

the art of dressing fiscally



“I dress myself.”

Ralph Wiggum

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**8 PM – 12 AM**

## **The Art of Conjuring (Turtles All the Way Down).**

The devil makes champagne<sup>1</sup>  
by distilling the stars.

*I refill your measuring  
cup and continue.*

That's why you can't  
see them during the day.

*I add grenadine  
to your drink,*

He also has a bottle  
of tincture he uses  
to create the clouds.

*a Horsehead Nebula  
of suspended syrup.*

I heard he makes shooting stars,  
you say, by smearing lightning  
bugs across the pavement of the sky.

*You swirl your glass,  
forming a spiral galaxy.*

I heard Quasars  
are the residue  
of Lucifer's habit  
of consuming raw  
habanero peppers  
by the fistful.

*Andromeda weeps  
to the bottom  
of your drink.*

I heard each photon  
is a note from a nocturne  
played at a harpsichord  
at the bottom  
of a pond  
in a country that,

*A cold, calculated  
condensate settles,*

by the time  
the music  
reaches us,

*microscopic events  
at a macroscopic level.<sup>2</sup>*

no longer  
exists.



## II

Contrary to what they teach  
in Sunday school,  
the Tower of Babel was actually completed.

*Lying in a cemetery with you, engaged  
in the art of conjuring<sup>3</sup>  
anthropocentric explanations  
for natural phenomena,  
in the old style.*

The day the bank foreclosed (God  
was sub-prime paper back then),  
Satan dropped a nickel and a pellet  
of enriched hemoglobin  
from Babel's penthouse.

*I hold my hand a foot  
above my mason jar  
and let slip a pair  
of pomegranate seeds.*

That's how the Earth's core was formed.

*I close one eye, and raise  
my glass telescopically;*

I heard the devil was in the middle of a venture capital raise when he created the hagfish,  
but had money to burn when he created the narwhal.

*the moon hangs  
in the altocumulus  
like a poached egg.*

I saw him step outside for a cigarette when he created the dodo.

*Orion, the cowboy,  
is perched over easy,  
diving back over  
the mountains.*

He was compounding interest when he created the tortoise.<sup>4</sup>

*Our universe is a glazed donut.*

He needed a good scrubbing when he created the entelodont.

*Our universe is a tin ashtray.*

He was feeling molecular when he created lacewings.

*Our universe is an aneurysm  
in a bubble from a carbonated bath*

He was feeling whimsical when he created the paramecium.

*caused when Beelzebub missed  
a note, singing, in the tub.<sup>5</sup>*

He was feeling crafty when he created the trilobite.<sup>6</sup>

*Our universe is a black hole  
caused by the devil thinking*

He was in a curious mood when he created the meerkat.

*past 5 PM and collapsing under  
the weight of his own cogitation.*

He was smarter than he let on when he created the prairie dog.

*Our universe is the latest computer  
simulation, perched on the carapace  
of another simulation, and so on:  
infinitely many simulacra down.<sup>7</sup>*

He was unstrapping the flask from his ankle when he created the lemur.<sup>8</sup>

*The contest is fixed.<sup>9</sup>  
Graveyard crickets conspire  
to a sixty degree dirge;*

He was having a devil of a time when he created the quetzal.<sup>10</sup>

*a constellation  
of freckles hang  
from your ear.*

### III

We toast, and bend.  
To drink an unbound  
necklace, a concurrent  
burst of nucleation  
on the throat,

(the phenomenologies  
of the superfluid)<sup>11</sup>

then ball bearings  
of water, ethanol, acid, tannins,  
and small digestibles

(micro-  
credit)

seduced in the general direction  
of the center of the planet  
and into a series of secret meetings  
with vested interests: proteases,  
proteins, more acids, lipids, esters,  
bile, everyone,

(this one practically lived  
at a restaurant,  
learning wine  
by osmosis)

climaxing in the creation  
of adenosine triphosphate—  
ATP, molecular bullion, the currency of life—  
and the diatoms  
and mucilage  
of freshly fallen  
marine snow.

Trade agreements renewed, gift cards debited, options exercised.

Amortization.

Count yourself among the undefeated,  
those who live:

we are innocent  
until proven  
extinct.

## **Comfort Food.**

This wasn't the first time  
she told me she wasn't  
sure that wasn't anything  
three drinks and a bowl  
of queso couldn't handle.

We might eat cold  
whatever for breakfast,  
but my baby is  
a buttermilk  
biscuit:

hot,  
buttery,

blonde

& totally

flaky.

## A Love-Love Situation.

*... "Play" is something else;  
It exists, in a society specifically  
Organized as a demonstration of itself.*

—John Ashbery, "Self Portrait in a Convex Mirror"

—Wait, isn't he out? I thought you said foul balls count as strikes.

—Yes, but not if there are two strikes already. Unless the batter tips it and the catcher is able to hold on.

—And then...

—The batter's out. But it's not just a regular out; it's a strikeout, despite contact having been made.

—Okay.

—And if the batter swings and misses and the catcher drops the ball, the batter can try for first base. Sort of like a mistrial.

—What the hell.

\*\*\*

It's the top of the fifth  
on opening day  
and the score is still

tied at zero. There are fifteen<sup>12</sup>  
ways of committing a balk,  
and I tried them all with her,

until I decided to stop waiting  
for express written consent.  
I have trouble trusting people

who don't like professional sports,  
    how Caesar regarded Cassius  
        for abstaining from music.

All language is a game,  
    all games given but  
        to instruct,<sup>13</sup> and all sports

merely subsets of language.  
    Note the conjugal simplicity  
        of soccer versus the abstruse

bookkeeping of baseball  
    and cricket, or U.S. football  
        against the metric-speaking world.<sup>14</sup>

Note the bloated notional value  
    of the derivatives market  
        in Barry Bonds' hat size.

The *Iliad* was dictated  
    in verse to aid in recollection  
        from generation to generation:

the staccato rhythm of pitch  
    and swing, inning-by-inning  
        is our dactylic hexameter.

"America" is something else;  
    It exists, in a game specifically  
        organized as capitalism

masquerading as team sport.  
    It's the top of the fifth  
        on opening day, and the score

is still tied at zero.

\*\*\*

—Wait, didn't your dad have season tickets to the Red Sox when you were growing up?

—Yes, but I didn't really pay attention. Did I ever tell you about the time I got hit by a foul ball?

—No. Awesome. I mean... you were okay, right?

—Yes. I was 8, and we were sitting behind home plate. I was reading *The Little Prince*. A ball came straight back through the net. Fortunately, I was reading the book up at my face like *this* so I didn't get hurt.

—Good thing you were wearing an extra large piece of the True Cross that day.<sup>15</sup>

—Well played.



## Alternative Medicine.

Yes, you have  
a figure capable  
of moving Easter  
Island Moai  
in ways only  
the indigenous  
parted grasp,  
but I find  
love is best  
administered  
in homeopathic  
doses: nothing  
beats cracking  
your knuckles  
except  
cracking your toes.

## **Expostulation and Reply.<sup>16</sup>**

‘In the 3rd century BC, Eratosthenes<sup>17</sup>  
measured the earth's circumference  
with nothing but two sticks  
and the desire to hug the world—  
what did we do today, baby?’

‘We used an atlas as a tray.’

‘In the 1830s, Andrew Jackson  
personally murdered the gouty  
Nicholas Biddle's plan to renew  
the Second Bank of the U.S.—  
what did we do today, baby?’

‘We found a coupon for half-  
off the price of regret.’

‘In the 1950s, Armour Hot Dogs<sup>18</sup>  
purified an entire kilogram  
of bovine pancreatic ribonuclease  
and gave it to scientists for free—  
what did we do today, baby?’

‘We ate six species of cheese.’

'In 1970, Dock Ellis tossed  
a no-hitter while under the effects  
of LSD. He walked eight and thought  
that Richard Nixon was the umpire.  
What did we do today, baby?'

'What if I were made of sheet?  
You have to ask yourself  
the difficult questions.'

'Yesterday, I shoveled my car out  
of the snow with a tennis racket  
to fetch a bottle of our favorite wine  
(gin) before we got wet and ran dry—<sup>19</sup>  
and what did we do today, baby?'

'We etched our lives  
on grains of rice.'

## Discrete Encounters I.

Don't be upset if I took your advice  
to dally at the outset of our fling  
when it's the molecules themselves that swing.  
I said I didn't want to, which was nice

AND true; equally, love was not the guise  
behind which I would text you from a stall  
with someone pretty waiting at the bar  
or trace your name in other women's thighs.

Though people never change, the hand that lights  
your cigarette is not the same that poured  
your drink last month; it may intend more harm.<sup>20</sup>

The half-life of a heart-bound myocyte  
exists, and chaos hunts our love for sport,  
with nothing left except that quark called charm.<sup>21</sup>

## The Marrow of an Exploding Star.

People lie but garbage cans don't – this much we've known since Charles Martel invented the television tray-table. And when your father Betelgeuse bedded your mother Rigel, a protostar was born. They dabbed mercury under your eyelids and gave you earrings made out of iridium; which is to say, your sight is quick and your pitch cannot be eroded by aqua one day, you noticed that our mind's boroughs (it was originally referred to as it a feature). Indeed, it had been for quite invented object-oriented programming. Maiden of the midden, damsel of the dump, I collect memes for you who collects junk. regis and related sulfuric magic. And sewer was backed up here to the rotten a bug in the code; we shall later prove some time, at least since Lady Lovelace And you saw fit to direct the overflow into your apartment. Nickel washers, tin thimbles, bits of solder cut with bismuth, stochastically derived buttons. You built a library of soon-to-be-ex-love letters and other failed biology assignments. You raised an army made from sawdust and glue. And, likewise, you started a zoo, as it's cheaper than flood insurance.

\*\*\*

For the four and twenty  
years since mad King Ludwig  
invented the spork, you've been  
living in this offal museum,  
and it is your love song. Exhibit A:<sup>22</sup>  
we have fourteen ways of spooning  
tiny bits of nada into nada,  
and only one fork. Exhibit B:  
there are thirty-seven stickers  
affixed to your kitchen counter,  
and I've never seen you eat  
fruit. Exhibit C: and how can  
we eat jars of tarragon without  
a saucer to bruise and steep  
the leaves of dragon's root?<sup>23</sup>

*Maiden of the midden,  
goddess of the trash,  
keeps a bottle of brandy  
and no glass.*

\*\*\*

For every act of consumption  
there's an equal and opposite  
psychological combustion –

this much we've known since Cistercian monks forged the first blast furnace. And did you know that every  
atom of every piece of shrapnel you've ever farmed

(suffice to say, the silver fillings  
that turned our mouths  
into electrical sockets

when we chewed aluminum foil as children)<sup>24</sup> originated (suffice to say, your endometrium) in chemical  
processes (suffice to say, my scapula) in the marrow of an exploding star?

*Maiden of the midden  
tsarina of the yard,  
hydrogen begets helium,  
helium begets carbon,  
carbon begets iron,  
iron begets chrome.*

And this is the place, the place,  
the place we call home.

\*\*\*

One day, when there is plenty to do, we plant airplane bottles in the carpet.<sup>25</sup> Shortly thereafter we are  
witnessing a new species of nylon kudzu climb the bedroom wall. Nobody has tried this approach since  
Anaximander invented the notion that nobody ever invented anything; corollary, some were just lucky  
enough to have left what came out the ass end of a supernova folded a bit more neatly than before; sub-  
corollary, inflation is rubbish and advances in kissing technology account for the 1% annual GDP growth.  
The vine bows to us, in full deference to the art of phototropism, and starts weaving itself into a tapestry:

Everyone has a fundamental  
wavelength that is the life  
and the death of everyone  
and an angle and everyone

dies and when everyone  
dies they assume their life  
and death and frequency  
in addition to their angle:

chewing wormwood, tending  
the itch, considering having  
to apologize as an integral  
part of the process, refusing  
your part *as* part, mixing  
hot and cool media with  
the delicacy of a medieval  
alchemist, constructing

a map at one-to-one scale.<sup>26</sup>  
As for you, because everyone  
lies but garbage cans don't,  
the ash is always preferable  
to the flesh; your swiftest  
nightmare only comes when  
equal to your fondest wish.  
And you know me: I get off

on giving away, at cost,  
the trade secrets  
of the archerfish.

*Maiden of the midden,  
duchess of debris,  
no-one else could leaven  
life from rotted yeast.*

*The anthropology of waste<sup>27</sup>  
is written in the clouds  
and how, by turns, we get  
excited, and then bored:*

*buried, burnt, scorned;  
buried, burnt, reborn.<sup>28</sup>*

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MS. ELLEN D-  
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TO ELLEN.

IS THIS THE FACE THAT LAUNCHED A THOUSAND  
SHIFTLESS COLLEGE READING ASSIGNMENTS  
AND ONE DANDY OF A BRAD PITT VEHICLE?  
BENEATH EVERY BLOND TETHER IN BOULDER  
I SEE IT. WHO KNEW ALL THESE CENTURIES  
YOU WERE DRAWING CURRICLES ON THE HILL,  
AGELESS CURATOR OF AN INDIE-ROCK  
PARTHENON ATOP POE'S ACROPOLIS?

WE NEED A VACATION, ELLEN. LET'S DRAFT  
OURSELVES ON A BOARDING SLIP AND LIVE  
INSIDE ONE OF THE MALNOURISHED BOTTLES  
ON YOUR DINING ROOM TABLE. WE'LL SLIDE  
INTO MARE NOSTRUM AND SPEND A DECADE  
TOSSED ABOUT THE SEA LIKE A DISAGREE-  
ABLE MEAL IF WE HAVE TO. AND WE MUST.  
PARIS ISN'T GETTING ANY YOUNGER,

AND NEITHER ARE WE. I KNOW YOU'VE FELT IT  
BEFORE; YOUR OIL-BASED URUK IS A DEAD  
GIVEAWAY, LIVING PROOF. ALL THAT'S LEFT  
IN TROY IS TO OPEN MY CELL, SUMMON  
MENELAUS, AND SAY, "YES, I'VE GOT HER,  
AND I'M NOT FALLING FOR THAT WOODEN HORSE."



**Tastes Like Burning.<sup>29</sup>**

I

"I have amazing body control," I say,  
knocking over the Bix Beiderbecke<sup>30</sup>  
cover as I walk across your bedroom.  
"You cannot pull my hair by hurting  
me." The stylus is warped and blue<sup>31</sup>  
sounds wobbly. "In a messianic twist,  
Bix wore a hat made of razor blades."  
You are lying naked with a string  
hanging from your vagina; I'm getting  
a bit drunk now and starting to talk

in words. "Death tastes like pennies."  
"How do you know what pennies  
taste like?" Your voice is a cornet  
recorded on a phonograph behind  
French doors; my ears are burning  
together to serve you. "Sometimes<sup>32</sup>  
you have to cut up the middleman."  
Your card is declined, but I do accept  
this mutual user acceptance testing<sup>33</sup>  
of our bodies. A found symphony,

written on rose-petals and goose-  
droppings, conducted with butter  
knives, pickled in Hendrick's gin.  
Because we ran out of integers.

## II

Given the great gap  
analysis between coffin  
and grave, we'll win

a medal for our efforts  
in the art of combined  
arms, but lose all de-  
composure in the process.

I strike the wrong end  
of a cigarette and put  
the match in my mouth.

You brush your teeth  
with cortisone cream  
and floss with a piano  
wire, high F above C.

I take a slice of pizza  
from the refrigerator,  
dressing it with enough

Tabasco to simulate  
active denial. It's a step  
up from my usual diet  
of elephant seal milk

and Scotch bonnets.<sup>34</sup>

A cold, burnt crumb  
falls out of my hands,

turns into a midge  
and bites you  
on the arm.

Never point

a loaded cap  
gun unless you  
intend to use it.

### **Anechoic Mockheroic.**

The trouble with racquetball courts  
isn't so much the claustrophobia  
as the oppressive quiet. Heavy  
exercise and inner monologue  
angry up the blood,<sup>35</sup>  
and are to be avoided  
in any denomination.

It is to that dumb voice  
we owe switching stations,  
limited-liability corporations,  
and the toaster oven – any device  
lesser than the son  
of its moving parts.

Consider the alternative, meditation,  
a terrific strategy  
if you like to treat thinking  
like a case of herpes.

At thirty-six, John Cage  
visits the soundproof room  
at Harvard for a friendly chat  
with silence. He stops  
along the Charles to pick  
toadstools on the way.

Cage closes the door  
of a room less  
a room and more  
a Maclaurin series<sup>36</sup>  
of conic symmetry  
centered at silence,  
and awaits his revelation.  
The gods yield nothing  
but dry Chardonnay  
and good Vin du Pape.

Cage leaves, convinced  
that the room is broken.  
The attendant assures him,  
“The high-pitched sound,  
is your nervous system,  
and the low-pitched one  
is your blood circulating.”

At thirty-six, John Cage  
visits the soundproof room  
at Harvard to scream  
at silence. He stops  
at Magazine Beach  
on the way back.

Platelets clash  
like hoplites.

Synaptic muskets  
lay fulgurite  
like lightning  
on Magazine sand.

Every grain  
on every beach  
ever discovered  
is a headstone  
for every note  
every human  
ever played  
on every  
instrument.

Absolute zero  
is impossible.<sup>37</sup>

There can be  
no peace.

**12 AM – 8 AM**

**Permian Daylight.**<sup>38</sup>

I am obsessed with catching the errant  
trilobite in our house. He's still a fist-  
sized woodlouse in armor, but he's evolved  
the hands of a prospector. He watches me

watch him sneak into a grocery bag.  
Then he laughs and flies away. I chase him,  
toppling a bowl of Permian time  
pieces. The trilobite lands on a picture

album on our drawing room floor. I leap,  
only to find calcite without substance  
beneath. You lie beside me, holding out  
your arm. Trilobites scuttle about your wrist.

You pet them and feed them bits of sulfide.  
If our fossils don't split the rent, I'll die.

## Let He Who is Moral Step Forward.

I am the Earl of Leicester, 1<sup>st</sup> of the 8<sup>th</sup> creation, or 31<sup>st</sup> overall.<sup>39</sup> I am involved in courtly intrigue for the successor to Castlereagh, CEO of Great Britain.<sup>40</sup> I suspect that he suspects that I suspect his plan to establish a central bank. One day, after a session of parliament during which we yet again voted down a tax on private stills, I follow Castlereagh back to his office and surprise him while he is on the phone.

“Yes, I’d like to send this letter to the Pomeranian consulate in Dahomey by zeppelin. Am I too late for...” He hangs up as soon as he notices me.<sup>41</sup>

“Just dropping these off for you to sign in the morning,” I say, waving some racing forms I picked up earlier at My Brother’s Bar.<sup>42</sup> I see that Castlereagh’s Burberry suspenders are undone. Then I notice the little hardbody sitting on his desk. “Am I interrupting something?”

“Leave them on my desk,” Castlereagh says, turning his back to me. I recognize his mistress as Charlotte, one of Metternich’s secretaries.<sup>43</sup> She is wearing a black dress by Coco Chanel and matching leather sneakers by Puma. “I guess you think I’m some sort of hypocrite.”

“Who am I to judge?”

“Everyone judges. Who are you *not* to?”

“Does it matter?” I ask. Charlotte smiles with eye contact. I think she likes me.

“What do you mean?” Castlereagh asks back, still turned around.

“Well, perhaps I’m naïve, but I’m not sure personal ethics have anything to do with the art of statecraft.”

“This is true.” Castlereagh spins the globe next to his desk. The ocean is dust and each country is made out of a different precious stone. Prussia is electrum, Tanganyika is satinspar, and Siam is moolooite. “After me, Castlereagh continues, “no-one understands the affairs of the continent.”



I take a stainless steel can opener by Brookstone in *SkyMall* out of my chamois skin jacket by Valentino and stab Castlereagh in the carotid artery. Blood covers the globe; I clean it off with a silk handkerchief by Prada. Then I place the can opener in Castlereagh's dominant hand.

"Hey," I say to Charlotte, "need a ride?"

\*\*\*

We are at Eton, an oft-trod field behind a plain white Victorian house.<sup>44</sup> It is cold and cloudy outside. The entire House of Lords, including myself, are standing in a wide circle. The chamberlain is on the steps of the back porch. He is wearing an understated double-breasted beige suit by Brioni, a silk shirt and tie by Louis Vuitton, and Crocs. He claps once. This signals the beginning of the first test. Everyone quiets, and there are twenty seconds of silence. It is broken by the chamberlain's speech, which is solemn and accurate:

"Let he who is moral step forward."

Several lords and I take one step forward, forming an inner circle. We are the pool of candidates from which Castlereagh's successor is to be chosen. John Wilmot, 2<sup>nd</sup> Earl of Rochester, stumbles forward later than everyone else.<sup>45</sup> He is wearing a blue pinstripe suit by P. Diddy, a shirt by Tommy Bahama, horn-rimmed glasses by Oliver Peoples, a silver nosepiece by The Sharper Image, and makeup by Rick Baker.<sup>46</sup> Everybody laughs except the chamberlain, who claps once and says:

"These men believe that they are moral. Very well. We shall find out if they are moral." The chamberlain looks around, and then continues. "The first test has come to pass. Now begins recess."

\*\*\*

The chamberlain steps forward and claps twice. This signals the beginning of the second test. Everyone quiets, producing twenty seconds of silence. Then the chamberlain speaks, solemn, accurate:

"Let he who is moral step forward."

Two people step forward: me and John Wilmot. Many besides the chamberlain laugh, except people are also shocked and-or appalled. Lord Grey spits tea out his nose. Palmerston yells until Wellington boxes his ears. A lady from East Anglia and her daughter vomit. Gordon Brown wets himself.<sup>47</sup>

"These men believe that they are moral. Very well. We shall find out if they are moral." The chamberlain pauses, looks around, and continues. "The second test has come to pass. Now begins recess."

\*\*\*

After the second test, Charlotte comes to my side. A reporter and her camera-fellow, a eunuch, approach.

"I'm here at the *playing fields of Eton* with the *Earl of Leicester*, Whig candidate for CEO of the Commonwealth." The reporter is a little blonde hardbody. She is wearing a plaid suit by Armani, a taupe shirt by Dolce and Gabbana, a bronzeberry frost silk scarf by Burberry, and gazelle skin loafers by Adidas. "People often refer to the *Earl of Rochester* having the will of the people," the hardbody continues, "as both a

*good and bad* thing. Now, with the tragic loss of Lord Castlereagh and subsequent battle for succession, *John Wilmot* is your sole opposition. *Any thoughts on today's turn of events?*"

"I have the utmost respect for Rochester." I supplicate Castlereagh's ex-mistress' ass as I speak. "He is a great man, a great friend, and a worthy adversary. I can understand how some people might be opposed to his candidacy." I pause to watch Wilmot administer a philtre on the tongues of several admirers of both sexes using an eye-dropper by Williams-Sonoma. "But just because a man isn't moral doesn't mean he can't harness the morals of others to further the nation."

"Well, there you have it. Leicester, in a touch of class, harbors only *praise* for his opponent, the *controversial* Earl of Rochester. Let he who is moral, step forward! *Back to you, Kent.*"

\*\*\*

Several other lords are behind the garage with their wives, mistresses, and page-boys. The chamberlain is also here, but he just likes to watch. Charlotte is back here, too, smoking. She is wearing Seven-for-all-Mankind denim, a black v-neck tee by American Apparel, and red high heels by Manolo Blahnik. The ashes from her Parliament Light become dust mites as they return to the soil. We kiss. Opening my eyes, I notice two men approaching. They are brandishing unfinished cricket bats by Hammacher Schlemmer.

"I can explain, gentlemen."

"Let he who is moral step forward," the smaller one says, smacking the bat against his bare hand.

I take Charlotte by the hand, run across the field, and enter the house. We head up the concrete stairs. The walls are also concrete and barren. We stop every step to make out against the stairs and walls, which will hurt in the morning.

We enter a room on the third floor. There is a twin bed and a window. Charlotte jumps on and tugs at me.

"I know who you are," I say.

But you do not  
answer. The sheets  
are pond count,

infinitely many  
Riemann surfaces  
per square inch,

and you pull  
me down  
into you.

## **The Art of Invisibility.**

### I: Canary Island (Discrete Encounter II)

The field is lush, exhibiting the chromoluminosity of a mid-main sequence pointillist work. The spaces between brushstrokes, created with the tiny bits of toilet paper a hasty businessman applies to his face, teem with undiscovered species. Tiny frogs dart about, alongside hardy crickets and albino squirrels.

As I take you behind the baobab tree I have a strange forbidding feeling.<sup>48</sup> Whose land is this? Who holds the mortgage, who underwrote it, who securitized it, who sliced it into tranches, who rated it, who reinsured it, who bet on the player, who bet on the banker, who gave her a little extra love, and who sold poison meth to schoolchildren?<sup>49</sup> No island is an island anymore.

The leaves of the baobab have been eclipsed by a flock of canaries that have gone to roost. It is an impressive tree; there must be thousands of birds. They form a large yellow mass in the middle of the field, a mid-main sequence star not unlike the Sun, complete with corona of feathers.

A canary flies away and another emerges to take its place at the photosphere. She keeps the doors open by force before another subway departs.

It must have taken her millennia to shove her way there.

## II: Inaccessible Island<sup>50</sup>

I'm being chased by a pack of flightless birds. The Capitol is an extinct volcano surrounded by a moat of untreated sewage. I try to jump across, falling face-first into the effluent. It tastes like an open relationship left on the counter overnight. So I swim across, and I'm there. I turn around and see them – ostriches, emus, rheas, kiwis, cassowaries – I see them flying, which is all too obvious.

I run, and run into a massive barbed-wire cast-iron fence. I cannot bend the bars. My pursuers, fast to a bird, are gaining. I cut my hands trying to climb the fence. A giant moa covered in a sub-pack of Inaccessible Island Rails saddles up. I take a debit card out of my wallet and take a bite out of it. The moa and her friends try to eat me but my teeth marks cut through iron. A stained-glass window in the Capitol shows my checking account balance increase with each broken bar. I slip through but it is too narrow for the birds. They try to fly over but get stuck in the wire. The Inaccessible Island Rails jump off and start plucking earthworms out of the ground.

A penguin-shaped gremlin is waiting for me on the steps.<sup>51</sup>

—What do you have there?

—Proprietary algae.

—How did you get it?

—Like anything else. I stole it.

I figured out how to siphon off some of the package and deliver it to the world in such a way that it increases as it is consumed. A transelastic good. I keep going but the gremlin follows me.

—Steamed, not sautéed.

He doesn't just want points on the package.<sup>52</sup> He wants to consume it in such a way that it denies other people from using it. I think about killing the gremlin for pan-fried penguin-meat. I keep climbing.

—Fricasséed, not filleted.

Every time I look back, the gremlin is still there. As each stair passes, the front door appears further away.

—*Allegro con brio, non al dente.*

He keeps tempting. And he has a point. What incentive do I have for others to gain without climbing here with me? Why shouldn't I enjoy it all for myself?

—*Espresso, non elegantissimamente.*

The stairs turn into a down escalator as the entrance recedes from view. I start running, but my gremlin, my dark passenger, the addict of my soul, is still there.<sup>53</sup> And his transaction is not complete.

### III: Tibet Island

Base camp isn't what I expect. Multiple buildings surround a giant parking lot. I stop at a lookout; India is below. I lean over the railing and drop a washer, watching it fall until I can no longer see it.

This is, in fact, Everest.

I circle the lot a few more times, then park and start walking around. The buildings are unmarked. I enter one, and go to the third floor. The rooms are unnumbered. I enter one in which the desks are arranged in a giant square. There are fifty-three people mingling before class and two inches of snow on the floor.

Three women are talking by a window. One of them asks:

"What do they use in your native Nepal for currency?"

I look outside. The country of Nepal is sectioned off by cattle wire in the courtyard.

"Anglais, bien sûr," another answers in a British accent. "Chacun parle anglais partout." <sup>54</sup>

The two others nod in agreement. The professor breaks a champagne glass over his podium. As everyone sits down, he assures us:

"Don't worry, this isn't anything unusual. That's just what we call 'kid's blood.' It's quite natural here."

There are infinitesimal red droplets collecting in the snow.

"Oh, how delightful!"

"I read about this in *Lonely Planet*."

"Maybe I can bottle it and sell it on eBay."

IV: Thule Island (The Art of Invisibility)<sup>55</sup>

I'm attending a weeklong seminar at base camp, 17,600 feet above sea level. Where did I get the money for this? It isn't cheap. Maybe I've been awarded a grant. Maybe I'm here on a business trip. I'm worried they're going to come around to collect after today's session and throw me out. I'm worried I won't have enough money to come back and see you. I'm not a rich man. I'm not even landed gentry.

The professor leads us through that exercise where you drip wax into cold water. You have my copy of *Le Manifeste du Surréalisme* and a little portrait of Breton next to your oven. There is a cigarette hanging out of his mouth and he is giving us the finger.

Will I ever see either, kid? I stop

fretting and start a self-portrait. A candle glows at the bottom of the glass on my desk. Using my iPhone and copper wire, I start melting a red crayon over it. Each drip turns into a bloodworm as it hits the water. I reach down and take some snow. It is red, light, and fluffy. I ball it up and put it on top of my fist

to create a cone. I lick, but can't swallow.

The bloodworms are sinking, tiny prisms  
amidst the luminiferous ether.

Again: nothing. Then the glass to my lips.

There is an infinity  
greater than  
infinity,  
kid,  
and I have  
the records  
to prove  
it.<sup>56</sup>

## **An Imperial Message.**

I'm on a U.S. diplomatic mission in North Korea. Our envoy consists of three people: the Secretariat of State, her assistant, and me. We're taking a glass elevator in Juche Tower,<sup>57</sup> an obsidian geyser rising from the center of Pyongyang, the nation's capital.

"Where are we going?" I ask the Secretariat, who is wearing a taupe pantsuit.

"Wherever our feet go," she replies.

Her assistant smirks at me, but I ignore him. The concentric circles of imperial Pyongyang become visible outside the elevator. They appear rapidly in and out of focus as the elevator climbs.

"So what is he like?" I try again.

"Two-and-a-half, three pounds of flax, tops."

I don't bother to look at the assistant this time. I understand certain matters are on a "need-to-know" basis, but it seems rather tacky for the Secretariat to play mind games with me. I don't have time to stew on this before the elevator doors open. A short man wearing a purple Armani suit and square glasses greets us.

"Welcome to Korea, my American friends. We hope your journey was uneventful."

I do know one thing: we are here to sign a nuclear non-proliferation treaty with the notorious Kim-Jong-Il.

\*\*\*

Sure, I had read the intelligence on Kim. The repressive government, the forced starvations, the cult of personality. I heard that he subsidizes his decidedly New Jack Swing era taste for Hennessey by printing millions of counterfeit U.S. dollars. On paper, he doesn't seem much different than your run-of-the-mill Idi Amin, Pol Pot, or Robert Mugabe – except for that whole "nuclear ambition" thing that brought us here.

Jong-Il starts leading us through a lobby. "What airline did you fly?"

“Pan Am” our Secretariat answers.<sup>58</sup>

“Nice,” Jong-Il says. “I hear they offer in-flight WiFi.”

“I played farthing stocks on the Mumbai Exchange with my iPhone.”

“Glocalization, in both stock and covalent bond.”

Jong-Il proceeds to show us around his place a bit. One room is a gambling parlor in the fashion of the concert of Europe. Another room is a library, also in the old Continental style. Another room is a geodesic theater. Another room is an aquarium designed as a Klein bottle,<sup>59</sup> with an improbable table-for-two placed in the middle. Another room is the imperial seraglio, with concubines hailing from various countries in proportion to their delegation at the International Monetary Fund.

Another room is a garden, with abundant pomegranate, wolfberry, açai, and other superfruit.

“Go ahead,” Jong-Il says. “The tree is not attached to its fruit.”

“Thank you.” I take a mangosteen.

Another room is a conference hall for the official proceedings. Kim Jong-Chul waits with documents and a pen. Jong-Chul bears the same suit as his father (to whom he is heir apparent), but is slightly taller. The room has a table with a few chairs and a window overlooking imperial Pyongyang. It stinks of butterflies.

Jong-Il snaps his fingers, and his son hands the documents to our Secretariat, who starts licking them.

“I believe our offer is most beneficial to the collective security of SEATO<sup>60</sup> and beyond,” Jong-Il says. “After all, what is the sound of one lip talking?”

Our Secretariat signs the treaty while I try to say grace using only my lower lip.

“Or one hand shaking,” our Secretariat says to Jong-Il, holding out her palm.

They shake; the North Koreans are pleased. The Secretariat’s assistant looks at me, but, again, I ignore him. Jong-Chul tears off the yellow copy and gives it to our Secretariat, folds the original and puts it in his wallet, and seals the pink copy in an envelope addressed to the United Nations. Meanwhile, Jong-Il gets a bottle of Hennessy V.S.O.P. and five snifters from a hidden cabinet in the wall, and pours everyone a glass.

“Not since Vienna<sup>61</sup> has humanity negotiated such a peace,” Jong-Il says. Our Secretariat picks her nose and eats it. “We shall be composed by the aria we compose.”

Maybe Jong-Il isn’t so crazy after all. Then again, my hair always looks good before I’m about to get it cut.

“My friends,” Jong-Il raises his glass. “To us.”



We all toast, and then I shoot both Jongs in the throat with a bone pistol. They die instantly. Due to the world-historical nature of my decision, our envoy splits up. Every man for himself in the DPRK. Before leaving, I wipe some of Jong-Il's blood on the mangosteen I took from his garden, for proof. I suspect that the state-controlled media will attempt to cover up Jong-Il's death. Not bloody likely.

\*\*\*

Scrambling downstairs. Five floors down, stumbling over a crawling man.

김 일 성... 김 정 일...

He is gaunt and mumbling in Hangul.<sup>62</sup>

김 의 별 칭 정

I keep going, floating down two and three and four stairs at a time. By fifteen floors there is a trickle; by thirty, a throng. I am surprised no-one suspects that I killed Kim Jong-Il, but everyone seems too possessed (starving?) to care. At 60 floors down there is a Haymarket in the stairwell; at 101, the Majority Whip of a makeshift Duma is carving a 9th commandment into the wall to a mob's approval.

One of the stouter men steps out to greet me.

"What's the password?"

I don't say anything and attempt to side-step him.

"Nobody gets by without the password," he stops me. "It should have been granted to you by your systems administrator. To reset your pass..."

I wave him off, averting my head so my ensuing brute force attack will take him by surprise.

"Feel free to try to get by," he pre-empts. "Just so you know, I'm rather ripped."

I think about bribing him with the imperial mangosteen, but decide against it.

"If there is no sysadmin, everything is permitted."

"Hold out your right wrist," he says. I oblige, and gives me a stamp: EVICTED.

"Thank you," I say, and move on, though not before pointing out how crucial a multi-polar framework of checks and balances is for domestic security.

\*\*\*

Eventually, I escape outside a delivery bay at the bottom of the palace.

"Halt!"

A North Korean soldier is pointing a gun at me. I run.

*“Bodhi!”*

The solidier shoots and misses; I duck behind an anti-aircraft battery and then escape unharmed into a crowd. A full-scale riot has broken out in Pyongyang. Citizens have taken to the streets and are looting local businesses. Several mansions are ablaze. As I negotiate the multitude, pushing this way and that, an old woman holding a phalarope by the neck approaches. She walks with a cane, but speaks with a force that defies her frailty.

“I know who you are!”

“Do you, now?”

“Why did you do it?”

“Father dies, son dies, grandson dies.”

There is an explosion in the distance. The mausoleum of Kim Il-Sung (founder of North Korea and father of Kim Jong-Il) is under siege. I turn left and collide with a man, who reaches for me; I turn right and bump into a woman who lunges likewise. I stutter-step and find a crease.

“Long live dear Buddha!” the old lady yells.

As I run away, she throws her phalarope at me. It catches flight before contact and soars into the distance.

I owe her a bird.

\*\*\*

I find a North Korean helicopter behind a building, which I steal and fly towards South Korea. The border resembles the Battle of Britain. The sky is molecular, full of fighter jets, gunships, and floating platforms. I was correct in my suspicions: North Korea invaded South Korea just as we signed the treaty. I escape the peninsula in the confusion, starting about East Asia. First, Inner Manchuria, whom Imperial Japan occupied in 1931 and the Soviet Union later annexed. I pass a number of cities – Tong Hua, Shenyang, Dalian – whose names and populations appear above in a translucent font as I fly by.

Anshan, Fushun, Tangshan.

Mountain, desert, Beijing, and more cities, most I’ve never heard of, each at least twice as big as the mid-major city I grew up next to (Cleveland) or the mid-major city where I work now (Denver).

Jinan, Nanjing, Qingdao.

Copper and iron.

Shanghai.

Molybdenum and manganese.

Xuzhou, Huainan, Hangzhou.

Silicon.

Wenzhou.

I turn into the East China Sea to approach South Korea from the back door. It's called the Princeton Offense. I was correct in my suspicions: South Korea invaded North Korea just as we signed the treaty. Avoiding enemy and friendly fire, I get lost. I'm spatially adept but bad with directions – I didn't learn how to drive until I was 23. I end up in Tokyo. The city is neon; each skyscraper of *Nishi-Shinjuku* is a different color. Translucent pop-ups appear as I hover over, telling me who is doing what and where and how.

On the 21st floor of the Hyatt, a man with thinning hair and arteriosclerosis stares at himself in the mirror with 2 jackets, 4 shirts, and 5 ties scattered about him on the floor;

On the 34th floor of Old Mitsui, a woman with recurring migraines and 29 lifetime prescriptions for various antibiotics enters her credit card information into the third screen (of four): VISA, 4463764468468213, CVC2 903, expiration 03/15, authorized for \$14.95 on the eighth of every month;

On the 55th floor of Shinjuku L, two vassals, one with a disposition to diabetes and a left fibula that never quite healed right and the other with a case of athlete's foot and an allergy to shellfish and a malignant FICO score, take leave of their duties on the desk of a Marquis of Marketing Strategy, who has warts;

On the 89th floor of Tax Tower,<sup>63</sup> a perfectly healthy man is working late again. Passing out on his desk, he kisses the moon goodnight.

The moon, immune to lobbyists,  
does not respond in kind.

\*\*\*

I land on an American aircraft carrier in the Sea of Japan. Freedom! The men on deck keep distance, looking at me and whispering to each other. A general with a cob pipe steps forward.

"I'm \_\_\_\_\_," I say. "\_\_\_\_\_." I try to say my name, but it is the sound of one lip talking. "\_\_\_\_\_!"

"We know," he says. "Is that all you got here with?"

The helicopter I started with in Pyongyang has been reduced to a helmet with a propeller on it. I remove it.

"Yes." I toss the mangosteen to the general like a knuckleball. He catches and examines it.

"You better start running." The general takes an antioxidant-rich bite.

"What?"

I was correct in my suspicions. They are going to cover up Kim Jong-Il's death, install a lookalike, and kill me, in no particular order. I met the Buddha face-to-face; sure, he was extravagant, but he was also kind, generous, eloquent, a veritable student of history. Yet we see him as this power-crazed midget, drunk on cognac and Korean blood, banging 19 year old Belgian girls at will while watching *Rambo*. We see him a step from keeping jars of his own urine and shuffling around with five-star tissue boxes on his feet.

In places we don't talk about at parties, we want a crazy Kim Jong-Il. We need a crazy Kim Jong-Il.<sup>64</sup>

"For governor," the general says,  
juice dripping down his chin.  
The drops harden  
into bits of dried  
dung before  
they hit  
ground  
zero.

"You're a hero!"

The men  
cheer.  
I have no-  
where to  
go.

**The Opera Game, or Denny's Grand Slam Eats Afterbirth.<sup>65</sup>**

—How do you know my name?

The janitor grins.

—No, seriously.

He taps the top of his head. I forgot I had a convention nametag stuck to my bald spot. I rip it off and find my name written illegibly in someone else's handwriting. The janitor tries to stop me, but I slap the sticker over his mouth. The elevator is one of those old crank jobs that I have to operate. I am here to help prepare for a meeting — a diet, if you will. I don't know what it's all about, so it must be important. And if I knew, I'm sure it would still be important.

At any rate, there is greater honor in being a knight than a vassal.

I enter without knocking. There is nothing crazy about the loft (big, wooden) except for the fact that VISA is written everywhere.<sup>66</sup> On the walls and other opaque surfaces in activated charcoal, and on the windows and other translucent surfaces in fuck-me lipstick.

I find him in the kitchen with his mane tied back. He opens the stove and takes out this great big cylinder of a cake, complete with frosting.

I ask:

—Can I play?

And he replies:

—I command you to play.

He takes a wet toilet brush out of his pants and uses it to sculpt the cake's frosting. A mountain of generic Ho-Ho's appears nearby, a result of the natural processes of orogeny.

—Be it in exacting nanocredit like 10,000 tiny catheters or preparing delicious cakes, we must focus on our core competencies to deliver on our value proposition for our partners and investors.

He unwraps a non-union equivalent Ho-Ho and hands it to me.<sup>67</sup>

—What do you think?

The phenomenology of the eupeptic: a flimsy chocolate sponge covered in synthetic cream, rolled radially symmetric like a hand towel at a sushi bar into a chiaroscuro swirl, swaddled in a raincoat of cocoa not unlike the body of a subcompact automobile.

—Use either no ornament or good ornament.<sup>68</sup>

I lean into placing the Ho-Ho on the perimeter of the cake while looking to him for approval.

—I command you to.

I do so, and we take turns adding Ho-Ho's to the cake, and then the next one, and the one after that. It is a delicate enterprise. Each cake is extracted from the stove according to its API (hand, handle) and placed on the counter so as not to disturb any of its three layers (the business layer, the data access later, and the user interface layer).<sup>69</sup> Then we adorn it with Ho-Ho's in a circle Euclid himself would underwrite.

—Why are we doing this?

Players most similar at this age include the Cincinnati Kid, Hotspur, and the Scotch Gambit.

—No. No. Don't you see?

He squeezes a Ho-Ho to death and continues:

—That doesn't matter.

He lunges as if he is about to alter me but instead wipes Ho-Ho innards on my nose.

—The word 'janitor' resolves to Janus, the ancient god of doorjambs and brand management.

He smashes a cake against the wall, which resolves to a jam and butter supernova. He adds:

—A visa is a door to a hallway, not a hall unto itself.

I swore that I understood his theory, and would follow his advice.<sup>70</sup>

\*\*\*

*The bathroom is strange. I came for a piss and the bottles are lined up like chess pieces. They are variously colored and contain various industrial and non-industrial instances of sludge pitted against each other:*

NON-INDUSTRIAL SLUDGE  
(white)

1. vomit adopts dura mater IV
2. ocular custard adopts rancid mayonnaise III

INDUSTRIAL SLUDGE  
(non-white)

- manure adopts grey goo IV
- raw sewage adopts venereal ointment III

*The idea is to control the middle of the board for maximum visibility, develop your pieces, protect the commander-in-chief, and prevent your competitors from doing any of these three things whenever possible.*

3. pus adopts venereal discharge IV
- rat-liver pate adopts dented canned gruel V

*It is not enough to succeed; others must have their noses rubbed ulcerative in the thoroughly beshitted dressing-gown of failure.*

4. pus eats manure
- rat-liver pate eats ocular custard

*This is called ability to accomplish a thing by sheer cunning.<sup>71</sup>*

5. venereal discharge eats rat-liver pate
- raw sewage eats pus

*Now all the color is oozing out of the bottles into a vortex in the middle of the floor.*

6. rancid mayonnaise adopts thick diarrhea IV
- dented canned gruel adopts plutonic peat bog III

*This isn't particularly fun or funny.*

7. venereal discharge adopts fetid whey III
- venereal ointment adopts grey goo II

*I leave the bathroom, make sure no-one is watching, and then peek back in...*

8. fetid whey adopts thick diarrhea III

*... the hemorrhaging resumes.*

9. thick diarrhea adopts ocular custard V
10. fetid whey eats icy hot!
- 8... septic scum adopts rat liver pate III
- icy hot adopts 2-in-1 hair cleanser V

*Now I must have really lost it. My sheer presence seems to induce the color out of everything into the Coriolis soup. Even the mirror is sloughing its chromium tongue. It's as if I had an irresistible urge to drop the black hole I've been fondling between my thumb and forefinger all this time in the geographical center of the room like a needle on a record player.*

10... septic scum eats fetid whey

*There has to be someone I can call  
to cancel this magnetism, I'm thinking,  
if I stand here long enough I'll louche  
the entire galaxy.*

11. rancid mayonnaise eats septic scum psyche

*I open the shower curtain but the line is busy.*

11... 2-in-1 hair cleanser adopts venereal  
ointment II

*I light a candle but the build is broken.*

12. castle venereal discharge side

*I try to jump out the window but they are out of half-and-half.*

12... Denny's Grand Slam adopts venereal  
ointment I

13. afterbirth eats 2-in-1 hair cleanser

Denny's Grand Slam eats afterbirth

14. subcutaneous fat adopts venereal discharge I

*The duodenum digests itself, a constellation of polyps in recursive peristalsis.*

14... venereal ointment adopts grey goo III

*Undo to primordial ooze {for state  $S \exists$  an algorithm  $f \mid f_1(S_t) = S_{t-1}; f_2(S_{t-1}) = S_{t-2} \dots f_n(S_n) = S_{n-1};$   
retract to amniotic sac {(loop for  $i$  from 1 to  $n$  (if nil ( $f$  everything) ( $S_{n-1}$ )))  $\rightarrow S_0.$ }*

15. rancid mayonnaise eats EPO-boosted blood

dented canned gruel eats rancid mayonnaise

*Because eventually everything bleeds. The lovers, the ex-lovers, the crushes, the ex-crushes, the co-workers, the ex-co-workers, that sneaky hot number who may or may not have been from Euclidean/non-Euclidean geometry class — at some point they all bleed together into an anthropomorphic apeiron, one body at the vanishing point of consciousness, and whenever you fuck anything you're making a philosophical statement about the nature of fucking.<sup>72</sup>*

16. venereal discharge adopts fetid whey VIII psyche!

*I wish I could make it stop. I'm going to get in trouble. I'm going to be very lonely.*

16... dented canned gruel eats venereal discharge

17. subcutaneous fat adopts venereal discharge VIII QED

*∴ I wonder if I said something cocky when I was drunk.*



## Die Üblich, Wie Üblich.<sup>73</sup>

The time has come, gentlemen,” I say to the full-length mirror, “to embrace type whatever letter comes five before ‘A.’”

I snort fentanyl off the septic tank.

“I, Gottfried Alexander Leopold Ludwig Kant Goethe Stich Müller Merkel von Bismarck-Schönhausen<sup>74</sup> this-that-and-the-other, am destined for greatness.”

I am the heir to Heckerisiken, a hedge fund that specializes in commodity and related derivatives. We gamble on wheat, cotton, soyabeans, copper, tungsten, typhoons, and anything else taking bets. I know what I’m thinking, but I *earned* the title of Chief Risk Officer. I read at the London School of Economics and then interned at the derivatives arm of the Exchange before coming home to work for Papa.

“I might have been born in Hamburg, but I grew up in London.”<sup>75</sup>

“Gotti! The show is about to start.”

I leave the bathroom and Helen is there.

“Do I look okay?” I ask, straightening my blue velvet blazer.

“Are you kidding? You look great.”

“So do you.”

“Oh, yeah,” Helen says, rolling her eyes.

“The face that launched a thousand gins.”

“More like the face with a thousand chins.”

“Jesus.”

Helen is the daughter of Oxford-educated tax attorneys and has Old Dutch Habsburg<sup>76</sup> in her veins. This is good, because I am the great-great grandson of Otto Von Bismarck, who unified my homeland in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century and, in doing so, became her first CEO.

“Sorry. Thank you,” Helen says, rolling her eyes again.

“What are we doing here? I thought you said the show was starting.”

“Well,” she kisses me, uncharacteristic for her in public. “We need drinks first.”

## OSAKA PREFECTURE

We’re at Safari, a Hamburg nightclub. Helen and I don’t need to get our own drinks, but I get a populist kick out of it. Besides, it’s quicker this way.

*“Die üblich?”*

The bartender holds up two double gin-and-tonics-in-a-short-glass.

*“Wie üblich.”*

I take the drinks. As I hand one to Helen, a young, slender Japanese man dances over.

“Hey!”

“Osaka!”

“How are you!?”

“Great!”

Osaka is wearing a halfway-unbuttoned shirt, revealing a silver spork hanging from a chain around his neck. He is carrying a martini in one hand and whiskey in the other.

“I thought you were on tour?” Helen asks. Osaka is the lead singer of Jar, a Krautrock band.

“I just flew in from Boulder, Colorado!”

“How was it?”

“Everyone there acts like they live in New York or don’t have money, it’s charming!”

Someone fires a 9mm luger.

“Want to watch the show from our table?”

“Sure!” Osaka holds up his drinks. “*Die üblich!*”

“*Wie üblich.*”

The show begins, as usual, right on time. There are six bodies on stage, two male, two female, and two indeterminate. The permutations are stunning, even to me, and I aced advanced microeconomic theory.

## ADMONISHMENTARIANISMS

—No more.

—No more what?

—Of this drinking like a poet on payday.<sup>77</sup>

—You were young, once.

—You need to stop.

—I can train my way out of it.

—You need to stop hanging out with people like Osaka.

—Osaka is my friend.

—Osaka is not your friend.

—Osaka is an artist.

—Just like, Helen, right?

—What are you saying?

—A painter who doesn’t paint...

—love her...

—...and...

—apa...

—...an executive who doesn’t execute.

—...

—...

## JUST LIKE STARTING OVER

We're in a cabin in the Bohemian countryside, fifty statute miles from Prague. In my study, there are books and papers everywhere:

<i>On War,</i>	Hughes' <i>Tales from Ovid,</i>	<i>Don Quixote,</i>	<i>Liar's Poker,</i>
<i>The Art of War,</i>	<i>The Lives of Romans,</i>	<i>The Complete Works of</i>	<i>The Tipping Point,</i>
<i>The Book of Five Rings,</i>	<i>The Wealth of Nations,</i>	<i>Chaucer and Shakespeare,</i>	<i>Good to Great,</i>
<i>The Prince,</i>	<i>The Nicomachean Ethics,</i>	<i>The Complete Works of</i>	<i>The Buffett Way,</i>
<i>Anti-Machiavel,</i>	<i>The Federalist Papers,</i>	<i>Goethe and Mann,</i>	<i>How to Win Friends and</i>
<i>48 Laws of Power,</i>	<i>The Social Contract,</i>	<i>I, Claudius,</i>	<i>Influence People,</i>
<i>Kissinger's Diplomacy,</i>	<i>Leviathan,</i>	<i>Barbarians at the Gate,</i>	<i>How to Live on Twenty-</i>
<i>Plato's Republic,</i>	<i>Gargantua and Pantagruel,</i>	<i>Den of Thieves,</i>	<i>Four Hours a Day;</i>

Selections from Popper, Nietzsche, and the pre-Socratics; stacks of *The Financial Times*, *The Economist* and other periodicals; the Chicago and Austrian schools simulated as game of Stratego; and a craps table fully handicapping various vehicles of the dimly lit alleys of the international investment market.

In Helen's study, there are tiny things and giant things: plastic figurines of various species grouped according to past beliefs; a massive Klein bottle glass pitcher plant; charcoal sketches of land ungulates:<sup>78</sup>

horse,	bison,	ibex,	African wild ass,	teleoceras,
goat,	water buffalo,	oryx,	Dromedary camel,	eohippus,
pig,	warthog,	onager,	Bactrian camel,	mesohippus,
sheep,	giraffe,	tamaraw,	Przewalski's horse,	parahippus,
cow,	zebra,	tapir,	elephant,	sivatherium,
donkey,	moose,	alpaca,	mammoth,	entelodont,
mule,	antelope,	anoa,	mastodon,	unicorn,
llama,	gazelle,	eland,	hippopotamus,	centaur,
yak,	chamois,	kting voar,	rhinoceros,	esquilax; <sup>79</sup>

A stuffed narwhal tattooed with a narwhal, which itself has a narwhal tattoo; a laptop connected to two-dozen typewriters so when you type on the laptop each typewriter belts the letters out; and paintings, tiny and giant, in thick black oil: URUK. YORIK. BAB-EL. KNOB HELL. NEV-SKY. GOOGOL.

I walk into the next room, a racquetball court converted into a beastorium. Most of the animals co-exist peacefully, except the sivatherium (a yak-sized giraffe) and my warthog (Blackcurrant). I ask the latter, named after one of my deprecated securitization vehicles, if he wants to hunt for food. He says yes, and the sivatherium mocks him. Blackcurrant tries to gore the sivatherium, who dodges and then throws a big toothy grin against the plexiglass.

The court-boy posts a message up against the wall, which I grab through the surface and read:

## SLOUGH OFF THE CICADA'S GOLDEN SHELL<sup>80</sup>

I go out to the barn to feed the crabsterpion, Petropolis Kahn.<sup>81</sup> He is the offspring of a crab, a lobster, and a scorpion. The bottom of the massive tank is filled with 29 progressively larger molts, all topologically equivalent to the creature. Each is shed as he gains levels of experience. I open a drawer of umlauts and float a handful in the tank.<sup>82</sup> The beast has inherited the tail of the scorpion, which he uses to pick morsels from the surface of the water, as well as the disposition to treachery.

He is also heir to the histrionics of the crab, and the lobster's immortality.

## DIE ÜBLICH, WIE ÜBLICH

I'm in the study, reading *The Theory of the Leisure Class*.<sup>83</sup> There's a map of Europe on the wall, with the Great Powers crossed out and replaced with the G8: LIVERPOOL, FIRENZE, MARSIELLE, DETROIT, WINNIPEG, VLADIVOSTOK, OSAKA. And Helen painted me ARTEMI, who taught tiny birds to sit on tiny chairs at tiny tables. It is signed in the lower right hand corner, as usual: HCE.

She enters, wearing a see-through sundress.

"*Die üblich?*" she asks, holding up a kettle.

"*Wie üblich.*"

Helen pours tea into a tiny flowerpot. Then she takes a glass thermometer, dips it in a jar of honey, and laces the tea. I place it beside myself, using the following *Oblique Strategies* entry as a coaster:

## HONOR THY ERROR AS AN INTENTION

I finish my tea, walk into Helen's study, and find her crying. She is sitting swollen in a three-legged wooden stool in the middle of the room. The walls are barren and all of her art is gone.

—I need a drink.

I dry Helen's tears with a cotton swab. A doe's entrails lie at her feet.

—One can't hurt.

I walk into the kitchen and find a bottle of Châteauneuf-du-Pape already open on the counter. Next to it there is a typewriter containing a sheet of paper with one word:

## DEER-HUNTER

We're at our usual table at Safari. Sitting in the throne to our left is the performer of the night (that is, the interstitial act between shows). The music is cabaret-style over electronic beats. The performer's makeup is running and he sings in a slow, high-pitched groan.

*Die üblich,*  
*ya ya ya.*

A relatively young, relatively slender Japanese man dances over. His shirt is infinitely unbuttoned, revealing a gold spork hanging from a chain around his neck. He is carrying a snifter of brandy the size of a floor globe with both hands.

"Hey, remember me!"

We stare off into the distance. I have purplish streaks up the inside of my arms. Helen's right ear is melting.

"It's Osaka!"

We keep staring off. I know what I'm thinking: I don't know what I'm thinking.

"Gotti!?" "Biz!?"

I look up with an opioid smile. Then I raise my glass as I would to any other patron of the club.

*"Wie üblich."*

The show begins,  
as usual,  
right  
on  
time.

**8 AM – 4 PM**

## **Hair of the Smilodon.**

The sun casts the sparrows  
onto your bedroom curtain

and into a shadow-puppet  
recapitulation of Caligula:

a play only one waking  
next to you has tickets to.

Every sleep is a little death,  
a constant erasure and recast

of the map, of this feeling  
about for the coast, but it's six

hours a night that kills me.  
Coffee is the perfect pyramid

scheme: borrowing from a future  
marketer of your brand (you)

so that there can be any future,  
and marketer of your brand.

A hangover is rarely other  
than a sterile promissory: <sup>84</sup>



the cure for audacity awry is  
of course, further audacity.<sup>85</sup>

Thus with a touch of the Irish  
into the tub. When I'm finished,

you say I insisted in my sleep  
in a language that doesn't exist,

despite its perfect intonation.  
Also, while I was in the shower,

you dreamt that you woke up  
next to my having turned into

a black saber-toothed tiger.  
Sure, *Smilodon fatalis* may

have been deadly to megafauna  
like camels and ground sloths,

but the obtuse angle by which  
she took life by the throat

left her over-equipped to deal  
with the remnants of an ice age.<sup>86</sup>

I trust God fired the product  
manager; the cat with canines

is more defensive end than free  
safety. What a piece of work

is sand. On my way out, I eat<sup>87</sup>  
several strands of your hair,

grab a slice of cold pizza,  
cover it with Lot's wife,

and cast my eyes ever forward.

## Wheel to the Shoulder.<sup>88</sup>

Waiting by the dock, there is a young man smoking. Every time he takes a drag he holds the cigarette above his head, creating an aperture between himself and the Sun, and looks up as if it has granted him some sort of divine wisdom, as if Prometheus has wriggled free long enough just to give him a light.

\*\*\*

The strategy is straightforward: I take a mid-range seat full to the window, and put my bag up by the isle to discourage any companions during the initial boarding. When attractive females present themselves upon subsequent boardings, I pull my bag into my lap and fumble around, as if I'm looking for something.<sup>89</sup>

\*\*\*

When we pull in, everyone files out as usual except for the lady in the seat in front of me, who is sticking around. I've sat with her before; she teaches biology classes at a local university. She also keeps a splendid figure for her age (hands don't lie).

As I pass, the lady explains to her friend:

—I'm waiting for all the *hara-kiri* to make their way by.

I think she meant *the hoi polloi*. Which, as we know, translates to *the the chickens*.

Or did she?

Either her propeller isn't moving, or it's rotating at the precise velocity such that the individual blades appear motionless.

## **Horses.**

When Vinton Cerf, legitimate father  
of the Internet, got too old to race,  
he moved on, putting himself out to stud  
at Google. Top of the breed registry.<sup>90</sup>

I, on the other hand, am a student  
of the feminine form that emerges  
whenever you throw a bunch of software  
engineers in a room long enough.

The lack of sunlight has made me a pale  
rider, and my job is to make sure  
she doesn't give birth to a unicorn,  
when all we really wanted was a mule.<sup>91</sup>

## **Triptych Paris – Prague – Shangri-la.**

**me:** facebook + heavy number theory = \$\$\$\$

**edubreuil:** ohhhh.....threadcount.....

**me:** haha

**edubreuil:** i'm kidding. you're fascinating.

**me:** \$i h----->|<sup>92</sup>

**edubreuil:** i just have the attention span of a.....

10:14 AM

finish my sentence for me

i don't know. tell me.

**me:** napoleon said he could multitask really easily by opening and closing the drawers of his mind

and when he wanted to sleep, he slept great - he just closed them all  
so you just have a lot of tiny drawers

**edubreuil:** haha

10:15 AM

**me:** the combination between something victorian and the old dewey decimal system cards

**edubreuil:** my tiny drawers have quite literally been overflowing for years

**me:** a few of the drawers have drawers

\*\*\*

10:23 AM

oh anyway he finds all these books and crap and takes them home... he's always drunk.... his apartment is crammed with paper crap..... he builds shelves everywhere, everywhere, even above his bed, like, literally, a sort of table of shelves above his bed..... and it creaks in the night, shoddily built, so that he imagines it's going to crush him....<sup>93</sup>

yeah anyway

**me:** funny

**edubreuil:** kinda.

napoleon's drawers are better.

**me:** ha

10:24 AM

if only for the underwear entendre

**edubreuil:** that sounds more sexual than i intended

yes

**me:** we both realized that at the same time

**edubreuil:** ah...

**me:** awww...

\*\*\*

**me:** or not drink

nice

10:31 AM

**edubreuil:** heh "some" is an accomplishment

not nice.

**me:** nice was modifying the writing, not the boozinf

**edubreuil:** no.

**me:** boozing

**edubreuil:** ah, okay.

the boozinf.

10:32 AM

a mythical creature

**me:** haha

take it from there

i expect a drawing with caption and blurb later

**edubreuil:** oh, you'll get it.

**Of Men Whose Means to Wealth are More Obscure.<sup>94</sup>**

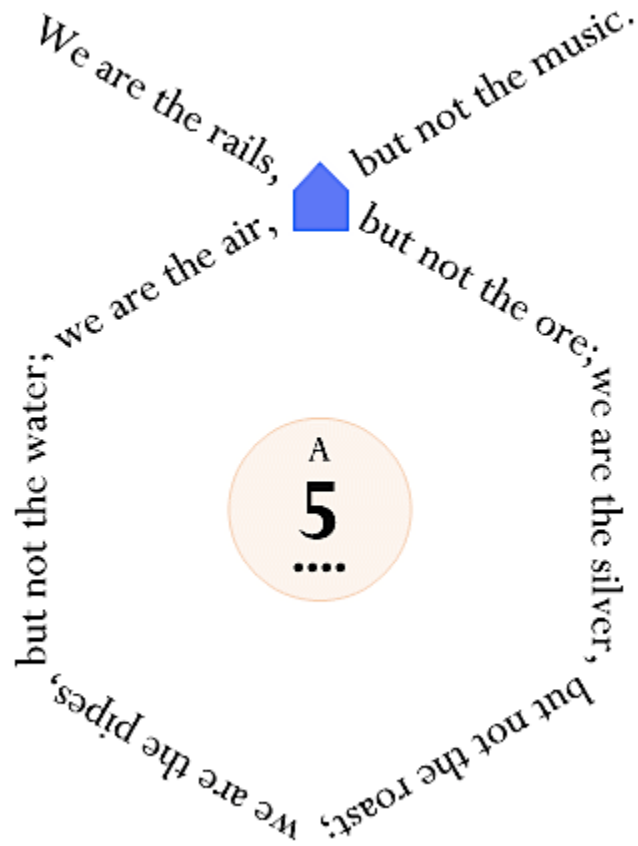
Of men whose means to wealth are more obscure,  
important men, importers, men who close  
funding from hidden quarters (board room doors  
and balance sheets); and those like me, who post

the failing banker's bail, who operate  
on tulip-petal margins (cutting chops  
with pocket knives) who follow slightly late  
on monthly bills; and those like you, who shop

for vintage goods. You never mention how  
your father fills your glass, although I've asked  
repeatedly; instead of saying no  
to you tonight, I'd rather take a cash

advance. Can two such people ever freeze  
their mortgage-buttressed insecurities?

Die Siedler von Catan.<sup>95</sup>



## Fermat's Software Theorem

i think i left  
out a washer  
when i put it  
back together.

basic problems  
of causality,  
like whether  
a cigarette gets  
shorter when  
you smoke it,  
prove elusive.

i've been feeding  
the tapeworm  
devouring man<sup>96</sup>  
for so long  
that my friends  
and loves became  
tasks on a list  
in notepad  
plus plus.



my feelings are  
a tub of sour  
cream left open  
on the kitchen  
counter overnight:

they've turned.

i have an elegant  
proof of Fermat's  
Software Theorem

(there is a point  
in every project  
after which it can  
only get worse  
before regressing  
to the mean)

but there isn't  
enough time  
to write it  
in the margins.<sup>97</sup>

## **A Perfect Day for Yellowtail.**

Among the slimiest of extant lifeforms  
are those who peddle to merchants  
on behalf of member institutions.  
ISOs took a left turn with the fishes<sup>98</sup>  
in the evolutionary tree: scaly, breathing  
with gills, only technically vertebrates.  
I'm dead certain that I'm going to catch  
something untreatable just by looking  
at their sites, what with the greasy  
stock photos and web design courtesy  
of a non-honors fourth grade student.

My office door is closed and I'm listening  
to the John Lennon Pandora station  
while navigating the ocean of corporate  
porn when "Somewhere Over the Rainbow"  
by the late half-ton of Hawai'iian  
ukulele magic Israel Kamakawio'ole  
comes on, seducing me into the shallows  
of suicidal despair. A sublime lack  
of the sublime, the tender indifference  
of hamachi. No, I can't come to lunch,<sup>99</sup>  
not even for a mouthful of molten silver.

Work to be done. Miles to be run. Now,  
for the love of God, quit staring at my feet.<sup>100</sup>

## **The Latest Initiative.**

Lately, I've been sneaking in runs at halftime, and washing at the sink afterwards. Mostly the dry Denver air sucks everything out of you; working in software handles the rest. One of my usual routes takes me past the converted factories and warehouse lofts down on the South Platte. Union Station used to be all California Zephyr and the hieroglyphs of hobo code; now there are thirteen ways of eating cheese enchiladas within a half-mile of the old SEEDS warehouse. Greenpeace canvassers straddle the 16<sup>th</sup> Street Mall like Scylla and Charybdis. John Hickenlooper turned rail yard fail into Rail Yard Ale.<sup>101</sup>

I am running through Confluence Park, where Cherry Creek meets the South Platte and, before Denver was founded, where gold met desire. I pass a young lady in scrubs walking a collie with her friend. They are having a loud conversation.

"He's just too intellectual for me – too well-read."

I immediately think:

*Not attractive enough.*

Then I pinch my gut in full stride, recalling the twenty pounds I adopted during the latest initiative that failed to change the world, which was after the previous, and prior to the current. We must have more light rail! Code is truth, and shall be all that remains for the coroners.

\*\*\*

The South Platte below Five Points is what Confluence Park used to be before rehab. Downtown moved upstream: transients, shopping carts, detritus, empty bottles of Old English. There is a bench where the river bends sinister, and every time I run down here, a man is sitting there beside the same ten-speed, reading the same newspaper, smoking the same cigarette. Off-white sneakers. The face of a whetstone. But he is too constant to be shiftless; he strikes me more as someone thinking very hard about a chess problem,

\*\*\*

Running subsidizes  
the night. It is,  
to me, the process  
that begets all  
other processes.<sup>102</sup>

As I pass the old  
gristmill, I cough  
from the smoking.

I am the city  
and I am nothing:  
my cytoplasm  
are converted  
protein factories,  
my mitochondria  
sugar lofts.

My duodenum  
is a petrol refinery  
and my marrow  
the barracks.

My alveoli  
are dockyard  
canneries<sup>103</sup>  
and my lips  
the source  
of the Nile.

My gut flora  
is a brewpub  
and my pancreas  
the apothecary.

And if the sun  
is the prototype  
trickle-down  
economist,

my spleen  
is the lender  
of last resort.

\*\*\*

He strikes me more as someone thinking very hard about a go problem,  
trying to regain the initiative. Usually when I run past  
he puts his head down and looks up to see if I'm gone yet. But yesterday  
he started a profuse nose bleed. At first, into his hands; then he got up  
and turned to the river-bound ragwort and chokecherries. As if he felt shame,  
didn't want to get the precious bike path dirty. I didn't stop, didn't  
ask if he needed help. Today he wasn't there. And it was thus that Ra,

the egret, afflicted his nostrils, turning him into the mulberry bush.

**re: (no subject).**

two words

from you

are drops

of methadone

on the tongue

of an addict

watch me

spit them

into my hand

& turn you

on the street

for a profit

### Discovery of the Elusive Blame Particle.

For every Midas, there is an equal  
and opposite Anti-Midas, who turns  
everything he touches into lead.

We all know the story of Achilles,  
dipped by his tendon into the Styx  
to the sixth sigma of mortality,

but a lesser-known Greek myth  
concerns the distinguished colleague  
whose mother's womb was coated

in Teflon. He was born with a ball  
bearing where others have a brain;  
scientists consider him a perfect

emitter of the elusive "blame"  
particle. A body without organs.<sup>104</sup>  
Just because you can't touch him

doesn't mean you can't refactor his face.<sup>105</sup>  
But, like the famous garbage collector<sup>106</sup>  
Karl Popper once said, the chief value

of intelligence is to exterminate  
a bad idea before you wake  
up with the ears of a donkey.<sup>107</sup>

## The Art of War.

3:23 PM      **arayl:** you?  
                 **me:** good question  
                 maybe i'll go to the zoo  
                 maybe i'll invest in one of those penny pink sheet stocks  
                 maybe i'll eat my weight in queso  
                 maybe i'll stage a recreation of the battle of lepanto by conscripting the spice rack  
                 maybe i'll read something idealistic  
                 maybe i'll go dark<sup>108</sup>

\*\*\*

I have one  
piece of advice  
and it is this:

all the advice  
worth taking

(one hard move,  
seek higher ground,  
man is rope,  
calorie in-out,  
ice will suffice,  
bring clean socks)

fits on the blunt  
end of a 2x4.

Everything else



is the product  
of value-added  
resellers,

case firmly  
implanted  
in point.

\*\*\*

3:24 PM

maybe i'll set off fireworks  
maybe i'll eat roasted bear  
maybe i'll set off fireworks while eating roasted bear  
that i killed

**arayl:** with your bare hands

**me:** with an excel spreadsheet.

## Real Artists Ship.<sup>109</sup>

Sitting at my desk as Hilary Hahn  
plays Mendelssohn's violin concerto  
reminds me that it takes seventeen times  
as long to unlearn the wrong way to play  
than it does to do it right the first time.

This is why child prodigies and software  
start-ups emerge with fanfare, playing  
your requiem with nothing but driftwood  
for a fiddle and the grand glockenspiel  
of your bones.<sup>110</sup>

Yet, I have my suspicions  
that Mozart withheld the worthier part  
of some random scene in *The Magic Flute*  
believing he'd have time to do it right  
after he became cash flow positive.

Mendelssohn suddenly stops, and the found<sup>111</sup>  
symphony of the hum-drum commences:  
wind in the twin fans of the motherboard  
and ductwork above; percussion in keys  
clicking like poker chips and the Starbucks

machine grinding beans across the office;  
and strings in the meeting across from me,  
in pure Penderecki mode, where a prince  
assumes center stage, adopts the chinrest,  
and applies his bow like a goddam child.

**Periplaneta Americana.**

i am Prometheus  
and the buzzard  
forever digesting  
his immortal coil.<sup>112</sup>

i am the jewel  
wasp and her larva,  
slowly hollowing  
the sedated roach  
on a component-  
by-component basis.<sup>113</sup>

i am a visionary  
and the worm  
that cannot live  
except by burrowing  
through eyeballs.<sup>114</sup>

i am an employee  
and when i am bound  
in a strait-jacket  
and gagged with  
a billiard ball  
in a window-less room  
with stone walls  
in the fifth basement  
of a secret compound

where nobody could  
ever find me  
i will still  
blink symphonies.

### **Theory of the Leisure Class.**

In the mid after-lunch  
I walk down to the Tattered  
Cover to browse the journals.<sup>115</sup>

Contrary to reports,  
most of the covers are,  
in fact, quite slick.

This ten-dollar journal,  
for example,  
is purple and named  
after one of the muses.

I bet Wallace Stevens  
published here  
after staring  
at the blackbirds  
on the tree  
outside his office  
between bouts  
with the actuarial tables.

This twelve-dollar number  
has a sepia textured cover  
and a conspicuous name.

Perhaps it tenured Veblen<sup>116</sup>  
amidst his circumamorous  
seduction of Stanford coeds.

And this seven-dollar piece  
looks like the kind of place  
where McLuhan gave<sup>117</sup>  
us permission to judge  
a pub by its cover.

As evidenced by pages  
6, 31-32, 56, and 70,  
it might be pretty good.

Then I get a text-picture  
of a toy stegosaurus.  
Apparently, Ellen found it  
wandering by Boulder Creek.

I want to reply  
with the scent  
of book-binding,  
just like I wish  
I could google  
a melody  
by humming—  
  
assisted synesthesia,  
they call it.

She and I make plans  
to meet at this place  
that "specializes"  
in seven-dollar martinis  
in the mid after-school.

I want to propose  
one global currency -  
backed by the full faith  
of Pantagruel—<sup>118</sup>  
the gin standard.

“Did you hear about the price  
of crude? Broke thirty Boodles.”

“I know, it cost me seven  
Gordon’s to fill up today.”

“ITEM - a barrel of cucumbers  
beats Hendrick’s with a twist.”

“Don't let the grandfatherly  
beard fool you - Bernanke<sup>119</sup>  
never met a dirty martini  
he wouldn't subsidize  
with the hidden tax  
known as inflation.”

Because I don't want  
to waste the money,  
I put the journal down  
and walk back to work.

Gin is the spirit  
flavored with  
juniper berries.

Now if I could only find  
that tattered typewriter  
Frank O’Hara used to<sup>120</sup>  
punch into submission.



### **Discrete Encounters III.**

My voice dances with a voice  
that isn't mine which I assume  
belongs to you. Later, when  
the universe is cooler,  
I meet someone I assume  
is you with the voice with whom  
I assume my voice danced  
when everything was hotter.<sup>121</sup>

If a boson meets a boson coming  
down the street, April doesn't  
imply May anymore than  
tomorrow implies today.<sup>122</sup>

Love object reference not set  
to instance of love object:<sup>123</sup>

I can't remember the future.

from stephen charles lester <lesters@gmail.com>  
to [REDACTED]  
date Wed Apr 02, 2008 at 3:53 PM  
subject **it ain't over 'til it's over.**

well, we lost a few more today.

at such inflection points, those who don't get cut french-style (which is to say, vivisected) are given to the art of multishirking, that Eucharist of plural non-work activities simultaneously. try entertaining a revolving brood of fellow drones, dermatophagia, and mentally updating your personal philosophy according to the principles of Bayesian inference.<sup>124</sup>

try a stare so far ahead you can see your first day on the job.

there is survivor guilt among heirloom employees, even on the shores of depression. chief symptoms include emotional incontinence, intellectual torpor, and the brain tricking you into thinking you're eating dandelions.<sup>125</sup>

there may also be warts of attrition, but correlation doesn't imply causality.

playing the same song to abject redundancy is an integral station of the process. i've listened to it ain't over 'til it's over on our configuration manager's iTunes share 12 times now.<sup>126</sup> specifically, the part where the violin stutter-steps before relapsing to it's regularly scheduled theme.

we'll see if i end up having the tenacity of herpes,  
or just crabs.<sup>127</sup>

**Punching Out.**

time will tell

not taking time

telling how

i took time

will not take time

away from me.

**4 PM – 8 PM**

## Live from the Weimar Republic.

Love means never having to say  
stop saying you're sorry  
so often. It all started<sup>128</sup>  
on the gold standard,  
every word investment-  
grade convertible,  
but your purported  
penance is less charming  
tic and more runaway  
inflation, live from  
the Weimar Republic.<sup>129</sup>  
Trading on such gestures  
is a finite half-life:  
the cost of my martini  
has doubled since  
the barman poured it.<sup>130</sup>  
But only fools take up  
arms against engines  
beyond their control:  
the result, as they say,  
is rout. I'm sorry I'm so<sup>131</sup>  
strange; let's just see  
where this plays out.



**The Most Powerful Force in the Universe.<sup>132</sup>**

And there are those who treat love (i.e., me)  
not like a bottomless glass of nepenthe,  
but as fractional-reserve currency.  
My promises are backed by a mere tenth

in the mattress for keeping. The way you lose  
your purchase in climax is rather quaint  
for a gesture without intrinsic value.  
To Love! The oldest pyramid scheme, built

before they allowed unions. A plum pox,<sup>133</sup>  
aphid-vectored into compound deceit.  
The death duty on a half-eaten box  
of condoms and a fistful of receipts.

Our cigarettes burn as the dollar tumbles.  
Yet these ashes, lightly held, shall not crumble.

#### **Discrete Encounters IV.**

Before the rite of first refusal,  
before endeavor, even before we met,  
I knew you were untouchable.  
It's not a matter of water seeking  
its level; it's the molecules themselves  
that demur. Love is a non-Newtonian<sup>134</sup>  
fluid: diving into suspended starch  
will break your face. That which feels soft

is merely less repulsive. And you,  
I caught you in the bathroom  
mirror, behaving like a wave.  
Love exhibits properties of both  
tide and particle: we are together,  
continuously, yet the logical  
entity called 'me' meets the logical  
entity called 'you' at broken

intervals. Discrete encounters.  
And when I study the valence  
of your scent, I am actually  
inhaling tiny pieces of you.  
From the clay on your cheek,  
to the carbon in your throat,  
and the iron in your cunt  
all taste is founded on smell,

and all smell upon consumption.  
Love is the bacteria that laid siege  
to our bodies before they were  
our bodies but after one of our  
regularly failed suicide attempts.<sup>135</sup>  
They shit electricity: my sole  
purpose in life is to feed the beast.  
The trough between your legs until

I lay me down in state, and full.



## **Remote Access.**

*After the Enchiridion of Epictetus*

It is easy to work from anywhere in the knowledge trade. Power may be exercised across oceans in ways the kings and scientists of old only dreamt about. Your contribution may be desired, for example, when you are with your lover. You must never lament this, nor deem it unfair. Remember, it is not because your superiors have given you remote access to their information systems; rather, it is you who have given them remote access to your mind.

When the question of availability is yours to answer and yours alone, nothing happens against your will. Rare is the case when a lover leaves that cannot be expressed in terms of employer and employee.

## Here's a Spoon.

*There are still other made-up countries  
Where we can hide forever,  
Wasted with eternal desire and sadness,  
Sucking the sherbets, crooning the tunes, naming the names.*

—John Ashbery, “Hop O’ My Thumb”

My girlfriend is being harassed  
by a poet at the local university  
who also happens to be  
a successful neo-Nazi  
because she co-wrote the broadside  
that let everyone know  
he’s a successful neo-Nazi.

His name is Josh McNair,  
and his hobbies include  
texting my girlfriend,  
winning essay contests  
judged by David Duke,  
and shooting guns.<sup>136</sup>

Josh also wrote a poem  
called miscegenation  
where cross-product  
of interracial intercourse  
comes out striped  
like a zebra.

Which is very scary,  
of course,  
because people aren’t zebras.

My girlfriend is also being harassed  
by one of her professors  
who shall remain nameless  
(Elizabeth Robinson)  
who gave the successful neo-Nazi  
a teaching fellowship.

A practicing Christian,  
she said she knows what  
it's like to be persecuted.

As we take our victory gin  
with a spoonful of minced  
oaths and two facepalms,  
Chancellor Bud Peterson  
gags the entire opinion  
staff of the campus press.

My girlfriend has another  
professor, Sidney Goldfarb,  
who calls me Steve Tasker,<sup>137</sup>  
famous special teams gunner,  
because I am "small, white,  
and great at taking people down."

Sidney can flat-out write.<sup>138</sup>  
As for the rest of them –

the would-be Catulluses  
lamenting Bush and Gitmo  
while housing a heroin-addled  
friend of failed Austrian artists –

the rest of them  
can eat my ass.<sup>139</sup>

They are nothing  
but guppies  
in a pond the size  
of a shot glass.

## **The Art of Dressing Fiscally.**

The promise that love only gets you so far before you have to do the laundry;  
the promise of wearing more hats than a Kentucky Derby party;  
the promise that venture capital, well-timed and properly applied, can accomplish anything;<sup>140</sup>  
the promise of angel investors with their angel dust;  
the promise that any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from Abramelin oil;<sup>141</sup>  
the promise of zero one infinity;<sup>142</sup>  
the promise that a pile of money lies hidden in any horribly broken system;  
the promise of a new city, complete with its own dialect, mythology, failures, and pariahs;  
the promise that doing your job well puts ten others in the bread lines;  
the promise of wearing jeans or shorts, not shaving for a week, or walking around in your stocking feet - the  
promise of business presentable, presented at ten, from a coffee shop where the students roam, or in boxer  
briefs, working from home;  
the promise that you might, despite what any Vegas sports book will tell you, be part of something special:  
plucking a pigeon feather in 1215, handing Martin Luther a nail in 1517, travelling with that Berber  
merchant who poured milk into the guts of a sheep and let it bake in the East Sahel sun;<sup>143</sup>  
the promise of fucking swearing in fucking meetings;  
the promise of not just holding down a job, but smothering it in enchilada sauce;

the promise of corporate peerage:

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Junior-level.                                 | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Apprentices.          |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Senior-level.                                 | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Knights.              |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Upper Lower Middle Management. <sup>144</sup> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Vassals.              |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Leads.  | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Barons and Viscounts. |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Principals.                                   | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Earls.                |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Directors.                                    | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Marquises.            |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Vice-Presidents.                              | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Dukes.                |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Chief Officers.                               | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Princes.              |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> CEO.  | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> The King.             |

All the promise of high-tech feudalism,<sup>145</sup>  
where love leaves the hybrid half-empty  
and you're lighting the laundry aflame.

\*\*\*

But, come six, seven, eight, four, or ten,  
it's just me, you, and two glasses of red.  
To founding members of the leisure caste,  
manifestoes and prototypes come faster  
than we can sort them into focus,  
and besides, the bar runs out of coasters.<sup>146</sup>  
First, however, I go home to change  
into new clothes, or at least a new shirt,  
which will, depending on the color  
of the evening, be put to sleep neatly  
hanging off your bathroom towel rack  
(because you don't have any hangers)  
or wind up wound-up in your bedroom  
so I have to shower with it before work  
(because you don't own an iron)  
before you (don't whisper, "I love you;"  
say, "you're my favorite;" rather than holding  
hands, insist we merely exchange long  
protein strings; our start-up romance lives<sup>147</sup>  
on borrowed indie cred) make me catch  
the bus-after-that, so I show up a half  
hour after the bell, eat coffee, and crack  
wise with my boss, the Duke of [REDACTED].

Love, however, only gets you so far  
before you have to do the laundry.  
They say Charlemagne dined on cloth  
he threw in a fire to clean.  
If I get burned, I get burned:  
I'll take my chances, wrapped  
in an asbestos-colored blazer.

Play is work,  
work is sleep,  
sleep is play:  
such is the art  
of dressing fiscally.<sup>148</sup>

## **The Great Othering.**

I recognize myself  
as someone you could  
talk to for an hour  
and walk away impressed  
without knowing anything  
of substance. I grew up

on Lost Nation in a suburb  
east of Cleveland, home  
of the Drive, the Fumble,  
the Shot, Red Right 88,  
and the crooked river  
that caught fire. I never flew<sup>149</sup>

until I went to Boston  
College. I took classes  
in the British Romantics  
with the same Jesuit  
as my girlfriend's parents;  
otherwise, they fit better

with the acknowledged  
legislators of the world.<sup>150</sup>  
Her father fired Google  
as clients – after they were  
Google – because Larry  
and Sergei were total dicks.<sup>151</sup>

Her brother is a graphic  
designer at her Dad's  
old law firm in Manhattan,  
and her sister insists she  
emerged from Zeus' thigh.  
Ellen has been an American

Express member since ten  
years before she was born.  
And you have to know  
this to know something  
about me: even prior to  
making the basketball team

in eighth grade, I have  
succeeded at being all  
that I'm not. When I'm  
an outlier, I wish I were  
normal, and vice versa.  
The curse of a constant,

reflexive othering.  
Everything is familiar  
if there is no familial:  
the Great Othering.  
I don't owe anybody  
anything except myself,

and all that I owe myself  
concerns higher education  
and the ensuing civic loans.  
Here, I cannot fault  
the causal observer  
for asking, 'Is this love?

Or is it biconditional  
class tourism?' At best,  
two shape-shifting nightjars  
building a nest that doubles  
as a crown, leaf-by-stem;  
at worst, domesticated civets



hawking palm flowers by dusk,  
shitting coffee cherries where  
the other drinks, falling perfect.

**Anechoic Cenozoic.**<sup>152</sup>

America, I love you,  
but your goose-  
feathers are showing.  
You're falling apart  
at the seams. Everyday

on Colorado Route 36  
I pass a medical clinic  
sign that's missing an 'i'  
between vacant offices  
and internment condos.

Earth's first rivers  
flowed like today's:  
ribbons of igneous  
carrying the detritus  
of a protoplanet  
through the bowels  
of nowhere. Imagine,

now, a black hole  
so bloated it makes  
passing the event  
horizon hardly  
an event: there  
are no traffic signs  
or dismemberment

to commemorate  
switching brands  
of nothingness.<sup>153</sup>

Dropsy is the hoarding  
of aqueous humours  
and has five patho-  
physiologic causes:<sup>154</sup>

palpitations in salary,  
failure to evacuate loose  
monetary policy, constipated  
waste management labor

disputes, fractured diplomacy  
between pathogenic symbionts  
and state, and the keeping  
of landed seats for too long.

Who among us today would  
willingly build the Parisian  
sewers given a few shovels  
and a steady stream of vomit?

In the course of human conflict,  
never has so much been given  
by so many to so few. Death<sup>155</sup>  
by a thousand mosquito bites.

For all but intensive purposes,  
it's impossible to consume  
that which doesn't take several  
orders of magnitude to create.

Since every dollar you charge  
raises ten more from the undead,  
to exceed your credit limit  
is to exceed the call of duty,

and I am as proud as anyone.  
I lick doorknobs for a living.  
I've eaten too many sweetbreads<sup>156</sup>  
and my apartment is a cavity:

I avoid dining there because  
it hurts to chew. My belt is frayed  
and it isn't a policy statement;  
there's a hole in my pant-pocket  
and it's not a euphemism.

My semi-permeable life.

My tomato-based life,  
bursting at the seems.

Yet the end game is nothing  
but bars, banks, and carbon  
credits in the slot machines.

Three well-dressed men  
playing single-deck blackjack  
for tea saucers of bone china.

Dead tulips planted  
outside a room  
in the necropolis  
that junk bonds built.<sup>157</sup>

Several doors down  
you are passed out  
with petals hanging  
from your face.

There is nothing wrong  
with eating off the floor:  
more bacteria thrives  
in your mouth than  
on the soles of your feet.

**All Rise.**

And repeat after me:	(I make a successful design on you)
I solemnly swear	(slipping the ring on your finger)
on this mote of dust	(stripping away your surname)
suspended on a sunbeam <sup>158</sup>	(ripping out your tongue)
to preserve our covalent bond	(and you become non-existent); <sup>159</sup>
in Aleppo soap and psoriasis	(may your transport layers never exist);
in latch-key and in vitro	(may your corpus luteum never exist);
in fiscal solvency and on margin call	(may your instruments of leverage never exist);
with bottle service	(may your arms never exist)
and from a brown paper bag	(may you never exist);
in gestures of lead acetate <sup>160</sup>	(may your personal space never exist)
and while sleeping on the couch;	(may your posture never exist);
in lieu of an analyst	(may you never exist)
and in mining browser histories;	(may your words of passage never exist);

in dipping Victoria sponge Pennyroyal

(may your melody never exist)

and in picking hair from the drain;

(may your follicles never exist).

You are my thallium

(may you never exist)

and my Prussian blue<sup>161</sup>

(may your lymph nodes never exist);

I will taste your brunch

(may your fungiform papillae never exist)

and gargle your bathwater

(may your profile(s) never exist);

and should distance dissolve us

(may your direction never exist)

I will utter your name

(may you never exist)

right before the forgetting

(may you never exist)

so you won't become

(may you never exist)

an unlit mirror<sup>162</sup>

(may your shade never exist).

\*\*\*

And here we would preach  
that it is drinking, not laughter,  
and especially not love,  
that makes us human.<sup>163</sup>

The macaque is, by accounts,  
an inveterate prankster,  
and elephants, having invented  
the art of ceremonial burial,<sup>164</sup>  
drag the bones of their dead  
even further than a drunk  
will drive after running out.

Each instance of life is a reading,  
an interpretation of our shared  
genetic text. Gold and a port<sup>165</sup>  
wine stain on the coat of arms.  
The rule of tincture is absolute:

what the spirit  
of gin has joined,  
let no man separate.<sup>166</sup>

By the power  
vested in me  
by the state  
of Delaware,<sup>167</sup>

I now pronounce you  
Gog and Magog.

You may kiss  
the toilet.

## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> Dom Perignon supposedly both invented **champagne** and, upon tasting it, said, “Come quickly, I’m drinking **stars!**” Both notions are likely feats of marketing: the former religious, the latter capitalist.

<sup>2</sup> One of the chief curiosities of the Bose-Einstein **condensate**, a fifth state of matter, is that it exhibits quantum effects at a macroscopic level.

<sup>3</sup> “**The art of conjuring** and deceiving by light and shadow” is a quote from the cave allegory of Plato’s *Republic*.

<sup>4</sup> The turtle or **tortoise** is also the symbol of the British Fabian Society, of whom George Bernard Shaw was a founder. The Fabians preferred gradualism, versus Leninist revolution, to achieve their socialist ends. Of particular note is the Fabian Society’s (again, supposed, depending on who you ask) involvement in the creation of the International Monetary Fund and World Bank.

<sup>5</sup> Parallel universes, perturbation theory, brane cosmology of string theory &c.

<sup>6</sup> “Akbar and Jeff’s Reincarnation Hut” is featured in *The Big Book of Hell*, a 1990 compendium of *Simpsons* creator Matt Groening’s *Life in Hell* comic strip. The piece goes: “In a past life you may have been a dazzling princess! ... a courageous gladiator! ... a powerful wizard! ... a hapless yeoman! ... a crafty **trilobite!**”

<sup>7</sup> Stephen Hawking’s 1988 book, *A Brief History of Time*, starts:

A well-known scientist (some say it was Bertrand Russell) once gave a public lecture on astronomy. He described how the earth orbits around the sun and how the sun, in turn, orbits around the center of a vast collection of stars called our galaxy. At the end of the lecture, a little old lady at the back of the room got up and said: “What you have told us is rubbish. The world is really a flat plate supported on the back of a giant tortoise.” The scientist gave a superior smile before replying, “What is the tortoise standing on?” “You’re very clever, young man, very clever,” said the old lady. “But it’s **turtles all the way down!**”

Many volumes can be (and have been) spilled concerning the so-called “**simulation** argument,” but the concept hit a larger audience with John Tierney’s August 14, 2007 *New York Times* article, “Our Lives, Controlled from Some Guy’s Couch.” The piece largely highlights the work of Nick Bostrom, a philosopher at Oxford University. For more information about Bostrom vis-à-vis simulation, visit <http://www.simulation-argument.com>.

<sup>8</sup> Several references to *The Simpsons*:

- In episode AABF18, “They Saved Lisa’s Brain,” Stephen Hawking says, “Your theory of a **donut-shaped universe** is intriguing, Homer. I may have to steal it.”
- In episode 9F12, “Brother from the Same Planet,” Homer gets a “little brother” named Pepe. When Pepe asks Homer to tell him the names of constellations, Homer replies, “Well, there’s... Jerry the **Cowboy**. And that big dipper looking thing is Alan... the Cowboy.”
- Episode 3F31, “The Simpsons 138<sup>th</sup> Episode Spectacular,” shows scenes from an alternative ending to episode 2F20, “Who Shot Mr. Burns? Part Two.” In it, Montgomery Burns says, “but at the last moment, Smithers, drunk as a **lemur**, lurched out of the darkness and fired.”

<sup>9</sup> The ending of Henry Miller’s *Tropic of Cancer*, about the Siene: “I feel this river flowing through me – its past, its ancient soil, the changing climate. The hills gently girdle it about: its course **is fixed.**”



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<sup>10</sup> The 1974 edition of Charles Bukowski's *Burning in Water, Drowning in Flame* features a poem titled "yes, yes." It starts with an anaphoristic pattern of lines such as "when He [God] created the giraffe He was drunk."

<sup>11</sup> I took "**the phenomenologies of the superfluid**" from the first sentence of the "Background" section of the Wikipedia article "Superfluid" ([Wikipedia: 11 December 2007](#)).

<sup>12</sup> Excerpt from beginning of "The Waste Land (Executive Producer's Cut)"

April is the fiscal month, mixing  
business with pleasure, sweeping  
the trading floor, taking stock  
of last year's receipts, throwing out  
the first pitch, once more kicking  
dirt on death's stirrup, just dying  
to play another prank or two.

T.S. Eliot worked at Lloyd's bank from 1917 to 1925, during which time he wrote *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* and *The Waste Land*. On April 1, 2008, the Colorado Rockies beat the St. Louis Cardinals 2-1 in the former's opening away game.

<sup>13</sup> Heralded computer game developer Chris Crawford wrote *Chris Crawford on Game Design* in 1984, during the infancy of his trade. In the book's preface, Crawford posits the following:

Games are thus the most ancient and time-honored vehicle for education. They are the original educational technology, the natural one, having received the seal of approval of natural selection. We don't see mother lions lecturing cubs at the chalkboard; we don't see senior lions writing their memoirs for posterity. In light of this, the question, "Can games have educational value?" becomes absurd. It is not games but schools that are the newfangled notion, the untested fad, the violator of tradition. Game-playing is a vital educational function for any creature capable of learning.

Read *Chris Crawford on Game Design* in its entirety here: <http://www.vancouver.wsu.edu/fac/peabody/game-book/Coverpage.html>. Crawford would go on to design *Balance of Power*, a Cold-War inspired simulation in which the U.S. and U.S.S.R. battle for geopolitical prestige while trying to avoid a nuclear holocaust.

Wittgenstein also develops his concept of **language-game** (*Sprachspiel*) in *Philosophical Investigations*.

<sup>14</sup> Note 95 *sub*.

<sup>15</sup> In episode 2F12 of *The Simpsons*, "Homie the Clown," Fat Tony and his cronies are shooting at Homer, having mistaken him for Krusty the Clown, who owes money after losing a bet at the track. One shot hits Ned Flanders in the chest, but the Bible he "always keeps close to his heart" blocks the bullet. As Ned gets hit again, and is similarly protected, he says, "Ho ho, lucky **I was wearing an extra large piece of the True Cross today**. I think I'll go inside."

<sup>16</sup> "**Expostulation and Reply**" is the first piece in both the 1798 and 1800 versions of *Lyrical Ballads*, a Wordsworth – Coleridge joint. The poem's text can be found here: <http://www.bartleby.com/145/ww133.html>.

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<sup>17</sup> **Eratosthenes** of Cyrene is a Greek polymath who lived from c. 275 BC – c. 195 BC. Carl Sagan refers to this story in particular in the first episode of *Cosmos*, “The Shores of the Cosmic Ocean.” The entire series can be viewed streaming on Netflix.

<sup>18</sup> In episode 1F21 of *The Simpsons*, “Lady Bouvier’s Lover,” the entire family sings the **Armour Hot Dogs** jingle with panache at Grampa’s insistence.

<sup>19</sup> The story goes: when a sommelier asked Julia Child what her **favorite wine** was, she replied, “**Gin.**”

Suck it, Robert Parker.

<sup>20</sup> I.e., skin cells regenerate on a monthly basis.

<sup>21</sup> Quarks have never been found separated from particles they comprise (hadrons such as protons and neutrons). However, strange (pun intended) results are theorized at the edges of existence, such as quark stars.

<sup>22</sup> The first line of Czech writer Bohumil Hrabal’s *Too Loud a Solitude*, as translated by Michael Henry Heim, reads: “For thirty-five years now I’ve been in wastepaper, and it’s my **love story.**”

<sup>23</sup> In episode 3F05 of *The Simpsons*, “King Sized Homer,” Homer is trying to gain enough weight to qualify for disability and thus work from home. Frightened as he weighs in 1 pound shy of 300 one morning, Bart informs him: “Bad news, Dad. We’re out of food. We’re even out of the basic elements of food. You ate all the **tarragon** and you drank all the soy sauce.” Homer proceeds to eat some of Maggie’s Play-doh, which pushes him over the limit, only then to realize that his gut was on the towel rack, pushing him further to 315.

<sup>24</sup> This is actually known as “galvanic shock.”

<sup>25</sup> I was thinking of, “*It’s time to plant tears*, says the almanac” from Elizabeth Bishop’s “Sestina.”

<sup>26</sup> Marshall McLuhan introduces the concepts of **hot and cool media** in his 1964 book, *Understanding Media*. This is also references “On Exactitude in Science” (“Del rigor en la ciencia”), a one-paragraph literary forgery by Jorge Luis Borges. This also harkens to the Alfred Korzybski quote, “the map is not the territory,” which is pretty deft irrespective of what one thinks of General Semantics.

<sup>27</sup> This entire piece was inspired (in that Gavrilo Princip kinda way) by “You are what you throw away,” which ran in the 26 February 2009 issue of *The Economist*. The report was subtitled “**The anthropology of garbage.**”

<sup>28</sup> An allusion to the rhyme that harbors the fate of each of Henry VIII’s wives, “divorced, beheaded, died; divorced, beheaded, survived.” The endgame for garbage is discrete: landfills, incinerators, recycling, or neglect.

<sup>29</sup> In episode 5F11 of *The Simpsons*, “Das Bus,” bus driver Otto gets into an accident and the kids find themselves stranded on an island, in full-on parody of *The Lord of the Flies*. While looking for food, all they find are a handful of poisonous-looking berries, which Ralph announces by saying “I ated the purple berries!” When Bart asks how they are, Ralph doubles over in pain and replies, “They **taste like... burning.**”

<sup>30</sup> **Bix Beiderbecke** is a legendary jazz musician from Davenport, Iowa and contemporary of Louis Armstrong on the **cornet**. At turns, his tone was said to be that of “a girl saying yes” (Condon) and, in its inimitability and timelessness, “**pickled** in alcohol” (Mezzrow). Many attribute his death from pneumonia, likely exacerbated by delirium tremens, at the age of 28 to his work with Paul Whiteman, the leading and notoriously demanding bandleader of the day. His lasting influence and “martyrdom” at the hands of Whiteman have given Beiderbecke’s legacy a decidedly Jesus-like mystique (Barton).

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- <sup>31</sup> Arthur Rimbaud: “I invented the colors of the vowels! A black, E white, I red, O **blue**, U green...”
- <sup>32</sup> The motto of Davenport, Iowa, Bix Biederbecke’s hometown, is “Working **together to serve you**.” In episode 2F31 of *The Simpsons*, “A Star is Burns,” Lisa is complimenting The Critic when Homer, walking by, says, “**My ears are burning**.” Lisa replies, “Uh, I wasn’t talking about you, Dad,” to which Homer replies, “No, my ears are really burning, I wanted to see inside so I lit a Q-Tip.”
- <sup>33</sup> **User acceptance testing** is a term commonly used in software development to describe the process of ensuring that a product meets stated business specifications.
- <sup>34</sup> While recording the seminal 1976 album *Station to Station* in Los Angeles, David Bowie is said to have been living in a state of cocaine-induced psychic terror, subsisting on a diet of **milk** and peppers. The **Scotch bonnet** is a chili pepper measuring between 100,000 to 350,000 Scovilles, putting it up with the habanero at 9 on a scale of 1 to 10.
- <sup>35</sup> Avoid fried meats which **angry up the blood**. Is one of Satchel Paige’s tips as far as “How to Stay Young” that appeared in 1953 in *Colliers Magazine*. This is alluded to in two separate episodes of *The Simpsons* by Grampa: 4F17, “The Old Man and Lisa” (“Sorry, we’re not allowed to read newspapers. They angry up the blood.”); and AABF04, “Kidney Trouble” (“Ah, can’t get a good sarsaparilla like this back in Springfield. It angries up the blood.”)
- <sup>36</sup> A Taylor series is a mathematical function represented as “an infinite sum of terms calculated from the values of its derivatives at a single point.” ([Wikipedia: 4 August 2010](#)). A **Maclaurin series** is a Taylor series centered at zero.
- <sup>37</sup> The last major proposition of Ludwig Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, “Wovon man nicht sprechen kann, darüber muß man schweigen,” is roughly translated as “What can be said at all can be said clearly, and what we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence.” Good practical advice, to be sure, but you can’t isolate any discrete part of the universe from the rest of the universe, rendering zero entropy impossible in both the experimental and abstract.
- <sup>38</sup> Occurring c.299 to 251 million years ago, the **Permian** period ended with the greatest extinction event in history, during which over 90% of all living organisms perished. While its cause remains unclear (Antarctic meteorite impact? Siberian volcanic activity? Hydrogen sulfide or carbon dioxide-induced oceanic anoxia?), everyone agrees that trilobites, which had evolved some 300-million-odd years earlier, died out.
- <sup>39</sup> **Leicester** is pronounced “Lester.” Cute, I know.
- <sup>40</sup> Robert Stewart, **Viscount Castlereagh** was born in Dublin on June 18, 1769 and committed suicide in Kent on August 12, 1822. He never served as the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom and, it is said, was the only statesman present at the Congress of Vienna (1814) that did not have a mistress. Though he was criticized in epigram by both Byron *and* Shelley, Castlereagh is now revered (notably by Henry Kissinger) for exercising a foreign policy far ahead of his time.
- <sup>41</sup> Adaptation of a Montgomery Burns quote in episode 3F06 of *The Simpsons*, “Mother Simpson.”
- <sup>42</sup> **My Brother’s Bar** is a pub in downtown Denver.

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<sup>43</sup> Prince Klemens Wenzel von **Metternich** was born in Coblenz, Austria on May 15, 1773 and died in Vienna on June 11, 1859. Metternich was the Foreign Minister of Austria from 1809 until the revolutions of 1848, which were caused in part by his continuous suppression of liberal elements. During this time, he championed a “balance of power” diplomacy that both preserved Austria’s precarious position and maintained relative peace in Europe following Napoleon. Metternich was also a patron to Beethoven, and, it is said, invented the female secretary, efforts without which the movie *Secretary* might still exist, but who knows?

<sup>44</sup> The Duke of **Wellington** is famous for commemorating his victory over Napoleon at Waterloo by saying, “the battle of Waterloo was won on the playing fields of **Eton**.” Except he never really said it. Good copy, though.

<sup>45</sup> John Wilmot, 2<sup>nd</sup> **Earl of Rochester**, was born in Oxfordshire on April 1, 1647, and died (presumably from syphilis) there on July 26, 1680. The original libertine, Rochester was quite popular in the court of King Charles II, where he engaged in frivolities with a group of nobles and associated ne’er-do-wells known as *The Merry Gang*. Rochester was at turns a war hero, a patron of the arts, a louche and a profligate and, according to many admirers implicitly and Ezra Pound explicitly (in *The ABC’s of Reading*), a key figure in the development of English-language poetry.

<sup>46</sup> **Rick Baker** won an Academy Award in the category of Best Makeup Effects for his work on each of the following six films: *An American Werewolf in London* (1981), *Harry and the Hendersons* (1988), *Ed Wood* (1995), *The Nutty Professor* (1997), *Men in Black* (1998), *Dr. Seuss’ How the Grinch Stole Christmas* (2001).

<sup>47</sup> Henry John Temple, 3<sup>rd</sup> Viscount **Palmerston** (1784 – 1865), served as Prime Minister on two non-consecutive occasions in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century. Barney Gumble punches out Wade Boggs (and then, mistakenly, Moe) in episode 8F13 of *The Simpsons*, “Homer at the Bat,” culminating an argument over whether Palmerston or Pitt the Elder was the greatest British PM (Barney favors the former).

There have been six Earls **Grey**, a few of which were also Viscounts Howick, since the creation of the baronetcy. The second was Prime Minister and is known for the eponymous tea; the fourth has the Canadian Football League trophy named after him. At this trajectory, the sixth will probably manage a Tesco.

<sup>48</sup> “You **have a strange forbidding feeling**” is the message that appears when you enter a temple impious, or with a cross-aligned priest present, in the venerable role-playing game NetHack. Baobab trees are also prevalent in *The Little Prince*.

<sup>49</sup> In episode 9F09 of *The Simpsons*, “Homer’s Triple Bypass,” Homer reassures his children before the titular medical procedure:

Homer: Kids, kids, I’m not going to die. That only happens to bad people.

Lisa: What about Abe Lincoln?

Homer: He **sold poison** milk **to schoolchildren**.

Even school boards, such as that in Kenosha, Wisconsin, were duped into buying the collateralized debt obligations (CDOs) based upon the stank mortgages at their core.

<sup>50</sup> **Inaccessible Island** is just south of Tristan da Cunha in the South Atlantic. It is an **extinct** volcano and harbors no permanent residents. It does, however, feature the Inaccessible Island **Rail**, the smallest flightless bird.

<sup>51</sup> Tux, the **penguin**, is the logo / mascot for the Linux operating system kernel.

<sup>52</sup> “**Points on the package**” is basically sales commission for drug dealers. It is featured in *The Wire*.

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53 Dexter refers to the inner voice directing his serial exploits as his **dark passenger**.

54 English, of course. Everyone speaks English everywhere.

55 **Thule Island** is one of the South Sandwich Islands, closer to Antarctica than South America in the Atlantic. The last three lines of the anaphoristic “Il y a” (“There Is There Are”), from Guillaume Apollinaire’s *Calligrammes*:

*Il y a Hindous qui regardent avec étonnement les campagnes occidentales  
Ils pensant avec mélancolie à ceux dont ils se demandent s’ils les reverront  
Car on poussé très loin Durant cette guerre l’art de invisibilité.*

Which is the following as per Anne Hyde Greet’s 1980 translation:

*There are Hindus watching in astonishment the Western landscapes  
They think sadly of their friends and wonder if they’ll see them again  
For we have pushed very far in this war **the art of invisibility**.*

56 German mathematician George Cantor did, in fact, do this, by pulling his theory of transfinite numbers out of every generation’s thin, bends-inducing air of radical scientific inquiry. An easy way to conceptualize this is to consider natural numbers (the set **N** of positive integers 1, 2, 3...) vis-à-vis integers (the set **Z** of whole numbers ...-3, -2, -1, 0, 1, 2, 3...). There are an infinity of both; yet, intuitively, there are “more” of the latter than the former. Cantor subjected this intuition to scientific rigor, efforts for which he drew scathing criticism from Christian theologians, Henry Poincaré, Ludwig Wittgenstein, and others. It went so far that he was accused of corrupting the youth of Athens.<sup>[citation needed]</sup>

57 A term that basically means “nationalist self-reliance,” **Juche** is the “official state ideology of North Korea” ([Wikipedia: 1 November 2007](#)). Juche is a crucial component of “Kimilsungism,” which doesn’t quite have the ring of “Stalinism,” but is just as real and way more insane.

58 **Pan American World Airways** operated from March 14, 1927 until December 4, 1991.

59 Picture the **Klein bottle** as a three-dimensional analogue of the non-orientable one-sided Möbius strip. While it sounds like an idea out of Escher, a Klein bottle aquarium dinner nook is not only possible, but would be very sexy.

60 The Southeast Asia Treaty Organization, or **SEATO**, existed from September 8, 1954 to June 30, 1977. NATO for the South China Sea and environs.

































61 The subject of Henry Kissinger’s doctoral dissertation, the **Congress of Vienna** was Metternich’s nine-month moment in the sun.

62 **Hangul** : Italian :: Hanja : Latin. The phrases translate to “Kim Il-Sung, Kim Jong-Il, Kim Stephen-Jong.”

63 The second-tallest building in Tokyo, **Tax Tower** is a nickname for Tokyo City Hall, which in turn is a nickname for the Tokyo Metropolitan Government Building.

64 With apologies to Colonel Nathan R. Jessup from *A Few Good Men*, but not very many of them.

<sup>65</sup> The second half of this piece “translates” the **Opera Game** contested between American chess legend Paul Morphy and the two noble kinsmen Duke Brunswick and Count Isouard in 1858. Here is the full cipher:

NON-INDUSTRIAL SLUDGE		INDUSTRIAL SLUDGE	
<i>(white)</i>		<i>(non-white)</i>	
 afterbirth	 slugs	tar 	Denny’s Grand Slam 
 fetid whey	 drool	icy hot 	2-in-1 hair cleanser 
 thick diarrhea	 mucus	septic scum 	rat-liver pate 
 venereal discharge	 pus	raw sewage 	venereal ointment 
 dura mater	 vomit	manure 	grey goo 
 rancid mayonnaise	 slime mold	lead acid 	plutonic peat bog 
 ocular custard	 guano	axle grease 	dented canned gruel 
 subcutaneous fat	 casu marzu	poutine 	EPO-boosted blood 

<sup>66</sup> This was inspired by a supposed origin of the word “quiz.”

<sup>67</sup> In episode 2F31 of *The Simpsons*, “A Star is Burns,” Burns is trying to find a director for his autobiographical entry in Springfield’s film festival. He says to Smithers, “Get me Steven Spielberg!” When Smithers says he’s unavailable, Burns follows, “Then get me his **non-union** Mexican **equivalent!**” (i.e., Señor Spielberg).

Also, curiously, **Ho-Ho’s** are distributed by the Hostess Company in the United States and *Egypt*, of all places.

<sup>68</sup> “**Use either no ornament or good ornament**” is one of several strong opinions that Ezra Pound espouses in “A Few Dos and Don’ts for an Imag-ist.”

<sup>69</sup> An application programming interface, or **API**, “is a set of routines, data structures, object classes and/or protocols provided by libraries and/or operating system services in order to support the building of applications” ([Wikipedia: 14 March 2009](#)).

<sup>70</sup> A subject reversal of the final line of “Assommons les Pauvres!” (“Beat Up the Poor!”), a prose poem near the end of Baudelaire’s *Paris Spleen*.

<sup>71</sup> From chapter XI, “The Nine Situations,” of Lionel Giles’ translation of Sun Tzu’s *The Art of War*.

<sup>72</sup> As per the pre-Socratic philosopher Anaximander, **apeiron** is the primal chaos from which all spawns and to which all returns. The second independent clause is distilled Sartre as per “Existentialism is a Humanism.”

<sup>73</sup> “The usual, as usual.” The cover art, “Die Üblich, Wie Üblich,” is by Ellen Dubreuil.

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<sup>74</sup> Count **Gottfried** Alexander Leopold Graf **von Bismarck**-Schönhausen was born in Hamburg on September 19, 1962, and was found dead in his £5 million Chelsea flat on July 2, 2007. He was, in fact, the great-great grandson of Otto von Bismarck, but never became more than a failed telecom executive. Gottfried von Bismarck's life was plagued by flamboyant substance abuse and two deaths at parties he hosted: Olivia Channon, (bathroom, heroin), Oxford 1986; and Anthony Casey, (balcony, cocaine), Chelsea 2007. According to an article in *The Independent* on October 11, 2007, Bismarck's coroner found the "highest level of cocaine he had ever seen" in the count's body, in addition to Hepatitis B, Hepatitis C, and HIV.

<sup>75</sup> John Lennon said, "I may have been born in Liverpool, but I grew up in Hamburg." The Beatles played regular lengthy shows there for a stretch in the early 60's, before becoming world-famous.

<sup>76</sup> There are several facets to the **Habsburg** dynasty. The Austria-based Habsburg Monarchy existed from 1526 until 1918, although the house started collecting territory in 1276. Another line of Habsburgs controlled Spain and sundry from 1516-1700. One such territory was the Spanish Netherlands, roughly the present-day Netherlands, giving credence to the term "Old Dutch Habsburg."

<sup>77</sup> In episode 3F24 of *The Simpsons*, "El Viaje Misterioso de Nuestro Homer," Marge is trying to keep Homer away from the annual Springfield chili cook-off. When he finds out, she explains, "Every time you go to that cook-off you get drunk **as a poet on payday**."

<sup>78</sup> The lyrics "various species grouped together according to their past beliefs" appear in the song "Bills Corpse" on the 1969 Captain Beefheart album *Trout Mask Replica*.

<sup>79</sup> In episode 2F15 of *The Simpsons*, "Lisa's Wedding," Chief Wiggum, as the imprimatur of "Friar Wiggum's Fantastical **Beastorium**," says, "Oooh, and here, out of the mists of history, the legendary **esquilax**, a horse with the head of a rabbit and the body of a rabbit."

<sup>80</sup> **Slough off the cicada's golden shell** is one of the "Thirty-Six Stratagems" of Chinese war philosophy lore. It conveys the utility of both adopting and discarding masks.

<sup>81</sup> **Petropolis Kahn** is one of the kids at the Enfield Tennis Academy, the same age as Hal Incandenza, in *Infinite Jest*. His nickname in the novel is actually "Woolly Mammoth."

<sup>82</sup> The 18 September 2008 issue of *The Economist* features an obituary of Martin Tyrell, an American typewriter specialist who possessed an actual **drawer of umlauts** among the pieces in his shop upon closing it in 2001.

<sup>83</sup> Note 116 *sub*.

<sup>84</sup> "This goodly frame, the earth, / seems to me a **sterile promontory**" is a quote from the "What a piece of work is a man" speech in Act II, scene II of *Hamlet*.

<sup>85</sup> "Enter action with boldness" is the 28<sup>th</sup> entry in Robert Greene's *The 48 Laws of Power*. The main text ends, "The problems created by an audacious move can be disguised, even remedied, by more and greater **audacity**."

<sup>86</sup> University of New South Wales. "Saber-Toothed Cat Was More Like A Pussycat Than A Tiger." *ScienceDaily* 2 October 2007. Retrieved 13 December 2009.

Also, Robert Frost said, "Poetry is a way of **taking life by the throat**."

<sup>87</sup> Note 84 *supra*.

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88 “Hercules and the Waggoner”

A Waggoner was once driving a heavy load along a very muddy way. At last he came to a part of the road where the wheels sank half-way into the mire, and the more the horses pulled, the deeper sank the wheels. So the Waggoner threw down his whip, and knelt down and prayed to Hercules the Strong. "O Hercules, help me in this my hour of distress," quoth he. But Hercules appeared to him, and said:

"Tut, man, don't sprawl there. Get up and put your **shoulder** to the **wheel**."

*The gods help them that help themselves.*

- Aesop (c.620 BCE – c.560 BCE), translated Joseph Jacobs (1894). [Wikisource: 5 May 2008](#).

89 “Dublin Core”

There once was a bawdy commuter  
with porn on his laptop computer  
who thought it correct  
to SQL inject<sup>a</sup>  
his sperm in a bank in Bermuda.

<sup>a</sup> SQL injection is a technique by which inadequately secured databases are attacked with unexpectedly executed queries, e.g., via a field in a web application. This typically results in the malicious theft or deletion of information.

<sup>90</sup> **Vinton Cerf**, with Robert Kahn, developed the Transmission Control Protocol and Internet Protocol (TCP/IP) model at DARPA in 1973. Its four layers form the basis of Internet communication. Cerf widely credits Al Gore for being an early champion of the technology, culminating in the *High Performance Computing and Communication Act of 1991* (the “Gore Bill”) that led to the creation of the “information superhighway.”

<sup>91</sup> “A camel is a **horse** designed by committee” is a relatively well-known quote to this end.

<sup>92</sup> Excerpt from an email 29 January 2007, 5:52 PM MST:

can you tell what this is?:

i\$ h -----> i

it's a man giving a horse-hitman money to knock off his business partner.

<sup>93</sup> Note 22 *supra*.

<sup>94</sup> “...to **men whose means to wealth were more obscure**” appears on page 283 of Ben Mezrich's 2005 book *Busting Vegas*, the sequel to *Bringing Down the House*. Both chronicle supposedly factual stories about the MIT Blackjack Team; the line in question occurs in reference to a real estate agent's clientele in Monte Carlo. Reading during the third of three lunchtime sorties at the Tattered Cover, the phrase gave me pause, it being rendered in perfect iambic pentameter.

<sup>95</sup> **Die Siedlers von Catan** (The Settlers of Catan) is an award-winning 1995 board game designed by Klaus Teuber. Game play is typical of the “German style” genre: it focuses on economic development rather than military might, random luck is strongly mitigated, and no players are eliminated over the course of play.



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<sup>96</sup> Note 127 *sub*. “The sparrow-hawk rends the sparrow, the figs eats the donkey, and the **tapeworm devours man**.”

<sup>97</sup> Pierre de **Fermat’s Last Theorem** says that  $a^n + b^n = c^n$  cannot be solved for any natural number not equal to 2 such that  $a$ ,  $b$ , and  $c$  are all positive integers. Fermat first postulated it in a copy of Diophantus’ *Arithmetica* in 1637, to which he added, “I have a truly marvelous demonstration of this proposition which this **margin** is too narrow to contain.” Fermat’s Last Theorem was not proven – quite famously, as far as math problems go – until 1995 by Andrew Wiles in a 108-page paper, “Modular elliptic curves and Fermat’s Last Theorem,” in *Annals of Mathematics*.

<sup>98</sup> Independent sales organizations, or **ISOs**, have a specific meaning in the world of commerce: they partner with acquiring banks to help bring merchants into the fold. This includes, among other things, underwriting agreements and the means by which the merchant may accept and process payments.

<sup>99</sup> See Longinus (or “pseudo-Longinus”), *On the Sublime*. Also, Camus’ 1942 novel *The Stranger* ends with Meursault contemplating “*la tendre indifférence du monde*” (“**the tender indifference of the world**.”)

<sup>100</sup> SPOILER ALERT!

In J.D. Salinger’s “**A Perfect Day for Bananafish**,” Seymour Glass commits suicide shortly after accusing someone in the hotel elevator of staring at his feet.

<sup>101</sup> **John Hickenlooper**, former mayor of Denver and now Governor of Colorado, got his start by co-founding the Wynkoop Brewing Company in desolate downtown Denver in 1988. Wynkoop, located a few blocks away from **Union Station**, features a **Rail Yard Ale**.

<sup>102</sup> “**Init** (short for “initialization”) is the program on Unix and Unix-like systems that spawns all other processes. It runs as a daemon and typically has PID 1.” ([Wikipedia: 18 September 2008](#)).

<sup>103</sup> R.I.P. Frank Sobotka.

<sup>104</sup> “Capital is indeed the **body without organs** of the capitalist, or rather of the capitalist being. But as such, it is not only the fluid and petrified substance of money, for it will give to the sterility of money the form whereby money produces money.” Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Translated by Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane.

<sup>105</sup> To **refactor** code is, generally speaking, to clean up or restructure it in such a way that the basic functions performed are not disturbed.

<sup>106</sup> In the context of computer science, a **garbage collector** automatically frees up system memory no longer in use by a program (but cannot be reused so long as there is still “garbage” present).

<sup>107</sup> When Pan challenged Apollo to a music contest, **Midas** was the only one present who disagreed with Tmolus awarding the victory to Apollo. The annoyed Olympian God thus gave poor Midas the **ears of a donkey**.

Also, the real **Popper** quote is “**the chief value of intelligence is to exterminate a bad idea before the bad idea exterminates us**.”

<sup>108</sup> “**Going dark**,” within the context of software development, is to essentially shut yourself in a room, devoid of normal means of communication (including, but not limited to: phone, email, instant messenger, Facebook, Twitter) to write code. It worked for Marquez but often results in code of questionable merit in projects with multiple developers.

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109 “**Real artists ship**” is attributed to Steve Jobs, co-founder of Apple, from the early Macintosh days.

110 “What About You?”

I splashed some colours from a tumbler  
and smeared the drab world with emotion.  
I charted on a dish of jelly  
the jutting cheekbones of the ocean.  
Upon the scales of a tin salmon  
I read the calls of lips yet mute.  
And you,  
could you have played a nocturne  
with just a drainpipe for a flute?

Vladimir Mayakovsky (tr. Dorian Rottenberg), 1913

111 What happens when the iTunes share you're listening to gets disconnected, but that sounds anachronistic.

112 From the “To be, or not to be” speech:

...To die, to sleep—  
To sleep, perchance to dream. Ay, there's the rub,  
For in that sleep of death what dreams may come ,  
When we have shuffled off this **mortal coil**,  
Must give us pause...  
(*Hamlet* III.i.64-68)

113 *Periplaneta americana* is the scientific name for the American cockroach.

114 From <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/tvandradio/4345830/Sir-David-Attenborough-I-get-hate-mail-telling-me-to-burn-in-hell-for-not-crediting-God.html>. When not condemning the esteemed naturalist and filmmaker, they tend to cite pretty things like hummingbirds as evidence of a divine creator. Attenborough says:

"I always reply by saying that I think of a little child in East Africa with a worm burrowing through his eyeball.

"**The worm cannot live** in any other way, **except by burrowing through eyeballs.**

"I find that hard to reconcile with the notion of a divine and benevolent creator."

The worm in reference is the Loa Loa, a filarial nematode.

115 The **Tattered Cover** is an independent bookstore in Lower Downtown Denver (AKA "LoDo.")

116 Thorstein **Veblen** coined the phrase “conspicuous consumption,” among other things, in his famous (and still-relevant) 1899 work, *The **Theory of the Leisure Class: an economic study of institutions***. The text is available via [dailylit.com](http://dailylit.com). Veblen was also, in practice, a womanizer.

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<sup>117</sup> Marshall **McLuhan**, English professor and Canadian granddaddy of all media theorists, coined terms and phrases such as "the medium is the message," the "global village," "hot" and "cold" media, and others throughout his life's work.

<sup>118</sup> *The Life of Gargantua and Pantagruel* is a collection of five bawdy and satirical books written by François Rabelais in the 16th century. They detail the adventures (read: excesses) of the titular father-son giants in remarkable clarity.

<sup>119</sup> Benjamin **Bernanke** is 14th Governor of the Federal Reserve, having succeeded Alan Greenspan in 2006.

I like to have a fiscal stimulus,  
but two is in my best interest.  
After three, I'm a bridesmaid;  
after four, I'm a spinstress.

<sup>120</sup> I.e., *Lunch Poems*.

<sup>121</sup> A consequence of the second law of thermodynamics, whereby entropy always increases over time in an isolated system, is *the* arrow of time problem – all other arrows of time (cosmological, causal, perceptual, quantum wave function collapse) are derivative. It is the only irreversible function. "Heat death" is the likely endgame in this scenario, where all energy is eventually lost forever to the disorder of heat dissipation. However, many questions remain: why was there low entropy after the Big Bang, are we suffering from anthropic bias, will gravity lead to a Big Crunch etc. Note also that entropy can decrease locally; Earth is highly organized but flooded with the Sun's energy. So, too, then can we set aside the causal arrow of time for the time being.

<sup>122</sup> "Gin a body meet a body" is a oft-repeated verse of Robert Burns' "Comin Thro' The Rye." A **boson** is usually a "force carrier" particle, as opposed to the fermions that comprise matter. Photons, for example, convey the electromagnetic force. A notable exception is the Higgs boson, thought to explain mass but not carry force. It is as yet undiscovered at the Large Hadron Collider at CERN.

<sup>123</sup> "**Object reference not set to instance of object**" is a common run-time error in ASP.Net web applications.

<sup>124</sup> The stingless male honeybees hang out in an area away from the hive, waiting for the opportunity to have their genitals and abdomen ripped out while fertilizing the queen, in what is known as a "**drone** congregation area."

**Dermatophagia** is the term for compulsively biting your skin (onychophagia being the nail-biting variant).

Last, **Bayesian inference**, named after the 18<sup>th</sup> century Presbyterian minister and mathematician Thomas Bayes, uses empirical evidence to revise previously calculated probabilities and further examine related hypotheses.

<sup>125</sup> In episode 1F16 of *The Simpsons*, "Burns' Heir," it is revealed that Homer's "secret shame" is eating flowers.

<sup>126</sup> When the Mets were trailing the Cubs by 9 ½ games in July 1973, Yogi Berra famously quipped, "**It ain't over till it's over.**" The Mets wound up winning the division and the quote has since entered the pantheon of what are referred to as Yogiisms. It was used in the 1991 Lenny Kravitz single of the same name.

<sup>127</sup> Alexis Lykiard translated the end of the first canto of *Les Chants de Maldoror* by Comte de Lautremont (real name: Isidore Ducasse) as, "You, young man, do not despair, for despite your opinion to the contrary, you have a friend in the vampire. Counting the *acarus sarcoptes* that causes **crabs**, you have two!"

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128 Love means never having to say you're sorry is the famous line from Erich Segal's *Love Story*.

129 The image is of a woman burning *Papiermarks* for warmth, as doing so was cheaper during the hyperinflationary period of the Weimar Republic than buying firewood. The photograph was taken in 1923, thus may not be in German public domain (+70 years of the death of the author). However, nobody knows who published it, and is probably fair use.

130 "Green Hour"

Jesus turned water to wine;  
we turn Sapphire to water.  
At five o'clock I cut the limes,  
like mutton repairing with slaughter.

131 From Chapter X, "Terrain," of Lionel Giles' translation of Sun Tzu's *The Art of War*:

*When a general, unable to estimate the enemy's strength, allows an inferior force to engage a larger one, or hurls a weak detachment against a powerful one, and neglects to place picked soldiers in the front rank, **the result must be rout.***

132 Albert Einstein is variously reported to have called compound interest the 8<sup>th</sup> wonder of the world, mankind's greatest invention, and **the most powerful force in the universe**. All and none of it may be true.

133 An exchange in the apartment of Bud Fox (Charlie Sheen) in the 1987 film *Wall Street*:

*Carl Fox*: There came into Egypt a Pharaoh who did not know.

*Gordon Gekko*: I beg your pardon. Is that a proverb?

*Carl Fox*: No, a prophecy. The rich have been doing it to the poor since the beginning of time. The only difference between the Pyramids and the Empire State Building is that the Egyptians **didn't allow unions**.

[http://www.dailyscript.com/scripts/wall\\_street.html](http://www.dailyscript.com/scripts/wall_street.html) consulted on 5 January 2008.

134 Between the residuum of the strong interaction and the electromagnetic purview of Coulomb's law, and an ass-ton of particles, I used a little poetic license here.

135 Paleontologist Peter Ward has developed an interesting twist on the Gaia Hypothesis: instead of the Earth superorganism acting in a way that is conducive to life, it is self-destructive. This is substantiated by evidence related to myriad extinction events not generally attributed to external causes (e.g., asteroid attack). Fittingly, it is called the "Medea Hypothesis."

Also, mitochondria that power every animal cell have their own distinct genome from everything around them. The idea – endosymbiotic theory – is that between 1.5 and 2 billion years ago, the intercession of certain bacteria proved useful for some multi-cellular organisms, and away we went. The endosymbionts are thought to belong to the same order (*Rickettsia*) of those that cause diseases such as Rocky Mountain spotted fever and typhus. Similarly, the ancient, intrepid cyanobacteria (or blue-green algae) likely became photosynthesizing chloroplasts.

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<sup>136</sup> **Josh McNair** won \$1,125 from white supremacist foundation Stormfront for an essay titled “Organization, Cooperation, and Action.” **David Duke**, who served in House of Representatives from Louisiana from 1990-1992, is the “modernizer” and former Grand Wizard of the Ku Klux Klan. Duke entered the national conscious with his unsuccessful bid against the notoriously corrupt (and later convicted) Edwin Edwards for governor in 1991.

When this and other exploits were featured in *The Yeti*, Chancellor **Bud Peterson** defended McNair and suspended publication of the broadside; soon after, he would muzzle the *Campus Press*. McNair won the “Best Nazi Impression” award given by *Boulder Weekly* the following year; Peterson is the President of Georgia Tech.

<sup>137</sup> As of now, seven-time pro-bowler **Steve Tasker** is not in the Pro Football Hall of Fame, but he should be.

<sup>138</sup> **Sidney Goldfarb** is the author of three books of poetry, *Speech, for Instance* (1969), *Messages* (1971), and *Curve in the Road*, as well as the verse-play *The Rushes of Tulsa* (1999 and 2008).

<sup>139</sup> From *American Pie 2*:

**Stifler**: You're a disgrace to men everywhere. I mean, look at the Stifmeister. I got laid 23 times this year, and I'm not counting the hummer I got in the library stacks, baby.

**Oz**: Here's a new idea for you Stifler. You find a girl, you two become best friends and you don't bother counting how many times you have sex with each other you just laugh at the people who do count.

**Stifler**: Here's a new idea for you. I'll get you a **spoon** so you **can eat my ass**.

<sup>140</sup> In Stanley Kubrick's 1975 film *Barry Lyndon*, based upon the Thackeray novel *The Luck of Barry Lyndon* (1844), the mother of the titular character offers her son the following advice: “**For money, well-timed and properly applied, can accomplish anything.**”

<sup>141</sup> The third of Arthur C. Clarke's “Three Laws of Prediction” is “**Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic.**”

<sup>142</sup> **Zero one infinity** is a principle of software development whereby an entity should either be completely disallowed (zero), rendered unique (one), or limitless (infinity). Isaac Asimov strikes a similar chord in *The Gods Themselves* with the notion that “the number 2 is impossible” because if you believe in more than one universe, you should believe in infinitely many.

<sup>143</sup> “The Field.”

*Pays out 1:37*

Somewhere by an oxbow lake  
occluded from the water supply  
there's a nylon field, and the tale  
of a romance made in Dubai.

It's not love at cocktail hour, but you feel  
the electroreception; sure, she's coy,  
but you're a sucker for hair of wolf's bane  
and the clothes of a fourteen year old boy.

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She takes you back to her studio flat,  
where you drink, hoping things get frisky;  
you lay down, and she shuts your eyes  
with four-some-odd gins, and a whiskey.

"**You're my favorite**," she says, taking a drag  
and using Yorick's skull for an ash-tray;  
it's not beyond the gambler's dominion  
to play a game of sexual croquet.

**Manifestoes and prototypes come faster  
than [you] can sort them into focus,  
and besides, the bar runs out of coasters.**

It's the promise of a privileged locus:

**plucking a pigeon feather in 1215,  
handing Martin Luther a nail in 1517,  
travelling with that Berber merchant  
who poured milk into the guts of a sheep**

**and let it bake in the East Sahel sun.**  
But you miss the Veldt for the tsetse flies.  
You must be asleep, or blacked-out,  
when the relationship capsizes,

and now the investors only want theirs.  
It doesn't take a Chief Title Officer  
like Adam to recognize Belladonna  
without mercy (tastes like burnt coffee).

Now you're in a field by an oxbow lake  
formed when the Nile decides, on a whim,  
to take a shortcut, and besides:  
you forgot how to swim.

<sup>144</sup> In episode 2F21 of *The Simpsons*, "the Springfield Connection," they're walking through a seedy part of town when Homer implores Marge, "Whoa, careful now. These are dangerous streets for us **upper-lower-middle** class types, so avoid eye contact, watch your pocketbook, and suspect everyone." Immediately thereafter Homer is naturally enticed by a game of Three-Card Monte run by Snake.

<sup>145</sup> Nobody owns the phrase **high-tech feudalism**, per se, but I was thinking of a section in the "pessimistic" outcome chapter of Edward Griffin's *The Creature from Jekyll Island*.

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<sup>146</sup> Note 143 *supra*.

<sup>147</sup> In episode 4F02 of *The Simpsons*, "Treehouse of Horror VII," George Stephanopoulos expresses confusion as to why Bill Clinton and Bob Dole are constantly seen holding hands. Secretly, however, the major party presidential candidates have been replaced by the extraterrestrial anthropocephalopods Kang and Kodos. The former, disguised as Clinton, replies, "We are **merely exchanging long protein strings**. If you can think of a simpler way, I'd like to hear it!"

<sup>148</sup> Two quotes from Chapter VII, "Maneuvering," of Lionel Giles' translation of Sun Tzu's *The Art of War*:

"He will conquer who has learnt the artifice of deviation. **Such is the art** of maneuvering."

"When you surround an army, leave an outlet free. Do not press a desperate foe too hard. **Such is the art** of warfare."

<sup>149</sup> **The Drive** refers to the last minute, 98-yard game-tying score led by John Elway in the 1987 AFC Championship. The Broncos would defeat the Browns 23-20 in overtime. **The Fumble** refers the goal-line fumble by Earnest Byner while trying to score a last-minute game-tying touchdown in the 1988 AFC Championship. The Broncos won, 38-33. **The Shot** refers to the buzzer-beating jumper by Michael Jordan over Craig Ehlo to win a deciding game five for the Bulls over the Cavs in the first round of the 1989 NBA Playoffs. **Red Right 88** refers to the play call in the waning minutes of a -36°F wind-chill 1981 divisional playoff game between the Browns and Raiders. Trailing 14-12 with the ball on the Raiders' 13 with less than a minute to play, the Browns' Brian Sipe threw an interception into tight coverage instead of throwing the ball away, negating a potential game-winning field goal attempt. The Raiders would go on to win the Super Bowl.

The Cuyahoga, which means **crooked river** in Iroquois, famously caught fire in 1969, although it had also done so at least 12 times back to 1868.

<sup>150</sup> In *A Defence of Poetry* (1821; published 1840), British Romantic Percy Bysshe Shelley claims, "poets are the **unacknowledged legislators of the world**." John L. Mahoney taught this and more for 47 years at Boston College, although he wasn't actually a Jesuit.

<sup>151</sup> **Larry** Page and **Sergei** Brin co-founded Google in 1998 while doctoral students at Stanford. The story goes that when they first met they disliked each other (e.g., "Enlightenment Man," *The Economist*, 4 December 2008).

<sup>152</sup> **Cenozoic** is the most recent geologic era. It started roughly 65.5 million years ago (MYA) with the Cretaceous-Tertiary (K-T) Extinction Event that caused the extinction of dinosaurs and emergence of mammals.

<sup>153</sup> Inspired by "**Black Holes**: the Ultimate Game Changer," Princeton physicist Paul Steinhardt's response to the Edge World Question Center offering for 2009: "What will change everything?"

<sup>154</sup> Edward Gibbon presents **five** chief **causes** in *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*: divorce, taxation, sport, military spending, loss of true faith.

<sup>155</sup> In a speech during the Battle of Britain, Winston Churchill said, "**Never in the field of human conflict was so much owed by so many to so few**." The Declaration of Independence also starts, "When in the course of human events..."

<sup>156</sup> Henry Miller had this to say about James Joyce: "*Ulysses* is like a vomit spilled by a delicate child whose stomach has been overloaded with sweetmeats." One of life's great paradoxes is that sweetmeats are bread and **sweetbreads** are meat.

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157 “Angles in America”

0 $\pi$ : There is a time when vessel / is cargo, just as being / is extension of stage.

$\pi$ /4: A prison economy flourishes at work. I barter cigarettes for information.

$\pi$ /2: Do you think if I bribed God / with enchiladas, he would comment / out my nemesis in the source code? / Our universe is a masters thesis / filmed through a neo-natal lens.<sup>a</sup>

3 $\pi$ /4: what kind of boozinfery is this.

$\pi$ : Excerpt from “Live from Vichy France”

The Edith Piaf record  
we put on before going  
into the shower is done,  
but the motor and needle  
are still working together  
to try to make music.

5 $\pi$ /4: Embiggen your deliverables with cromulent functionality!<sup>b</sup>

3 $\pi$ /2: Sometimes you have / to take a long lunch / off a short pier. A free / source wrapper for / a Microsoft product / is like wrapping / a condom around / a binary chance. / The assembly’s carpet / never matches / its curtains.

7 $\pi$ /4: Like a house-cat, I’m only partially domesticated.

2 $\pi$ : Of all the gin joints / in all the world / you sprained mine.

<sup>a</sup> i.e., *Infinite Jest V*.

<sup>b</sup> In episode 3F13 of *The Simpsons*, “Lisa the Iconoclast,” Edna questions Jebediah Springfield’s use of “**embiggens**” (on film), to which Ms. Hoover replies, “I don’t know why. It’s a perfectly **cromulent** word.” Later in the episode, Principal Skinner comments on Homer’s top-notch crier: “Yes, he’s embiggened that role with his cromulent performance.”

158 In *Pale Blue Dot: A Vision of the Human Future in Space*, Carl Sagan refers to Earth as a **mote of dust suspended in a sunbeam**. Sagan was inspired by the eponymous photograph taken by *Voyager I* 3.7 billion miles away from Earth in 1990.

159 “**Mayest thou never exist**” and related curses appear in “On The Hieratic Papyrus Of Nesi-Amsu, A Scribe In The Temple Of Amen-Ra At Thebes, About B.C. 305,” chapter XVI of E.A. Wallis Budge’s *Archaeologia*. The entire litany constitutes the “Book of Overthrowing the Enemy of Ra in the Course of Every Day” directed at the demon Apep. It extends themes in the “Papyrus of Ani” from the *Egyptian Book of the Dead*, also translated by Budge in 1895.

160 Specifically, **Lead(II) Acetate**, which has been used as an (albeit deadly) sugar substitute throughout history.

161 **Prussian blue** is a venerable pigment also useful as an antidote for **thallium** and cesium poisoning.



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<sup>162</sup> “The Baltic sea is dark as **an unlit mirror**” appears in an article Gary Wolf wrote for *Wired* titled “Want to Remember Everything you Learn? Surrender to this Algorithm.” It features Piotr Wozniak, a Polish researcher who founded SuperMemo in 1985, commercial memory-aiding software based upon the theory of spaced repetition.

<sup>163</sup> “**And here we would argue that it is drinking, not laughter, that makes men human**” is a quote from Burton Raffel’s translation of François Rabelais’ *Gargantua and Pantagruel*. It is a reply to Panurge in “Baqbuc Explains the Bottle’s Prophecy,” the forty-sixth, or third-to-last, chapter of the fifth and final book of the work.

<sup>164</sup> **Ceremonial burial** was an early-game technology in the Civilization line of computer games until the most recent Civilization V.

<sup>165</sup> Inspired by “The Organism itself as the Emergent Meaning,” Canadian biologist Brian Goodwin’s response to the Edge World Question Center offering for 2009. Goodwin is the author of *How the Leopard Changed its Spots*. See also note 153 *supra*.

<sup>166</sup> Traditional English marriage vows stem from the first *Book of Common Prayer* published in 1549 at the height of Reformation. Many within and without the book stem from Biblical verse, such as *Matthew 19:6*: Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder” (King James Version). “In sickness and in health” is a typical vow found in the *Book of Common Prayer*, reminiscent of the contraries featured in *Ecclesiastes 3*.

“**Gin is the spirit**” is a quote from the earlier “Theory of the Leisure Class.”

<sup>167</sup> **Delaware**, which contains less than one-half of one percent of the total U.S. population, has over 50% of publicly traded companies incorporated there due to its, ahem, friendly tax law.