

Parade Day for Hungry Ghosts

HAIKU AND OTHER WRITING

John Xavier

*Corruption has never been compulsory;
when the cities lie at the monster's feet
there are left the mountains.*

- Robinson Jeffers

Preface

My approach to haiku is naively straightforward: I wait for a moment or idea to inspire me and then I do my best to capture this within the limits of the haiku form. Sometimes I'll consciously try to expand those limits but more often than not my efforts will be guided by fidelity rather than design. Haiku is a legitimate medium for experimentation and fiction but I think its greatest possibilities lie in attention to real life experiences. Other literary forms can better serve different ends but none can match haiku in expressing the epiphanic. Because the totality of any insight likewise occurs in the circumference of specific moments, conveying the immediacy of this demands equal concision. And the haiku form has truly converged on a perfect balance here.

It is a profound art and this has been proven again and again by the work of its great practitioners. Because of that, I've been surprised by how much superficiality I've encountered while engaging with the contemporary haiku community; not everyone of course but a surprising number nonetheless. A couple of minor stylistic preferences of mine have garnered weirdly emphatic criticism on more than one occasion so I'd like the opportunity to explain myself now in those regards:

1) My marking of a kireji cut using punctuation

Plenty of English language haiku writers nowadays favor a minimalist approach with nothing to indicate a kireji cut. And their reasoning here isn't terrible: the grammatical structure of the individual lines will often show quite clearly where the poem is meant to be divided. But not in every case. I, on the other hand, prefer to always indicate my kireji cuts (Not just for those haiku which are ambiguous) because I also write haiku that eschew the kireji entirely and so, in the context of my body of poems, I want to distinguish both of these from each other. Since the inclusion of said punctuation doesn't diminish those haiku even where it's not individually necessary, I lose a lot of respect for editors etc who fixate on this aspect of my work. Literature at its best is concerned with substantial things and so should be judged by substantial measures: obsessing over minor idiosyncrasies or the slightest sins against orthography betrays a petty mind. Like, we can indulge Cormac McCarthy's attitude towards commas being frequently unnecessary in various situations but if he were to hold normal comma usage against the work of other writers that would be a lame preoccupation. Personally, I barely even notice things like that in a writer's work; I accept Henry James and E. E. Cummings on their individual terms and would never try to judge them by the standard of the other (Or anyone else)

2) I use a slash to mark my kireji cuts

Where as there was some rudimentary logic in the former criticism, the obnoxious complaining I've encountered here is something I lack any patience for. Now, I don't have a problem with people commenting on the unusual nature of my choice of " / " over the " - " and other more typical variants but, to express any irritation or criticism about this, is to expose oneself as a fundamentally unserious person when it comes to poetry. This is nothing more than a personal convention that introduces no genuine obstacle to the appreciation of my haiku; to make any issue out of it is to whine in the manner of a fussy child. I suspect though that a lot of this kind of irrational opposition can be explained as pathetic attempts to establish hierarchical dominance (Yeah, the anxiety riddled potentates of the marginal literati tend to be quite susceptible to that) If it's a minor preference though, why am I so insistent? Well, one is I don't defer to the absurd demands of others when it comes to writing: it sets a bad precedent. And two, I actually do find it aesthetically more pleasing than the other methods of denoting the kireji function. Em dashes are too horizontal, vertical pipe bars too vertical, and the other means fail to my mind for various reasons. Plus a slash has a certain visual dynamism and conveys the suggestion of a katana swipe; adding a nice bit of *joie de vivre*. So the naysayers don't even rate.

The whole of this collection was written with an equally heedless attitude. Some of my haiku here are utterly respectable and conventional but I made no attempt to consistently adhere to popular styles or themes, and neither did I dedicate myself to subverting these. As such, the reader will find poems as disparate as the following facing each other on opposite pages:

Autumn together /
the old tea kettle
has one last cup

tattooed white rose /
tossed origami from
someone's math test

If you enjoy poetry that's eclectic, read on.

HAIKU

stars at noon /
an outstretched field
sparkling with dew

pieces of sky
strewn on pavement /
flawless mirror F

words upon water /
a torn page gently
carried along F

ignored garden /
the revelry of weeds
reclaims it F

bamboo pole /
the master's sword
duals F

inlet quay /
just a place to store
their fat yachts

a ripe moment?
only one's bite can give
the apple's worth F

moonshine /
the teetotaler's church
stands unswayed A

a travel dream /
foreign leaves falling in
Matsuyama F

by lonely specks
the dust has its say /
museum bones F

underfoot /
pigeons and puddles
in soft havoc

the nuisance
of much luggage /
was *anything* left?

loud toddler /
outside the creaking bus,
silent streets pass

unemployed me /
ample poverty buys
much haiku time

gravel dog park /
yet the ruff terrain
doesn't give them paws

*on how to sing
frog and skylark schools
argue so*

- SHIKI

even a lady
of the night can blush /
the blood moon

M

dark leaves /
just beyond these,
orange rain by street lamp

soft rain drops
petitioning me
to let them in

breaking clouds
loose the rays of dawn /
Spring's banzai

M

warm rain /
songs of villagers
lighten sorrow

F

sun behind clouds /
at the library
writing emails

pigeon murmurs /
an author slinking by
below the awnings

their songs, yes
but not the species /
misty day

inflated ball
covered in atlas /
our floating world F

on both sides
exceptions to the rules /
turtle in bamboo F

what I don't see /
from the high rooftop,
umbrellas F

nom de plume /
the lure of fame
naked, and yet...

past self, a foe
to present self who
pays it forward, always

blur of fences /
the bus window also
a submarine's

flooded streets /
a bus plagiarizing
Hokusai

flooded streets /
the bus recreates
a master's wave

campus sidewalk
in the splash zone /
a gray lesson

streaming in /
not out of the river but
almost that wet

war and peace /
discussed at book club,
it's the former

F

shower ceiling /
lingering like me,
humidity

no “I” in team /
so they didn’t even
pick me

F

goddess Liberty /
stopping in the rain
two girls heed

night’s blue creep /
a butterfly, yes
cocooning itself

passing just once /
the stranger at night,
forever *this*

only the sky now /
what the setting sun
illuminates

sung prayers
filling enormity /
others’ filth

music hall
hums with amateurs
adding gong to gong

bus terminal /
dark clockwork hissing
from serpent machines

rumbling along /
street lamps quivering
in grimy windows

he turns away
from the dark mirror /
self in profile

four stops to go /
no real relief now
at the end of day

not one of them
guilty of a crime /
bamboo poles

F

gleaming streets /
wheels spinning over the
purple edge of dawn

steady downpour /
at last the babbler
exits outside

her wild hair
hued bronze in the light /
that was my moment

M

haiku party /
not every bead on their
necklace the same

F

budding before Spring /
like showing up early
on your first day

blades and ice
in pleasant strife /
indoor rink

F

indoor rink /
the scoreboard
frozen

waiting parked /
tuning through stations
mixed with soft rain

F

where a stream
creeps over the path /
strands of brown silt

plants and trees, all
voting one hue of green /
rain forest walk

no heads yet /
everywhere though
dandelion sprouts

forest creek /
in competing whispers,
rainy highway

decades, centuries /
pillars of the cedars
tangled in mist

felled tree
coated in moss /
a poet's sofa

dark suburbs /
curving roads and ditches
singing with frogs M

from an awning
watching fountains and rain,
enjoying green melon

slate tiles
in perfect rows /
clover sneaking through

cigar stench /
of course the culprit
sits beside me

one rude thing /
enough to know you don't
want to know someone

college kids
carting around beer /
soaked streets

elderly cyclist /
her trailing rain slicker
cinematic

shaped concrete
besieged by weeds /
empty skate bowl

peonies out first!
on long green necks
flowers dripping

mocked at lunch /
his silent response,
incensed chopsticks

F

sunrise, sunset /
going at all hours,
the hamster wheel

F

two sticks of incense

burning at dawn /

Manhattan

F

“help!” she cries
off the lit path
from dark in the forest

F

rotting fence /
the dark forest beyond
caution enough

F

flapping madly /
the crows depart
before I do

overcast dawn /
elderly people
everywhere

fading winter /
in a woman’s stroller
her first born

baseball practice
on a cool wet day /
Mariachi songs

when I leave
the whole murder descends /
hungry crows

the black base of
a muddy chestnut tree /
pristine clover

pale yellow daffodils /
in their pistils
black flies

hairlike twigs
bundled on their backs /
strange inchworm

frog croak
rings out from a hushed
bathroom stall

tire tracks where
boots leave no trace /
clouds encroaching

branch debris
littering the path /
adding beauty

a tiny speck
lands on my page /
the smudge of murder

bench at evening /
scraping my jar of
peanut butter

family walk /
the rain's hiatus
tomorrow's nostalgia

placid Toshima /
in a garden at dawn,
one olive tree

F

destroyed gods /
street after street
without a temple

crowds out
strolling the urban glow /
energy at dusk

facing me
or not facing me /
the lonely ones

watching her
sit across from me
forty yards away

stopped busses /
civilization
takes a pause

many street lamps /
somewhere out of sight,
a moon

what might hatch
much less important /
unknown egg

F

slightly chill /
writing outside with
nowhere to go

sleep calling /
friends and family gone
into this silence

after winter
not all will return /
enemy self

the same people
walking in nightfall /
others' rhythms

sitting in grass
under a street lamp /
blue dappled night

mumbling shadows
trailed by a red light /
couple and dog

waterfall sounds /
just fleeting illusions
from passing cars

dark blue night
tectonic with clouds /
a jet's roar

bare radiant trees
tinged orange against
the blue night

housetights
like glowing camellias
still, a few stars

the old clay
shaped by no one /
what will I become?

F

gears and wheels /
quiet suburban night,
passing cyclist

what I lost,
I'd found and kept /
karma in darkness

electric hum
arching over stillness /
not in zazen

buddha nature
across the dharma /
but where else zazen?

that old corpse
mummified in zazen /
whose marrow has he?

P

avoiding Buddha
waiting for peace /
zazen please

wild fox spirit
should have just sat /
that quack Baizhang!

Sit long enough
and it will grow back /
the boy's finger

it doesn't matter
which hand does it /
twirling flowers

lily shadows /
not all that different
from hand puppetry

dead fennel
now purged of aphids /
dozing ladybugs

ambling crow
bobbing their head /
morning routine

squinting at dawn
seated by the windows /
bus commute

pigeon and sparrow
forage side by side /
cars dispersing

picturesque
in the light of dawn /
an old cinema

worn crosswalk /
perpendicular shade
cuts the street in half

retirees
lounging at a café /
soft radio

fast food joint
understaffed /
kitchen sounds

two leashed dogs
eager to meet /
owners cut a wide berth

not Summer /
although months away,
a good illusion

donut blather /
just complicating things,
the old patron

writing haiku /
I am an expert
at procrastinating

scenes reflected
in building windows /
optic cubism

passing through,
another pretty girl /
longing hearts

flying past
in a straight line /
crow overhead

soulless air
to the fast food queue /
Nirvana playing

anxious man
at a crosswalk /
he steps inside

still too early /
coffee shop before
the library opens

turning back
due to a call perhaps /
firefighters

memory gone
and failing in mine /
lost USB

way back,
after my own youth /
classic rock

index and thumb
pinching her breakfast /
Japanese woman

sniffling
she's still cute /
gentle dawn

intoxicated
with the blossoms /
frantic butterfly

ten thousand feet
above the blue mountains /
white clouds

maybe my sweat
on the bag's straps?
things that interest flies

this art form
crossed the ocean for me /
stranger to Hokkaido

square hedges ring
the descending garden
down to the wild sea

below mountains
the sun now, in the west /
old garden oak F

all four gates /
the stars don't add up
to even one moon F

river to cross
or finding it in thirst /
star of dawn and dusk F

glacial water
strewn with dry flat stones /
pure happenstance F

waking up
to the downpour gone /
just the dripping leaves

*country where
palanquin cannot go /
carried past dew* - BASHO

tea mastery
rare as Spring snow /
fox prints in mud F

*peeling torii
at the entrance to
the pine grove* - KOZAN

thrashing storm
swings its ghost scythe /
fields by lightning F

borrowing the ink
from an other's fine pen /
that hunky dory? F

*waiting at dusk /
discreetly touching up
her face in the mirror* - TOYO

millennia
eroding the stone /
apple tree blooms F

grass billowing /
the slight glint of dew
here and there

*hurried coffin /
put together as the
dew evaporates* - BASHO

warm breezes
and playfulness return /
grass stains F

green knees /
finding lost keys
after a daytime nap F

cookie crumbs and snot /
right after choking,
blowing my nose

timid puppy /
wary of the grocer's
even in this chill

all the day's sun
in a single burst /
donning gray robes F

add a stroke /
golfer on the green
clutching his chest F

absurd eyebrows /
everywhere wrestling with
dirt and weeds

mud puddle /
slight and drying out
yet you'll come and go

their noise first
as children are marched by /
passing storm clouds

passing gray cloud
looming and oceanic /
swallows flying by

immense clouds
heavenly from afar /
trees trembling

families stroll /
alone I gather my
mandarin peels

street curbs fringed
by dark jagged puddles /
their soft ripples

free books /
the community shelf
circled by shoe prints

“jesus loves you”
says an evangelist
cycling by

your ancestors
gave you pure rice /
why the bowl of sand? F

spiraling kite /
already torn, its then
pierced by bamboo F

stop using gray!
says the critic
in a rainy city F

cascading bronze hair /
a few curled like
broken guitar strings

delighted
at the gentleman!
suave jumping spider

prism spinner /
Autumn's slight butterfly
quite unreal - SONOME

leaning on the porch,
thoughts of yesterday's moon /
winds crossing tree tops F

old poet
slips on a banana peel /
kerrrr-splat! F

“well well well”
seeing the cherry tree
he lifts his glass F

stars and a soft breeze
in the long grass, watching
flames of distant battle F

river in darkness /
what swirls, not sparks
but fireflies F

floral robe unraveled /
disentangling
strings and such - HISAO

in moonlight
while I sleep beside
one who's slowly dying - TAKAKO

wild eyebrows /
buttoning up I trade
a mirror for night

wind blown hair
across their faces /
bus stop at night

not quite rain
and faint things of doom
divorced from dreams

dawn's dripping trees
pointillist with green buds /
worms stirring

F

blue light of dawn
nudging the café patrons /
soft jazz

off to work
their mundane jobs /
magic hour

gentle waves /
otters' fish ceremony
well attended

*clear all the way down /
in the Autumn lake
a single boulder* - SOSEKI

periscoping
from dense bushes /
top of a daffodil

as I zigzag
around the puddles /
rings from sprinkled rain

busy busy busy
yellow line
f e w

*the outrage!
gazing at cherry blossoms
with his sword on*

frost settled
on a moat of corpses /
the fetal dead - SOSEI

*hoping for retreat /
anxious soldiers with guns
on shoulders* - KAMENBO

office worker,
his dreams long forgotten /
boiled egg lunch

F

now he's dead too /
the wood box on his chest
wet with cold rain

F

*laundry at night /
my tears flowing into
bathtub water*

- FUSAE

*this snuffed land /
lamp lights multiplying
with the first storm*

- RAISEI

a crooked limb
left in contested ash /
sulfurous island

F

sinking off shore
a steel prison /
ballet of seaweed

F

glistening statues
on either side /
sheer steps

ghastly moon /
not enough darkness
to hide a foul night

F

red hummingbird /
yamabuki glowing
by lightning flash

F

the wide road
had just one puddle /
so, of course...

she gives up her seat
which is nice, yes
but I don't

waxing moon giving
way to the waning /
Spring defers to Autumn

averted to body
the skin tight black, abstract /
just her tattooed hand

them, wiping tables,
clean of germs after I
found my camp gone

desert sand
hissing over sand /
camel hooves F

long sun, steady
slope to a snow capstone /
Kilimanjaro F

whispering earth
adds these crumbs of toil /
termite mounds F

as a bow bends
the neck of a gazelle /
Serengeti grass F

mountain kingdom /
clouds broken into bone
by ancient drum F

their smiles
stars to a blue sky /
Masai leaping F

red shadows
flesh of new sunset /
arc so, hippo tusk? F

heat shimmer
going roof to roof /
alley-sliced Tangiers F

a thousand leaf points
weave patter to mist /
gorilla eyes F

swaying yes,
tree tops in twilight /
a long line of giraffes F

violet fragments
electric as street signage /
tendril water on tile

*rainbow banished /
again I return to being
someone's wife*

- TAKAJO

yellow bones
slowly, so cave swallowed:
cadaver as hallowed

F

half asleep
sipping and reading /
citrus chamomile

tabled books
bent by fresh use /
a tea cup's shadow

faux marble /
a café's table tops
ruffled with trash

touched by flame
your origami birds go /
winter tears

F

rising together /
sparrows bursting from trees
ahead of the dawn

hovering fingers,
they pluck one at last /
mixed fruit

families at dusk
skip stones on the sea /
none reach the far shore

F

crowding the stall
to ogle bubbling tanks /
fish market crabs

F

air whistling /
knots of bare branches
ensnare the moon

same moon again
up late clipping my nails
fluttering

lost in a page
as my head slowly droops /
nearby, scrubbing

atop the sea cliff,
huge green fir tree /
branches rippling in waves

expansive
sea and mountainous shore /
just the one cargo ship

zigzagging /
four beam cliff fence
holding back brambles

jack pine
cutting blue mountains /
sea and sky mirrored

fingerprints of waves
across the sea far below /
surreal distance

miles away
the other shore /
clouds touching mountains

storm pale skies
and ocean, invaded /
coniferous green

not a sound
above the cliffs /
circling eagle

plant-fall cliffs
all fern and ivy /
green until the sea

out of nowhere,
on my glove /
tiny millipede

bell tolls
and cawing mix /
fickle Spring

faintest drizzle /
reluctant to shut
my haiku journal

comfy chairs
in public areas /
so intrepid, those lice!

laughing yarrup /
hidden above
to idle confusion

teeny drain fly
staying close, hanging out /
aw! we're buddies!

the old, notorious /
so even after,
farts of the dead

F

evils like blossoms
pile up on us
parasite buffets

bare foot she runs /
each step a hard slap
to the school

at night /
gleaming in the street,
someone's spit

old toilet
sitting down to shit
plop!

right upfront
just the big screen
movie theater

M

complaining
loudly on her phone /
unnoticed vista

*coxcombs in bloom /
there must be as many as
14, 15...*

- SHIKI

out past midnight
on unfamiliar streets /
an open café!

wanting
to lie down /
pavement everywhere

shaving
blood trickle
toilet paper

skeletal trees
clawing blue sky

we cross paths
after her night out /
she of shy gaze

elsewhere
I was the seeker /
dry night

a fine gray ink
barely tints the page /
Shiki's coxcombs

cargo ship /
out in the bay
an alien shape

fly out of here man!
a fast food worker
in pilot school

“this one”
a rich shopper
facing identical wares

night swallows day /
his haiku inbox
delyed

*fallen camellia
tossed into the flames /
glowing fireplace*

- KYOSHI

*much too early,
the sake splashed in my lap /
changing clothes*

- SONOME

*sorrow of war /
with my blind down,
I write*

- TAKAJO

*selling my flesh
has its upsides too /
this ripe persimmon*

- SHIZUKO

*summer citrus
gone sour now /
to hell with virginity!*

- SHIZUKO

a thing
in God's image /
my red testicles

they don't let up
for your other problems /
health issues

baked goods /
delicious looking,
their flat reflections

a rat
in the green grass
fleeing me

unfolding my chair
I take a nap at dawn
right below cherry blossoms

pink blossoms above /
the sky slowly
bluer

wiping their beak /
the irreverent crow
perched on a cherry tree

closing my eyes /
bird song and the crack
of golf swings

cherry blossoms /
today's sunrise
has yet to touch them

some tree ruffling
but mostly it's noise /
arguing crows

he paints with words /
at least I know
I am this

brightening trees /
greener with
dawn

grass my left
in shade, in light/
point of dew glinting

periphery
my eye
petal falling

disintegrating /
crow frenzy
on the tail of winter

one clump /
dawn finally
in the blossoms

my journal even /
things the blossoms
fall into

shadows and I
amply acquainted /
tardy dawn

flowing
down its bark /
my steaming piss

under the tree
a garbage midden /
still winter

cold /
I leave the grass
and fallen blossoms

bronze leaf /
a hundred copies
gently crinkled

ascending a hill /
the grass almost white
with morning dew

pure heat
even in the still air /
basking early

reclining in the sun
bird song slowly returns

dew beads
melting in sunshine /
grass quivering

ninja in the treasure /
scintillating dew,
black fly

bygone
my own cyber age /
a lan before time

empire of dew /
today the sun
teaching history

sunning myself
a fly lands on me to join /
why resent that?

climbing the path
it surprises me /
the geodesic dome

mountain hemlock
against the black cliff /
higher up, a wooden bridge

thick with moss /
sprawling branches
looming over the pond

cliff side /
in geometric rocks,
a patch of cactus

visiting beauty,
they gaze at themselves /
selfie-ists

overlooking
the Chinese garden /
jigsaw of colors

wall of mountains /
this city an army
offering siege

hopping
between branches /
dark finches

blocking the view
with insipid blather /
their greed

a nice clean
dystopian place /
hospital landscaping

colorful bags
sprinkled on top /
trash bin and dog shit

Presbyter church
topped by a capitol dome /
paint peeling

life on hard mode /
his stolen shopping cart
full of cherished junk

shyly she drifts
in butterfly motions /
now touching this, now that

young lovers
laughing and entangling /
tethered pinkies

stylish
black woman /
hard won poise

forest's edge /
all through the night,
frog's singing

filleted salmon /
her outfit
pink and gray

goldfinch
deep in green stalks /
fluff in its beak

v

morning wind
rustling the long grass /
white-crowned sparrow song

F

crowd of dandelions /
the terrorist
a black eyed sparrow

v

the highest branch /
green leaves and blue sky
as a fly catcher sings

v

swaying branches /
a grooming chickadee
shaded in leaves

v

with each burst of song,
their tail lifting /
marsh wren

v

so many houses
but just the one cat /
neighborhood walk

M

its villas,
embedded jewels /
terraced valley

P

warm food
night without rain
contented

neon streets
after last call /
by twos, by threes

marching darkly
with large headphones on /
wheeling luggage

away from lights
artificial in power /
a dark city

light suddenly
swiping at my legs /
passing taxi

pale by street lamp /
a thousand cherry blossoms,
a jellyfish school

so light alone
but the weight of them all /
cherry blossom night

a thunderhead
crossing the darkness /
blossom mass

dim blossom cloud /
the black cherry tree limbs
frozen lightning

punching out of earth
the dark cherry tree
blossoms night

gray and faintly blue /
the sky tonight
above winter's blossoms

winter blossoms /
in the chill darkness
their millions

lit ski hills /
their pale glow
rippled across the bay

calm night /
along the sea's edge
dense blackberries

calm water /
in the dark bay
a splash

gleaming cities
sprawled on either shore /
a goose's cry

night walk /
behind the mansion hedge
fountain gurgling

Klimt's palette /
yachts in the marina
swaying at night

though empty
the thumbed lighter
still sparking

shakuhachi ya!
its music drifting
like the morning mist

F

touching the earth
with their whole selves /
snake in motion

F

worms and leaves
come out of the earth /
tip toeing Spring

F

briefly
a Japanese garden /
turtles in sand

F

*alone, silently /
the bamboo shoot
becomes a bamboo*

- SANTOKA

wary as cats /
the clouds circling
mountain peaks

F

of all days /
creativity on fire
April 1st

mom things /
a hundred kids
on her back

F

a front yard /
the tree strung with lights
thick as Mardi Gras beads

*return my dream!
a crow waking me
to mist and moonlight*

- ONITSURA

*sea darkening /
the babble of ducks
pales slightly*

- BASHO

dropping the broom
to deal with customers /
one girl doing it all

*lowering herself /
her eloquent behind
onto his silent lap*

- ANONYMOUS

his stones circling mine
until I won by pure chance /
a strange Go game

M

both of us
cold perhaps /
fly rubbing its legs

ancient custom /
mosquito suicides,
I second them

where I'd walk /
the cemetery gate
always open

M

at any time
the ones who long to go /
door to winter

F

dappling
the stone gate, the path /
pale magnolia petals

vine of thorn
arching like a window
over mountains

steep, almost
hidden, the stone steps /
past mansions to the sea

high tide /
worn smooth the wood
clacking at the shore

lichen mottled boulder
jutting over the
silver rippled sea

squirrels and crows
gathered in the streets
for unknown reasons

meowing at me
she leaps atop the fence
so I can scratch her

green painted house /
at the back of their yard
a stone face

stops when he's got
the light / goes through
when he doesn't

“sorry” says the sun /
at 8 am finally
pushing past clouds

my lingering hand /
where the carefree butterfly
perched briefly

F

the singer's voice /
suddenly a peahen
flying away

A

Autumn together /
the old tea kettle
has one last cup

F

dawn's strangers
swerving in the street /
leaves in a gust

F

traveling far /
companions came and went
except the river

F

outdoor seating /
after the humans leave,
crows swooping in

sun prevails /
the contest of April
has begun

tattooed white rose /
tossed origami from
someone's math test

shaped from stone
yet stone it remains /
broken buddha

P

mild winter night /
one brief glance the whole
of our connection

retreating clouds /
after the brash sun,
the shyness of the stars

steaming vents
trailing into darkness /
café oasis

winter night /
a thousand shadows,
one cup of tea

turning the page /
a thumb licking up
his last novel

our sleeping world
frozen in darkness /
leaves in a tea bag

smiling hello
over that night's baking /
the dust of sugar

unfinished sky /
a few soft dabs of cloud
on a blue canvas

cell phone lifted
under cherry blossoms /
throats of baby birds

its outline
sweeping the green field /
a cloud's shadow

falling already /
tiny pink petals
fluttering down

Spring is early /
crow atop a stop sign
takes it literally

in the grass
all by themselves /
starlings quarrel

golden evening /
a lone lady bug
takes flight

on blurred wings
the day's ladybug
struggles into the air

his park-bench bed
cluttered with junk /
the sun descending

her shapely legs
shown through a white dress /
blinding sun

radio lyrics
from a passing car /
warm evening

owners trying
to make light of it /
the rage of rival dogs

starling pair
hunting in the grass /
fading sunlight

silhouettes
outlined in gold /
evening robin song

motorcycle roar /
its futile protest
as the day fades

defeated
by a window /
the puzzled aphid

sweating more now /
winter's attire
peels away

crescent moon /
night's celestial bow
aimed at the hidden sun

the way she turned her neck,
her ivory skin /
late winter sunset

boot prints in sidewalk /
cemented going
the opposite way

yellow wheelbarrow
half swallowed in
green foliage

drained pools /
lights on at the closed
aquatic center

table shadow /
evading the broom,
spilled french fries

instead of car glass /
magnolia petals
strewn in an alley

the smooth pebbles /
such are the feats
of the eons

whirlpool couple /
their displays of lust
grasping outwards

shoulders touching /
groups of young women
laughing in high heels

tired already
and the darkness
just beginning

windows at night /
ballerinas seen
sprinting down a hall

bus depot /
breaks and engine sounds
texture the dark

even a night
as mild as this /
darkness

one by one
seeing the stars appear /
or your regrets

Chinese drums /
the gurgle of small crowds
waiting in the night

machine gun sounds:
a loose bus window
rattling away

old woman
heaped in layers /
her shopping cart too

sudden rain /
the night air softly
spritzed with ozone

over my book /
the shadow of a moth
passing

peering inside /
man at the window of
a closed restaurant

pink magnolias
swaying against today's
overcast dawn

dolphin statues
mid-leap in a fountain /
just someone's front lawn

black squirrel
on a mossy branch /
the rain paused

limping along
with my heavy bag /
crow silently watching

stretched branches
sagging with splendor /
pink trumpets

pale blossoms
separated from sky
by just one hue

alcove of thorns /
no protection though
from the storm

practicing
with their door open /
the dance troop

M

pulsing music /
the sound of rain
each time the door opens

burrito place /
subdued conversation
among the damp

on the tops of things,
a slight blur from splashing rain

solemn young girl
debates her patient mom /
early Spring

after being drenched /
looking in silence at
my glistening bag

as I lean in /
the ant's antennae
detect me

bored, I fog up
the window of the bus
with my breath

I killed her
as she was giving birth /
the tiny white louse

to be nice, she
makes my coffee larger /
diluting it

stuffed nose /
headache standing on
a crowded bus

traffic noise
as the green light holds /
tires on a wet road

nine hours until
the library opens /
rain and darkness

each small mistake
added up with interest /
a life debt free

drenched streets
as the night drizzles on /
old fire hydrant

twisting branches
near the street lamp /
the rest, dark

kitchen mishap /
sounds of passing cars
through a propped door

green light
tinting the road
as it blinks

with my sleeve /
sweeping the old desk
of mouse scat

each a shadow
as they slowly near /
strangers taking shape

lacking sleep /
my bank account
not quite full enough

sandwich shop /
always open but
always empty

a long worm
nudging its way along
the wet pavement

black coffee /
although I hate it,
it's their cheapest thing

rings of steam /
in the dark alley
where my piss splashes

high above
this dark world /
tonight's full moon

colored garlands
of cut out rabbits /
coffee shop queue

arm crooked, resting
my chin in my palm /
the words absent

heading to bed /
two raccoons and I
in the wet dawn

gray clock tower /
gray clouds flowing past
gray sky

right as I
go to leave
she comes back

tiled ceiling
stretching away /
florescent lights humming

crushing unborn lice,
my thoughts turn
to Bankei

as my foot blisters
grow more tender
my heart hardens

elderly man
hunched over papers /
burger shop at night

record high tide /
there the ambitious
barnacle dies

F

lights blaring
ambulance and police
trickle out east

needing to shave
I delay it again /
how petty life is

barbeque grill /
in its black char
nostalgia

F

unable to sleep
time has become
my enemy

each tissue
a fleeting reprieve /
regenerating snot

in the now
of darkness
shine yesterday's lies

lies blossom /
everything sacred
is dead

no nearby trees /
the black SUV
speckled with blossoms

Tibetan prayer flags /
soaked and clinging to
a street lamp

leaning back
under open sky
waiting for the stars

fingers prying
the window blinds /
moon in clouds

F

moth shadow /
projected large in all
its confusion

haloed moon /
the dark sprawling woods
filled with frog chorus

before dawn /
the tree's black shape
in a blue pond

hissing flames
as its snapped and fed in /
green twig

its gentle
red pulse /
glowing ash

sifting what's left
of my beach fire /
not one cinder

after sleeping rough /
hobbling past the
closed mattress store

purple clover
shooting up beside
a baby blue dumpster

unbroken storm clouds
but then, a frontier
of blue sky, incoming

sun breaking
upon the plaza /
a flush of shadows

a feline whine /
steam from the green stalk
cast into fire

wings splashing /
one goose in the azure
blue fountain pond

bright blue sky /
a pair of crows
playing in the updrafts

hiker lying down
on a wooden bench /
white petals falling

many stairs left
but hearing the surf now
and glimpsing sunset

sea flies
stampeding before me
over beach stones

landless horizon /
the gently crashing waves
a brilliant gold

as I look up /
full moon in a pale dusk
passing through clouds

willows at dusk /
in their midst a nameless
abstract sculpture

roadside creek /
besides, the rain forest
spilling over cliff

Spring just begun
and now suddenly
mosquitoes everywhere

windy day /
the white cherry tree
slowly plucked

nice sleeping bag /
I don't know whether I
found it or stole it

in the morning
tracks skirting my beach camp /
nosy seagulls

bike tracks
across a beach
pock marked with shadows

sand and grass mounds
in dawn's golden light /
birdsong all around

flying away
due to beach dogs,
the heron croaks

first squeeze /
from out of my palm
the red thorn slides

Nara deer
eating cherry blossoms /
face showered by these

v

from grass, from stones /
dandelions' yellow
heads peeking everywhere

seeds husks
from a lone pine tree
where bees and robins hunt

flurried steps
and then the pause /
stabbing his beak in earth

magnolia tree /
thriving amid the shade
of tall cedars

such a gift should
not have a broken fence /
the Pacific Bell

to care for trees
they nail IDs to them /
idyllic day

dappled light
in the pleasant shade
from tall cedars

upset ladybug /
aghast at me, wings
trailing from her shell

wrestling sparrows /
deciding who owns
a patch of dirt

like one's fingers
all touching on one's hand /
Japanese maple leaves

between three
elder cherry trees
petals falling through light

music students
interrupt the chorus
of the cherry blossoms

mossy branches
at whip crack angles /
blossoms and blue sky

seated on grass /
his back turned to the
magnificent cherry trees

dandelions
and cherry petals /
Spring favors both

instead of clouds /
pale cherry blossoms
touching the sky

between myself
and this cherry tree
capitalism dies

flashing across
the pale blossoms /
crow shadows

each falling petal /
a sermon on impermanence

unseen petals /
the cherry blossoms
full of lost moments

caught in a breeze
the cherry petal
briefly a butterfly

backing in /
their house lit up
tail-light red

closing my book
I resign myself
to the night

Shiki's Coxcombs: The Margins of Subtlety

The strife that haiku can inspire is a bit surprising. It's hardly believable that such small poems could arouse anything like bitter passion. And yet they do. Repeatedly. Consider for example the following:

Keito no juyogo-hon mo arunubeshi

Cockscombs: there must be as many as fourteen, fifteen

- Shiki (Hiroaki Sato translation)

Here's a work that's caused a notable controversy among poets in Japan; some arguing that it's an exemplary modern haiku while others dismiss it as utterly worthless. Because its author is such an important figure in the history of the artform, it's probably best not to jump to the latter conclusion while still acknowledging that no poem should be ascribed merit simply on the basis of its author's reputation. With both in mind, I'd like to proceed with sharing a few of my own thoughts.

At the most superficial level, there seems to be nothing here. All we have is a man stating that he sees a number of flowers but unsure of how many precisely. Probably the first thing a lot of readers would want to know is whether the flowers being mentioned have any symbolic meaning. Which they do. As readers though, we can't necessarily infer that the poet had any intent of highlighting their cultural significance so that detail isn't as helpful as popular literary criticism might make it seem. At least, that information won't actually solve anything. And neither would the historical context since, among other reasons, artists frequently create works with the intent of distorting history. A good place to begin then would be to just focus on the face value of the words. What do these convey?

What strikes me immediately is how interesting the poet's guess range is. Between fourteen and fifteen is quite specific for someone not sure. So we're given clear indication that the observer has some concern for the actual number of flowers but is unable to ascertain this exactly. Now imagine looking at a garden or vase full of flowers: counting them would be increasingly difficult the farther away you were. I think the number range we're given then strongly suggests someone a fair distance off and unable to come any nearer; either due to mobility or confinement issues. There's also a weakness implied in the observer's utterance: they are resigned to not knowing how many there are despite wanting to and despite making at least one attempt at counting them. Can we also say that there's a lingering desire here? I think so. Even at the limit of their power, they seem glad for so many.

Reliant as I am (Entirely) on the English translation, much of the present interpretation depends on Hiroaki Sato's ability to capture the essence of the original. In that I'm inclined to confidence because something I think I've noticed in his essays is that he translates haiku etc which he's less sure of with less grammatical artifice, intending I suspect to preserve more of the Japanese syntax. Consider this:

Hana-goromo nugu ya matsuwaru himo iroiro

The flower robe disrobing strings clinging various

- Hisajo

Given the impeccable fluency of his English prose, and the deft assuredness of the majority of his translations, the unnatural wording he gives us here can't be inadvertent. While I can't say for sure, my instinct tells me it's the result of the writer's humility in the context of an unresolved translation question.* So, returning to Mr. Hiroaki's version of Shiki's haiku: the confidence displayed in its rendering makes me confident. Should that faith prove unjustified, much of what I contend will be invalidated. But not everything. I'll leave what is and what isn't though to the reader's determination.

Continuing with my analysis, I want to draw attention to the middle phrase of the haiku: "*... there must be as many as...*" This has the distinct sound of something said at a hospital bedside or similar situation. There's a texture here of the listless and somber. Again, I don't know how much is owed to the contribution of the translator but taking the English version of the haiku *as is*, what must be obvious now is that despite its overt simplicity, the poem in fact conveys a great deal of information. Or is this all just projection? That assertion however would be more plausible if we didn't know that what's been gleaned from the text of the haiku aligns with what we know of Shiki's circumstances at the time of its writing. Even if the author weren't someone who specifically advocated for the primacy of haiku being grounded in real life, everything about this poem is suggestive of a basic realism.

Not wanting really to emphasize the symbolic (Since the symbolic can't be genuinely subtle: only esoteric or obscure) it's still good perhaps to note that coxcombs signify vitality and energy, so they represent the complete opposite of what the author of the poem was going through. Said flowers then not being without a hint of irony. In terms of actual subtlety though, this is provided with traditional haiku understatement; although to an exceptional degree. Which is why maybe even many Japanese haiku poets had difficulty appreciating the poem. The key to unlocking this piece however is the number of flowers: once the implications of that are perceived, the reader is in a better state of mind to give the poem some credit. Because, yes, this is a work that can be easily dismissed. I accept the judgement of others though who've called it a masterpiece. It's very much a poetic jack-in-the-box whose full meaning will only spring out at you once the handle's been cranked enough, so to speak.

Any artform that prioritizes subtlety naturally runs the risk of coming off as vacuous or trivial. Such accusations should not be given too much attention unless there is a real doubt as to whether the work being produced is genuinely subtle or just the pretentious imitation of this. In either case, the best guard is to foster a thoughtful and sincere reading culture to support the art form. And I hope this essay does just that. We must begin I think by being attentive; like a slow erosion by water, mere attentiveness has the power to induce breakthroughs. Plus, once someone experiences this a few times, the momentum will carry their other readings. It's best for haiku then that haiku readers be highly discriminating and that there be no dismissal of wading into the finest details (So long as said details are real and objective; only what is truly shareable can provide genuine social content) Since it's easiest for me to demonstrate this from a poem I have the greatest knowledge about, let me conclude this essay with a few words about one of my own haiku. This one:

miles away
the other shore /
clouds touching mountains

Although describing a completely real observational experience, I was quite conscious of the symbolism I was capturing with my choice of empirical content. Yes, this is a poem alluding to death; that part's not subtle at all. What I'd like for the reader to consider conversely are the different implications that would be conveyed by inverting the word order in the last line. 'Clouds touching mountains' and 'mountains touching clouds' do not suggest the same thing symbolically: the former hints at grace while the latter hints at accomplishment. Matters quite antithetical. So even small choices like this can have profound artistic ramifications. Especially in a literary genre as sparing as haiku. But then that emphasizes one of the art form's most noteworthy virtues: its capacity to deepen and refine the tastes of its participants. In that regard, Masaoka Shiki's legacy will always remain immense.

* Something born out in a later part of the book 'On Haiku', the last sentence of the last essay in fact, where Hiroaki Sato confesses to a particular translation uncertainty.

JUXTAPOSITION AS TECHNIQUE AND FETISH

Summary

Although the technique of juxtaposition is used effectively in some English language haiku, a prevalent fetishizing of juxtaposition has arisen as a result of it being conflated with traditional Japanese kireji and this because the latter has many challenging nuances while the former offers an easy simplification. Explaining the common confusions here in terms of a fetish framework has not been previously done to my knowledge and this further highlights the power of irrational attachments in haiku literature; although that's certainly not unique to it. By distinguishing between technique and fetish however, a new criterion is introduced by which juxtaposition itself can be analyzed in individual haiku as well as in the broader critical literature.

The issue of translation is not just limited to the literal meaning of words. When a genre of poetry is adopted from a different language for instance, the question of how best to recreate it must be decided within a framework of definition. What we are looking for is, at the very least, to achieve a degree of commonality with other works that depends on a general insight about some body of primary texts. Said texts will obviously not circumscribe all the possibilities of a genre (Then the genre would be dead) but they will collectively provide a foundation that all ensuing must establish themselves upon. For haiku in any language, this means a basic cognizance of the historical Japanese tradition. No matter how haiku evolves, its evolution will just as much require linking itself to a lineage as actual biological evolution. What is completely separated cannot share in identity.

What, if anything then, connects English language haiku written today with works from past eras of Japan? Among the elements both possess, we can acknowledge several forms of subject matter and aesthetic principle but, given the inevitable debate here, this essay will limit itself to the consideration of a single concept: juxtaposition. Specifically, juxtaposition in the context of historically prominent Japanese poets that provide a litmus test for said art form to the English speaking world and juxtaposition as it features in English language haiku presently. Doing so, the question will be raised whether fundamental misunderstandings have taken root in the English language haiku community.

Let me begin by saying that juxtaposition, strictly speaking, is not a crucial element of haiku. Evaluating works in this genre using strength of juxtaposition as a fundamental criteria is as arbitrary and ahistorical as insisting on the inclusion of mountain references; haiku can encompass both, yes, but neither is essential. Because there's abundant evidence for this across Japanese haiku writers and translations, it's rather baffling that any deep conviction to the contrary should take hold; and yet it has. First though, some examples of excellent haiku where juxtaposition is slight or nonexistent:

1)

*on the homecoming servant's
face too...
peach blossoms*

Issa, trans. Lanoue

1763 - 1828

2)

*fanning out its tail
in the spring breeze,
see - a peacock!*

Shiki, trans. Beichman
1867 - 1902

3)

*how cool the feeling
of a wall against the feet -
siesta*

Basho, trans. Darlington
1644 - 1694

4)

*Urinating
I look down
On the sleeping village*

Santoka Taneda, trans. Stevens
1882 - 1940

5)

*Summer's first melon
lies firmly hugged to the breast
of a sleeping child*

Issa, trans. Hamill

6)

*whispering
something to the rose
she cuts the rose*

Momoko, trans. Makoto Ueda

1) Lanoue's version of this Issa poem presents us with a single image but waits to reveal its most significant detail until the very end; here we have dénouement as punctuation. What prevails in this case though is continuity rather than juxtaposition. At the first word, the reader is being primed for the flourish of the closing phrase. There's barely even any contrast: and nothing seriously antithetical in the interplay of elements. Yet it conveys plenty of Issa's distinctive charm.

2) Although the previous haiku was devoid of the kireji juxtaposing so much emphasized by many English language writers, someone could still try to subsume it into a general juxtapositional framework.

They might point to the contrast between the servant's face and the peach blossoms as satisfying their preferred aesthetic criteria, but then a huge range of ordinary images with trivial complexity would constitute use of a juxtaposing technique. An absurd amount. That clarified, in our second poem we are presented with a haiku that contains even less contrast in it; a peacock the only concrete thing. And it's revealed to us in a single action. Here we have no dramatic cut or surprising reveal so, by the standards of various English language haiku authorities, something that would be dismissed as a failure if not for the eminence of its author. This a mere glimpse at the cognitive dissonance which will later be addressed.

3) Great writers serve as literary touchstones where future generations will return in times of indecisiveness to find new direction. Not so much to emulate but to reconnect with a sense of solidity even if this is to just go and seek that elsewhere. In eras dominated by illusions, truth fades into unfamiliarity and it is only by the cultural reservoir of some canon that said knowledge can be restored; those with no ancestors have no future. Basho of course is as central to haiku as Monet is to impressionism: a singularly great personality whose work will always be emblematic to said art. What this poem again provides confirmation of is the fact that haiku is not a genre defined by juxtaposition. Darlington's use of a dash makes clear where he tries to replicate the kireji function but how would this be the crux of any juxtaposing? A siesta, by itself (Or we can substitute 'mid day nap' if we prefer a less culturally anachronistic translation) is just an abstractly floated concept untethered to any image; only in the context of the other two lines is it grounded in something concrete. To borrow a term made famous by T. S. Eliot, in isolation such words and phrases lack a true 'objective correlative' to juxtapose.

4) It's possible to picture this haiku in a way that conjures juxtaposition. We can visualize the author with their back turned to us, standing in the foreground urinating off a cliff and, below them, a village in the near distance. However this means inflating the poem with things that aren't there. No actual use of juxtaposition as technique is present. To further illustrate this, I'll demonstrate how it could be written in a genuinely juxtaposing fashion: taking a piss / off the cliffs at night / dozing seaside village. Perhaps the village here wasn't situated on a shore but regardless this shows the form in which juxtaposition is properly done; concrete images are independently established and then directly contrasted. To my mind though, my version of the poem here doesn't improve it but merely caters to an arbitrary imposition.

5) Does anything need to be said about this poem which hasn't already been dealt with? There's obviously no juxtaposition here. Supposing there was or the content of the poem was restructured to include that; how would it be improved? Contorting the expression of an identical scenario to satisfy some particular form for its own sake is a mere exercise in empty ingenuity; where the traditional rules of haiku serve to focus and encapsulate-pithily, mandating juxtaposition for every haiku only introduces convolution.

6) For the final example in this group of poems, we have one that displays a purely syntactic juxtaposition without the "imagistic" juxtaposition (Or empirical if we don't want to constrain ourselves to a one dimensional sensorium) erroneously conflated with the essence of haiku. Of the poem's two concrete elements, the rose is central and the woman peripheral; she provides a boundary of focus that revolves, through one cycle of repetition, around a singular poetic axis. The rose is not being juxtaposed with anything however since what is of primary meaning here is the emotional effect felt by the woman as she kills that which she has grown. Melancholy perhaps but the ambiguity is a major reason this haiku works so well; being superficially mundane but suggesting a plenitude of feeling. Something that's clearly not contingent on any juxtapositional technique.

—

Many more examples of great haiku without strong juxtaposition could be introduced, collecting the above required scarcely any effort at all, but what would be the point? What is already obvious cannot be made more persuasive by added argument. If people are deeply attached to some misunderstanding, logic and fact will not dissuade them. Still, I think it's worthwhile to challenge any popular misconception because those who are being newly instructed as such won't have the same firmness of conviction and, even among proponents of a basic untruth, there will be a few with no irrational investment in what they claim and therefore amenable to reason.

And it might also help to explain how artistic fetishes grounded in falsehood tend to arise and ways in which they often manifest themselves. With respect to the former, haiku isn't even especially difficult. Instead, it is the depth and delicateness of subtlety so prevalent across Japanese art forms (Flower arrangement, pottery, etc) that is the difficult thing; thereby incentivizing the appetite for simplistic formulae. Such reductionism makes it easier to convince oneself one has gained expertise in something still elusive and no doubt irritating to the point of exasperation. Which is not to say that the haiku written under the influence of unnecessary juxtaposition aren't proper haiku: only that a part has been mistaken for the whole. They comprehend at best a branch while missing the roots and so cannot speak with real authority on the nature of a tree. And as such generations will gradually drift away from the source of vitality in an art form; by fragmenting of fragments, the distortion sweeping all.

Likewise, this highlights one of the main means to identify fetishizing in literature: where reductionism is emphasized, where fundamental mystery is smothered in narrow orthodoxies, there is inevitably an impulse dishonest and misleading. The lust for authority has overtaken artistic integrity. Because creativity only exists along the edges of rules, only where freedom blossoms, the elevation of any template answer above the primacy of questioning and searching is itself indicative of cultural stray. At that point the thread is clearly lost. Accordingly, the practitioners of any art who've succumbed to such a condition will drift away from what their predecessors created as their version of said art form inbreeds its increasingly constricting set of ideas. Eventually the offspring of this, individual haiku in the present context, will begin to display a congenital crippling. Ever worsening since basic misunderstandings will always lean away from truth and shuffle off in every other direction.

I believe the major falsehoods surrounding juxtaposition in haiku have now been sufficiently addressed: they have crept in as a result of the aforementioned cognitive dissonance that prizes its connection to a foreign artistic lineage but then betrays the spirit of that via inaccurate gloss in order to establish itself in non-existent mastery. To be blunt, many English language haiku writers lack deep respect for the art form. Those of us who consider ourselves real haiku aficionados may feel a sense of superiority over people who think anything written in a three line, five-seven-five syllable, format constitutes haiku but perhaps ours is only a more sophisticated species of mutilation? I'd just add to this that I consider myself very much ignorant about all the nuances haiku encompasses but especially in regards to its cultural depths. There is much to learn about haiku but perhaps even more to unlearn. I only feel bold enough to write what I have here because of the immediate and total affinity I've felt reading various canonical haiku writers. It is a wonderful literary form deserving of the utmost care by those who claim possession of its legacy.

With what's been said so far, it might seem like I hold the use of juxtaposition in inherently low regard. That's not the case. My opinion is merely that it's been grossly fetishized due to its linear appeal to western sensibilities; what it offers as such is a simplistic criteria for adjudicating haiku that sidesteps all

the profundities of the art. It's like if Kubrick's celebrated match cut from the flung bone to the space station in 2001 became the measure of all other editing techniques in cinema. Which of course would lead to subsequent films contriving hard match cuts, taking the place in scene transitions for example where a slow dissolve would be much more effective. When juxtaposition is done well though, it is quite satisfying. Michael Dylan Welch, a well known haiku writer, authored the following poem which exemplifies an effective use of juxtaposition:

*meteor shower
a gentle wave
wets our sandals*

Not only does the kireji cut between the first and second line demarcate two strongly contrasting images but this is augmented by a thematic opposition between the celestial/terrestrial and two other dualities: the unreachable and tactile, as well as the ephemeral and repeating. Its distinction I think lies in how elegantly it combines so much in so natural a manner. Whether or not it has any basis in lived experience, we are immediately impressed with the authenticity of the picture; there's no sense of contrivance polluting it. And of course the use of juxtaposition is merited because of how it provides a horizon between sky and shore; locating human perception at the fulcrum of a vertical scale. Here we are given a centering *in* the kireji.

Which is just one way juxtaposition participates in the essence of haiku; highlighting individual human relationship to the world while doing so with astute succinctness. A form of poetry then that does not separate itself from anything but rather embraces all in a celebration of moments where some aspect of life is unfolded for us. The truth waiting to be found, everywhere.

YOUR TIME ON EARTH

for Lajos and his family

It's easy to forget, always
but especially those things excluded
from our lives by
so many casual choices;
life, a map, torn smaller for convenience
and the scraps of discarded territories
drifting away unnoticed

Maybe it's as simple as walking a dog;
something that can become so routine
it's like brushing teeth; but of course
there are people such as I
who will go decades never doing this

Look then: look
at each day honestly, notice
what is and isn't there

If you are walking a dog, appreciate the dog

See the animal, the vitality in them,
as they snuffle earnestly for the odors of
other dogs and crane their neck
under the head scratches of friendly strangers
and bark at a puzzling world

Take a moment to see our shared existence
through their eyes

Mystery is everywhere, lurking
like the light inside of atoms
while the universe waits for the eyes of one awakened
to read the omnipresent words of a library
older than language

I mean, it's up to you

This is just your time on earth

ENDING A FRIENDSHIP

I've never known it to be hard;
Just speak the truth a little
And all the hidden fractures will reveal themselves

I'm not even talking about intimate personal criticism
Or a deep confrontation of values;
So much as scratch their illusion of power, over themselves,
You, or anything, and watched the facade of friendship
Boil to nothing in a flash

The rage at the audacity that you
Would dare expose them

I think the problem is I'm quite good at arguing and can
Quickly pierce their illogical armors
To sting the meat of soft emotions underneath

Doing this is usually enough to provoke
Savage outrage

Expect no proportional escalation; more often than not
They'll go for the biggest ammunition first
Because the hatred at being wounded is total and there's no
Ointment as soothing as revenge

Which is why I hate arguing: either
I yield to preserve a lie, or win animosity as my prize

Someone once assured me
How much they valued honesty, craved it in fact,
And that blunt directness was so much better;
Guess how they reacted
To the slightest press of challenge?

I've never seen anyone unravel so fast

From condescending to unctuously pleasant
To frothing at the mouth in three messages and I
Was almost bewildered

The thing is, no real friendship ever ends

You simply awaken at some point from a fantasy

DOOMS FOR EACH

They subterraneans of solid obscurity
Do not bloom in later life
But starve slowly by the mana of their dreams;
In this omnipresent lie, this
Robber of a world, perfected with
All trials of youth and self-unguarded to be
Crushed eventually, it drinks them dry
At its own good speed

But many others will not see this:
Like a mirror realm
Beyond the edges of a mirror, it
Will lurk throughout their blessed days yet
Never spoil these, never

Touch what is equal or more fragile, to render
Judgement of objective kind,
And instead defy the lesser tyrant of merit
With its own callous whimsy

Facts chronicled by piled dead whose sin
Was the boredom of God
And the pleasure, so divine, found in breaking
Things that are wholly yours;
Why create in clay if not to savor the erosion
Of fumbling beings
Dumbed without your breath?

Luck, the spiderweb of trapped souls
Vibrating with such minuscule hopes

SOME MIGHT SAY THEY KNEW ME

Doubt this

If my work endures such
That anecdotes about me become bartered
For attention, consider
What these merchants of my shadows
Were to me in life

From the desert that I was
Only the poetry thrived
And who among my tardy commentators
Supported that art in me?

Did even one of them speak in public
To promote what they now use as a platform for
Their peddled insights?
How wise are they who were before
So apathetic

Not that they aren't entitled to their indifference
But the shift is certainly suspect

Potato-root personalities, famished
For any limelight, finding
In the radiance of my dead words exactly what
They couldn't obtain for themselves

Merely an audience and very merely

Rare are those who'd prefer oblivion
To riding another's coattails
And that, at the low price, of a few safe lies

RAPUNZEL, I CALL YOU

In my private thoughts to name those
Fresh shards of memory
Which serve as your substitute

Because, I know you have depth and truth
Far beyond any stranger's imagination;
You are a lifetime's worth of mystery sprung into
Total womanhood, like a magnolia petal
Invisible in its bud, but
Pure as the midnight moon

This is not true of all people

Many are numbed into insensitivity, or worse
Eroded as I am, becoming
A species of calloused thing estranged
From their past selves

Scavengers of wishful fantasies who dream now
Of exit roads they passed without hesitation

To me, you are almost frightening;
Apparition from a more beautiful life that always
Eluded my grasp, a fable
Chasm by the moat of your grace, your
Loveliest of poise

Yes, the soft cruelty of this
Equalled in various superficial aspects; though none
So distinctive as your hair

Black and flowing with the long perfection
Of a masterful ink brush painting but

Kept by your efforts alone
And although I know my weakness for fiction
I cannot help picturing you caressing it:
Fingers delicate as a harpist's

NO PLACE

Everyone falls away so quickly;
Soft glow kindling to ash
As soon as the light's reciprocated

People are a darkness, comfortable
With itself along
The edges of my own life

And maybe the maze is just a series
Of dead-ends disguised
As a solvable mystery, maybe...

Or I am a key created without
Any corresponding locks;
Cursed with a useless optimism

Marrow-deep in my ignorance only
Broken by some hyena's jaws;
Yes, that too is life

To be fundamentally alien:
Similarities and overlap
Outside the axis of category-you

What the immune system
Ruling society's body refused at outset
To incorporate in itself

Enemy in genus, enemy in spirit;
Judgement of enemy undeclared
But seeded in every acquaintance

Not that I am perfect, however
I *have* tried; surfacing numerous times,
Never sighting land

BULLETPROOF HORSES

A mass: them magnet to instruction
With ferrous gallop across
This limestone desert utopia

Great chariot of time, rumbling
And the fossils vibrating
In their soft internment, promise to
Expose the esoteric wisdom,
Still lurid, though
Child to toothless eons

Horses ground to glue
Save the innocence of kindergarten classrooms
As shapes cut from construction paper:
Doubly flat, these daydreams

These witch-beasts enamoring;
Idol to adolescent girls and trial, who
Do not die (until the world)
Reveals its ugly face sneering
With nostrils of thistle
And the shrinking field already yellow
In summer's hatred

Such life defies the hostile void
Once perfect and unquestioned
In original dictatorship

What cannot be explained, hence
The ammunition invading all, all petty with wrath
As jigsaw pieces comprehending not
Their picture in togetherness; that steed,
Beyond the reach of weapon

FEARLESS TO BE YOURSELF

to Sam, for the inspiration

Who are we if all we do is appease what
Others want, or what we imagine
From them, and so live in a labyrinth of dreads
And privately imposed hearsay? Yes,
Reputation is worth considering
But whose reputation?

If we are never real, never raw in honesty,
Then I think it's fair to say
We've never really touched this earth

No evidence of our natural person
Will ever be found and
The legacy and memories which take its place
Are just the sad artifice of fear
Gloating in its triumph

At a certain point, persona becomes treachery:
Us betraying ourselves, our dreams

Somewhere in the past we were pure enough once
For innocence so, ask yourself, what
Wretched weeds grew over the child you?
And can't you strip these away?

THE ART IS YOU

Stimulated by the work of Dan Small

A whole planet to play your life upon;
Hues of experience to outdo a prism
In the dazzling truth each person possesses, if only
They're brave enough

Every mortal self a story, the author
Through hunger and thirst constant in its creation

Not even apathy can halt it;
Time, our colleague, a steadfast cinematographer
Keeping the camera going as we perform
Most of the other roles, simultaneously
Director and actor and, even, editor; memory ours
To screen the dailies on, to tweak

And this, our sole inheritance, to make of
What we will; the possibilities of beauty enduring
Regardless of raw materials

Because even as all are not equal in fortune,
Art is what transcends its medium

POOR GRENDEL HAD AN ACCIDENT

How the stars conspire!
Icebergs in the black sea of ignorance,
Where waves of painful feeling
Crash and shatter into mist and fog
The way for voyaging minds
Fish-pregnant with a hundred omens; nightmare to
Monsters such as us

Life, that burning sun, bright with
Frustrations, whose dawn
Intrudes on the cool caverns of hearts which hadn't even
Yearned to be born

So burst the seeds of vengeance, groping
Beast-like in a pagan landscape
While deprived the logic of true animality; fated
To think, to dream
And roam the moonlight in cruel feast of man
Though themselves
Just meal of cosmic millstone

Now consider our lonesome Grendel:
Verified a bastard
By any human arithmetic

Stubborn as a mountain goat, he grew
Fat off other's terror
And laughed in limitless schadenfreude while
The nihilism ran hot in his blood

Moral arguments aside, isn't it a bit disarming
Imagining ourselves likewise cursed?

ILLUSION'S FOREST

Splinter apart from the tree, belong to nothing
As the scars rewrite you; past now
The butterflies with wings of moonlight that perched
Upon the branch you were

Joined once to greater life, now whole
And alone; independent save for the limits of dimension

Expand though you may,
You can at most inhabit your dreams
While these dissolve your feet
In ankles planted into dusty earth, below
The hidden limb
Uncoiling in venous root system

Where toes ceased to exist, a conversation with
Philosophic worms stutters
Across the sadness of a lifetime

Truth-seeker now lie-glutton, maturity
Whittling still at the ego though
All that's left of this is ash of falsehood hence,
Like an icon of an old religion
You never really believed in your heart

Not the creation of a garden: you, however wishful

FUTURE LESS

Mahjong in a quiet shopping mall;
The mild disarray of vacant food court tables
And elderly people exercising:
Phantom despite their substance, echoes
Of some coveted banality
Which memory rewrites into nostalgia
For those hopeless and old

Outside the normal flow of time, paired
Architecture from different eras
Is fused together to become something that
Belongs to neither; a mongrel location
Where sunset never turns to night, instead the same
Cigarette butts and geese shit
Linger in the yellow grass as when the
Building first opened

Though the city changes around this place
It is a slow siege to penetrate the barriers of anachronism;
Each atom of alteration, a mosquito
Stymied at the incomprehensible net put up
By nameless guardians, now derelicts

One day it will be torn down of course
To pave the road for an even more spiritless structure
As history moves to erase, not just individual lives,
But life itself, yes history the anathema,
Since eternity is the essence of life; meaning all
Progress is a devious inversion of this, explaining then the
Otherwise baffling instinct for stagnation

VAGRANT AT DUSK

As the crows fly home
I wait for darkness to finish its slow work;
Too apathetic for impatience
But resentful maybe, annoyed that
So many years could be spent
To obtain no more than this

Yet how would it be otherwise? Uncertainty
Being *that* poisonous, and I
Allowing it to invade every aspect of my life;
Every desire doubted, suspect,
Leading to a vast carnage of inaction, the scythe
Still not lifted even when
The wheat has rotted away completely

Knowing this however seems meaningless since
No improvement of feeling follows;
It's like I see my life with such utter detachment
Even self-preservation can't penetrate it

Perhaps there's a reason for this, a cause
Now long forgotten by me;
If pressed to conjecture, I can imagine
Maybe there was once a thief
Who stole the mechanism of happiness from me
So early on that to this day
I have no clue what needs replacing

THE CHAOS ARTIST

Drips of speech running down
The sonic canvas of the city, the palette
Mixed with ambulance sirens
And road rage, to no coherent purpose;
Because truth is a sum that does not flinch from violence,
It delights in ugly colors,
In the messiest of possible disharmonies

An action painter of course, the drunk splotcher
Of our world; known by
Too many scattered pseudonyms, they incite
The artist's collectors to riot
But without generative mayhem

Creation that breaks and breaks again,
Body without sanctuary, hung
Upon the wall so the suffering has witnesses

THAT HOUR WILL COME

A Short Film

Screenplay By:
mirumazimuth@outlook.com

CUT IN FROM BLACK:

INT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE. DAY

MEDIUM SHOT of a medical SKELETON hanging in the room against the backdrop of a pristine wall. Shot lingers.

CUT TO:

CLOSE UP of the skeleton's face. Camera stays on this as a door audibly OPENS and SHUTS (Vibration and subtle light change also noticeable)

CUT TO:

Doctor's DESK. Sparse and neat, its most notable features are a NOTE PAD and PEN lying on top of this. Camera is eye level, MEDIUM SHOT, tilted slightly down so the surface contents are visible.

DOCTOR, 50 to 70 years old, enters FRAME; head above the top of this until they sit down, facing towards camera. They immediately start searching for something in their desk drawer though and rummage around for a minute before finding the BOTTLE of PINK BISMUTH. They take a chug from this and then screw the lid back on and stuff the bottle back in the desk. The DOCTOR appears stressed and exhausted. After a significant interval, their PHONE rings and they answer it.

DOCTOR

(Resignedly)

Okay... send them in.

DOCTOR hangs up and adjusts themselves in their seat; glancing more than once towards the door. Finally, a pair of KNOCKS is heard.

DOCTOR

It's open.

SOUND of the door opening and closing politely. DOCTOR is doing their best to greet the new arrival with a smile but this is a tight lipped, lackluster effort. DOCTOR gestures to a chair across from them which has a back only slightly above the FRAME.

PATIENT, 30 to 50 years old, sits where directed.

CUT TO:

MEDIUM SHOT of the PATIENT with the SKELETON visible over one of their shoulders. They appear supremely calm. Almost beatific.

DOCTOR (V.O)

(Unsurely)

How are you... holding up?

PATIENT

I've been worse.

DOCTOR (V.O)
(Confused)

Really?

PATIENT
(With the slightest shrug)

Depends. Technically I'm at the bottom of the karmic wheel. But I don't feel any physical pain.

CUT TO:

DOCTOR
(Concerned)

Uh... huh.

PATIENT (V.O)

You sound doubtful.

DOCTOR

It's just uh, this is your third time in remission and uh, (Slowly) last we talked... you sounded quite pessimistic (Takes a deep breath) which is fair. You've been through a lot already. And uh, I know how disappointed you were... in me.

PATIENT (V.O)
(Matter-of-factly)

That's true.

DOCTOR
(Plowing forward)

Because we've known each other a long time. And I care about you deeply.

PATIENT (V.O)
(Again, matter-of-factly but softer)

Also true.

DOCTOR
(On the verge of tears)

I'm sorry but this is one of the hardest things I've ever had to do.

PATIENT (V.O)
(Sympathetically)

I understand.

DOCTOR

It's back. (Long pause, the quieter) Your cancer.

CUT TO:

CLOSE UP of PATIENT's face. A furrowed expression forms on this before DISSOLVING into an EXTREME CLOSE UP of their lips. A wistful, carefree smile gradually takes shape.

PATIENT

(Idly)

Yes. It was, wasn't it?

CUT TO:

MEDIUM CLOSE on DOCTOR.

DOCTOR

I'm sorry?

ROTATE to PATIENT in a gentle 180 degree sweep. There's a hint of condescension on PATIENT's face.

PATIENT

I'm not ill doctor. I've already died. Long ago.

CUT TO:

DOCTOR

(Extremely troubled)

Is that a... metaphor?

PATIENT (V.O)

(Insistent)

No no. No no. I am quite literally dead. Indeed, I am death itself.

CUT TO:

DOCTOR and PATIENT in a series of ALTERNATING SHOTS where neither says anything. Emphasizes the strain of the situation.

CUT TO:

Widest possible OVERHEAD SHOT of the DOCTOR's office without extending beyond the walls. Still no dialogue. SLOW ZOOM and TWIST (Restoring proper orientation) on to the NOTEPAD AND PEN. DOCTOR writes the following on this: 'Delusions from medication?' Hold briefly.

CUT TO:

MEDIUM SHOT of the DOCTOR and PATIENT with the camera perpendicular to them. The DOCTOR hesitates for a few seconds before circumspectly sliding the NOTEPAD and PEN closer (And beyond the inspection of the PATIENT)

DOCTOR

Being under sufficient stress, prolonged stress, can... alter our perception of reality..."

PATIENT

(Raising hand)

Let me stop you right there.

CUT TO:

MEDIUM CLOSE on the PATIENT, their hand still raised.

PATIENT

(Slowly lowering hand)

I'm not who you think I am. I'm not even human.

DOCTOR

Okay. (Long pause) What are you?

PATIENT

Like I said. Death. Or more precisely, an aspect of this.

CUT TO:

DOCTOR wiping their mouth in chagrin.

DOCTOR

I... don't follow.

CUT TO:

PATIENT nodding empathetically.

PATIENT

A manifestation then. That part of death which stoops to personify itself in... humanish? humanoid? form. Not in the manner of Krishna though. Not as some sovereign avatar. Think of me more as a servant, pressganged into escort duty.

DOCTOR (V.O)

(Suddenly laughing at the absurdity)

Victim of the post-mortem draft?

PATIENT

(Grinning slightly)

Not really. It's just the wages of sin. But I'll let you in on a little secret. (Whispering) The universe keeps perfect accounts.

CUT TO:

DOCTOR exhaling and leaning back to stretch. They're stymied by the whole situation. Eventually though they gather their thoughts.

DOCTOR
So, you're Death?

PATIENT (V.O)
Here it comes.

DOCTOR
No. It's just uh, you look suspiciously like this patient who I've been treating for years. And your voices sound exactly alike, and..."

PATIENT (V.O)
I know, I know. It was the easiest way.

DOCTOR
(Betraying some irritation)
To what?

When the PATIENT doesn't respond, the DOCTOR gestures expectantly.

CUT TO:

PATIENT
(Bluntly)
It's your time to go.

CUT TO:

MEDIUM SHOT of the DOCTOR with the back of the PATIENT's head in one of the lower corners of the FRAME. DOCTOR goes to write something on their NOTEPAD but quickly drops the pen in disgust. Gradually, the DOCTOR raises their gaze to the PATIENT.

DOCTOR
So... you're here... to tell me... I'm dying.

CUT TO:

PATIENT
(Relieved)
Bullseye.

CUT TO:

DOCTOR

Alright. (Pause) I think I understand.

CUT TO:

PATIENT

(Shaking their head and smiling)

Judging by that tone of voice, I don't think so.

CUT TO:

DOCTOR

(With growing conviction)

Look. You feel powerless. Obviously. And a fantasy... can be a means to try and reclaim that.

CUT TO:

PATIENT

(In a focussed and curious examination of their own hands)

Just ask me to prove it.

CUT TO:

MEDIUM SHOT of the two from a perpendicular angle and then PAN away from PATIENT before TRACKING back to them in a CLOSE UP.

PATIENT

Challenge me.

After another long silent pause.

PATIENT

Go on.

PATIENT now smiles broadly.

CUT TO:

DOCTOR

Right now, you're like someone I've never met before. This behavior... it's (Sighs)

PATIENT (V.O)

I can't unless you specifically request it.

DOCTOR

(Incredulously)

Fine. By all means

PATIENT (V.O)

Your greatest fear is the fear of drowning (DOCTOR reacts with surprise) When you were eleven, you capsized a canoe near the shore of your parent's lakeside cabin and were using this as a kind of diving bell when you got trapped under it. Naturally you panicked. And your frantic efforts caused the water to cloud up with silt. But eventually you slipped out and swam the six feet to the surface. Afterwards, you were never so reckless around water. In fact, a general caution crept into your heart. Before this you hadn't known what it was to be truly timid. (PATIENT laughs) The best part is, you never told anyone what happened. To their last days, your parents always believed that the canoe had been stolen.

CAMERA has been slowly ZOOMING in on the DOCTOR while they silently react to the above; anger and defiance and fear all mixing in a boiling pot of overwhelmed emotions.

CUT TO:

DOCTOR
(Enraged)

What the hell are you trying to pull here!?

PATIENT (V.O)

Okay. We'll do this the hard way.

CUT TO:

MEDIUM SHOT of PATIENT and DOCTOR. The PATIENT mimes shooting the DOCTOR with their hand and the DOCTOR instantly goes limp, sliding down and flopping hard out of their chair. Hold shot as the PATIENT waits afterwards in a state of boredom (Examining their nails, etc) PATIENT also briefly steps out of FRAME to grab a MAGAZINE and, after reading this for a while, a LOUD GASP is heard as the DOCTOR returns to consciousness. PATIENT offers only the occasional glance as the DOCTOR painfully climbs up and crawls into their chair. They look like the dry version of someone freshly rescued from a lifeboat after weeks at sea. When the DOCTOR seems to have recovered a bit, the PATIENT puts down their magazine and waits expectantly. Finally, the two lock eyes and hold eye contact for an unusually long time.

CUT TO:

MEDIUM SHOT of the DOCTOR behind their DESK.

DOCTOR
(Dumbfounded)

I'm still alive.

CUT TO:

PATIENT
Sort of. We haven't finished.

CUT TO:

DOCTOR

(Awed)
What... was that?

PATIENT (V.O)
Just a taste of things to come.

DOCTOR visibly gulps.

CUT TO:

PATIENT

DOCTOR (V.O)
If you're...

PATIENT nods.

DOCTOR (V.O)
What happened to...

PATIENT
(Interrupting)
Also dead. Not from the cancer though. Choked on their breakfast. Toast.

PATIENT chuckles slightly at the inadvertent pun.

CUT TO:

DOCTOR
You?

CUT TO:

PATIENT
No, not that. I mean, yes me but... we don't force things to happen. Chaos is... an illusion.
One necessary to the sanity of finite minds.

CUT TO:

DOCTOR
(Dazed)
This must be a dream.

CUT TO:

PATIENT

And that's why I exist. The dying are often in a state of mental freefall and so their minds will grasp at anything they can. I'm here to pleasantly convince you to let go. Or pry you loose if need be. Either way, I have an unblemished record of success.

CUT TO:

MEDIUM SHOT of DOCTOR rising to a standing pose on wobbly legs. They then turn their back to the CAMERA and grab a LETTER OPENER from a counter behind them.

DOCTOR
(Glaring at patient)
What if I kill you?

CUT TO:

PATIENT, unimpressed. Their voice suddenly RESONATES (FX) with supernatural power.

PATIENT
(Terrifying but casual)

I IMMEDIATELY RESSURECT MYSELF IN THE FORM OF A WRATHFUL DEITY
AND SPEND THE NEXT FEW EONS USING YOU AS DENTAL FLOSS IN MY MILLION-
FANGED MOUTH.

After this, PATIENT smiles with all their teeth but these are TOO SHARP AND NUMEROUS this time for any human mouth. (FX)

CUT TO:

MEDIUM CLOSE on the DOCTOR from a downward ANGLE. They drop the LETTER OPENER and fall to their knees, weeping. This continues for a while.

PATIENT (V.O)
(Reassuringly)

Hey. It's not the end of the world. Well, maybe a little bit. But departing? Now? Sure, that's cutting things a tad short but you're not missing all that much.

DOCTOR
(With angry self-pity)
How can you say that!?

CUT TO:

PATIENT
(Authoritatively)

I could ask whether you've given any thought... ever... to how many children die each day... but I know you don't think about stuff like that. Yet, contemplate it now. All the kids who never got to go to a national park. Never went skiing. Never tasted a mango. Never fell in love. Never felt love. Never graduated. Never had careers. Kids whose lives weren't even a tenth of yours; not just in

duration but richness of experience. (Pauses) Don't be a whiner. (Another pause) You were so utterly privileged.

CUT TO:

Downward ANGLED MEDIUM SHOT of PATIENT from behind as they stare at the DOCTOR kneeling on the floor; the latter also in FRAME. Hold as the DOCTOR's shoulders slump. DOCTOR slowly looks up.

CUT TO:

CLOSE UP of the DOCTOR's eyes.

DOCTOR (V.O)
(Surrendering)
What do I need to do?

PATIENT (V.O)

Accept that ultimately your life was never in your control. That then, now, and always, you were and are, a creature desperate for mercy.

DOCTOR's eyes tearing up.

DOCTOR (V.O)
How?

CUT TO:

MEDIUM SHOT, starkly ANGLED UP, of the PATIENT. Camera is slowly ZOOMING OUT. PATIENT extends their hand towards the camera, palm up and this in the exact CENTER of the FRAME.

PATIENT
Take my hand. My flesh is the gateway to eternity. (Chime FX)

The FRAME continues to expand as a stumbling DOCTOR crawls forward (The NOISE of this audible before they cross into FRAME) When they get within reach, the DOCTOR is afraid but eventually they place their own hand atop the PATIENT's outstretched one.

HARD CUT:

MEDIUM CLOSE as PATIENT instantly transforms into the SAINT OF DEATH with STROBBING LIGHT EFFECT and INTENSE MUSIC accompanying. Hold shot for a few seconds.

CUT TO:

CREDITS and SOFTER PENSIVE MUSIC.

The End

HELLAS' GIFT

A Horror Story

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FADE IN:

The intro sequence for a current affairs show starts. MUSIC plays as a SIGIL appears dead centre in the FRAME; said sigil resembles a NETWORK DIAGRAM but with multiple shade gradients and a well-defined complex geometry. Now the FRAME begins to transform in fragmented dynamic planes (Horizontally moving trapezoids, tumbling isosceles triangles, etc) as these are interspersed with SCENES from a familiar yet strange Earth. Glimpses of altered history from the 20th and 21st century tantalize the viewer in flashing IMAGES and CLIPS. When the cloud of these eventually dissolves, a camera on a boom OUT OF FRAME sweeps the viewer through a large bright white room.

INT. POSTMODERNIST STUDIO - NIGHT

At the heart of this is a WHITE DESK with TWO WHITE CHAIRS. One of which is occupied by the show's host, AVA WEST, a charismatic but deftly ruthless media personality with all the lethal poise of a praying mantis. Tonight she's wearing a couture ensemble comprising a RED SUIT JACKET and RED THIGH-HIGH SKIRT with CERULEAN HIGH HEELS; one stiletto protruding in the air from a dangling leg crossed over the other's knee, swaying like the head of a mesmerized cobra. Her HAIR is the glistening black of volcanic glass, cut in an IMMACULATE BOB. Her voice simultaneously seductive and authoritative (Casting Type:

SYLVIA HOEKS)

CAMERA has slowly zoomed in on AVA until she is FRAMED in a MEDIUM SHOT where she offers a friendly smirk to her viewers.

Simultaneously, the MUSIC has faded away as the CHEERING of an enormous crowd replaced it; not that of a mere studio audience but something equivalent to multiple stadiums. It is literally the sound of her entire audience although how that would be possible is not yet revealed. Suddenly, AVA's expression begins to change, becoming one of wry surprise as something expected fails to occur. Finally it does.

ANNOUNCER (V.O)

Today is September 17th 2001 and this is 'Mind Rewind', braincast to you live from Culver City, California. And now, let me introduce your host: A-VAAAAA WEST! (APPLAUSE renews)

AVA (V.O)

Thank you Orson. Thank you everyone.
It's a pleasure, as always. But today especially. I have a lot of great news to share, starting with the terrestrial...

NOTE: This entire time, AVA has not said anything with her mouth. She is looking into CAMERA and conducting herself as a typical television host would except that she clearly knows she can project her voice to her audience without speaking. As the show continues, NEWS GRAPHICS accompany each story.

AVA (V.O continues)

Hours ago, China and Japan signed their historic 'Century of Peace' treaty that'll liberalize trade relations between the two countries and enshrine their mutually avowed policies of military non-aggression (POLITE APPLAUSE) The McCain Administration issued a statement saying that this would serve as a model for other nations with similarly complicated histories and congratulated both on working together in the spirit of mutual cooperation. President McCain is believed to have played a key role in the final round of discussions which took place these last few months and the prevailing opinion is that this is a much needed foreign policy victory for an administration still struggling to capitalize on the pre-election enthusiasm which carried it into the White House.

CUT TO: SHOT from a DIFFERENT CAMERA of AVA at her desk.

AVA (V.O)

Meanwhile, in the world of movies, MGM announced that it has greenlit Stanley Kubrick's long unrealized film about Napoleon. This will be the director's 13th film, and first since 1987's 'Full Metal Jacket'. Starring Christian Bale in the titular role and Jennifer Connolly as the Empress Josephine, it's also being reported that the film's budget is in excess of 200 million dollars.

Audience EXCLAMATIONS of wow.

AVA (V.O)

It's considerable, quite. But it's a highly anticipated epic. There's every reason to believe 'Napoleon' will do great across the globe. Well... except Russia.

Audience LAUGHS

CUT TO: SHOT, from a DIFFERENT CAMERA again, of AVA at her desk.

AVA (V.O)

More on both those stories later but now let's shift to
'Tonight's Headline.'

Segment TITLE and accompanying GRAPHICS converge on screen from the borders of the FRAME before dissolving in an equally slick and elaborate animation. Audience CHEERING swells and fades with appropriate timing.

AVA (V.O continued)

Hellas has returned!

Audience CHEERS WILDLY. Ava smiles.

AVA (V.O)

84 years after its first startling passage ushered in the New Age, astronomers have confirmed that our miraculous interstellar visitor is on a near Earth trajectory and will make a sublunar flyby in approximately sixteen months. Leading scientists and heads of industry have already begun meeting at the President's behest to devise a communications strategy and to develop plans for an Outerspace rendezvous. Last time we were taken by surprise but when Hellas next visits us, we will be prepared to properly welcome our cosmic friend.

CUT TO: ANOTHER SHOT, from a DIFFERENT CAMERA, of AVA at her desk.

AVA (V.O)

Although the vast majority of us are excited by today's announcement, others are less enthusiastic.

We at 'Mind Rewind' pride ourselves on providing a balanced portrayal of public debates so, in the interest of fairness, we invited tonight's first guest here to speak about their concerns. Please give a cordial round of applause to Elijah Freeman, spokesperson for the Atavist group Loquimur.

CUT TO: A WIDE SHOT of ELIJAH walking on stage. He's a youthful looking middle-aged black man with a lightly professorial air about him balanced by a more fundamental masculinity (Casting Type: JOHN DAVID WASHINGTON) Crossing the stage in a SLATE COLORED CORDUROY SUIT

and BROGUE SHOES, he's greeted with TEPID CLAPPING by the AUDIENCE and a perfunctory handshake from AVA.

CUT TO: A CLOSER WIDE SHOT when ELIJAH takes his seat. CAMERA holds as he adjusts himself and his chair with ordinary awkwardness. We should have a hint here that the CAMERA is hostile to him; that it's searching for flaws.

CUT TO: A TWO SHOT of AVA and ELIJAH at her desk. His attention will remain focused entirely on her while she proceeds to play with him for the amusement of the audience; though still retaining a thin veneer of respectfulness.

AVA (V.O)

Thank you for coming Eli. Especially on such late notice.

ELIJAH (V.O)

The pleasure is mine. My colleagues and I at Loquimur appreciate the opportunity to raise our concerns about the direction humanity has taken. In our view, there are several existential risks that need to be considered...

AVA (V.O)

Which we will no doubt get to. Let's begin however with the controversy that's surrounded Atavism since its inception. What made you want to become an advocate for something that's so unpopular?

ELIJAH (V.O)

Well, ah, we don't actually use the term Atavism ourselves. It's a bit like the name "impressionism" which was originally a pejorative used by critics to dismiss a new style of painting. Not that it matters all that much either way.

AVA (V.O)

Semantics aside though, why should we care about your issues? (A flickered LEER towards CAMERA)

ELIJAH (V.O)

So... less than a century ago, 99.9 percent of people in this country could read a written

language. Today it's less than 0.01 percent. What Hellas has done to us, has altered our species in ways we don't even fully comprehend yet.

CUT TO: MEDIUM SHOT of AVA.

AVA (V.O)

Surely you aren't (Dark pause) anti-telepathy?

CUT TO: MEDIUM SHOT of ELIJAH.

ELIJAH (V.O)

No, I uh, don't think so. We're just trying to emphasize caution. It's actually amazing, unbelievable really, how little funding is being spent to research the biology and physics of telepathy. And this despite the exponential explosion in sigil infrastructure and products.

CUT TO: A TWO SHOT of AVA and ELIJAH with the former more prominently FRAMED. He's notably slouching in his seat, tiring.

AVA (V.O)

How is that not a testament to our own greatness in developing innovative technologies? Are you really saying that the invention of SIGILS wasn't an incredible breakthrough?

ELIJAH (V.O, uncomfortable)

Of course, from a scientific and engineering perspective I can appreciate the accomplishment. What I'm worried about is the fragile dependency we're creating for ourselves. What if this system fails? How would we recover?

AVA (V.O)

Fail in what way? (Quickly, to pressure him)

ELIJAH (V.O)

I... don't know (Stressful pause) but it seems like a prudent thing to think about.

AVA (V.O)

No one believes anything's infallible but it does come across as empty alarmism if a fear can't be correlated with some plausible outcome. Isn't the burden on you and your fellow doubters to illustrate this hypothetical danger?

CUT TO: CLOSE UP SHOT of ELIJAH literally sweating. CAMERA slow ZOOMS on this as he wipes his forehead with the back of his hand.

ELIJAH (V.O)

I just don't believe we should be, uh, putting all our eggs in one basket.

CUT TO: MEDIUM SHOT of AVA. She arches an eyebrow.

AVA (V.O)

At the risk of sounding like Chicken Little?

Audience LAUGHS UPROARIOUSLY.

CUT TO: A TWO SHOT of AVA and ELIJAH. He's flustered. AVA shrugs apologetically at the CAMERA while a smile spreads across her face. Now she turns back towards him to deliver the coup de grâce.

AVA (V.O)

Since you're so in favor of a return to traditional speech Eli, why don't you say something now to everyone at home. With your lips.

CUT TO: A MEDIUM SHOT of ELIJAH.

ELIJAH (V.O)

It's uh, not that simple.

Audience LAUGHTER

ELIJAH (V.O)

As you well know, uh, anyone who grew up with telepathy suffers vocal atrophy... uh, it's like with feral children raised by animals...

CUT TO: CLOSE UP of ELIJAH as audience LAUGHTER INCREASES.

ELIJAH (V.O)

I mean we, well us at Loquimur, we're in the early stages of building a rehabilitation program to address this. To retrain linguistic usage. Sorry, language use.

CUT TO: EXTREME CLOSE UP of ELIJAH as audience LAUGHTER SWELLS EVEN LOUDER. It has a nightmarish ring to it now. ELIJAH meanwhile is rendered speechless as the laughter threatens to engulf him like some kind of invisible inferno. And he is trapped. FREEZE FRAME. The LAUGHTER CONTINUES, maliciously.

INT. FREEMAN LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

WIDE SHOT on an adjacent KITCHEN ISLAND shows us a late generation BOX TELEVISION centered in the FRAME and on the screen of this is the FREEZE FRAME of ELIJAH's appearance on 'Mind Rewind'. The laughter from the previous scene bleeds in but fades quickly as ELIJAH sits stooped on a STOOL with a REMOTE in his hand and his back turned towards CAMERA. In the DARK room he is almost a silhouette; the light from the TV only illuminating the edge of his body. He sits silently a moment, gutted by his public humiliation. Then someone behind him audibly FLICKS a light switch on and the LIVING ROOM is now dimly lit by an adjacent BEDROOM out of FRAME and behind CAMERA. A woman's shadow partially blocks the glow.

DELTA (V.O, out of FRAME)

It wasn't that bad, baby.

ELIJAH slowly turns around in his seat. He looks out of FRAME, slightly away from CAMERA, and sighs; grateful but still morose.

ELIJAH (V.O)

It was pretty bad.

CUT TO: WIDE SHOT of DELTA FREEMAN leaning against her bedroom door frame. A beautiful black woman with natural hair, she stands before her husband as more than his equal, and this in bare feet and SILK PAJAMAS. A former athlete, she now heads the human resources department for a large financial firm (Casting Type: ILLFENESH HADERA)

DELTA (V.O)

She... set you up. They weren't interested in

hearing what you had to say. Just, poking holes in your credibility.

CUT TO: MEDIUM SHOT of DELTA from behind with ELIJAH in FRAME. He gets up from his stool and walks towards his wife. They embrace under the door frame. Sensually and tenderly but without erotic energy yet.

ELIJAH (V.O)

Maybe.

DELTA (V.O)

You know you've chosen the harder road.

ELIJAH (V.O)

And what do you think?

DELTA (V.O, hesitating)

I think you need to stick to your principles.

His hands rove appreciatively over her arms and back in soft caress.

ELIJAH (V.O)

But you have doubts.

DELTA (V.O)

Maybe I don't share your sense of conviction but that doesn't mean I don't support your right to challenge the prevailing narrative.

ELIJAH (V.O)

That's fair. Sorry.

DELTA (V.O)

It's one a.m. baby. You need sleep. More importantly, I need sleep. And I can't when you're out here sulking (Gently, then pauses) So?

ELIJAH (V.O, smiling)

Okay, okay. I'll come count sheep with you.

DELTA (V.O)

And hold me a little?

ELIJAH leans in and kisses DELTA.

ELIJAH (V.O)

That's a given.

A soft peck turns into slow but passionate kissing in an entangling embrace.

FADE TO BLACK.

INT. FREEMAN KITCHEN - MORNING

CLOSE UP DOWN SHOT of the Freeman's STOVE TOP, initially barren and clean. Then we see the CORNROWS of elementary school aged HUXLEY FREEMAN peeking over the bottom of the FRAME. He has a bit of trouble lifting a large CAST IRON SKILLET but manages to set this down on one of the cold elements with a CRASH. Then he RIPS open a BAG off FRAME and proceeds to lift this above his head and pour out FROZEN SHREDDED HASH BROWNS into the skillet with predictable mess. Less than halfway through, he's interrupted.

ELIJAH (V.O, out of FRAME)

Whoa there sonny. Better let your Pa handle the breakfast wrangling.

CUT TO: TWO SHOT of ELIJAH and HUXLEY in front of the stove.

HUXLEY (V.O)

I can help too Dad.

ELIJAH (V.O)

I know you can pal. But breakfast is kind of my thing. Besides, I want you to go over that homework you did yesterday.

HUXLEY (V.O, sighing)

Fine.

HUXLEY leaves and ELIJAH cleans up the mess his son made; throwing shreds of hash brown into the skillet with his fingers before

sweeping up the little bits left over with a DISH TOWEL and shaking these into a small compost bin implied but below the bottom of the FRAME.

CUT TO: WIDE SHOT of ELIJAH making breakfast. This begins a LONG TAKE of him grabbing things from the FRIDGE (SAUSAGES, MILK) and CUPBOARDS (CEREAL) while intermittently dealing with the cooking the hash browns. His demeanor has substantially improved from last night. After a minute, he begins humming ARETHA'S VERSION of 'I SAY A LITTLE PRAYER' and then starts singing part of it.

CUT TO: MEDIUM SHOT of ELIJAH doing a dancing spin move in full performance mode. He then grabs a pinch of hash browns with two fingers and a thumb and stuffs this in his mouth.

HUXLEY (V.O, out of FRAME)

Dad?

CUT TO: TWO SHOT of HUXLEY holding a DUOTANG WRITING BOOK in the FOREGROUND and ELIJAH in the BACKGROUND. ELIJAH looks at his son in the midst of chewing and simply points at a CHAIR for him to sit in. HUXLEY plops himself down and ELIJAH grabs some PLATES and begins serving breakfast. He's finished chewing now and affectionately rubs his son's head before sitting down himself.

ELIJAH (V.O)

Alright kid. Lay it on me.

HUXLEY (V.O, eager to share)

So the teacher said we could write an essay on anything okay and since Hellas is coming back I was like I should write about Hellas right?

ELIJAH (V.O)

You might not be the only one.

CUT TO: CLOSER TWO SHOT of ELIJAH and HUXLEY. The son looks at his father with slight puzzlement.

ELIJAH (V.O)

But go on...

HUXLEY nods and then proceeds to open his writing book and FLIP to the appropriate page.

HUXLEY (V.O)

Okay. The story of Hellas. That's the title
(Brief pause) While studying the stars of
Sirius, Jor-gee-os Vore-iz (Georgios Vouris)
was surprised to find a strange sight in the sky.
He checked his telescope carefully but it was no mistake.
He had made a new discovery and he called
it Hellas after his homeland. This was in 1852.
Many years later, Hellas visited us.

ELIJAH (V.O)

It's good to be specific. How many years?

HUXLEY (V.O)

Um. Uh. July 11th 1914.

ELIJAH (V.O)

Which was?

HUXLEY (V.O)

A super long time ago?

ELIJAH laughs. Due to the effects of telepathy on human behavior, he doesn't actually make any noise with his mouth but instead projects his laughter mentally with only diminished residual face movements.

ELIJAH (V.O, smiling)

It's a bit early for math isn't it? Oh. But
don't tell your mother I said that (Leans back) Continue.

HUXLEY (V.O)

Uh... (Finding his place again) It appeared in
the sky shooting beams of scary light but it was peaceful.
Hellas did not speak to us. When it was gone, people later
found they could send messages using their mind (Instead of
'minds') Not many but they grew and soon most people could
talk this way
if they concentrated. Hey Dad?

ELIJAH (V.O)

Yeah?

HUXLEY (V.O)

Why did Hellas take old people's voices away? Like, grandpa could talk with his mouth right?

ELIJAH (V.O)

Hellas didn't actually take anything. That was just something we stopped doing because telepathy was so much easier. Also, no one knows for sure that Hellas was intelligent. A lot of people think it was an alien spaceship but it could have been some kind of natural phenomenon too.

HUXLEY (V.O)

Kenny's parents say it was an angel of the pocket lips.

ELIJAH (V.O, ignoring malapropism)

Kenny's parents believe what they want to believe
(Sighs) Like most people. But... you're a truth seeker right!?

HUXLEY (V.O, enthusiastic)

Right!

ELIJAH (V.O)

And truth seekers got to grow up big and strong,
so eat up champ.

ELIJAH grabs a CEREAL BOX to hand over to HUXLEY.

CUT TO: CLOSE UP of the CEREAL BOX as it's given from father to son. A RECOGNIZABLE BRAND, the packaging is nevertheless curious since it contains absolutely NO WRITING. Instead we see only a FEW SIGILS of varying sizes. These are accompanied by the RECORDED THOUGHTS of the brand's SPOKESPERSON in soft voiceover; indicating how sigil technology has supplanted writing through a vastly simpler information conveying means. HOLD SHOT on the background as the cereal box disappears out of FRAME. Eating NOISES begin and continue.

CUT TO: MEDIUM SHOT of DELTA FREEMAN putting on her second EARRING that ZOOMS OUT to a FULL SHOT as she enters the vicinity of the KITCHEN. She's wearing a perfectly tailored GRAY SUIT in a

historically contemporary business style. Light touches of color in her ACCESSORIES offset this and her EXPENSIVE PURSE is a vivid hue of tangerine.

CUT TO: WIDE SHOT of the whole family as DELTA approaches her son from behind and hugs him, nuzzling the top of his head.

HUXLEY (V.O, half-protesting)

Mom! My braids!

DELTA (V.O)

They aight yo.

ELIJAH admires his wife a moment before asking a question.

ELIJAH (V.O)

Have you got time for a little breakfast
slugger?

DELTA snatches up a SAUSAGE and starts chewing this.

DELTA (V.O)

Not really (Pauses) Slugger?

ELIJAH (V.O)

I mean, you are knocking it out of the park
this morning.

DELTA (V.O, smiling)

Charming and handsome.

DELTA moves from her son to her husband and kisses a seated ELIJAH as he lifts up his face to hers.

DELTA (V.O)

I'm glad I married a *man* (Strong emphasis
on 'man')

ELIJAH (V.O, smiling)

I do my macho best.

DELTA (V.O, amused)

Oh? You're macho now?

DELTA walks backwards from ELIJAH to HUXLEY, caressing her son briefly, before continuing to walk backwards lightheartedly in the direction of the FRONT DOOR. CAMERA PANS and ZOOMS OUT to keep everyone in FRAME.

ELIJAH (V.O, joking)

Always was. Can't help it. I come from a long line of exceptional masculinity.

CUT TO: WIDE SHOT of DELTA scoffing good naturedly before turning around and continuing towards a visible FRONT DOOR. When she's close enough that the door FRAMES her within the outer FRAME of the SHOT, she pauses. DELTA turns her head slightly in profile and smiles mischievously. Then she starts shimmying in a manner reminiscent of MO-TOWN performers and sings the second stanza for ARETHA'S VERSION of 'I SAY A LITTLE PRAYER'.

CUT TO: MEDIUM SHOT of ELIJAH as he blushes happily. The REFRAIN his wife is now singing is still audible as DELTA can be heard opening the FRONT DOOR off FRAME. ELIJAH'S face settles on a smile of gentle bliss. HOLD SHOT for a few seconds. Then MATCH CUT to:

INT. LOQUIMUR MEETING ROOM - DAY

ELIJAH'S face here has a fake smile on it as the SOUND of a door closing can be heard. Someone is talking.

DEWEY (V.O, out of FRAME)

Grab a chair Steve.

CUT TO: WIDE SHOT of Loquimur staff seated and dispersed throughout a couple rows of cheap OFFICE CHAIRS with less than a third of these filled. ELIJAH is sitting in the front row located in the MIDDLE GROUND of the FRAME. Pacing across the FRAME in the FOREGROUND meanwhile is DEWEY SMITH, a slightly ruffled social activist who (Mostly) manages to compensate for this through the sheer passion he's had for his chosen causes. Genuinely respected by his colleagues, DEWEY is the de facto leader of the Loquimur standing committee and the last of the group's founding members (Casting Type: EDDIE MARSAN)

DEWEY (V.O)

As I was saying... what was I saying? Oh, right.

CUT TO: MEDIUM SHOT of DEWEY turning to face his colleagues as he stops pacing. There's some sheepishness in his expression but he's trying to be brave and soften what he's about to say. Behind him an IMMENSE WHITEBOARD with FADED MEETING NOTES and a SMUDGED GAME OF HANGMAN occupies the rest of the FRAME.

DEWEY (V.O)

Sometimes... sometimes the necessary is hideous. And I've been fighting fights like these for a long time now. Fights that are often losers. Because the odds don't really matter. What is good in this world lives and breathes because decent people are willing to line up to give it mouth to mouth. Uh. But there's a lot of good. Separate good things. And each one is its own cause. Requiring volunteers (Pauses) You're the ones who lined up. You put yourselves out there... (With feeling) in service. And you'll do so again. But uh, not everything can be saved.

CUT TO: WIDE SHOT of ELIJAH with other Loquimur staff IN FOCUS in the BACKGROUND. ELIJAH swivels his head to check beside and behind him on both sides. Other staff are visibly sharing in his confusion but no one is putting up their hand to speak. So ELIJAH does.

DEWEY (V.O, out of FRAME)

Eli.

ELIJAH (V.O)

So just to be clear... (Openly puzzled)

DEWEY (V.O)

On?

ELIJAH (V.O)

Are we talking, like a fundamental shift in strategy?

CUT TO: MEDIUM SHOT of DEWEY. Fresh sadness creeps into his face.

DEWEY (V.O)

It's over Eli. The whole thing.

CUT TO: The SAME WIDE SHOT of ELIJAH and the rest again. There's some shock on the faces of the other members but the reaction's rather muted. DEWEY's announcement is not coming as a total surprise. ELIJAH in fact seems the most caught off guard as he squirms, searching for an angle of rebuttal.

ELIJAH (V.O)

I know we're not in the best shape right now.
And... I did drop the ball. That's on me.

CUT TO: WIDE TWO SHOT of DEWEY and ELIJAH from a PERPENDICULAR ANGLE.

DEWEY (V.O)

No. Last week's interview didn't help, sure,
but it was the hailest of Hail Maries. This
has been coming for awhile. You and I, we just
didn't want to believe it.

ELIJAH (V.O)

I still don't want to believe it. I don't
believe it.

DEWEY (V.O)

Eli.

ELIJAH (V.O)

We can find new avenues for funding Dewey.
We'll go door to door, like back in the day.
Grass roots man.

DEWEY (V.O)

Elijah!

ELIJAH (V.O)

Grass roots! The people, do not want this!
They do not want to have their world turned
into a place where they're completely dependent
on a system they have no say over. We (Strong

emphasis on we) are not going to cast our children into a darkness!

DEWEY (V.O)

STOP!!!

CUT TO: CLOSE UP of DEWEY's flustered face as the CAMERA slowly ZOOMS OUT. He is angry but pleading.

DEWEY (V.O)

The Amish, Elijah! The fucking Amish (Softer, then sighs) How are we supposed to push back the tide when even the Amish are embracing sigils? If you'd told me twenty years ago that my future kids would rather sit in front of a computer on a Friday night than borrow their dad's car, I wouldn't have believed you. And yet here we are.

CUT TO: WIDE SHOT with DEWEY turned away from CAMERA and the attendant Loquimur staff visible in the MIDDLEGROUND and BACKGROUND. ELIJAH stands up.

ELIJAH (V.O, weary)

It's the boot Dewey. That's the shadow creeping over us right now.

CUT TO: TWO SHOT of DEWEY and ELIJAH.

DEWEY (V.O)

You know, when I first read 1984 I remember thinking it was so unrealistic that people would let the government install surveillance systems in their homes. Those TVs right, with the two way cameras. But now we've got cameras you hook up to the internet and all that. Which TVs will get too, I'm sure. And who says we'll even need people to spy on us. Maybe in the future, every home will have its own HAL 9000?

ELIJAH (V.O)

What are you trying to say?

DEWEY steps closer to ELIJAH.

CUT TO: EXTREME CLOSE UP of DEWEY leaning in as he mentally whispers to ELIJAH.

DEWEY (V.O, softly)

The people have chosen to be silent. Thus silence will be their destiny.

The SHOT is held as neither man says anything for a moment.

CUT TO: WIDE SHOT of the CAMERA panning laterally, parallel to the BACKROW of chairs. Three attendees of the Loquimur meeting are shown in sequence, each SPACED far enough apart from the others to have the entire FRAME to themselves. They display various degrees of nervousness and trepidation. None speak. When the CAMERA stops moving, the SHOT ENDS on an empty chair in the CENTRE of the FRAME (Taxi Driver homage)

EXT. PRIVATE GARDEN - NIGHT

An outdoor party is being held with roughly two dozen GUESTS. The DINING TABLE is long and rectangular, draped in CRISP WHITE LINEN that occasionally flutters with the nocturnal BREEZE. The remains of a largely FINISHED-OFF FEAST extend across this with DIRTY DISHES at every seating place. ELIJAH is sitting there are one of the far ends and is poking at his HALF-EATEN DINNER with a FORK. In the vicinity meanwhile there are other guests standing together in various small groups, talking telepathically and drinking.

CUT TO: CLOSER WIDE SHOT of ELIJAH. DELTA enters the FRAME. She's wearing an exquisite EVENING DRESS and we see that her husband is also dressed up; but not to the same degree. DELTA looms over ELIJAH and puts a hand on his shoulder.

DELTA (V.O, looking down)

Worn out from all the dancing?

ELIJAH (V.O, looking up)

You're funny.

DELTA (V.O)

Funny how? Like I amuse you?

ELIJAH (V.O)

You... complete me.

DELTA snatches back her hand and playfully pushes the side of her husband's head. ELIJAH indulges this by yielding theatrically.

DELTA (V.O)

It's alive. Sort of.

ELIJAH (V.O)

I know baby. But all my friends are giving up.

DELTA (V.O)

It's been months though. First Morehouse, then Loquimur, and now what? The EU thing?

ELIJAH (V.O)

I had big money on Luxembourg.

DELTA (V.O, joking)

Great. So now we're broke. I guess I should be depressed too.

ELIJAH (V.O)

There's no one I'd rather share my misery with.

DELTA (V.O, turning serious)

But there comes a time to move on right?

ELIJAH (V.O)

Yeah.

CUT TO: WIDE SHOT from the other side of the table as DELTA takes a seat next to ELIJAH. She caresses his face.

DELTA (V.O)

You did all that you could.

ELIJAH (V.O)

I don't think so... but it doesn't matter now.

DELTA (V.O, insistently)

That's right. It's old shit. Let it go.

ELIJAH's daze evaporates. He looks at his wife with focused attention.

DELTA (V.O, continuing)

Your father and I were talking once. This was... before we were married. He... (Laughs) He had a lot of advice. And I wish I could remember more of it but one thing that really stuck with me was... "The past doesn't really exist."

ELIJAH (V.O, nodding)

"Because it's just a drum beat. If we all put down the sticks, it's gone."

DELTA (V.O)

(Snapping her fingers) Just like that... Wise man.

ELIJAH (V.O, agreeing)

One of his better aphorisms.

DELTA (V.O)

I think about what he was going through at the time. And how he was still so present. Doing what's best... for his child.

DELTA gives ELIJAH a wide-eyed look, suggesting something obvious he hasn't acknowledged yet. But he understands her and makes the connection between his father's example and his own responsibilities.

ELIJAH (V.O)

Because the past is the past. And my boy's in the here and now.

DELTA (V.O)

That's right.

ELIJAH (V.O)

With us.

DELTA (V.O)

Yeah.

After a moment's pause, ELIJAH shakes his head like he's just had cold water splashed on his face. He adjusts his mouth and blinks rapidly a few times. A wave of determination sweeps over him. Now he looks at his wife again.

ELIJAH (V.O)

Alright. Put me in coach.

DELTA doesn't reply. Instead she stands up and extends her hand to him with a fully outstretched arm. He takes this with one of his own hands and rises with her, pulling only slightly. She gives him an encouraging look and he follows her away from the table, trailing with a sort of hypnotic devotion. When they've both disappeared from the FRAME, a GUST of breeze lifts a part of the table linen. Gently. Then it settles again.

FADE TO: OVERHEAD CLOSE UP of BRIGHT RED ORIGAMI PAPER being folded on top of a BLACK TABLE. The hands doing this are HUXLEY's.

CUT TO: EXTREME CLOSE UP of further folds being made.

CUT TO: CLOSE UP of the origami as it begins to take shape while HUXLEY continues to fold it. What it's supposed to be isn't clear.

INT. FREEMAN LIVING ROOM. MORNING

WIDE SHOT of ELIJAH on his back hooking up a 42" PLASMA TV in the MIDDLEGROUND while HUXLEY is doing origami at the aforementioned black table in the FOREGROUND. Both are focused on what they're doing until HUXLEY suddenly looks over at his father.

HUXLEY (V.O, happy)

Are you excited Dad?

ELIJAH (V.O, somewhat flatly)

Sure buddy. It's going to be quite the day.

CUT TO: MEDIUM SHOT of HUXLEY. He forgets about the origami for a moment.

HUXLEY (V.O)

Anything could happen! Like, Hellas could give everyone superpowers! Like, telepathy didn't even exist and that used to be a superpower right? So maybe tonight we'll all be able to fly or... or teleport! Yeah. Hey Dad! If we get teleportation powers can we visit Hellas tonight?

CUT TO: MEDIUM SHOT of ELIJAH still working on the television. He responds without looking up.

ELIJAH (V.O)

Ask your mother.

HUXLEY (V.O, out of FRAME)

Mom. Mom! Mom?

CUT TO: WIDE SHOT of DELTA entering the room in CASUAL DRESS.

DELTA (V.O)

Yes baby?

CUT TO: TWO SHOT of DELTA and HUXLEY.

HUXLEY (V.O)

If we get teleportation powers tonight....

DELTA (V.O, interrupting)

Whoa! Hold up. We are *not* getting teleportation powers.

HUXLEY (V.O)

But...

DELTA (V.O, gently)

Hux. Don't set yourself up for disappointments.
What happened years and years ago was a
miracle. Hellas might just come and go this time. Either
way, it's better to be *ch-illll* about it.
Okay?

HUXLEY (V.O)

Okay.

DELTA (V.O)

Tonight we're going to relax. Grandma and Grandpa
Lee are coming over and we're simply going to
watch some TV together as a family. That's all.

HUXLEY (V.O)

Sure Mom. I understand (Pauses) By the way, I
made this for you.

HUXLEY hands his mother the origami after making a few last second
tweaks. DELTA accepts this with genuine appreciation.

DELTA (V.O)

Thank you baby.

HUXLEY (V.O)

It's Hellas.

DELTA (V.O)

I can tell. It's very good.

HUXLEY smiles at his mom as DELTA rubs his shoulder affectionately.

HUXLEY (V.O)

Um, can I go play on the computer?

DELTA (V.O)

Sure. But don't sit too close to the screen.

HUXLEY (V.O)

I won't.

HUXLEY scampers off ad DELTA turns the origami over in her hand. The look on her face is troubled now.

CUT TO: EXTREME CLOSE UP of the origami. It looks like a cross between a squid and a twelve pointed star. UNSETTLING MUSIC begins that emphasizes the TONAL SHIFT between DELTA's confident demeanor for the benefit of her son and her own feelings of uncertainty.

CUT TO: WIDE SHOT of DELTA looking down as she examines the origami in her hand. ELIJAH then enters the FRAME.

ELIJAH (V.O)

Nothing bad will happen. ET's not going to travel millions of miles just to pick a fight.

DELTA (V.O, surprised)

You think it's aliens now?

ELIJAH (V.O)

No. But if it's not that, what's there to worry about?

DELTA (V.O)

People.

ELIJAH pauses as if to make a rebuttal. Then he nods slightly in agreement.

ELIJAH (V.O)

I think the TV's working.

DELTA (V.O)

Turn it on.

CUT TO: TWO SHOT of ELIJAH and DELTA in the FOREGROUND and the plasma TV in the MIDDLEGROUND. ELIJAH grabs a REMOTE and activates the TV. It works. On screen is a RECOGNIZABLE MOMENT from a FAMOUS SHOW that's been CGI EDITED so that no one's lips are moving while they're talking (Something like FRIENDS or SEINFELD)

CUT TO: CLOSE UP of the TV screen as ELIJAH begins flicking through channels. LIGHT STATIC is visible throughout due to signal interference. Audio is fine. One channel briefly shows a COMMERCIAL for a THOUGHT RECORDING MACHINE, illuminating how this is used for the viewers. Eventually ELIJAH finds what he's looking for: LIVE NEWS about Hellas. A VISUAL REPRESENTATION of Hellas features prominently as an interviewed scientist drones on. HOLD SHOT on the image of Hellas as the previous UNSETTLING MUSIC swells again.

SCIENTIST (V.O, out of FRAME)

If its velocity doesn't change, Hellas should only be visible in the night sky for about six minutes. So not very long but it will be spectacular.

FADE TO:

INT. FREEMAN APARTMENT - NIGHT

WIDE SHOT of DELTA and GRANNY LEE (Her mother) working in the KITCHEN to finish the last few things before serving dinner.

CUT TO: Quick MONTAGE without music of all the dishes about to be served. This accelerates in speed before...

CUT TO: TWO SHOT of DELTA and GRANNY LEE who are FRAMED in such a way that the WHITE KITCHEN makes them look like they're being served on a platter.

CUT TO: MEDIUM SHOT of GRANNY LEE grabbing two DINNER ITEMS and lifting these up individually in each hand while giving her daughter (Out of FRAME) an encouraging book. She turns away from the CAMERA as she heads towards the LIVING ROOM. DELTA enters the FRAME behind her. Movement SOUNDS from the others in the living room.

CUT TO: WIDE SHOT with ELIJAH, HUXLEY and GRANDPA LEE in the LIVING ROOM. GRANDPA LEE is seated on a RECLINER beside the other two who are on a LARGE COUCH. All three are focused on the PLASMA TV in front of them (TV out of FRAME) The SHOT is HIGHLY COMPOSED as they sit there without moving. Then the women arrive; heads out of FRAME while standing straight. They begin placing FOOD and PLATES and UTENSILS down on a SHORT TABLE. Almost no conversation is exchanged. ELIJAH leans forward to somewhat help distributing plates and utensils. GRANNY LEE and DELTA make a second trip to the kitchen and back with more FOOD. In the meantime, the men start to serve themselves. SHOT HOLDS as the women return and everyone settles in to watch TV. DELTA sits between ELIJAH and HUXLEY, GRANNY LEE beside HUXLEY on the other

side (Which is furthest from her husband) They commence eating. GRANDPA LEE picks up the remote to change the channel.

CUT TO: WIDE SHOT behind GRANDPA LEE with everyone else and the TV in FRAME. He settles on a channel. It's 'MIND REWIND', just starting. DELTA turns towards her father as the show's INTRO MUSIC plays.

DELTA (V.O)

Dad, maybe we can watch something else?

ELIJAH shakes his head.

ELIJAH (V.O)

Nah, it's fine.

CUT TO: CLOSE UP of DELTA smiling uncertainly at ELIJAH off FRAME.

CUT TO: CLOSE UP of ELIJAH smiling reassuringly at DELTA off FRAME. INTRO MUSIC grows LOUDER.

HARD CUT TO:

INT. POST MODERNIST TELEVISION STUDIO - NIGHT

WIDE SHOT from a MOVING CAMERA of AVA WEST as she is sitting at the same TABLE in an almost IDENTICAL LAYOUT as when we last saw her. Tonight she is wearing a 2001 MOSS GREEN WOOL SUIT (Vintage ALEXANDER MCQUEEN) and ODALISQUE SAPPHIRE BLUE HERMES HIGH HEELS. Around her a panel of GUESTS, also dressed up, but in considerably more MUTED ATTIRE. Directly behind everyone is a MASSIVE DISPLAY SCREEN where an ANIMATED ARTIST RENDERING of Hellas is running on a loop. CAMERA movement repeats what occurred on the last episode of 'Mind Rewind'; likewise MUSIC cues and audience CHEERING. This time however the announcer comes in correctly.

DIFFERENT ANNOUNCER (V.O)

Today is December 21st, 2001 and this is Mind Rewind, braincast to you live from Culver City, California. And now, let me introduce your host, AAAA-VAAAAAAA WEST! (APPLAUSE renews)

AVA (V.O)

Thank you Casey. Right on time. How a pro does it.

And thank you everyone. Today of course we have an extraordinary show for you. In only a few minutes, Hellas will be making its historic return and we'll have live footage of this along with continuous commentary. In the meantime though, the producers at Mind Rewind have assembled a group of distinguished experts to analyze what we are about to witness and provide context. Joining me, from left to right are...

INTERCUT TO: CLOSE UPS of each expert in sequence.

AVA (V.O, continuing)

Dr. Gale Wesley, a professor of astronomy at Michigan State University
(Female, White, 40s)

Dr. Walpola Jayatilleke, Professor Emeritus of Cognitive Linguistics at Berkeley
(Male, Sinhalese, 70s)

Dr. David Curtis, the head of NASA's exobiology program
(Male, white, 50s)

and Yune Eun-sun, spokesperson for the Holy Spirit Alliance and Interfaith Council
(Female, Korean, 30s, attractive)

Welcome all. I'll begin with you Dr. Jayatilleke.

CUT TO: WIDE SHOT with DR. JAYATILLEKE to the immediate left of AVA.

AVA (V.O, continuing)

Doctor, you've spent most of your adult life researching the possibilities of communicating with extraterrestrials; has Hellas demonstrated any signs of intelligence?

DR. JAYATILLEKE (V.O)

Even as a young boy, I dreamed of Hellas almost every other night. It's what drove me in my studies. No one wants Hellas to bring us first contact more than I but... nothing in the data we've collected confirms any of our speculations. The mystery remains... insistent.

AVA (V.O)

Are we at least sure our attempts at communication have been properly received?

DR. JAYATILLEKE (V.O)

There's no indication of electromagnetic interference, if that's what you mean. Apart from receiving an unambiguous response though, we have no way of knowing if our efforts are in vain. It's conceivable that we might find ourselves facing an impenetrable barrier of radical otherness. Cognitively speaking. Although the obstacle could also be some exotic physics perhaps.

AVA (V.O, towards CAMERA)

On the threshold of revelation, still the unknowns proliferate. Moving on to what has been established however...

CUT TO: LARGER WIDE SHOT with AVA, DR. JAYATILLEKE, DR. WESLEY, and DR. CURTIS all in FRAME. AVA turns her attention to DR. WESLEY.

AVA (V.O)

Dr. Wesley, you and your colleagues at Michigan State were the first to relocate Hellas and have been tracking it ever since. Tell us, what can we expect to see tonight.

DR. WESLEY (V.O)

Well, I want to start by emphasizing that tracking Hellas has been the collective work of thousands of scientists from all around the world. One of humanity's greatest collaborations in fact. Here in America however we'll be quite fortunate in our viewpoint. Hellas' trajectory is highly parallel to the ecliptic plane so not only will it be visible on our side of the planet but it should transit the night sky in an almost straight line just below the moon. And due to its angle of approach, it will rapidly increase in magnitude before quickly fading again. Imagine a cosmic bullet whizzing past your eyes...

AVA lifts a finger to one of her ears, highlighting the fact she's wearing an inconspicuous RADIO EARPIECE.

AVA (V.O)

Excuse me doctor. Just a moment... We're getting reports through our AP source that Hellas is... accelerating.

AVA looks expectantly at DR. WESLEY. Everyone is silent a moment.

DR. WESLEY (V.O)

That... that's extraordinary. I mean...

Ignoring television protocol, DR. WESLEY pulls out a 2001 era FLIP PHONE and proceeds to hastily MIND CALL one of her colleagues; pressing the one SIGIL on the flip pad to do so. The other panelists watch her and proceed to do likewise. AVA is thrown for a couple of seconds but recovers.

HASTILY CUT TO: MEDIUM SHOT of AVA alone in FRAME (Conveying the fact the camera operator was caught off guard)

AVA (V.O, smiling artificially)

Yes, we're all excited here! So let's turn to our satellite feed now.

CUT TO: MASSIVE DISPLAY SCREEN filling the FRAME and a PICTURE-IN-PICTURE of AVA in the lower left-hand corner. On screen is a VIDEO FEED above the atmosphere with the Earth partially in view. Night covers North America; light from multiple cities providing the sole constellations as the surrounding void is barren due to the overpowering radiance of the sun. Only one light beyond the Earth is visible: a tiny red point with subtle scintillations. This is Hellas.

AVA (V.O)

If you look carefully you can see Hellas in the upper right-hand corner. Uh, amazingly it's still millions of miles away and already brighter than any star visible from Earth.

YUNE EUN-SUN (V.O, out of FRAME)

Except the sun! (Chipperly) The sun's a star too!

The briefest flash of a GLARE crosses AVA's face before she suppresses it.

BRIEFLY CUT TO: CLOSE UP of YUNE EUN-SUN for a literal SECOND as the control room reverses its decision to put her on the PIP. Back on AVA, she composes herself with some faint tension dissipating and resumes speaking directly into CAMERA.

AVA (V.O)

We've waited a... decades, *decades*, for some indication of Hellas' intentions towards us, if it has such things. Very soon, even sooner than we anticipated, we might finally...

DR. CURTIS (V.O, out of FRAME)

Holy hell! Are you two getting this!?

CUT TO: WIDE SHOT with all the panelists visible. DR. CURTIS' focus glances between his scientific counterparts (Ignoring both AVA and YUNE EUN-SUN)

DR. WESLEY (V.O, afraid)

It's at 15% c! More!

As the experts remain fixated on their phones and YUNE EUN-SUN looks around vapidly pleased, AVA shows signs of renewed frustration and, for the first time in a long while, the creep of panic. Behind them all, the SCREEN showing the VIDEO FEED now has HELLAS visibly increasing in size; a vortex of tendrils red energy arcs like lightning but radiating in conic lines and with the smaller branches of these thrashing in a manner similar to that of a searching neuron:

(See link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RxBo1ICEEnKE>)

Slowly everyone in the FRAME notices this and they are all successively transfixed as Hellas dramatically fills the screen. STATIC however proliferates on this and the feed cuts out right as tension reaches a crescendo.

AVA (V.O, towards CAMERA)

Jake! Go to the sky cam!

After some tense seconds, the SCREEN behind them switches to a FEED from the studio rooftop. The night over CULVER CITY is clear and HELLAS, although slightly diminished from this new perspective, is still an awesome sight; coloring the modest cityscape and the sky in an eerie RED GLOW. Instead of streaking past the Earth however,

Hellas comes to an abrupt halt and then starts to configure its branches of radiance in geometrical patterns reminiscent of SIGILS. MUSIC now emphasizes the TRANSCENDENTAL rather than the terrifying.

CUT TO: CLOSER WIDE SHOT with AVA's face featuring prominently beneath a large section of the SKY CAM on screen.

AVA (V.O, shifting to awe;
a novel feeling for her)

It's... it's... extraordinary. How... ancient must it be, this traveller from a strange world. Alone crossing a great abyss. To come here. To see us. With an entire universe to explore, how lucky are we to receive this herald of another civilization. When people talk about the meaning of li-

AVA's soliloquy halts unexpectantly as a PULSE OF RED LIGHT is emitted from Hellas. She's confused at first but then a look of dismay comes over her face that rapidly morphs into utter horror. CAMERA ZOOMS OUT as she stares wide-eyed at those around her; watching the others succumb to the same realization she has. Nothing is said between them but through desperate gesturing and frenzied behavior it's made clear that they are trying to communicate with each other and are failing. Hellas has taken away the telepathy it gifted humanity. FRAME VIBRATES and is knocked slightly askew; the implication being that the camera operator is suffering from panic too. Meanwhile, AVA and her guests have descended into a grief-stricken feral state devoid of any self-consciousness as they tear at their own clothes and weep. Drawing on once dormant instinct, they try to speak to one another with their mouths but can only manage pathetic ANIMALISTIC NOISES. They MOAN in the most sickening fashion, unable to express anything to each other verbally.

INT. FREEMAN LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

WIDE SHOT of the five members of the FREEMAN FAMILY in an equally helpless state. Instead of a dramatic display of grief though, they are huddled together SOBBING. Their attempts at verbal communication are just as incoherent but are appropriately SOFTER due to the greater intimacy present.

CUT TO: TIGHT THREE SHOT of ELIJAH, DELTA, and HUXLEY holding each other in the core of the family huddle. HUXLEY clings to his mother like a baby, head bowed as he GROANS. Both parents try to comfort him while their own anguish consumes them individually. ELIJAH and DELTA make eye contact. Their FACES are TEAR STAINED and warped with sorrow. They are completely broken.

CUT TO: MONTAGE of FAMOUS CITIES, the SHOTS all taken from INTERIOR LOCATIONS (No skyline shots) using DUTCH ANGLES. MONUMENTS and buildings but no people in FRAME. Our last impression of humanity are the accompanying NOISES of urban chaos and mass grief. The FINAL SHOT in the montage is an UPSHOT of the LINCOLN STATUE at the LINCOLN MEMORIAL, except it's UPSIDE DOWN.

CUT TO: BLACK

THE END