a violent thrust with the ruler.

"But the blots, Turkey," intimated I.

"True,—but, with submission, sir, behold these hairs! I am getting old. Surely, sir, a blot or two of a warm afternoon is not to be severely urged against gray hairs. Old age—even if it blot the page—is honorable. With submission, sir, we *both* are getting old."

This appeal to my fellow-feeling was hardly to be resisted. At all events, I saw that go he would not. So I made up my mind to let him stay, resolving, nevertheless, to see to it, that during the afternoon he had to do with my less important papers.

Nippers, the second on my list, was a whiskered, sallow, and, upon the whole, rather piratical-looking young man of about five and twenty. I always deemed him the victim of two evil powers—ambition and indigestion. The ambition was evinced by a certain impatience of the duties of a mere copyist, an unwarrantable usurpation of strictly professional affairs, such as the original drawing up of legal documents. The indigestion seemed betokened in an occasional nervous testiness and grinning irritability, causing the teeth to audibly grind together over

mistakes committed in copying; unnecessary maledictions, hissed, rather than spoken, in the heat of business; and especially by a continual discontent with the height of the table where he worked. Though of a very ingenious mechanical turn, Nippers could never get this table to suit him. He put chips under it, blocks of various sorts, bits of pasteboard, and at last went so far as to attempt an exquisite adjustment by final pieces of folded blotting paper. But no invention would answer. If, for the sake of easing his back, he brought the table lid at a sharp angle well up towards his chin, and wrote there like a man using the steep roof of a Dutch house for his desk:—then he declared that it stopped the circulation in his arms. If now he lowered the table to his waistbands, and stooped over it in writing, then there was a sore aching in his back. In short, the truth of the matter was, Nippers knew not what he wanted. Or, if he wanted any thing, it was to be rid of a scrivener's table altogether. Among the manifestations of his diseased ambition was a fondness he had for receiving visits from certain ambiguous-looking fellows in seedy coats, whom he called his clients. Indeed I was aware that not only was he, at times, considerable of a ward-politician, but he occasionally did a little business at the Justices' courts, and was not unknown on the steps of the Tombs. I have good reason to believe, however, that one individual who called upon him at my chambers, and who, with a grand air, he insisted was his client, was no other than a dun, and the alleged title-deed, a bill. But with all his failings, and the annoyances he caused me, Nippers, like his compatriot Turkey, was a very useful man to me; wrote a neat, swift hand; and, when he chose, was not deficient in a gentlemanly sort of deportment. Added to this, he always dressed in a gentlemanly sort of way; and so, incidentally, reflected credit upon my chambers. Whereas with respect to Turkey, I had much ado to keep him from being a reproach to me. His clothes were apt to look oily and smell of eating-houses. He wore his pantaloons very loose and baggy in summer. His coats were execrable; his hat not to be handled. But while the hat was a thing of indifference to me, inasmuch as his natural civility and deference, as a dependent Englishman, always led him to doff it the moment he entered the room, yet his coat was another matter. Concerning his coats, I reasoned with him; but with no effect. The truth was, I suppose, that a man of so small an income, could not afford to sport such a lustrous face and a lustrous coat at one and the same time. As Nippers once observed, Turkey's money went chiefly for red ink. One winter day I presented Turkey with a highly-respectable looking coat of my own, a padded gray coat, of a most comfortable warmth, and which buttoned straight up from the knee to the neck. I thought Turkey would appreciate the favor, and abate his rashness and obstreperousness of afternoons. But no. I verily believe that buttoning himself up in so downy and blanket-like a coat had a pernicious effect upon him; upon the same principle that too much oats are bad for horses.

In fact, precisely as a rash, restive horse is said to feel his oats, so Turkey felt his coat. It made him insolent. He was a man whom prosperity harmed.

Though concerning the self-indulgent habits of Turkey I had my own private surmises, yet touching Nippers I was well persuaded that whatever might be his faults in other respects, he was, at least, a temperate young man. But indeed, nature herself seemed to have been his vintner, and at his birth charged him so thoroughly with an irritable, brandy-like disposition, that all subsequent potations were needless. When I consider how, amid the stillness of my chambers, Nippers would sometimes impatiently rise from his seat, and stooping over his table, spread his arms wide apart, seize the whole desk, and move it, and jerk it, with a grim, grinding motion on the floor, as if the table were a perverse voluntary agent, intent on thwarting and vexing him; I plainly perceive that for Nippers, brandy and water were altogether superfluous.

It was fortunate for me that, owing to its peculiar cause—indigestion—the irritability and consequent nervousness of Nippers, were mainly observable in the morning, while in the afternoon he was comparatively mild. So that Turkey's paroxysms only coming on about twelve o'clock, I never had to do with their eccentricities at one time. Their fits relieved each other like guards. When Nippers' was on, Turkey's was off; and *vice versa*. This was a good natural arrangement under the circumstances.

Ginger Nut, the third on my list, was a lad some twelve years old. His father was a carman, ambitious of seeing his son on the bench instead of a cart, before he died. So he sent him to my office as student at law, errand boy, and cleaner and sweeper, at the rate of one dollar a week. He had a little desk to himself, but he did not use it much. Upon inspection, the drawer exhibited a great array of the shells of various sorts of nuts. Indeed, to this quick-witted youth the whole noble science of the law was contained in a nut-shell. Not the least among the employments of Ginger Nut, as well as one which he discharged with the most alacrity, was his duty as cake and apple purveyor for Turkey and Nippers. Copying law papers being proverbially dry, husky sort of business, my two scriveners were fain to moisten their mouths very often with Spitzembergs to be had at the numerous stalls nigh the Custom House and Post Office. Also, they sent Ginger Nut very frequently for that peculiar cake—small, flat, round, and very spicy—after which he had been named by them. Of a cold morning when business was but dull, Turkey would gobble up scores of these cakes, as if they were mere wafers—indeed they sell them at the rate of six or eight for a penny—the scrape of his pen blending with the crunching of the crisp particles in his mouth. Of all the fiery afternoon blunders and flurried rashnesses of Turkey, was his once moistening a ginger-cake between his lips, and clapping it on to a mortgage for a seal. I came within an ace of dismissing him then. But he mollified me by making

an oriental bow, and saying—"With submission, sir, it was generous of me to find you in stationery on my own account."

Now my original business—that of a conveyancer and title hunter, and drawer-up of recondite documents of all sorts—was considerably increased by receiving the master's office. There was now great work for scriveners. Not only must I push the clerks already with me, but I must have additional help. In answer to my advertisement, a motionless young man one morning, stood upon my office threshold, the door being open, for it was summer. I can see that figure now—pallidly neat, pitifully respectable, incurably forlorn! It was Bartleby.

After a few words touching his qualifications, I engaged him, glad to have among my corps of copyists a man of so singularly sedate an aspect, which I thought might operate beneficially upon the flighty temper of Turkey, and the fiery one of Nippers.

I should have stated before that ground glass folding-doors divided my premises into two parts, one of which was occupied by my scriveners, the other by myself. According to my humor I threw open these doors, or closed them. I resolved to assign Bartleby a corner by the folding-doors, but on my side of them, so as to have this quiet man within easy call, in case any trifling thing was to be done. I placed his desk close up to a small side-window in that part of the room, a window which originally had afforded a lateral view of certain grimy back-yards and bricks, but which, owing to subsequent erections, commanded at present no view at all, though it gave some light. Within three feet of the panes was a wall, and the light came down from far above, between two lofty buildings, as from a very small opening in a dome. Still further to a satisfactory arrangement, I procured a high green folding screen, which might entirely isolate Bartleby from my sight, though not remove him from my voice. And thus, in a manner, privacy and society were conjoined.

At first Bartleby did an extraordinary quantity of writing. As if long famishing for something to copy, he seemed to gorge himself on my documents. There was no pause for digestion. He ran a day and night line, copying by sun-light and by candle-light. I should have been quite delighted with his application, had he been cheerfully industrious. But he wrote on silently, palely, mechanically.

It is, of course, an indispensable part of a scrivener's business to verify the accuracy of his copy, word by word. Where there are two or more scriveners in an office, they assist each other in this examination, one reading from the copy, the other holding the original. It is a very dull, wearisome, and lethargic affair. I can readily imagine that to some sanguine temperaments it would be altogether intolerable. For example, I cannot credit that the mettlesome poet Byron would have contentedly sat down with Bartleby to examine a law document of, say five hundred pages, closely written in a crimped hand.

Now and then, in the haste of business, it had been my habit to assist in comparing some brief document myself, calling Turkey or Nippers for this purpose. One object I had in placing Bartleby so handy to me behind the screen, was to avail myself of his services on such trivial occasions. It was on the third day, I think, of his being with me, and before any necessity had arisen for having his own writing examined, that, being much hurried to complete a small affair I had in hand, I abruptly called to Bartleby. In my haste and natural expectancy of instant compliance, I sat with my head bent over the original on my desk, and my right hand sideways, and somewhat nervously extended with the copy, so that immediately upon emerging from his retreat, Bartleby might snatch it and proceed to business without the least delay.

In this very attitude did I sit when I called to him, rapidly stating what it was I wanted him to do—namely, to examine a small paper with me. Imagine my surprise, nay, my consternation, when without moving from his privacy, Bartleby in a singularly mild, firm voice, replied, “I would prefer not to.”

I sat awhile in perfect silence, rallying my stunned faculties. Immediately it occurred to me that my ears had deceived me, or Bartleby had entirely misunderstood my meaning. I repeated my request in the clearest tone I could assume. But in quite as clear a one came the previous reply, “I would prefer not to.”

“Prefer not to,” echoed I, rising in high excitement, and crossing the room with a stride. “What do you mean? Are you moon-struck? I want you to help me compare this sheet here—take it,” and I thrust it towards him.

“I would prefer not to,” said he.

I looked at him steadfastly. His face was leanly composed; his gray eye dimly calm. Not a wrinkle of agitation rippled him. Had there been the least uneasiness, anger, impatience or impertinence in his manner; in other words, had there been any thing ordinarily human about him, doubtless I should have violently dismissed him from the premises. But as it was, I should have as soon thought of turning my pale plaster-of-paris bust of Cicero out of doors. I stood gazing at him awhile, as he went on with his own writing, and then reseated myself at my desk. This is very strange, thought I. What had one best do? But my business hurried me. I concluded to forget the matter for the present, reserving it for my future leisure. So calling Nippers from the other room, the paper was speedily examined.

A few days after this, Bartleby concluded four lengthy documents, being quadruplicates of a week’s testimony taken before me in my High Court of Chancery. It became necessary to examine them. It was an important suit, and great accuracy was imperative. Having all things arranged I called Turkey, Nippers and Ginger Nut from the next room, meaning to place the four copies in the hands of my four clerks, while I should read from the original. Accordingly

Turkey, Nippers and Ginger Nut had taken their seats in a row, each with his document in hand, when I called to Bartleby to join this interesting group.

“Bartleby! quick, I am waiting.”

I heard a slow scrape of his chair legs on the uncarpeted floor, and soon he appeared standing at the entrance of his hermitage.

“What is wanted?” said he mildly.

“The copies, the copies,” said I hurriedly. “We are going to examine them. There”—and I held towards him the fourth quadruplicate.

“I would prefer not to,” he said, and gently disappeared behind the screen.

For a few moments I was turned into a pillar of salt, standing at the head of my seated column of clerks. Recovering myself, I advanced towards the screen, and demanded the reason for such extraordinary conduct.

“*Why* do you refuse?”

“I would prefer not to.”

With any other man I should have flown outright into a dreadful passion, scorned all further words, and thrust him ignominiously from my presence. But there was something about Bartleby that not only strangely disarmed me, but in a wonderful manner touched and disconcerted me. I began to reason with him.

“These are your own copies we are about to examine. It is labor saving to you, because one examination will answer for your four papers. It is common usage. Every copyist is bound to help examine his copy. Is it not so? Will you not speak? Answer!”

“I prefer not to,” he replied in a flute-like tone. It seemed to me that while I had been addressing him, he carefully revolved every statement that I made; fully comprehended the meaning; could not gainsay the irresistible conclusions; but, at the same time, some paramount consideration prevailed with him to reply as he did.

“You are decided, then, not to comply with my request—a request made according to common usage and common sense?”

He briefly gave me to understand that on that point my judgment was sound. Yes: his decision was irreversible.

It is not seldom the case that when a man is browbeaten in some unprecedented and violently unreasonable way, he begins to stagger in his own plainest faith. He begins, as it were, vaguely to surmise that, wonderful as it may be, all the justice and all the reason is on the other side. Accordingly, if any disinterested persons are present, he turns to them for some reinforcement for his own faltering mind.

“Turkey,” said I, “what do you think of this? Am I not right?”

“With submission, sir,” said Turkey, with his blandest tone, “I think that you are.”

"Nippers," said I, "what do *you* think of it?"

"I think I should kick him out of the office."

(The reader of nice perceptions will here perceive that, it being morning, Turkey's answer is couched in polite and tranquil terms, but Nippers replies in ill-tempered ones. Or, to repeat a previous sentence, Nippers' ugly mood was on duty and Turkey's off.)

"Ginger Nut," said I, willing to enlist the smallest suffrage in my behalf, "what do you think of it?"

"I think, sir, he's a little *luny*," replied Ginger Nut with a grin.

"You hear what they say," said I, turning towards the screen, "come forth and do your duty."

But he vouchsafed no reply. I pondered a moment in sore perplexity. But once more business hurried me. I determined again to postpone the consideration of this dilemma to my future leisure. With a little trouble we made out to examine the papers without Bartleby, though at every page or two, Turkey deferentially dropped his opinion that this proceeding was quite out of the common; while Nippers, twitching in his chair with a dyspeptic nervousness, ground out between his set teeth occasional hissing maledictions against the stubborn oaf behind the screen. And for his (Nippers') part, this was the first and the last time he would do another man's business without pay.

Meanwhile Bartleby sat in his hermitage, oblivious to every thing but his own peculiar business there.

Some days passed, the scrivener being employed upon another lengthy work. His late remarkable conduct led me to regard his ways narrowly. I observed that he never went to dinner; indeed that he never went any where. As yet I had never of my personal knowledge known him to be outside of my office. He was a perpetual sentry in the corner. At about eleven o'clock though, in the morning, I noticed that Ginger Nut would advance toward the opening in Bartleby's screen, as if silently beckoned thither by a gesture invisible to me where I sat. The boy would then leave the office jingling a few pence, and reappear with a handful of ginger-nuts which he delivered in the hermitage, receiving two of the cakes for his trouble.

He lives, then, on ginger-nuts, thought I; never eats a dinner, properly speaking; he must be a vegetarian then; but no; he never eats even vegetables, he eats nothing but ginger-nuts. My mind then ran on in reveries concerning the probable effects upon the human constitution of living entirely on ginger-nuts. Ginger-nuts are so called because they contain ginger as one of their peculiar constituents, and the final flavoring one. Now what was ginger? A hot, spicy thing. Was Bartleby hot and spicy? Not at all. Ginger, then, had no effect upon Bartleby. Probably he preferred it should have none.

Nothing so aggravates an earnest person as a passive resistance. If the individual so resisted be of a not inhumane temper, and the resisting one perfectly harmless in his passivity; then, in the better moods of the former, he will endeavor charitably to construe to his imagination what proves impossible to be solved by his judgment. Even so, for the most part, I regarded Bartleby and his ways. Poor fellow! thought I, he means no mischief; it is plain he intends no insolence; his aspect sufficiently evinces that his eccentricities are involuntary. He is useful to me. I can get along with him. If I turn him away, the chances are he will fall in with some less indulgent employer, and then he will be rudely treated, and perhaps driven forth miserably to starve. Yes. Here I can cheaply purchase a delicious self-approval. To befriend Bartleby; to humor him in his strange willfulness, will cost me little or nothing, while I lay up in my soul what will eventually prove a sweet morsel for my conscience. But this mood was not invariable with me. The passiveness of Bartleby sometimes irritated me. I felt strangely goaded on to encounter him in new opposition, to elicit some angry spark from him answerable to my own. But indeed I might as well have essayed to strike fire with my knuckles against a bit of Windsor soap. But one afternoon the evil impulse in me mastered me, and the following little scene ensued:

"Bartleby," said I, "when those papers are all copied, I will compare them with you."

"I would prefer not to."

"How? Surely you do not mean to persist in that mulish vagary?"

No answer.

I threw open the folding-doors near by, and turning upon Turkey and Nippers, exclaimed in an excited manner—

"He says, a second time, he won't examine his papers. What do you think of it, Turkey?"

It was afternoon, be it remembered. Turkey sat glowing like a brass boiler, his bald head steaming, his hands reeling among his blotted papers.

"Think of it?" roared Turkey; "I think I'll just step behind his screen, and black his eyes for him!"

So saying, Turkey rose to his feet and threw his arms into a pugilistic position. He was hurrying away to make good his promise, when I detained him, alarmed at the effect of incautiously rousing Turkey's combativeness after dinner.

"Sit down, Turkey," said I, "and hear what Nippers has to say. What do you think of it, Nippers? Would I not be justified in immediately dismissing Bartleby?"

"Excuse me, that is for you to decide, sir. I think his conduct quite unusual, and indeed unjust, as regards Turkey and myself. But it may only be a passing whim."

"Ah," exclaimed I, "you have strangely changed your mind then—you speak very gently of him now."

"All beer," cried Turkey; "gentleness is effects of beer—Nippers and I dined together to-day. You see how gentle *I* am, sir. Shall I go and black his eyes?"

"You refer to Bartleby, I suppose. No, not to-day, Turkey," I replied; "pray, put up your fists."

I closed the doors, and again advanced towards Bartleby. I felt additional incentives tempting me to my fate. I burned to be rebelled against again. I remembered that Bartleby never left the office.

"Bartleby," said I, "Ginger Nut is away; just step round to the Post Office, won't you? (it was but a three minute walk,) and see if there is any thing for me."

"I would prefer not to."

"You *will* not?"

"I *prefer* not."

I staggered to my desk, and sat there in a deep study. My blind inveteracy returned. Was there any other thing in which I could procure myself to be ignominiously repulsed by this lean, penniless wight?—my hired clerk? What added thing is there, perfectly reasonable, that he will be sure to refuse to do?

"Bartleby!"

No answer.

"Bartleby," in a louder tone.

No answer.

"Bartleby," I roared.

Like a very ghost, agreeably to the laws of magical invocation, at the third summons, he appeared at the entrance of his hermitage.

"Go to the next room, and tell Nippers to come to me."

"I prefer not to," he respectfully and slowly said, and mildly disappeared.

"Very good, Bartleby," said I, in a quiet sort of serenely severe self-possessed tone, intimating the unalterable purpose of some terrible retribution very close at hand. At the moment I half intended something of the kind. But upon the whole, as it was drawing towards my dinner-hour, I thought it best to put on my hat and walk home for the day, suffering much from perplexity and distress of mind.

Shall I acknowledge it? The conclusion of this whole business was, that it soon became a fixed fact of my chambers, that a pale young scrivener, by the name of Bartleby, had a desk there; that he copied for me at the usual rate of four cents a folio (one hundred words); but he was permanently exempt from examining the work done by him, that duty being transferred to Turkey and Nippers, one of compliment doubtless to their superior acuteness; moreover, said Bartleby was never on any account to be dispatched on the most trivial errand of any sort; and

that even if entreated to take upon him such a matter, it was generally understood that he would prefer not to—in other words, that he would refuse pointblank.

As days passed on, I became considerably reconciled to Bartleby. His steadiness, his freedom from all dissipation, his incessant industry (except when he chose to throw himself into a standing reverie behind his screen), his great, stillness, his unalterableness of demeanor under all circumstances, made him a valuable acquisition. One prime thing was this,—*he was always there*;—first in the morning, continually through the day, and the last at night. I had a singular confidence in his honesty. I felt my most precious papers perfectly safe in his hands. Sometimes to be sure I could not, for the very soul of me, avoid falling into sudden spasmodic passions with him. For it was exceeding difficult to bear in mind all the time those strange peculiarities, privileges, and unheard of exemptions, forming the tacit stipulations on Bartleby's part under which he remained in my office. Now and then, in the eagerness of dispatching pressing business, I would inadvertently summon Bartleby, in a short, rapid tone, to put his finger, say, on the incipient tie of a bit of red tape with which I was about compressing some papers. Of course, from behind the screen the usual answer, "I prefer not to," was sure to come; and then, how could a human creature with the common infirmities of our nature, refrain from bitterly exclaiming upon such perverseness—such unreasonableness. However, every added repulse of this sort which I received only tended to lessen the probability of my repeating the inadvertence.

Here it must be said, that according to the custom of most legal gentlemen occupying chambers in densely-populated law buildings, there were several keys to my door. One was kept by a woman residing in the attic, which person weekly scrubbed and daily swept and dusted my apartments. Another was kept by Turkey for convenience sake. The third I sometimes carried in my own pocket. The fourth I knew not who had.

Now, one Sunday morning I happened to go to Trinity Church, to hear a celebrated preacher, and finding myself rather early on the ground, I thought I would walk around to my chambers for a while. Luckily I had my key with me; but upon applying it to the lock, I found it resisted by something inserted from the inside. Quite surprised, I called out; when to my consternation a key was turned from within; and thrusting his lean visage at me, and holding the door ajar, the apparition of Bartleby appeared, in his shirt sleeves, and otherwise in a strangely tattered dishabille, saying quietly that he was sorry, but he was deeply engaged just then, and—preferred not admitting me at present. In a brief word or two, he moreover added, that perhaps I had better walk round the block two or three times, and by that time he would probably have concluded his affairs.

Now, the utterly unsurmised appearance of Bartleby, tenanting my law-chambers of a Sunday morning, with his cadaverously gentlemanly *nonchalance*, yet

withal firm and self-possessed, had such a strange effect upon me, that incontinently I slunk away from my own door, and did as desired. But not without sundry twinges of impotent rebellion against the mild effrontery of this unaccountable scrivener. Indeed, it was his wonderful mildness chiefly, which not only disarmed me, but unmanned me, as it were. For I consider that one, for the time, is a sort of unmanned when he tranquilly permits his hired clerk to dictate to him, and order him away from his own premises. Furthermore, I was full of uneasiness as to what Bartleby could possibly be doing in my office in his shirt sleeves, and in an otherwise dismantled condition of a Sunday morning. Was any thing amiss going on? Nay, that was out of the question. It was not to be thought of for a moment that Bartleby was an immoral person. But what could he be doing there?—copying? Nay again, whatever might be his eccentricities, Bartleby was an eminently decorous person. He would be the last man to sit down to his desk in any state approaching to nudity. Besides, it was Sunday; and there was something about Bartleby that forbade the supposition that he would by any secular occupation violate the proprieties of the day.

Nevertheless, my mind was not pacified; and full of a restless curiosity, at last I returned to the door. Without hindrance I inserted my key, opened it, and entered. Bartleby was not to be seen. I looked round anxiously, peeped behind his screen; but it was very plain that he was gone. Upon more closely examining the place, I surmised that for an indefinite period Bartleby must have ate, dressed, and slept in my office, and that too without plate, mirror, or bed. The cushioned seat of a rickety old sofa in one corner bore the faint impress of a lean, reclining form. Rolled away under his desk, I found a blanket; under the empty grate, a blacking box and brush; on a chair, a tin basin, with soap and a ragged towel; in a newspaper a few crumbs of ginger-nuts and a morsel of cheese. Yes, thought I, it is evident enough that Bartleby has been making his home here, keeping bachelor's hall all by himself. Immediately then the thought came sweeping across me, What miserable friendlessness and loneliness are here revealed! His poverty is great; but his solitude, how horrible! Think of it. Of a Sunday, Wall-street is deserted as Petra; and every night of every day it is an emptiness. This building too, which of week-days hums with industry and life, at nightfall echoes with sheer vacancy, and all through Sunday is forlorn. And here Bartleby makes his home; sole spectator of a solitude which he has seen all populous—a sort of innocent and transformed Marius brooding among the ruins of Carthage!

For the first time in my life a feeling of overpowering stinging melancholy seized me. Before, I had never experienced aught but a not-unpleasing sadness. The bond of a common humanity now drew me irresistibly to gloom. A fraternal melancholy! For both I and Bartleby were sons of Adam. I remembered the

bright silks and sparkling faces I had seen that day, in gala trim, swan-like sailing down the Mississippi of Broadway; and I contrasted them with the pallid copyist, and thought to myself, Ah, happiness courts the light, so we deem the world is gay; but misery hides aloof, so we deem that misery there is none. These sad fancyings—chimeras, doubtless, of a sick and silly brain—led on to other and more special thoughts, concerning the eccentricities of Bartleby. Presentiments of strange discoveries hovered round me. The scrivener's pale form appeared to me laid out, among uncaring strangers, in its shivering winding sheet.

Suddenly I was attracted by Bartleby's closed desk, the key in open sight left in the lock.

I mean no mischief, seek the gratification of no heartless curiosity, thought I; besides, the desk is mine, and its contents too, so I will make bold to look within. Every thing was methodically arranged, the papers smoothly placed. The pigeon holes were deep, and removing the files of documents, I groped into their recesses. Presently I felt something there, and dragged it out. It was an old bandanna handkerchief, heavy and knotted. I opened it, and saw it was a savings' bank.

I now recalled all the quiet mysteries which I had noted in the man. I remembered that he never spoke but to answer; that though at intervals he had considerable time to himself, yet I had never seen him reading—no, not even a newspaper; that for long periods he would stand looking out, at his pale window behind the screen, upon the dead brick wall; I was quite sure he never visited any refectory or eating house; while his pale face clearly indicated that he never drank beer like Turkey, or tea and coffee even, like other men; that he never went any where in particular that I could learn; never went out for a walk, unless indeed that was the case at present; that he had declined telling who he was, or whence he came, or whether he had any relatives in the world; that though so thin and pale, he never complained of ill health. And more than all, I remembered a certain unconscious air of pallid—how shall I call it?—of pallid haughtiness, say, or rather an austere reserve about him, which had positively awed me into my tame compliance with his eccentricities, when I had feared to ask him to do the slightest incidental thing for me, even though I might know, from his long-continued motionlessness, that behind his screen he must be standing in one of those dead-wall reveries of his.

Revolving all these things, and coupling them with the recently discovered fact that he made my office his constant abiding place and home, and not forgetful of his morbid moodiness; revolving all these things, a prudential feeling began to steal over me. My first emotions had been those of pure melancholy and sincerest pity; but just in proportion as the forlornness of Bartleby grew and grew to my imagination, did that same melancholy merge into fear, that pity into repulsion. So true it is, and so terrible too, that up to a certain point the thought or sight

of misery enlists our best affections; but, in certain special cases, beyond that point it does not. They err who would assert that invariably this is owing to the inherent selfishness of the human heart. It rather proceeds from a certain hopelessness of remedying excessive and organic ill. To a sensitive being, pity is not seldom pain. And when at last it is perceived that such pity cannot lead to effectual succor, common sense bids the soul rid of it. What I saw that morning persuaded me that the scrivener was the victim of innate and incurable disorder. I might give alms to his body; but his body did not pain him; it was his soul that suffered, and his soul I could not reach.

I did not accomplish the purpose of going to Trinity Church that morning. Somehow, the things I had seen disqualified me for the time from church-going. I walked homeward, thinking what I would do with Bartleby. Finally, I resolved upon this;—I would put certain calm questions to him the next morning, touching his history, etc., and if he declined to answer them openly and unreservedly (and I supposed he would prefer not), then to give him a twenty dollar bill over and above whatever I might owe him, and tell him his services were no longer required; but that if in any other way I could assist him, I would be happy to do so, especially if he desired to return to his native place, wherever that might be, I would willingly help to defray the expenses. Moreover, if, after reaching home, he found himself at any time in want of aid, a letter from him would be sure of a reply.

The next morning came.

“Bartleby,” said I, gently calling to him behind his screen.

No reply.

“Bartleby,” said I, in a still gentler tone, “come here; I am not going to ask you to do any thing you would prefer not to do—I simply wish to speak to you.”

Upon this he noiselessly slid into view.

“Will you tell me, Bartleby, where you were born?”

“I would prefer not to.”

“Will you tell me *any thing* about yourself?”

“I would prefer not to.”

“But what reasonable objection can you have to speak to me? I feel friendly towards you.”

He did not look at me while I spoke, but kept his glance fixed upon my bust of Cicero, which as I then sat, was directly behind me, some six inches above my head.

“What is your answer, Bartleby?” said I, after waiting a considerable time for a reply, during which his countenance remained immovable, only there was the faintest conceivable tremor of the white attenuated mouth.

“At present I prefer to give no answer,” he said, and retired into his hermitage.

It was rather weak in me I confess, but his manner on this occasion nettled me. Not only did there seem to lurk in it a certain calm disdain, but his perverseness seemed ungrateful, considering the undeniable good usage and indulgence he had received from me.

Again I sat ruminating what I should do. Mortified as I was at his behavior, and resolved as I had been to dismiss him when I entered my offices, nevertheless I strangely felt something superstitious knocking at my heart, and forbidding me to carry out my purpose, and denouncing me for a villain if I dared to breathe one bitter word against this forlornest of mankind. At last, familiarly drawing my chair behind his screen, I sat down and said: "Bartleby, never mind then about revealing your history; but let me entreat you, as a friend, to comply as far as may be with the usages of this office. Say now you will help to examine papers to-morrow or next day: in short, say now that in a day or two you will begin to be a little reasonable:—say so, Bartleby."

"At present I would prefer not to be a little reasonable," was his mildly cadaverous reply.

Just then the folding-doors opened, and Nippers approached. He seemed suffering from an unusually bad night's rest, induced by severer indigestion then common. He overheard those final words of Bartleby.

"*Prefer not, eh?*" gritted Nippers—"I'd *prefer* him, if I were you, sir," addressing me—"I'd *prefer* him; I'd give him preferences, the stubborn mule! What is it, sir, pray, that he *prefers* not to do now?"

Bartleby moved not a limb.

"Mr. Nippers," said I, "I'd prefer that you would withdraw for the present."

Somehow, of late I had got into the way of involuntarily using this word "prefer" upon all sorts of not exactly suitable occasions. And I trembled to think that my contact with the scrivener had already and seriously affected me in a mental way. And what further and deeper aberration might it not yet produce? This apprehension had not been without efficacy in determining me to summary means.

As Nippers, looking very sour and sulky, was departing, Turkey blandly and deferentially approached.

"With submission, sir," said he, "yesterday I was thinking about Bartleby here, and I think that if he would but prefer to take a quart of good ale every day, it would do much towards mending him, and enabling him to assist in examining his papers."

"So you have got the word too," said I, slightly excited.

"With submission, what word, sir," asked Turkey, respectfully crowding himself into the contracted space behind the screen, and by so doing, making me jostle the scrivener. "What word, sir?"

"I would prefer to be left alone here," said Bartleby, as if offended at being mobbed in his privacy.

"*That's* the word, Turkey," said I—"that's it."

"Oh, *prefer*? oh yes—queer word. I never use it myself. But, sir, as I was saying, if he would but prefer—"

"Turkey," interrupted I, "you will please withdraw."

"Oh certainly, sir, if you prefer that I should."

As he opened the folding-door to retire, Nippers at his desk caught a glimpse of me, and asked whether I would prefer to have a certain paper copied on blue paper or white. He did not in the least roguishly accent the word prefer. It was plain that it involuntarily rolled form his tongue. I thought to myself, surely I must get rid of a demented man, who already has in some degree turned the tongues, if not the heads of myself and clerks. But I thought it prudent not to break the dismission at once.

The next day I noticed that Bartleby did nothing but stand at his window in his dead-wall reverie. Upon asking him why he did not write, he said that he had decided upon doing no more writing.

"Why, how now? what next?" exclaimed I, "do no more writing?"

"No more."

"And what is the reason?"

"Do you not see the reason for yourself," he indifferently replied.

I looked steadfastly at him, and perceived that his eyes looked dull and glazed. Instantly it occurred to me, that his unexampled diligence in copying by his dim window for the first few weeks of his stay with me might have temporarily impaired his vision.

I was touched. I said something in condolence with him. I hinted that of course he did wisely in abstaining from writing for a while; and urged him to embrace that opportunity of taking wholesome exercise in the open air. This, however, he did not do. A few days after this, my other clerks being absent, and being in a great hurry to dispatch certain letters by the mail, I thought that, having nothing else earthly to do, Bartleby would surely be less inflexible than usual, and carry these letters to the post-office. But he blankly declined. So, much to my inconvenience, I went myself.

Still added days went by. Whether Bartleby's eyes improved or not, I could not say. To all appearance, I thought they did. But when I asked him if they did, he vouchsafed no answer. At all events, he would do no copying. At last, in reply to my urgings, he informed me that he had permanently given up copying.

"What!" exclaimed I; "suppose your eyes should get entirely well— better than ever before—would you not copy then?"

"I have given up copying," he answered, and slid aside.

He remained as ever, a fixture in my chamber. Nay—if that were possible—he became still more of a fixture than before. What was to be done? He would do nothing in the office: why should he stay there? In plain fact, he had now become a millstone to me, not only useless as a necklace, but afflictive to bear. Yet I was sorry for him. I speak less than truth when I say that, on his own account, he occasioned me uneasiness. If he would but have named a single relative or friend, I would instantly have written, and urged their taking the poor fellow away to some convenient retreat. But he seemed alone, absolutely alone in the universe. A bit of wreck in the mid Atlantic. At length, necessities connected with my business tyrannized over all other considerations. Decently as I could, I told Bartleby that in six days' time he must unconditionally leave the office. I warned him to take measures, in the interval, for procuring some other abode. I offered to assist him in this endeavor, if he himself would but take the first step towards a removal. "And when you finally quit me, Bartleby," added I, "I shall see that you go not away entirely unprovided. Six days from this hour, remember."

At the expiration of that period, I peeped behind the screen, and lo! Bartleby was there.

I buttoned up my coat, balanced myself; advanced slowly towards him, touched his shoulder, and said, "The time has come; you must quit this place; I am sorry for you; here is money; but you must go."

"I would prefer not," he replied, with his back still towards me.

"You *must*."

He remained silent.

Now I had an unbounded confidence in this man's common honesty. He had frequently restored to me sixpences and shillings carelessly dropped upon the floor, for I am apt to be very reckless in such shirt-button affairs. The proceeding then which followed will not be deemed extraordinary.

"Bartleby," said I, "I owe you twelve dollars on account; here are thirty-two; the odd twenty are yours.—Will you take it?" and I handed the bills towards him.

But he made no motion.

"I will leave them here then," putting them under a weight on the table. Then taking my hat and cane and going to the door I tranquilly turned and added—"After you have removed your things from these offices, Bartleby, you will of course lock the door—since every one is now gone for the day but you—and if you please, slip your key underneath the mat, so that I may have it in the morning. I shall not see you again; so good-bye to you. If hereafter in your new place of abode I can be of any service to you, do not fail to advise me by letter. Good-bye, Bartleby, and fare you well."

But he answered not a word; like the last column of some ruined temple, he remained standing mute and solitary in the middle of the otherwise deserted room.

As I walked home in a pensive mood, my vanity got the better of my pity. I could not but highly plume myself on my masterly management in getting rid of Bartleby. Masterly I call it, and such it must appear to any dispassionate thinker. The beauty of my procedure seemed to consist in its perfect quietness. There was no vulgar bullying, no bravado of any sort, no choleric hectoring, and striding to and fro across the apartment, jerking out vehement commands for Bartleby to bundle himself off with his beggarly traps. Nothing of the kind. Without loudly bidding Bartleby depart—as an inferior genius might have done—I assumed the ground that depart he must; and upon that assumption built all I had to say. The more I thought over my procedure, the more I was charmed with it. Nevertheless, next morning, upon awakening, I had my doubts,—I had somehow slept off the fumes of vanity. One of the coolest and wisest hours a man has, is just after he awakes in the morning. My procedure seemed as sagacious as ever.—but only in theory. How it would prove in practice—there was the rub. It was truly a beautiful thought to have assumed Bartleby's departure; but, after all, that assumption was simply my own, and none of Bartleby's. The great point was, not whether I had assumed that he would quit me, but whether he would prefer so to do. He was more a man of preferences than assumptions.

After breakfast, I walked down town, arguing the probabilities *pro* and *con*. One moment I thought it would prove a miserable failure, and Bartleby would be found all alive at my office as usual; the next moment it seemed certain that I should see his chair empty. And so I kept veering about. At the corner of Broadway and Canal-street, I saw quite an excited group of people standing in earnest conversation.

“I'll take odds he doesn't,” said a voice as I passed.

“Doesn't go?—done!” said I, “put up your money.”

I was instinctively putting my hand in my pocket to produce my own, when I remembered that this was an election day. The words I had overheard bore no reference to Bartleby, but to the success or non-success of some candidate for the mayoralty. In my intent frame of mind, I had, as it were, imagined that all Broadway shared in my excitement, and were debating the same question with me. I passed on, very thankful that the uproar of the street screened my momentary absent-mindedness.

As I had intended, I was earlier than usual at my office door. I stood listening for a moment. All was still. He must be gone. I tried the knob. The door was locked. Yes, my procedure had worked to a charm; he indeed must be vanished. Yet a certain melancholy mixed with this: I was almost sorry for my brilliant suc-

cess. I was fumbling under the door mat for the key, which Bartleby was to have left there for me, when accidentally my knee knocked against a panel, producing a summoning sound, and in response a voice came to me from within—"Not yet; I am occupied."

It was Bartleby.

I was thunderstruck. For an instant I stood like the man who, pipe in mouth, was killed one cloudless afternoon long ago in Virginia, by a summer lightning; at his own warm open window he was killed, and remained leaning out there upon the dreamy afternoon, till some one touched him, when he fell.

"Not gone!" I murmured at last. But again obeying that wondrous ascendancy which the inscrutable scrivener had over me, and from which ascendancy, for all my chafing, I could not completely escape, I slowly went down stairs and out into the street, and while walking round the block, considered what I should next do in this unheard-of perplexity. Turn the man out by an actual thrusting I could not; to drive him away by calling him hard names would not do; calling in the police was an unpleasant idea; and yet, permit him to enjoy his cadaverous triumph over me,—this too I could not think of. What was to be done? or, if nothing could be done, was there any thing further that I could *assume* in the matter? Yes, as before I had prospectively assumed that Bartleby would depart, so now I might retrospectively assume that departed he was. In the legitimate carrying out of this assumption, I might enter my office in a great hurry, and pretending not to see Bartleby at all, walk straight against him as if he were air. Such a proceeding would in a singular degree have the appearance of a home-thrust. It was hardly possible that Bartleby could withstand such an application of the doctrine of assumptions. But upon second thoughts the success of the plan seemed rather dubious. I resolved to argue the matter over with him again.

"Bartleby," said I, entering the office, with a quietly severe expression, "I am seriously displeased. I am pained, Bartleby. I had thought better of you. I had imagined you of such a gentlemanly organization, that in any delicate dilemma a slight hint would suffice—in short, an assumption. But it appears I am deceived. Why," I added, unaffectedly starting, "you have not even touched that money yet," pointing to it, just where I had left it the evening previous.

He answered nothing.

"Will you, or will you not, quit me?" I now demanded in a sudden passion, advancing close to him.

"I would prefer *not* to quit you," he replied, gently emphasizing the *not*.

"What earthly right have you to stay here? Do you pay any rent? Do you pay my taxes? Or is this property yours?"

He answered nothing.

"Are you ready to go on and write now? Are your eyes recovered? Could you copy a small paper for me this morning? or help examine a few lines? or step round to the post-office? In a word, will you do any thing at all, to give a coloring to your refusal to depart the premises?"

He silently retired into his hermitage.

I was now in such a state of nervous resentment that I thought it but prudent to check myself at present from further demonstrations. Bartleby and I were alone. I remembered the tragedy of the unfortunate Adams and the still more unfortunate Colt in the solitary office of the latter; and how poor Colt, being dreadfully incensed by Adams, and imprudently permitting himself to get wildly excited, was at unawares hurried into his fatal act—an act which certainly no man could possibly deplore more than the actor himself. Often it had occurred to me in my ponderings upon the subject, that had that altercation taken place in the public street, or at a private residence, it would not have terminated as it did. It was the circumstance of being alone in a solitary office, up stairs, of a building entirely unhallowed by humanizing domestic associations—an uncarpeted office, doubtless, of a dusty, haggard sort of appearance;—this it must have been, which greatly helped to enhance the irritable desperation of the hapless Colt.

But when this old Adam of resentment rose in me and tempted me concerning Bartleby, I grappled him and threw him. How? Why, simply by recalling the divine injunction: "A new commandment give I unto you, that ye love one another." Yes, this it was that saved me. Aside from higher considerations, charity often operates as a vastly wise and prudent principle—a great safeguard to its possessor. Men have committed murder for jealousy's sake, and anger's sake, and hatred's sake, and selfishness' sake, and spiritual pride's sake; but no man that ever I heard of, ever committed a diabolical murder for sweet charity's sake. Mere self-interest, then, if no better motive can be enlisted, should, especially with high-tempered men, prompt all beings to charity and philanthropy. At any rate, upon the occasion in question, I strove to drown my exasperated feelings towards the scrivener by benevolently construing his conduct. Poor fellow, poor fellow! thought I, he don't mean any thing; and besides, he has seen hard times, and ought to be indulged.

I endeavored also immediately to occupy myself, and at the same time to comfort my despondency. I tried to fancy that in the course of the morning, at such time as might prove agreeable to him. Bartleby, of his own free accord, would emerge from his hermitage, and take up some decided line of march in the direction of the door. But no. Half-past twelve o'clock came; Turkey began to glow in the face, overturn his inkstand, and become generally obstreperous; Nippers abated down into quietude and courtesy; Ginger Nut munched his noon apple; and Bartleby remained standing at his window in one of his profoundest dead-

wall reveries. Will it be credited? Ought I to acknowledge it? That afternoon I left the office without saying one further word to him.

Some days now passed, during which, at leisure intervals I looked a little into "Edwards on the Will," and "Priestly on Necessity." Under the circumstances, those books induced a salutary feeling. Gradually I slid into the persuasion that these troubles of mine touching the scrivener, had been all predestinated from eternity, and Bartleby was billeted upon me for some mysterious purpose of an all-wise Providence, which it was not for a mere mortal like me to fathom. Yes, Bartleby, stay there behind your screen, thought i; I shall persecute you no more; you are harmless and noiseless as any of these old chairs; in short, I never feel so private as when I know you are here. At last I see it, I feel it; I penetrate to the predestinated purpose of my life. I am content. Others may have loftier parts to enact; but my mission in this world, Bartleby, is to furnish you with office-room for such period as you may see fit to remain.

I believe that this wise and blessed frame of mind would have continued with me, had it not been for the unsolicited and uncharitable remarks obtruded upon me by my professional friends who visited the rooms. But thus it often is, that the constant friction of illiberal minds wears out at last the best resolves of the more generous. Though to be sure, when I reflected upon it, it was not strange that people entering my office should be struck by the peculiar aspect of the unaccountable Bartleby, and so be tempted to throw out some sinister observations concerning him. Sometimes an attorney having business with me, and calling at my office and finding no one but the scrivener there, would undertake to obtain some sort of precise information from him touching my whereabouts; but without heeding his idle talk, Bartleby would remain standing immovable in the middle of the room. So after contemplating him in that position for a time, the attorney would depart, no wiser than he came.

Also, when a Reference was going on, and the room full of lawyers and witnesses and business was driving fast; some deeply occupied legal gentleman present, seeing Bartleby wholly unemployed, would request him to run round to his (the legal gentleman's) office and fetch some papers for him. Thereupon, Bartleby would tranquilly decline, and yet remain idle as before. Then the lawyer would give a great stare, and turn to me. And what could I say? At last I was made aware that all through the circle of my professional acquaintance, a whisper of wonder was running round, having reference to the strange creature I kept at my office. This worried me very much. And as the idea came upon me of his possibly turning out a long-lived man, and keep occupying my chambers, and denying my authority; and perplexing my visitors; and scandalizing my professional reputation; and casting a general gloom over the premises; keeping soul and body together to the last upon his savings (for doubtless he spent but half a

dime a day), and in the end perhaps outlive me, and claim possession of my office by right of his perpetual occupancy: as all these dark anticipations crowded upon me more and more, and my friends continually intruded their relentless remarks upon the apparition in my room; a great change was wrought in me. I resolved to gather all my faculties together, and for ever rid me of this intolerable incubus.

Ere revolving any complicated project, however, adapted to this end, I first simply suggested to Bartleby the propriety of his permanent departure. In a calm and serious tone, I commended the idea to his careful and mature consideration. But having taken three days to meditate upon it, he apprised me that his original determination remained the same; in short, that he still preferred to abide with me.

What shall I do? I now said to myself, buttoning up my coat to the last button. What shall I do? what ought I to do? what does conscience say I *should* do with this man, or rather ghost. Rid myself of him, I must; go, he shall. But how? You will not thrust him, the poor, pale, passive mortal,—you will not thrust such a helpless creature out of your door? you will not dishonor yourself by such cruelty? No, I will not, I cannot do that. Rather would I let him live and die here, and then mason up his remains in the wall. What then will you do? For all your coaxing, he will not budge. Bribes he leaves under your own paperweight on your table; in short, it is quite plain that he prefers to cling to you.

Then something severe, something unusual must be done. What! surely you will not have him collared by a constable, and commit his innocent pallor to the common jail? And upon what ground could you procure such a thing to be done?—a vagrant, is he? What! he a vagrant, a wanderer, who refuses to budge? It is because he will *not* be a vagrant, then, that you seek to count him *as* a vagrant. That is too absurd. No visible means of support: there I have him. Wrong again: for indubitably he *does* support himself, and that is the only unanswerable proof that any man can show of his possessing the means so to do. No more then. Since he will not quit me, I must quit him. I will change my offices; I will move elsewhere; and give him fair notice, that if I find him on my new premises I will then proceed against him as a common trespasser.

Acting accordingly, next day I thus addressed him: “I find these chambers too far from the City Hall; the air is unwholesome. In a word, I propose to remove my offices next week, and shall no longer require your services. I tell you this now, in order that you may seek another place.”

He made no reply, and nothing more was said.

On the appointed day I engaged carts and men, proceeded to my chambers, and having but little furniture, every thing was removed in a few hours. Throughout, the scrivener remained standing behind the screen, which I directed to be removed the last thing. It was withdrawn; and being folded up like a huge folio,

left him the motionless occupant of a naked room. I stood in the entry watching him a moment, while something from within me upbraided me.

I re-entered, with my hand in my pocket—and—and my heart in my mouth.

“Good-bye, Bartleby; I am going—good-bye, and God some way bless you; and take that,” slipping something in his hand. But it dropped upon the floor, and then,—strange to say—I tore myself from him whom I had so longed to be rid of.

Established in my new quarters, for a day or two I kept the door locked, and started at every footfall in the passages. When I returned to my rooms after any little absence, I would pause at the threshold for an instant, and attentively listen, ere applying my key. But these fears were needless. Bartleby never came nigh me.

I thought all was going well, when a perturbed looking stranger visited me, inquiring whether I was the person who had recently occupied rooms at No. — Wall-street.

Full of forebodings, I replied that I was.

“Then sir,” said the stranger, who proved a lawyer, “you are responsible for the man you left there. He refuses to do any copying; he refuses to do any thing; he says he prefers not to; and he refuses to quit the premises.”

“I am very sorry, sir,” said I, with assumed tranquility, but an inward tremor, “but, really, the man you allude to is nothing to me—he is no relation or apprentice of mine, that you should hold me responsible for him.”

“In mercy’s name, who is he?”

“I certainly cannot inform you. I know nothing about him. Formerly I employed him as a copyist; but he has done nothing for me now for some time past.”

“I shall settle him then,—good morning, sir.”

Several days passed, and I heard nothing more; and though I often felt a charitable prompting to call at the place and see poor Bartleby, yet a certain squeamishness of I know not what withheld me.

All is over with him, by this time, thought I at last, when through another week no further intelligence reached me. But coming to my room the day after, I found several persons waiting at my door in a high state of nervous excitement.

“That’s the man—here he comes,” cried the foremost one, whom I recognized as the lawyer who had previously called upon me alone.

“You must take him away, sir, at once,” cried a portly person among them, advancing upon me, and whom I knew to be the landlord of No. — Wall-street. “These gentlemen, my tenants, cannot stand it any longer; Mr. B—” pointing to the lawyer, “has turned him out of his room, and he now persists in haunting the building generally, sitting upon the banisters of the stairs by day, and sleeping in

the entry by night. Every body is concerned; clients are leaving the offices; some fears are entertained of a mob; something you must do, and that without delay."

Aghast at this torrent, I fell back before it, and would fain have locked myself in my new quarters. In vain I persisted that Bartleby was nothing to me—no more than to any one else. In vain:—I was the last person known to have any thing to do with him, and they held me to the terrible account. Fearful then of being exposed in the papers (as one person present obscurely threatened) I considered the matter, and at length said, that if the lawyer would give me a confidential interview with the scrivener, in his (the lawyer's) own room, I would that afternoon strive my best to rid them of the nuisance they complained of.

Going up stairs to my old haunt, there was Bartleby silently sitting upon the banister at the landing.

"What are you doing here, Bartleby?" said I.

"Sitting upon the banister," he mildly replied.

I motioned him into the lawyer's room, who then left us.

"Bartleby," said I, "are you aware that you are the cause of great tribulation to me, by persisting in occupying the entry after being dismissed from the office?"

No answer.

"Now one of two things must take place. Either you must do something, or something must be done to you. Now what sort of business would you like to engage in? Would you like to re-engage in copying for some one?"

"No; I would prefer not to make any change."

"Would you like a clerkship in a dry-goods store?"

"There is too much confinement about that. No, I would not like a clerkship; but I am not particular."

"Too much confinement," I cried, "why you keep yourself confined all the time!"

"I would prefer not to take a clerkship," he rejoined, as if to settle that little item at once.

"How would a bar-tender's business suit you? There is no trying of the eyesight in that."

"I would not like it at all; though, as I said before, I am not particular."

His unwonted wordiness inspirited me. I returned to the charge.

"Well then, would you like to travel through the country collecting bills for the merchants? That would improve your health."

"No, I would prefer to be doing something else."

"How then would going as a companion to Europe, to entertain some young gentleman with your conversation,—how would that suit you?"

"Not at all. It does not strike me that there is any thing definite about that. I like to be stationary. But I am not particular."

"Stationary you shall be then," I cried, now losing all patience, and for the first time in all my exasperating connection with him fairly flying into a passion. "If you do not go away from these premises before night, I shall feel bound—indeed I *am* bound—to—to—to quit the premises myself!" I rather absurdly concluded, knowing not with what possible threat to try to frighten his immobility into compliance. Despairing of all further efforts, I was precipitately leaving him, when a final thought occurred to me—one which had not been wholly undulgued before.

"Bartleby," said I, in the kindest tone I could assume under such exciting circumstances, "will you go home with me now—not to my office, but my dwelling—and remain there till we can conclude upon some convenient arrangement for you at our leisure? Come, let us start now, right away."

"No: at present I would prefer not to make any change at all."

I answered nothing; but effectually dodging every one by the suddenness and rapidity of my flight, rushed from the building, ran up Wall-street towards Broadway, and jumping into the first omnibus was soon removed from pursuit. As soon as tranquility returned I distinctly perceived that I had now done all that I possibly could, both in respect to the demands of the landlord and his tenants, and with regard to my own desire and sense of duty, to benefit Bartleby, and shield him from rude persecution. I now strove to be entirely care-free and quiescent; and my conscience justified me in the attempt; though indeed it was not so successful as I could have wished. So fearful was I of being again hunted out by the incensed landlord and his exasperated tenants, that, surrendering my business to Nippers, for a few days I drove about the upper part of the town and through the suburbs, in my rockaway; crossed over to Jersey City and Hoboken, and paid fugitive visits to Manhattanville and Astoria. In fact I almost lived in my rockaway for the time.

When again I entered my office, lo, a note from the landlord lay upon the desk. I opened it with trembling hands. It informed me that the writer had sent to the police, and had Bartleby removed to the Tombs as a vagrant. Moreover, since I knew more about him than any one else, he wished me to appear at that place, and make a suitable statement of the facts. These tidings had a conflicting effect upon me. At first I was indignant; but at last almost approved. The landlord's energetic, summary disposition had led him to adopt a procedure which I do not think I would have decided upon myself; and yet as a last resort, under such peculiar circumstances, it seemed the only plan.

As I afterwards learned, the poor scrivener, when told that he must be conducted to the Tombs, offered not the slightest obstacle, but in his pale unmoving way, silently acquiesced.

Some of the compassionate and curious bystanders joined the party; and headed by one of the constables arm in arm with Bartleby, the silent procession filed its way through all the noise, and heat, and joy of the roaring thoroughfares at noon.

The same day I received the note I went to the Tombs, or to speak more properly, the Halls of Justice. Seeking the right officer, I stated the purpose of my call, and was informed that the individual I described was indeed within. I then assured the functionary that Bartleby was a perfectly honest man, and greatly to be compassionated, however unaccountably eccentric. I narrated all I knew, and closed by suggesting the idea of letting him remain in as indulgent confinement as possible till something less harsh might be done—though indeed I hardly knew what. At all events, if nothing else could be decided upon, the alms-house must receive him. I then begged to have an interview.

Being under no disgraceful charge, and quite serene and harmless in all his ways, they had permitted him freely to wander about the prison, and especially in the inclosed grass-platted yard thereof. And so I found him there, standing all alone in the quietest of the yards, his face towards a high wall, while all around, from the narrow slits of the jail windows, I thought I saw peering out upon him the eyes of murderers and thieves.

“Bartleby!”

“I know you,” he said, without looking round,—“and I want nothing to say to you.”

“It was not I that brought you here, Bartleby,” said I, keenly pained at his implied suspicion. “And to you, this should not be so vile a place. Nothing reproachful attaches to you by being here. And see, it is not so sad a place as one might think. Look, there is the sky, and here is the grass.”

“I know where I am,” he replied, but would say nothing more, and so I left him.

As I entered the corridor again, a broad meat-like man, in an apron, accosted me, and jerking his thumb over his shoulder said—“Is that your friend?”

“Yes.”

“Does he want to starve? If he does, let him live on the prison fare, that’s all.”

“Who are you?” asked I, not knowing what to make of such an unofficially speaking person in such a place.

“I am the grub-man. Such gentlemen as have friends here, hire me to provide them with something good to eat.”

“Is this so?” said I, turning to the turnkey.

He said it was.

"Well then," said I, slipping some silver into the grub-man's hands (for so they called him). "I want you to give particular attention to my friend there; let him have the best dinner you can get. And you must be as polite to him as possible."

"Introduce me, will you?" said the grub-man, looking at me with an expression which seemed to say he was all impatience for an opportunity to give a specimen of his breeding.

Thinking it would prove of benefit to the scrivener, I acquiesced; and asking the grub-man his name, went up with him to Bartleby.

"Bartleby, this is Mr. Cutlets; you will find him very useful to you."

"Your servant, sir, your servant," said the grub-man, making a low salutation behind his apron. "Hope you find it pleasant here, sir;—spacious grounds—cool apartments, sir—hope you'll stay with us some time—try to make it agreeable. May Mrs. Cutlets and I have the pleasure of your company to dinner, sir, in Mrs. Cutlets' private room?"

"I prefer not to dine to-day," said Bartleby, turning away. "It would disagree with me; I am unused to dinners." So saying he slowly moved to the other side of the inclosure, and took up a position fronting the dead-wall.

"How's this?" said the grub-man, addressing me with a stare of astonishment. "He's odd, aint he?"

"I think he is a little deranged," said I, sadly.

"Deranged? deranged is it? Well now, upon my word, I thought that friend of yours was a gentleman forger; they are always pale and genteel-like, them forgers. I can't pity'em—can't help it, sir. Did you know Monroe Edwards?" he added touchingly, and paused. Then, laying his hand pityingly on my shoulder, sighed, "he died of consumption at Sing-Sing. So you weren't acquainted with Monroe?"

"No, I was never socially acquainted with any forgers. But I cannot stop longer. Look to my friend yonder. You will not lose by it. I will see you again."

Some few days after this, I again obtained admission to the Tombs, and went through the corridors in quest of Bartleby; but without finding him.

"I saw him coming from his cell not long ago," said a turnkey, "may be he's gone to loiter in the yards."

So I went in that direction.

"Are you looking for the silent man?" said another turnkey passing me. "Yonder he lies—sleeping in the yard there. 'Tis not twenty minutes since I saw him lie down."

The yard was entirely quiet. It was not accessible to the common prisoners. The surrounding walls, of amazing thickness, kept off all sounds behind them. The Egyptian character of the masonry weighed upon me with its gloom. But a soft imprisoned turf grew under foot. The heart of the eternal pyramids, it

seemed, wherein, by some strange magic, through the clefts, grass-seed, dropped by birds, had sprung.

Strangely huddled at the base of the wall, his knees drawn up, and lying on his side, his head touching the cold stones, I saw the wasted Bartleby. But nothing stirred. I paused; then went close up to him; stooped over, and saw that his dim eyes were open; otherwise he seemed profoundly sleeping. Something prompted me to touch him. I felt his hand, when a tingling shiver ran up my arm and down my spine to my feet.

The round face of the grub-man peered upon me now. "His dinner is ready. Won't he dine to-day, either? Or does he live without dining?"

"Lives without dining," said I, and closed his eyes.

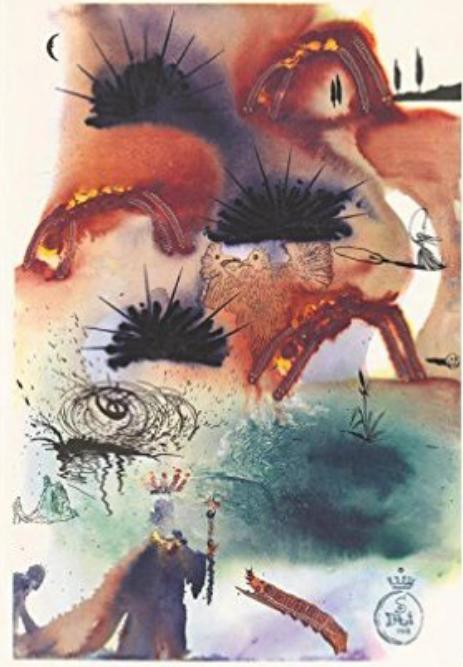
"Eh!—He's asleep, aint he?"

"With kings and counselors," murmured I.

\* \* \* \* \*

There would seem little need for proceeding further in this history. Imagination will readily supply the meager recital of poor Bartleby's interment. But ere parting with the reader, let me say, that if this little narrative has sufficiently interested him, to awaken curiosity as to who Bartleby was, and what manner of life he led prior to the present narrator's making his acquaintance, I can only reply, that in such curiosity I fully share, but am wholly unable to gratify it. Yet here I hardly know whether I should divulge one little item of rumor, which came to my ear a few months after the scrivener's decease. Upon what basis it rested, I could never ascertain; and hence, how true it is I cannot now tell. But inasmuch as this vague report has not been without certain strange suggestive interest to me, however sad, it may prove the same with some others; and so I will briefly mention it. The report was this: that Bartleby had been a subordinate clerk in the Dead Letter Office at Washington, from which he had been suddenly removed by a change in the administration. When I think over this rumor, I cannot adequately express the emotions which seize me. Dead letters! does it not sound like dead men? Conceive a man by nature and misfortune prone to a pallid hopelessness, can any business seem more fitted to heighten it than that of continually handling these dead letters, and assorting them for the flames? For by the cart-load they are annually burned. Sometimes from out the folded paper the pale clerk takes a ring:—the finger it was meant for, perhaps, moulders in the grave; a bank-note sent in swiftest charity:—he whom it would relieve, nor eats nor hungers any more; pardon for those who died despairing; hope for those who died unhoping; good tidings for those who died stifled by unrelieved calamities. On errands of life, these letters speed to death.

Ah Bartleby! Ah humanity!



Lewis Carroll

*Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*150TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION ILLUSTRATED BY SALVADOR DALÍ  
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## Chapter II

# The Pool of Tears

'Curiouser and curiouser!' cried Alice (she was so much surprised, that for the moment she quite forgot how to speak good English); 'now I'm opening out like the largest telescope that ever was! Good-bye, feet!' (for when she looked down at her feet, they seemed to be almost out of sight, they were getting so far off). 'Oh, my poor little feet, I wonder who will put on your shoes and stockings for you now, dears? I'm sure *I* shan't be able! I shall be a great deal too far off to trouble myself about you: you must manage the best way you can; – but I must be kind to them,' thought Alice, 'or perhaps they won't walk the way I want to go! Let me see: I'll give them a new pair of boots every Christmas.'

And she went on planning to herself how she would manage it. 'They must go by the carrier,' she thought, 'and how funny it'll seem, sending presents to one's own feet! And how odd the directions will look!

ALICE'S RIGHT FOOT, ESQ.  
HEARTHrug,  
NEAR THE FENDER,  
(WITH ALICE'S LOVE).

Oh dear, what nonsense I'm talking!

Just then her head struck against the roof of the hall; in fact she was now more than nine feet high and she at once took up the little golden key and hurried off to the garden door.



Poor Alice! It was as much as she could do, lying down on one side, to look through into the garden with one eye; but to get through was more hopeless than ever; she sat down and began to cry again.

'You ought to be ashamed of yourself,' said Alice, 'a great girl like you,' (she might well say this), 'to go on crying in this way! Stop this moment, I tell you!' But she went on all the same, shedding gallons of tears, until there was a large pool all round her, about four inches deep and reaching half down the hall.

After a time she heard a little patterning of feet in the distance and she hastily dried her eyes to see what was coming. It was the White Rabbit returning, splendidly dressed, with a pair of white kid gloves in one hand and a large fan in the other; he came trotting along in a great hurry, muttering to himself as he came, 'Oh! the Duchess, the Duchess! Oh! won't she be savage if I've kept her waiting!' Alice felt so desperate that she was ready to ask help of any one; so, when the Rabbit came near her, she began, in a low, timid voice, 'If you please, sir —' The Rabbit started violently, dropped the white kid gloves and the fan, and skurried away into the darkness as hard as he could go.

Alice took up the fan and gloves, and, as the hall was very hot, she kept fanning herself all the time she went on talking, 'Dear, dear! How queer everything is today! And yesterday things went on just as usual. I wonder if I've been changed in the night? Let me think: was I the same when I got up this morning? I almost think I can remember feeling a little different. But if I'm not the same, the next question is, Who in the world am I? Ah, *that's* the great puzzle!' And she began thinking over all the children she knew that were of the same age as herself, to see if she could have been changed for any of them.

'I'm sure I'm not Ada,' she said, 'for her hair goes in such long ringlets, and mine doesn't go in ringlets at all; and I'm sure I can't be Mabel, for I know all sorts of things, and she, oh! she knows such a very little! Besides, *she's* she, and I'm I, and — oh dear, how puzzling it all is! I'll try if I know all the things I used to know. Let me see: four times five is twelve, and four times six is thirteen, and four times seven is — oh dear! I shall never get to twenty at that rate! However, the Multiplication Table doesn't signify; let's try Geography. London is the capital of Paris, and Paris is the capital of Rome, and Rome — no, *that's* all wrong, I'm



certain! I must have been changed for Mabel! I'll try and say "How doth the little – " and she crossed her hands on her lap as if she were saying lessons and began to repeat it, but her voice sounded hoarse and strange, and the words did not come the same as they used to do:

*'How doth the little crocodile  
Improve his shining tail,  
And pour the waters of the Nile  
On every golden scale!  
  
How cheerfully he seems to grin,  
How neatly spread his claws,  
And welcome little fishes in  
With gently smiling jaws!'*

'I'm sure those are not the right words,' said poor Alice, and her eyes filled with tears again as she went on, 'I must be Mabel after all, and I shall have to go and live in that poky little house and have next to no toys to play with, and oh! ever so many lessons to learn! No, I've made up my mind about it; if I'm Mabel, I'll stay down here! It'll be no use their putting their heads down and saying "Come up again, dear!" I shall only look up and say, "Who am I then? Tell me that first, and then, if I like being that person, I'll come up: if not, I'll stay down here till I'm somebody else" – but, oh dear!' cried Alice, with a sudden burst of tears, 'I do wish they *would* put their heads down! I am so *very* tired of being all alone here!'

As she said this she looked down at her hands, and was surprised to see that she had put on one of the Rabbit's little white kid gloves while she was talking. 'How *can* I have done that?' she thought, 'I must be growing small again.' She got up and went to the table to measure herself by it, and found that, as nearly as she could guess, she was now about two feet high and was going on shrinking rapidly; she soon found out that the cause of this was the fan she was holding, and she dropped it hastily, just in time to avoid shrinking away altogether.

'That *was* a narrow escape!' said Alice, a good deal frightened at the sudden change, but very glad to find herself still in existence, 'and now for the garden!' and she ran with all speed back to the little door; but, alas! the little door was shut again, and the little golden key was lying on the glass table as before, 'and things are worse than ever,' thought the poor child, 'for I never was so small as this before, never! And I declare it's too bad, that it is!'

As she said these words her foot slipped and in another moment, splash! she was up to her chin in salt water. Her first idea was that she had somehow fallen into the sea, 'and in that case I can go back by railway,' she said to herself. (Alice had been to the seaside once in her life, and had come to the general conclusion, that wherever you go to on the English coast you find a number of bathing machines

in the sea, some children digging in the sand with wooden spades, then a row of lodging houses and behind them a railway station.) However, she soon made out that she was in the pool of tears which she had wept when she was nine feet high.

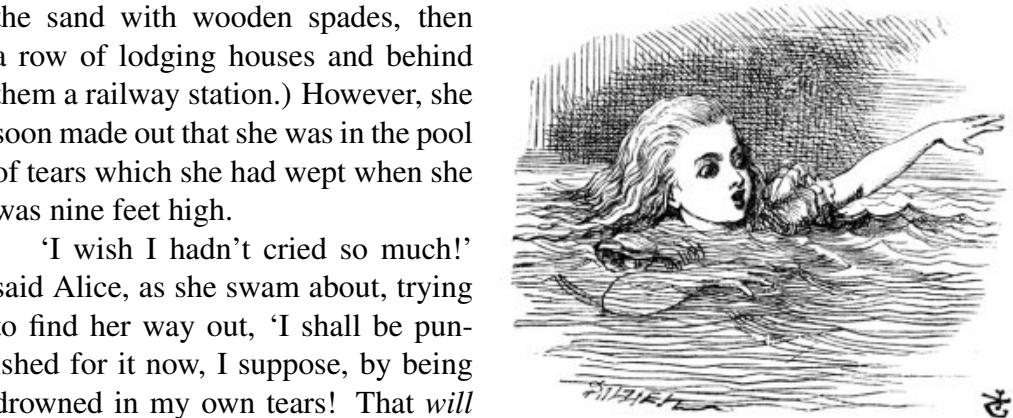
'I wish I hadn't cried so much!' said Alice, as she swam about, trying to find her way out, 'I shall be punished for it now, I suppose, by being drowned in my own tears! That *will* be a queer thing, to be sure! However, everything is queer to-day.'

Just then she heard something splashing about in the pool a little way off, and she swam nearer to make out what it was; at first she thought it must be a walrus or hippopotamus, but then she remembered how small she was now, and she soon made out that it was only a mouse that had slipped in like herself.

'Would it be of any use, now,' thought Alice, 'to speak to this mouse? Everything is so out-of-the-way down here, that I should think very likely it can talk; at any rate, there's no harm in trying.' So she began, 'O Mouse, do you know the way out of this pool? I am very tired of swimming about here, O Mouse!' (Alice thought this must be the right way of speaking to a mouse; she had never done such a thing before, but she remembered having seen in her brother's Latin Gram-

mar, 'A mouse – of a mouse – to a mouse – a mouse – O mouse!') The Mouse looked at her rather inquisitively, and seemed to her to wink with one of its little eyes, but it said nothing.

'Perhaps it doesn't understand English,' thought Alice, 'I daresay it's a French mouse, come over with William the Conqueror.' (For, with all her knowledge of history, Alice had no very clear notion how long ago anything had happened.) So she began again: 'Où est ma chatte?' which was the first sentence in her French lesson-book. The Mouse gave a sudden leap out of the water, and seemed to quiver all over with fright. 'Oh, I beg your pardon!' cried Alice hastily, afraid that she had hurt the poor animal's feelings. 'I quite forgot you didn't like cats.'



'Not like cats!' cried the Mouse, in a shrill, passionate voice, 'Would *you* like cats if you were me?'

'Well, perhaps not,' said Alice in a soothing tone, 'don't be angry about it. And yet I wish I could show you our cat Dinah: I think you'd take a fancy to cats if you could only see her. She is such a dear quiet thing,' Alice went on, half to herself, as she swam lazily about in the pool, 'and she sits purring so nicely by the fire, licking her paws and washing her face – and she is such a nice soft thing to nurse – and she's such a capital one for catching mice – oh, I beg your pardon!' cried Alice again, for this time the Mouse was bristling all over and she felt certain it must be really offended, 'We won't talk about her any more if you'd rather not.'

'We indeed!' cried the Mouse, who was trembling down to the end of his tail, 'As if I would talk on such a subject! Our family always *hated* cats: nasty, low, vulgar things! Don't let me hear the name again!'

'I won't indeed!' said Alice, in a great hurry to change the subject of conversation, 'Are you – are you fond – of – of dogs?' The Mouse did not answer, so Alice went on eagerly, 'There is such a nice little dog near our house I should like to show you! A little bright-eyed terrier, you know, with oh, such long curly brown hair! And it'll fetch things when you throw them and it'll sit up and beg for its dinner, and all sorts of things – I can't remember half of them – and it belongs to a farmer, you know, and he says it's so useful, it's worth a hundred pounds! He says it kills all the rats and – oh dear!' cried Alice in a sorrowful tone, 'I'm afraid I've offended it again!' For the Mouse was swimming away from her as hard as it could go, and making quite a commotion in the pool as it went.

So she called softly after it, 'Mouse dear! Do come back again, and we won't talk about cats or dogs either, if you don't like them!' When the Mouse heard this, it turned round and swam slowly back to her; its face was quite pale (with passion, Alice thought) and it said in a low trembling voice, 'Let us get to the shore, and then I'll tell you my history, and you'll understand why it is I hate cats and dogs.'

It was high time to go, for the pool was getting quite crowded with the birds and animals that had fallen into it: there were a Duck and a Dodo, a Lory and an Eaglet, and several other curious creatures. Alice led the way, and the whole party swam to the shore.

## Chapter III

### A Caucus-Race and a Long Tale

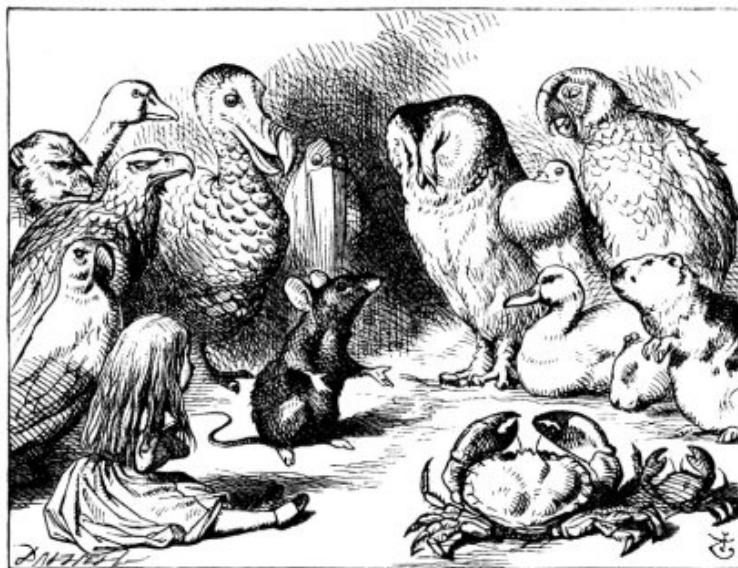
They were indeed a queer-looking party that assembled on the bank – the birds with draggled feathers, the animals with their fur clinging close to them, and all dripping wet, cross, and uncomfortable.

The first question of course was, how to get dry again; they had a consultation about this and after a few minutes it seemed quite natural to Alice to find herself talking familiarly with them, as if she had known them all her life. Indeed, she had quite a long argument with the Lory, who at last turned sulky, and would only say, ‘I am older than you and must know better’; and this Alice would not allow without knowing how old it was and, as the Lory positively refused to tell its age, there was no more to be said.

At last the Mouse, who seemed to be a person of authority among them, called out, ‘Sit down, all of you, and listen to me! *I'll* soon make you dry enough!’ They all sat down at once, in a large ring, with the Mouse in the middle. Alice kept her eyes anxiously fixed on it, for she felt sure she would catch a bad cold if she did not get dry very soon.

‘Ahem!’ said the Mouse with an important air, ‘are you all ready? This is the driest thing I know. Silence all round, if you please! “William the Conqueror, whose cause was favoured by the pope, was soon submitted to by the English, who wanted leaders, and had been of late much accustomed to usurpation and conquest. Edwin and Morcar, the earls of Mercia and Northumbria – ” ’





‘Ugh!’ said the Lory, with a shiver.

‘I beg your pardon!’ said the Mouse, frowning, but very politely, ‘Did you speak?’

‘Not I!’ said the Lory hastily.

‘I thought you did,’ said the Mouse, ‘ – I proceed. “Edwin and Morcar, the earls of Mercia and Northumbria, declared for him; and even Stigand, the patriotic archbishop of Canterbury, found it advisable – ”’

‘Found what?’ said the Duck.

‘Found *it*,’ the Mouse replied rather crossly, ‘of course you know what “it” means.’

‘I know what “it” means well enough when I find a thing,’ said the Duck, ‘it’s generally a frog or a worm. The question is, what did the archbishop find?’

The Mouse did not notice this question, but hurriedly went on, ‘“ – found it advisable to go with Edgar Atheling to meet William and offer him the crown. William’s conduct at first was moderate. But the insolence of his Normans – ”’ How are you getting on now, my dear?’ it continued, turning to Alice as it spoke.

‘As wet as ever,’ said Alice in a melancholy tone, ‘it doesn’t seem to dry me at all.’

‘In that case,’ said the Dodo solemnly, rising to its feet, ‘I move that the meeting adjourn, for the immediate adoption of more energetic remedies – ’

‘Speak English!’ said the Eaglet, ‘I don’t know the meaning of half those long words, and, what’s more, I don’t believe you do either!’ And the Eaglet bent down its head to hide a smile; some of the other birds tittered audibly.

‘What I was going to say,’ said the Dodo in an offended tone, ‘was, that the best thing to get us dry would be a Caucus-race.’

'What *is* a Caucus-race?' said Alice; not that she wanted much to know, but the Dodo had paused as if it thought that *somebody* ought to speak, and no one else seemed inclined to say anything.

'Why,' said the Dodo, 'the best way to explain it is to do it.' (And, as you might like to try the thing yourself, some winter day, I will tell you how the Dodo managed it.)

First it marked out a race-course, in a sort of circle ('the exact shape doesn't matter,' it said), and then all the party were placed along the course, here and there. There was no 'One, two, three, and away,' but they began running when they liked, and left off when they liked, so that it was not easy to know when the race was over. However, when they had been running half an hour or so, and were quite dry again, the Dodo suddenly called out 'The race is over!' and they all crowded round it, panting, and asking, 'But who has won?'

This question the Dodo could not answer without a great deal of thought, and it sat for a long time with one finger pressed upon its forehead (the position in which you usually see Shakespeare, in the pictures of him), while the rest waited in silence. At last the Dodo said, '*everybody* has won, and all must have prizes.'

'But who is to give the prizes?' quite a chorus of voices asked.

'Why, *she*, of course,' said the Dodo, pointing to Alice with one finger; and the whole party at once crowded round her, calling out in a confused way, 'Prizes! Prizes!'

Alice had no idea what to do, and in despair she put her hand in her pocket, and pulled out a box of comfits, (luckily the salt water had not got into it), and handed them round as prizes. There was exactly one a-piece all round.

'But she must have a prize herself, you know,' said the Mouse.

'Of course,' the Dodo replied very gravely, 'What else have you got in your pocket?' he went on, turning to Alice.

'Only a thimble,' said Alice sadly.

'Hand it over here,' said the Dodo.

Then they all crowded round her once more, while the Dodo solemnly presented the thimble, saying, 'We beg your acceptance of this elegant thimble'; and, when it had finished this short speech, they all cheered.

Alice thought the whole thing very absurd, but they all looked so grave that she did not dare to laugh; and, as she could not think of anything to say, she simply bowed, and took the thimble, looking as solemn as she could.

The next thing was to eat the comfits; this caused some noise and confusion, as the large birds complained that they could not taste theirs and the small ones choked and had to be patted on the back. However, it was over at last and they sat down again in a ring and begged the Mouse to tell them something more.

'You promised to tell me your history, you know,' said Alice, 'and why it is you hate - C and D,' she added in a whisper, half afraid that it would be offended again.

'Mine is a long and a sad tale!' said the Mouse, turning to Alice and sighing.

'It *is* a long tail, certainly,' said Alice, looking down with wonder at the Mouse's tail; 'but why do you call it sad?' And she kept on puzzling about it while the Mouse was speaking, so that her idea of the tale was something like this:

*Fury said to  
a mouse, That he  
met in the  
house,  
"Let us  
both go to  
law: I will  
prosecute  
you. — Come,  
I'll take no  
denial; We  
must have  
a trial: For  
really this  
morning I've  
nothing  
to do."*  
*Said the  
mouse to the  
cur, "Such a trial,  
dear Sir,  
With  
no jury  
or judge,  
would be  
wasting  
our  
breath."*  
*"I'll be  
judge, I'll  
be jury,"  
Said  
cunning  
old Fury:  
"I'll  
try the  
whole  
cause,  
and  
condemn  
you  
to  
death..."*

'You are not attending!' said the Mouse to Alice severely, 'What are you thinking of?'

'I beg your pardon,' said Alice very humbly, 'you had got to the fifth bend, I think?'

'I had *not*!' cried the Mouse, sharply and very angrily.

'A knot!' said Alice, always ready to make herself useful, and looking anxiously about her, 'Oh, do let me help to undo it!'

'I shall do nothing of the sort,' said the Mouse, getting up and walking away, 'You insult me by talking such nonsense!'

'I didn't mean it!' pleaded poor Alice. 'But you're so easily offended, you know!'

The Mouse only growled in reply.

'Please come back and finish your story!' Alice called after it, and the others all joined in chorus, 'Yes, please do!' but the Mouse only shook its head impatiently, and walked a little quicker.

'What a pity it wouldn't stay!' sighed the Lory as soon as it was quite out of sight; and an old Crab took the opportunity of saying to her daughter, 'Ah, my dear! Let this be a lesson to you never to lose *your* temper!' – 'Hold your tongue, Ma!' said the young Crab, a little snappishly, 'You're enough to try the patience of an oyster!'

'I wish I had our Dinah here, I know I do!' said Alice aloud, addressing nobody in particular, 'She'd soon fetch it back!'

'And who is Dinah, if I might venture to ask the question?' said the Lory.

Alice replied eagerly, for she was always ready to talk about her pet, 'Dinah's our cat. And she's such a capital one for catching mice you can't think! And oh, I wish you could see her after the birds! Why, she'll eat a little bird as soon as look at it!'

This speech caused a remarkable sensation among the party. Some of the birds hurried off at once; one old Magpie began wrapping itself up very carefully, remarking, 'I really must be getting home; the night-air doesn't suit my throat!' and a Canary called out in a trembling voice to its children, 'Come away, my dears! It's high time you were all in bed!' On various pretexts they all moved off, and Alice was soon left alone.

'I wish I hadn't mentioned Dinah!' she said to herself in a melancholy tone, 'Nobody seems to like her, down here, and I'm sure she's the best cat in the world! Oh, my dear Dinah! I wonder if I shall ever see you any more!' And here poor Alice began to cry again, for she felt very lonely and low-spirited. In a little while, however, she again heard a little pattering of footsteps in the distance and she looked up eagerly, half hoping that the Mouse had changed his mind, and was coming back to finish his story.

## Chapter VII

# A Mad Tea-Party

There was a table set out under a tree in front of the house, and the March Hare and the Hatter were having tea at it; a Dormouse was sitting between them, fast asleep, and the other two were using it as a cushion, resting their elbows on it, and talking over its head. ‘Very uncomfortable for the Dormouse,’ thought Alice, ‘only, as it’s asleep, I suppose it doesn’t mind.’

The table was a large one, but the three were all crowded together at one corner of it; ‘No room! No room!’ they cried out when they saw Alice coming. ‘There’s *plenty* of room!’ said Alice indignantly, and she sat down in a large arm-chair at one end of the table.

‘Have some wine,’ the March Hare said in an encouraging tone.

Alice looked all round the table, but there was nothing on it but tea. ‘I don’t see any wine,’ she remarked.

‘There isn’t any,’ said the March Hare.

‘Then it wasn’t very civil of you to offer it,’ said Alice angrily.

‘It wasn’t very civil of you to sit down without being invited,’ said the March Hare.

‘I didn’t know it was *your* table,’ said Alice, ‘it’s laid for a great many more than three.’

‘Your hair wants cutting,’ said the Hatter. He had been looking at Alice for some time with great curiosity, and this was his first speech.

‘You should learn not to make personal remarks,’ Alice said with some severity, ‘it’s very rude.’



The Hatter opened his eyes very wide on hearing this; but all he *said* was, ‘Why is a raven like a writing-desk?’

‘Come, we shall have some fun now!’ thought Alice. ‘I’m glad they’ve begun asking riddles. – I believe I can guess that,’ she added aloud.

‘Do you mean that you think you can find out the answer to it?’ said the March Hare.

‘Exactly so,’ said Alice.

‘Then you should say what you mean,’ the March Hare went on.

‘I do,’ Alice hastily replied, ‘at least – at least I mean what I say – that’s the same thing, you know.’

‘Not the same thing a bit!’ said the Hatter, ‘You might just as well say that “I see what I eat” is the same thing as “I eat what I see”!’

‘You might just as well say,’ added the March Hare, ‘that “I like what I get” is the same thing as “I get what I like”!’

‘You might just as well say,’ added the Dormouse, who seemed to be talking in his sleep, ‘that “I breathe when I sleep” is the same thing as “I sleep when I breathe”!’

‘It *is* the same thing with you,’ said the Hatter, and here the conversation dropped and the party sat silent for a minute, while Alice thought over all she could remember about ravens and writing-desks, which wasn’t much.

The Hatter was the first to break the silence. ‘What day of the month is it?’ he said, turning to Alice; he had taken his watch out of his pocket and was looking at it uneasily, shaking it every now and then and holding it to his ear.

Alice considered a little, and then said ‘The fourth.’

‘Two days wrong!’ sighed the Hatter. ‘I told you butter wouldn’t suit the works!’ he added looking angrily at the March Hare.

‘It was the *best* butter,’ the March Hare meekly replied.

‘Yes, but some crumbs must have got in as well,’ the Hatter grumbled, ‘you shouldn’t have put it in with the bread-knife.’

The March Hare took the watch and looked at it gloomily; then he dipped it into his cup of tea, and looked at it again; but he could think of nothing better to say than his first remark, ‘It was the *best* butter, you know.’

Alice had been looking over his shoulder with some curiosity. ‘What a funny watch!’ she remarked, ‘It tells the day of the month, and doesn’t tell what o’clock it is!’

‘Why should it?’ muttered the Hatter, ‘Does *your* watch tell you what year it is?’

‘Of course not,’ Alice replied very readily, ‘but that’s because it stays the same year for such a long time together.’

‘Which is just the case with *mine*,’ said the Hatter.

Alice felt dreadfully puzzled. The Hatter's remark seemed to have no sort of meaning in it and yet it was certainly English. 'I don't quite understand you,' she said, as politely as she could.

'The Dormouse is asleep again,' said the Hatter, and he poured a little hot tea upon its nose.

The Dormouse shook its head impatiently, and said, without opening its eyes, 'Of course, of course; just what I was going to remark myself.'

'Have you guessed the riddle yet?' the Hatter said, turning to Alice again.

'No, I give it up,' Alice replied, 'what's the answer?'

'I haven't the slightest idea,' said the Hatter.

'Nor I,' said the March Hare.

Alice sighed wearily. 'I think you might do something better with the time,' she said, 'than waste it in asking riddles that have no answers.'

'If you knew Time as well as I do,' said the Hatter, 'you wouldn't talk about wasting *it*. It's *him*.'

'I don't know what you mean,' said Alice.

'Of course you don't!' the Hatter said, tossing his head contemptuously, 'I dare say you never even spoke to Time!'

'Perhaps not,' Alice cautiously replied, 'but I know I have to beat time when I learn music.'

'Ah! that accounts for it,' said the Hatter, 'He won't stand beating. Now, if you only kept on good terms with him, he'd do almost anything you liked with the clock. For instance, suppose it were nine o'clock in the morning, just time to begin lessons; you'd only have to whisper a hint to Time, and round goes the clock in a twinkling! Half-past one, time for dinner!'

('I only wish it was,' the March Hare said to itself in a whisper.)

'That would be grand, certainly,' said Alice thoughtfully, 'but then – I shouldn't be hungry for it, you know.'

'Not at first, perhaps,' said the Hatter, 'but you could keep it to half-past one as long as you liked.'

'Is that the way *you* manage?' Alice asked.



The Hatter shook his head mournfully. ‘Not I!’ he replied, ‘We quarrelled last March – just before *he* went mad, you know – ’ (pointing with his tea spoon at the March Hare,) ‘ – it was at the great concert given by the Queen of Hearts, and I had to sing

“*Twinkle, twinkle, little bat!*  
*How I wonder what you’re at!*”

You know the song, perhaps?’  
‘I’ve heard something like it,’ said Alice.  
‘It goes on, you know,’ the Hatter continued, ‘in this way:

“*Up above the world you fly,*  
*Like a tea-tray in the sky.*  
*Twinkle, twinkle – ”*”

Here the Dormouse shook itself and began singing in its sleep ‘Twinkle, twinkle, twinkle, twinkle – ’ and went on so long that they had to pinch it to make it stop.

‘Well, I’d hardly finished the first verse,’ said the Hatter, ‘when the Queen jumped up and bawled out, “He’s murdering the time! Off with his head!”’

‘How dreadfully savage!’ exclaimed Alice.  
‘And ever since that,’ the Hatter went on in a mournful tone, ‘he won’t do a thing I ask! It’s always six o’clock now.’ A bright idea came into Alice’s head. ‘Is that the reason so many tea-things are put out here?’ she asked.

‘Yes, that’s it,’ said the Hatter with a sigh, ‘it’s always tea-time and we’ve no time to wash the things between whiles.’

‘Then you keep moving round, I suppose?’ said Alice.  
‘Exactly so,’ said the Hatter, ‘as the things get used up.’  
‘But what happens when you come to the beginning again?’ Alice ventured to ask.

‘Suppose we change the subject,’ the March Hare interrupted, yawning, ‘I’m getting tired of this. I vote the young lady tells us a story.’

‘I’m afraid I don’t know one,’ said Alice, rather alarmed at the proposal.  
‘Then the Dormouse shall!’ they both cried, ‘Wake up, Dormouse!’ And they pinched it on both sides at once.

The Dormouse slowly opened his eyes. ‘I wasn’t asleep,’ he said in a hoarse, feeble voice, ‘I heard every word you fellows were saying.’

‘Tell us a story!’ said the March Hare.  
‘Yes, please do!’ pleaded Alice.  
‘And be quick about it,’ added the Hatter, ‘or you’ll be asleep again before it’s done.’

'Once upon a time there were three little sisters,' the Dormouse began in a great hurry, 'and their names were Elsie, Lacie and Tillie; and they lived at the bottom of a well – '

'What did they live on?' said Alice, who always took a great interest in questions of eating and drinking.

'They lived on treacle,' said the Dormouse, after thinking a minute or two.

'They couldn't have done that, you know,' Alice gently remarked, 'they'd have been ill.'

'So they were,' said the Dormouse, '*very* ill.'

Alice tried to fancy to herself what such an extraordinary ways of living would be like, but it puzzled her too much, so she went on, 'But why did they live at the bottom of a well?'

'Take some more tea,' the March Hare said to Alice, very earnestly.

'I've had nothing yet,' Alice replied in an offended tone, 'so I can't take more.'

'You mean you can't take *less*,' said the Hatter, 'it's very easy to take *more* than nothing.'

'Nobody asked *your* opinion,' said Alice.

'Who's making personal remarks now?' the Hatter asked triumphantly.

Alice did not quite know what to say to this; so she helped herself to some tea and bread-and-butter, and then turned to the Dormouse, and repeated her question, 'Why did they live at the bottom of a well?'

The Dormouse again took a minute or two to think about it and then said, 'It was a treacle-well.'

'There's no such thing!' Alice was beginning very angrily, but the Hatter and the March Hare went 'Sh! sh!' and the Dormouse sulkily remarked, 'If you can't be civil, you'd better finish the story for yourself.'

'No, please go on!' Alice said very humbly, 'I won't interrupt again. I dare say there may be *one*.'

'One, indeed!' said the Dormouse indignantly. However, he consented to go on, 'And so these three little sisters – they were learning to draw, you know – '

'What did they draw?' said Alice, quite forgetting her promise.

'Treacle,' said the Dormouse without considering at all this time.

'I want a clean cup,' interrupted the Hatter, 'let's all move one place on.'

He moved on as he spoke, and the Dormouse followed him; the March Hare moved into the Dormouse's place and Alice rather unwillingly took the place of the March Hare. The Hatter was the only one who got any advantage from the change; and Alice was a good deal worse off than before as the March Hare had just upset the milk-jug into his plate.

Alice did not wish to offend the Dormouse again, so she began very cautiously, 'But I don't understand. Where did they draw the treacle from?'

'You can draw water out of a water-well,' said the Hatter, 'so I should think you could draw treacle out of a treacle-well – eh, stupid?'

'But they were *in* the well,' Alice said to the Dormouse, not choosing to notice this last remark.

'Of course they were', said the Dormouse, ' – well in.'

This answer so confused poor Alice, that she let the Dormouse go on for some time without interrupting it.

'They were learning to draw,' the Dormouse went on, yawning and rubbing its eyes, for it was getting very sleepy, 'and they drew all manner of things – everything that begins with an M – '

'Why with an M?' said Alice.

'Why not?' said the March Hare.

Alice was silent.

The Dormouse had closed its eyes by this time and was going off into a doze; but, on being pinched by the Hatter, it woke up again with a little shriek, and went on, ' – that begins with an M, such as mouse-traps, and the moon, and memory, and muchness – you know you say things are "much of a muchness" – did you ever see such a thing as a drawing of a muchness?'

'Really, now you ask me,' said Alice, very much confused, 'I don't think – '

'Then you shouldn't talk,' said the Hatter.

This piece of rudeness was more than Alice could bear; she got up in great disgust, and walked off; the Dormouse fell asleep instantly and neither of the others took the least notice of her going, though she looked back once or twice, half hoping that they would call after her; the last time she saw them, they were trying to put the Dormouse into the teapot.

'At any rate I'll never go *there* again!' said Alice as she picked her way through the wood, 'It's the stupidest tea-party I ever was at in all my life!'

Just as she said this, she noticed that one of the trees had a door leading right into it. 'That's very curious!' she thought, 'But everything's curious today. I think I may as well go in at once.' And in she went.

Once more she found herself in the long hall, and close to the little glass table. 'Now, I'll manage better this time,' she said to herself and began by taking the little golden key, and unlocking the door that led into the garden. Then she went



to work nibbling at the mushroom (she had kept a piece of it in her pocket) till she was about a foot high; then she walked down the little passage; and *then* – she found herself at last in the beautiful garden, among the bright flower-beds and the cool fountains.

# Through The Looking-Glass

And What Alice Found There

By  
Lewis Carroll

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## CHAPTER III



### Looking-Glass Insects

Of course the first thing to do was to make a grand survey of the country she was going to travel through. ‘It’s something very like learning geography,’ thought Alice, as she stood on tiptoe in hopes of being able to see a little further. ‘Principal rivers—there *are* none. Principal mountains—I’m on the only one, but I don’t think it’s got any name. Principal towns—why, what *are* those creatures, making honey down there? They can’t be bees—nobody ever saw bees a mile off, you know - - ’ and for some time she stood silent, watching one of them that was bustling about among the flowers,

poking its proboscis into them, ‘just as if it was a regular bee,’ thought Alice.

However, this was anything but a regular bee: in fact it was an elephant—as Alice soon found out, though the idea quite took her breath away at first. ‘And what enormous flowers they must be!’ was her next idea. ‘Something like cottages with the roofs taken off, and stalks put to them—and what quantities of honey they must make! I think I’ll go down and—no, I won’t *just* yet,’ she went on, checking herself just as she was beginning to run down the hill, and trying to find some excuse for turning shy so suddenly. ‘It’ll never do to go down among them without a good long branch to brush them away—and what fun it’ll be when they ask me how I like my walk. I shall say—“Oh, I like it well enough—” (here came the favourite little toss of the head), “only it was so dusty and hot, and the elephants did tease so!”’

‘I think I’ll go down the other way,’ she said after a pause: ‘and perhaps I may visit the elephants later on. Besides, I do so want to get into the Third Square!’

So with this excuse she ran down the hill and jumped over the first of the six littlebrooks.

‘Tickets, please!’ said the Guard, putting his head in at the window. In a moment everybody was holding out a ticket: they were about the same size as the people, and quite seemed to fill the carriage.

‘Now then! Show your ticket, child!’ the Guard went on, looking angrily at Alice. And a great many

voices all said together ('like the chorus of a song,' thought Alice), 'Don't keep him waiting, child! Why, his time is worth a thousand pounds a minute!'

'I'm afraid I haven't got one,' Alice said in a frightened tone: 'there wasn't a ticket-office where I came from.' And again the chorus of voices went on. 'There wasn't room for one where she came from. The land there is worth a thousand pounds an inch!'

'Don't make excuses,' said the Guard: 'you should have bought one from the engine-driver.' And once more the chorus of voices went on with 'The man that drives the engine. Why, the smoke alone is worth a thousand pounds a puff!'

Alice thought to herself, 'Then there's no use in speaking.' The voices didn't join in this time, as she hadn't spoken, but to her great surprise, they all *thought* in chorus (I hope you understand what *thinking in chorus* means—for I must confess that *I* don't), 'Better say nothing at all. Language is worth a thousand pounds a word!'

'I shall dream about a thousand pounds tonight, I know I shall!' thought Alice.

All this time the Guard was looking at her, first through a telescope, then through a microscope, and then through an opera-glass. At last he said, 'You're travelling the wrong way,' and shut up the window and went away.

'So young a child,' said the gentleman sitting opposite to her (he was dressed in white paper),

‘ought to know which way she’s going, even if she doesn’t know her own name!’

A Goat, that was sitting next to the gentleman in white, shut his eyes and said in aloud voice, ‘She ought to know her way to the ticket-office, even if she doesn’t know her alphabet!’

There was a Beetle sitting next to the Goat (it was a very queer carriage-full of passengers altogether), and, as the rule seemed to be that they should all speak in turn, *he* went on with ‘She’ll have to go back from here as luggage!’

Alice couldn’t see who was sitting beyond the Beetle, but a hoarse voice spoke next. ‘Change engines—’ it said, and was obliged to leave off.

‘It sounds like a horse,’ Alice thought to herself. And an extremely small voice, close to her ear, said, ‘You might make a joke on that— something about “horse” and “hoarse,” you know.’

Then a very gentle voice in the distance said, ‘She must be labelled “Lass, with care,” you know—’

And after that other voices went on (What a number of people there are in the carriage! thought Alice), saying, ‘She must go by post, as she’s got a head on her—’ ‘She must be sent as a message by the telegraph—’ ‘She must draw the train herself the rest of the way—’ and so on.

But the gentleman dressed in white paper leaned forwards and whispered in her ear, ‘Never mind what they all say, my dear, but take a return-ticket every time the train stops.”

‘Indeed I shan’t!’ Alice said rather impatiently. ‘I don’t belong to this railway journey at all—I was in a wood just now—and I wish I could get back there.’ ‘You might make a joke on *that*,’ said the little voice close to her ear: ‘something about “you *would* if you could,” you know.’

‘Don’t tease so,’ said Alice, looking about in vain to see where the voice came from; ‘if you’re so anxious to have a joke made, why don’t you make one yourself?’

The little voice sighed deeply: it was *very* unhappy, evidently, and Alice would have said something pitying to comfort it, ‘If it would only sigh like other people!’ she thought. But this was such a wonderfully small sigh, that she wouldn’t have heard it at all, if it hadn’t come *quite* close to her ear. The consequence of this was that it tickled her ear very much, and quite took off her thoughts from the unhappiness of the poor little creature. ‘I know you are a friend, the little voice went on; ‘a dear friend, and an old friend. And you won’t hurt me, though I *am* an insect.’

‘What kind of insect?’ Alice inquired a little anxiously. What she really wanted to know was, whether it could sting or not, but she thought this wouldn’t be quite a civil question to ask. ‘What, then you don’t—’ the little voice began, when it was drowned by a shrill scream from the engine, and everybody jumped up in alarm, Alice among the rest.

The Horse, who had put his head out of the window, quietly drew it in and said, ‘It’s only a brook we have to jump over.’ Everybody seemed satisfied with this, though Alice felt a little nervous at the idea of trains jumped at all. ‘However, it’ll take us into the Fourth Square, that’s some comfort!’ she said to herself. In another moment she felt the carriage rise straight up into the air, and in her fright she caught at the thing nearest to her hand, which happened to be the Goat’s beard.

But the beard seemed to melt away as she touched it, and she found herself sitting quietly under a tree— while the Gnat (for that was the insect she had been talking to) was balancing itself on a twig just over her head, and fanning her with its wings.

It certainly was a *very* large Gnat: ‘about the



size of a chicken,’ Alice thought. Still, she couldn’t feel nervous with it, after they had been talking together so long.

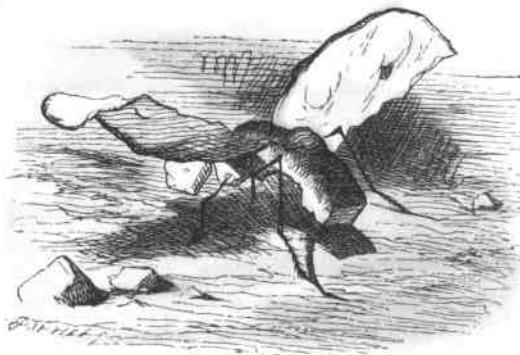
‘— then you don’t like all insects?’ the Gnat



went on, as quietly as if nothing had happened.

‘I like them when they can talk,’ Alice said.  
‘None of them ever talk, where *I* come from.’  
‘What sort of insects do you rejoice in, where *you* come from?’ the Gnat inquired.

‘I don’t *rejoice* in insects at all,’ Alice explained,



‘because I’m rather afraid of them— at least the large kinds. But I can tell you the names of some of them.’

‘Of course they answer to their names?’ the Gnat remarked carelessly.

‘I never knew them do it.’

‘What’s the use of their having names the Gnat said, ‘if they won’t answer to them?’

‘No use to *them*,’ said Alice; ‘but it’s useful to the people who name them, I suppose. If not, why do things have names at all?’

‘I can’t say,’ the Gnat replied. ‘Further on, in the wood down there, they’ve got no names— however, go on with your list of insects: you’re wasting time.’

‘Well, there’s the Horse-fly,’ Alice began, counting off the names on her fingers.

‘All right,’ said the Gnat: ‘half way up that bush, you’ll see a Rocking-horse-fly, if you look. It’s made entirely of wood, and gets about by swinging itself from branch to branch.’

‘What does it live on?’ Alice asked, with great curiosity.

‘Sap and sawdust,’ said the Gnat. ‘Go on with the list.’

Alice looked up at the Rocking-horse-fly with great interest, and made up her mind that it must have been just repainted, it looked so bright and sticky; and then she went on.

‘And there’s the Dragon-fly.’

‘Look on the branch above your head,’ said the Gnat, ‘and there you’ll find a snap-dragon-fly. Its body is made of plum-pudding, its wings of holly-leaves, and its head is a raisin burning in brandy.’

‘And what does it live on?’

‘Frumenty and mince pie,’ the Gnat replied; ‘and it makes its nest in a Christmas box.’

‘And then there’s the Butterfly,’ Alice went on, after she had taken a good look at the insect with its head on fire, and had thought to herself, ‘I wonder if that’s the reason insects are so fond of flying into candles—because they want to turn into Snap-dragon-flies!’

‘Crawling at your feet,’ said the Gnat (Alice drew her feet back in some alarm), ‘you may observe a Bread-and-Butterfly. Its wings are thin slices of Bread-and-butter, its body is a crust, and its head is a lump of sugar.’

‘And what does *it* live on?’

‘Weak tea with cream in it.’ A new difficulty came into Alice’s head. ‘Supposing it couldn’t find any?’ she suggested.

‘Then it would die, of course.’

‘But that must happen very often,’ Alice remarked thoughtfully.

‘It always happens,’ said the Gnat.

After this, Alice was silent for a minute or two, pondering. The Gnat amused itself meanwhile by humming round and round her head: at last it settled again and remarked, ‘I suppose you don’t want to lose your name?’

‘No, indeed,’ Alice said, a little anxiously.

‘And yet I don’t know,’ the Gnat went on in a careless tone: ‘only think how convenient it would be if you could manage to go home without it! For

instance, if the governess wanted to call you to your lessons, she would call out “come here—,” and there she would have to leave off, because there wouldn’t be any name for her to all, and of course you wouldn’t have to go, you know.’

‘That would never do, I’m sure,’ said Alice: ‘the governess would never think of excusing me lessons for that. If she couldn’t remember my name, she’d call me “Miss!” as the servants do.’

‘Well, if she said “Miss,” and didn’t say anything more,’ the Gnat remarked, ‘of course you’d miss your lessons. That’s a joke. I wish *you* had made it.’

‘Why do you wish *I* had made it?’ Alice asked.  
‘It’s a very bad one.’

But the Gnat only sighed deeply, while two large tears came rolling down its cheeks.

‘You shouldn’t make jokes,’ Alice said, ‘if it makes you so unhappy.’

Then came another of those melancholy little sighs, and this time the poor Gnat really seemed to have sighed itself away, for, when Alice looked up, there was nothing whatever to be seen on the twig, and, as she was getting quite chilly with sitting still so long she got up and walked on.

She very soon came to an open field, with a wood on the other side of it: it looked much darker than the last wood, and Alice felt a *little* timid about going into it. However, on second thoughts, she made up her mind to go on: ‘for I certainly won’t

go *back*’ she thought to herself, and this was the only way to the Eighth Square.

‘This must be the wood, she said thoughtfully to herself, ‘where things have no names. I wonder what’ll become of *my name* when I go in? I shouldn’t like to lose it at all—because they’d have to give me another, and it would be almost certain to be an ugly one. But then the fun would be, trying to find the creature that had got my old name! That’s just like the advertisements, you know, when people lose dogs—“*answers to the name of Dash: had on a brass collar*”—just fancy calling everything you met “Alice,” till one of them answered! Only they wouldn’t answer at all, if they were wise.’

She was rambling on in this way when she reached the wood: it looked very cool and shady. ‘Well, at any rate it’s a great comfort,’ she said as she stepped under the trees, ‘after being so hot, to get into the—into *what?*’ she went on, rather surprised at not being able to think of the word. ‘I mean to get under the—under the—under *this*, you know!’ putting her hand on the trunk of the tree. ‘What *does it* call itself, I wonder? I do believe it’s got no name—why, to be sure it hasn’t!’

She stood silent for a minute, thinking: then she suddenly began again. ‘Then it really *has* happened, after all! And how, who am I? I *will* remember, if I can! I’m determined to do it!’ But being determined didn’t help much, and all she could say, after a great deal of puzzling, was, ‘L, I *know* it begins with L!’

Just then a Fawn came wandering by: it looked at Alice with its large gentle eyes, but didn't seem at all frightened. 'Here then! Here then!' Alice said, as he held out her hand and tried to stroke it; but it only started back a little, and then stood looking at her again.

'What do you call yourself?' the Fawn said at



last. Such a soft sweet voice it had!

'I wish I knew!' thought poor Alice. She answered, rather sadly, 'Nothing, just now.'

'Think again,' it said: 'that won't do.'

Alice thought, but nothing came of it. 'Please, would you tell me what *you* call yourself?' she said timidly. 'I think that might help a little.'

'I'll tell you, if you'll move a little further on,' the Fawn said. 'I can't remember here.'

So they walked on together though the wood, Alice with her arms clasped lovingly round the soft neck of the Fawn, till they came out into another open field, and here the Fawn gave a sudden bound into the air, and shook itself free from Alice's arms. 'I'm a Fawn!' it cried out in a voice of delight, 'and, dear me! you're a human child!' A sudden look of alarm came into its beautiful brown eyes, and in another moment it had darted away a full speed.

Alice stood looking after it, almost ready to cry with vexation at having lost her dear little fellow-traveller so suddenly. 'However, I know my name now,' she said, 'that's *some* comfort. Alice—Alice—I won't forget it again. And now, which of these finger-posts ought I to follow, I wonder?'

It was not a very difficult question to answer, as there was only one road through the wood, and the two finger-posts both pointed along it. 'I'll settle it,' Alice said to herself, 'when the road divides and they point different ways.'

But this did not seem likely to happen. She went on and on, a long way, but wherever the road divided there were sure to be two finger-posts pointing the same way, one marked '*To Tweedledum's house*' and the other '*To the house of Tweedledee.*'

'I do believe,' said Alice at last, 'that they live in the same house! I wonder I never thought of that before— But I can't stay there long. I'll just call and say "how d'you do?" and ask them the way out of the wood. If I could only get the Eighth Square

before it gets dark!' So she wandered on, talking to herself as she went, till, on turning a sharp corner, she came upon two fat little men, so suddenly that she could not help starting back, but in another moment she recovered herself, feeling sure that they must be

But to a lesser extent I can perhaps meet your demand, and indeed I do so with the greatest pleasure. The first thing I learned was to give a handshake; a handshake betokens frankness; well, today, now that I stand at the very peak of my career, I hope to add frankness in words to the frankness of that first handshake. What I have to tell the Academy will contribute nothing essentially new, and will fall far behind what you have asked of me and what with the best will in the world I cannot communicate—nonetheless, it should indicate the line an erstwhile ape has had to follow in entering and establishing himself in the world of men. Yet I could not risk putting into words even such insignificant information as I am going to give you if I were not quite sure of myself and if my position on all the great variety stages of the civilized world had not become quite unassailable.

I belong to the Gold Coast. For the story of my capture I must depend on the evidence of others. A hunting expedition sent out by the firm of Hagenbeck—by the way, I have drunk many a bottle of good red wine since then with the leader of that expedition—had taken up its position in the bushes by the shore when I came down for a drink at evening among a troop of apes. They shot at us; I was the only one that was hit; I was hit in two places.

Once in the cheek; a slight wound; but it left a large, naked, red scar which earned me the name of Red Peter, a horrible name, utterly inappropriate, which only some ape could have thought of, as if the only difference between me and the performing ape Peter, who died not so long ago and had some small local reputation, were the red mark on my cheek. This by the way.

The second shot hit me below the hip. It was a severe wound, it is the cause of my limping a little to this day. I read an article recently by one of the ten thousand windbags who vent themselves concerning me in the newspapers, saying: my ape nature is not yet quite under control; the proof being that when visitors come to see me, I have a predilection for taking down my trousers to show them where the shot went in. The hand which wrote that should have its fingers shot away one by one. As for

### *A Report to an Academy*

HONORED MEMBERS of the Academy!

You have done me the honor of inviting me to give your Academy an account of the life I formerly led as an ape.

I regret that I cannot comply with your request to the extent you desire. It is now nearly five years since I was an ape, a short space of time, perhaps, according to the calendar, but an infinitely long time to gallop through at full speed, as I have done, more or less accompanied by excellent mentors, good advice, applause, and orchestral music, and yet essentially alone, since all my escorters, to keep the image, kept well off the course. I could never have achieved what I have done had I been stubbornly set on clinging to my origins, to the remembrances of my youth. In fact, to give up being stubborn was the supreme commandment I laid upon myself; free ape as I was, I submitted myself to that yoke. In revenge, however, my memory of the past has closed the door against me more and more. I could have returned at first, had human beings allowed it, through an archway as wide as the span of heaven over the earth, but as I spurred myself on in my forced career, the opening narrowed and shrank behind me; I felt more comfortable in the world of men and fitted it better; the strong wind that blew after me out of my past began to slacken; today it is only a gentle puff of air that plays around my heels, and the opening in the distance, through which it comes and through which I once came myself, has grown so small that, even if my strength and my will power sufficed to get me back to it, I should have to scrape the very skin from my body to crawl through. To put it plainly, much as I like expressing myself in images, to put it plainly: your life as apes, gentlemen, insofar as something of that kind lies behind you, cannot be farther removed from you than mine is from me. Yet everyone on earth feels a tickling at the heels; the small chimpanzee and the great Achilles alike.

me, I can take my trousers down before anyone if I like; you would find nothing but a well-groomed fur and the scar made—let me be particular in the choice of a word for this particular purpose, to avoid misunderstanding—the scar made by a wanton shot. Everything is open and aboveboard; there is nothing to conceal; when the plain truth is in question, great minds discard the niceties of refinement. But if the writer of the article were to take down his trousers before a visitor, that would be quite another story, and I will let it stand to his credit that he does not do it. In return, let him leave me alone with his delicacy!

After these two shots I came to myself—and this is where my own memories gradually begin—between decks in the Hagenbeck steamer, inside a cage. It was not a four-sided barred cage; it was only a three-sided cage nailed to a locker; the locker made the fourth side of it. The whole construction was too low for me to stand up in and too narrow to sit down in. So I had to squat with my knees bent and trembling all the time, and also, since probably for a time I wished to see no one, and to stay in the dark, my face was turned toward the locker while the bars of the cage cut into my flesh behind. Such a method of confining wild beasts is supposed to have its advantages during the first days of captivity, and out of my own experiences I cannot deny that from the human point of view this is really the case.

But that did not occur to me then. For the first time in my life I could see no way out; at least no direct way out; directly in front of me was the locker, board fitted close to board. True, there was a gap running right through the boards which I greeted with the blissful howl of ignorance when I first discovered it, but the hole was not even wide enough to stick one's tail through and not all the strength of an ape could enlarge it.

I am supposed to have made uncommonly little noise, as I was later informed, from which the conclusion was drawn that I would either soon die or if I managed to survive the first critical period would be very amenable to training. I did survive this period. Hopelessly sobbing, painfully hunting for fleas, apathetically licking a cocoanut, beating my skull against the locker, striking out my tongue at anyone who came near me—that was

how I filled in time at first in my new life. But over and above it all only the one feeling: no way out. Of course what I felt then as an ape I can represent now only in human terms, and therefore I misrepresent it, but although I cannot reach back to the truth of the old ape life, there is no doubt that it lies somewhere in the direction I have indicated.

Until then I had had so many ways out of everything, and now I had none. I was pinned down. Had I been nailed down, my right to free movement would not have been lessened. Why so? Scratch your flesh raw between your toes, but you won't find the answer. Press yourself against the bar behind you till it nearly cuts you in two, you won't find the answer. I had no way out but I had to devise one, for without it I could not live. All the time facing that locker—I should certainly have perished. Yet as far as Hagenbeck was concerned, the place for apes was in front of a locker—well then, I had to stop being an ape. A fine, clear train of thought, which I must have constructed somehow with my belly, since apes think with their bellies.

I fear that perhaps you do not quite understand what I mean by "way out." I use the expression in its fullest and most popular sense. I deliberately do not use the word "freedom." I do not mean the spacious feeling of freedom on all sides. As an ape, perhaps, I knew that, and I have men who yearn for it. But for my part I desired such freedom neither then nor now. In passing: may I say that all too often men are betrayed by the word freedom. And as freedom is counted among the most sublime feelings, so the corresponding disillusionment can be also sublime. In variety theaters I have often watched, before my turn came on, a couple of acrobats performing on trapezes high in the roof. They swung themselves, they rocked to and fro, they sprang into the air, they floated into each other's arms, one hung by the hair from the teeth of the other. "And that too is human freedom," I thought, "self-controlled movement." What a mockery of holy Mother Nature! Were the apes to see such a spectacle, no theater walls could stand the shock of their laughter.

No, freedom was not what I wanted. Only a way out; right

or left, or in any direction; I made no other demand; even should the way out prove to be an illusion; the demand was a small one, the disappointment could be no bigger. To get out somewhere, to get out! Only not to stay motionless with raised arms, crushed against a wooden wall.

Today I can see it clearly; without the most profound inward calm I could never have found my way out. And indeed perhaps I owe all that I have become to the calm that settled within me after my first few days in the ship. And again for that calmness it was the ship's crew I had to thank.

They were good creatures, in spite of everything. I find it still pleasant to remember the sound of their heavy footfalls which used to echo through my half-dreaming head. They had a habit of doing everything as slowly as possible. If one of them wanted to rub his eyes, he lifted a hand as if it were a drooping weight. Their jests were coarse, but hearty. Their laughter had always a gruff bark in it that sounded dangerous but meant nothing. They always had something in their mouths to spit out and did not care where they spat it. They always grumbled that they got fleas from me; yet they were not seriously angry about it; they knew that my fur fostered fleas, and that fleas jump; it was a simple matter of fact to them. When they were off duty some of them often used to sit down in a semicircle around me; they hardly spoke but only grunted to each other; smoked their pipes, stretched out on lockers; smacked their knees as soon as I made the slightest movement; and now and then one of them would take a stick and tickle me where I liked being tickled. If I were to be invited today to take a cruise on that ship I should certainly refuse the invitation, but just as certainly the memories I could recall between its decks would not all be hateful.

The calmness I acquired among these people kept me above all from trying to escape. As I look back now, it seems to me I must have had at least an inkling that I had to find a way out or die, but that my way out could not be reached through flight. I cannot tell now whether escape was possible, but I believe it must have been; for an ape it must always be possible. With my

teeth as they are today I have to be careful even in simply cracking nuts, but at that time I could certainly have managed by degrees to bite through the lock of my cage. I did not do it. What good would it have done me? As soon as I had poked out my head I should have been caught again and put in a worse cage, or I might have slipped among the other animals without being noticed, among the pythons, say, who were opposite me, and so breathed out my life in their embrace; or supposing I had actually succeeded in sneaking out as far as the deck and leaping overboard, I should have rocked for a little on the deep sea and then been drowned. Desperate remedies. I did not think it out in this human way, but under the influence of my surroundings I acted as if I had thought it out.

I did not think things out; but I observed everything quietly. I watched these men go to and fro, always the same faces, the same movements, often it seemed to me there was only the same man. So this man or these men walked about unimpeded. A lofty goal faintly dawned before me. No one promised me that if I became like them the bars of my cage would be taken away. Such promises for apparently impossible contingencies are not given. But if one achieves the impossible, the promises appear later retrospectively precisely where one had looked in vain for them before. Now, these men in themselves had no great attraction for me. Had I been devoted to the aforementioned idea of freedom, I should certainly have preferred the deep sea to the way out that suggested itself in the heavy faces of these men. At any rate, I watched them for a long time before I even thought of such things, indeed, it was only the mass weight of my observations that impelled me in the right direction.

It was so easy to imitate these people. I learned to spit in the very first days. We used to spit in each other's faces; the only difference was that I licked my face clean afterwards and they did not. I could soon smoke a pipe like an old hand; and if I also pressed my thumb into the bowl of the pipe, a roar of appreciation went up between-decks; only it took me a very long time to understand the difference between a full pipe and an empty one.

My worst trouble came from the schnapps bottle. The smell of it revolted me; I forced myself to it as best I could; but it took weeks for me to master my repulsion. This inward conflict, strangely enough, was taken more seriously by the crew than anything else about me. I cannot distinguish the men from each other in my recollection, but there was one of them who came again and again, alone or with friends, by day, by night, at all kinds of hours; he would post himself before me with the bottle and give me instructions. He could not understand me, he wanted to solve the enigma of my being. He would slowly uncork the bottle and then look at me to see if I had followed him; I admit that I always watched him with wildly eager, too eager attention; such a student of humankind no human teacher ever found on earth. After the bottle was uncorked he lifted it to his mouth; I followed it with my eyes right up to his jaws; he would nod, pleased with me, and set the bottle to his lips; I, enchanted with my gradual enlightenment, squealed and scratched myself comprehensively wherever scratching was called for; he rejoiced, tilted the bottle, and took a drink; I, impatient and desirous to emulate him, besouled myself in my cage, which again gave him great satisfaction; and then, holding the bottle at arm's length and bringing it up with a swing, he would empty it at one draught, leaning back at an exaggerated angle for my better instruction. I, exhausted by too much effort, could follow him no farther and hung limply to the bars, while he ended his theoretical exposition by rubbing his belly and grinning.

After theory came practice. Was I not already quite exhausted by my theoretical instruction? Indeed I was; utterly exhausted. That was part of my destiny. And yet I would take hold of the proffered bottle as well as I was able; uncork it, trembling; this successful action would gradually inspire me with new energy; I would lift the bottle, already following my original model almost exactly; put it to my lips and—and then throw it down in disgust, utter disgust, although it was empty and filled only with the smell of the spirit, throw it down on the floor in disgust. To the sorrow of my teacher, to the greater sorrow of myself, neither of us being really comforted by the fact

that I did not forget, even though I had thrown away the bottle, to rub my belly most admirably and to grin.

Far too often my lesson ended in that way. And to the credit of my teacher, he was not angry; sometimes indeed he would hold his burning pipe against my fur, until it began to smolder in some place I could not easily reach, but then he would himself extinguish it with his own kind, enormous hand; he was not angry with me, he perceived that we were both fighting on the same side against the nature of apes and that I had the more difficult task.

What a triumph it was then both for him and for me, when one evening before a large circle of spectators—perhaps there was a celebration of some kind, a gramophone was playing, an officer was circulating among the crew—when on this evening, just as no one was looking, I took hold of a schnapps bottle that had been carelessly left standing before my cage, uncorked it in the best style, while the company began to watch me with mounting attention, set it to my lips without hesitation, with no grimace, like a professional drinker, with rolling eyes and full throat, actually and truly drank it empty; then threw the bottle away, not this time in despair but as an artistic performer; forgotten, indeed, to rub my belly; but instead of that, because I could not help it, because my senses were reeling, called a brief and unmistakable "Hallo!" breaking into human speech, and with this outburst broke into the human community, and felt its echo: "Listen, he's talking!" like a cares over the whole of my sweat-drenched body.

I repeat: there was no attraction for me in imitating human beings; I imitated them because I needed a way out, and for no other reason. And even that triumph of mine did not achieve much. I lost my human voice again at once; it did not come back for months; my aversion for the schnapps bottle returned again with even greater force. But the line I was to follow had in any case been decided; once for all.

When I was handed over to my first trainer in Hamburg I soon realized that there were two alternatives before me: the Zoological Gardens or the variety stage. I did not hesitate. I said

to myself: do your utmost to get onto the variety stage; the Zoological Gardens means only a new cage; once there, you are done for.

And so I learned things, gentlemen. Ah, one learns when one has to; one learns when one needs a way out; one learns at all costs. One stands over oneself with a whip; one flays oneself at the slightest opposition. My ape nature fled out of me, head over heels and away, so that my first teacher was almost himself turned into an ape by it, had soon to give up teaching and was taken away to a mental hospital. Fortunately he was soon let out again.

But I used up many teachers, indeed, several teachers at once. As I became more confident of my abilities, as the public took an interest in my progress and my future began to look bright, I engaged teachers for myself, established them in five communicating rooms, and took lessons from them all at once by dint of leaping from one room to the other.

That progress of mine! How the rays of knowledge penetrated from all sides into my awakening brain! I do not deny it: I found it exhilarating. But I must also confess: I did not overestimate it, not even then, much less now. With an effort which up till now has never been repeated I managed to reach the cultural level of an average European. In itself that might be nothing to speak of, but it is something insofar as it has helped me out of my cage and opened a special way out for me, the way of humanity. There is an excellent idiom: to fight one's way through the thick of things; that is what I have done, I have fought through the thick of things. There was nothing else for me to do, provided always that freedom was not to be my choice.

As I look back over my development and survey what I have achieved so far, I do not complain, but I am not complacent either. With my hands in my trouser pockets, my bottle of wine on the table, I half lie and half sit in my rocking chair and gaze out of the window: if a visitor arrives, I receive him with propriety. My manager sits in the anteroom; when I ring, he comes and listens to what I have to say. Nearly every evening I give a

performance, and I have a success that could hardly be increased. When I come home late at night from banquets, from scientific receptions, from social gatherings, there sits waiting for me a half-trained little chimpanzee and I take comfort from her as apes do. By day I cannot bear to see her; for she has the insane look of the bewildered half-broken animal in her eye; no one else sees it, but I do, and I cannot bear it. On the whole, at any rate, I have achieved what I set out to achieve. But do not tell me that it was not worth the trouble. In any case, I am not appealing for any man's verdict, I am only imparting knowledge, I am only making a report. To you also, honored Members of the Academy, I have only made a report.

*Translated by Willa and Edwin Muir*

*A Report to an Academy.*

*Two Fragments*

~~WE ALL KNOW~~ Rorpetz, just as half the world knows him. But ~~when he came to our town for a great performance, I decided to get to know him personally. It is not difficult to be admitted. In big cities where everyone in the know clamors to watch celebrities breathe from as close as possible, great difficulties may be encountered, but in our town one is content to marvel at the marvelous from the pit.~~ Thus I was the only one so far, as the hotel servant told me, to have announced his visit. Herr Busenau, the impresario, received me with extreme courtesy. I had not expected to meet a man so modest, indeed almost timid. He was sitting in the anteroom of Rorpetz's apartment, eating an omelet. Although it was morning he already sat there in the evening clothes in which he appears at the performances. Hardly had he caught sight of me—the unknown, the unimportant ~~greatest~~—when he, possessor of highly distinguished medals, king of trainers, honorary doctor of great universities, jumped up, shook me by both hands, urged me to sit down, wiped his spoon