MORPHEUS: a BILDUNGSROMAN

A PARTIALLY BACK-ENGINEERED AND RECONSTRUCTED NOVEL
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JOHN KINSELLA

BLAZEVOX [BOOKS]
Buffalo, New York
BlazeVOX
trip, trip to a dream dragon
hide your wings in a ghost tower
sails crackling at ev’ry plate we break
cracked by scattered needles

from Syd Barrett’s “Octopus”
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Morpheus: a Bildungsroman

A partially back-engineered and reconstructed novel
Introduction:

Forging the Unimaginable: The Paradoxes of Morpheus

By Nicholas Birns

Morpheus has its origins in a novel John Kinsella worked on in his late teens — a time of transition between adolescence and adulthood, but not a time before he had at least glimpsed the contours of the vast, interconnecting literary project that was to be his lifelong pursuit. An amalgam of realism and fantasy, of fiction, poetry, and drama, the project limned the phantasmagoric yet self-questioning and disciplined emotional terrain that has so captivated and intrigued his many current readers worldwide.

But the young Kinsella never adequately “completed” Morpheus. This may be no accident, as Morpheus is so protean, so heterogeneous, and so capacious that, conceptually, it may defy completion. Kinsella thus shelved the project as he began to develop his characteristic adult idiom, which has articulated itself largely though not exclusively in lyric poetry. Now in his forties, Kinsella at least decided to bring a version of Morpheus into print. But the original Morpheus was not in adequate shape. Undeterred, Kinsella set out to write the novel he would have written had he been able to complete it twenty-five years before. What is the difference between writing a novel per se, and writing a novel one first thought of a quarter of a century previous? The microtargeting of temporal layers buried deep within the mental past is fascinating because it is inherently untrue: we can remember the past, but we cannot go back to it, and even our memories are conditioned by what Freud called “deferred action,” seen inexorably through the prism of the present, a “back-formation.” No imaginative writer of our day has been more thoroughly permeated by post-structuralism than Kinsella. But post-structuralism for him has never been of the corrosively skeptical sort which would deny all personal experience, or the wearingly cookie-cutter sort
that would rubber-stamp all experience as discursively rendered according to rote linguistic formulae. Kinsella’s is a sort of experimentation which does not solve all problems, but where authorial intention is discernible. The young age at which this work was originally written is not so much a symptom of precocity but, paradoxically, an index of assurance. It provides a sort of core ego, which, figured in the character of Thomas in a much more naïve and uninflected way, can endure the ravages of linguistic and psychological fragmentation.

Formal fissure here is at once the exemplification, aftermath, and atonement with respect to megalomania.

As in his *Graphology* series of lyric poems, Kinsella does not actually write out all the psychic reserves latent in his material — so there is an overall formal control, a sense of conservation — he is not putting in “everything but the kitchen sink” as, alas, an American writer assaying analogous emotional terrain well might do. *Morpheus* as a name signifies both content and form, and perhaps even connotes a certain trammeling of content in the name of formal flexibility. *Morpheus* combines the singing of Orpheus with the process of “morphing” into different shape. In the work’s current avatar, the title can also refer to the way the text wrestles with being composed at two very different times in its author’s life, and the consequent formal imbalance foregrounds, albeit fitfully, questions of shape and mass.

In a recent interview with Ramona Koval on National Radio, Gerald Murnane said that he had recently written a lengthy autobiographical account that “was faux...I wrote it down because if I didn’t write it soon I would have forgotten what we ate as kids, what it felt like to be strapped by the brothers at school, the simple things, the furniture in the house, that sort of thing.” *Morpheus* can also be seen as a faux-juvenilia narrative, albeit in a different way, as can Robert Drewe’s *The Shark Net* (interestingly, Drewe is now collaborating with Kinsella), and Patrick White’s last three narratives (*The Twyborn Affair* and the last two “autobiographies”), too. Why do writers
do this? Because they feel they have material within them that they could have or should have written about at the time the events happened to them, but which for some reason they did not, or could not adequately (or the manuscript was not preserved, their parents or roommates threw it away, and so on), and so now they must reinscribe this material as part of their historical record — but must write it as if it were an original, not admitting overt retrospection, as this would make it no more and no less than obvious fiction. Why do Australian writers, and Australian male writers to boot, seem particularly inclined to write faux juvenilia? Answers will be numerous and indeterminate, but the manifestation of faux juvenilia as an intermediate category between life-writing and the autobiographical novel is a fascinating one.

Perhaps Australian writers grow up feeling so much that, in Milan Kundera’s memorable phrase, “life is elsewhere,” feeling so dominated by anterior traditions and metropolitan image clusters, that carving out an autonomous self capable of recording memory is more difficult, and its achievement more deferred. Is it the fragility of Australian national identity, buffeted by the increasingly overt knowledge of white Australia’s forcible appropriation of the land from its Indigenous inhabitants? Is it that the developmental afflatus which so empowers the European bildungsroman can retard the Australian one, impose a frame of development and maturation over a path to realization as much communal as individual and as involved with an uneasy relation with the landscape as in a consolidating perspective on personal identity? The felt illegitimacy of European occupation of Australian land engenders colonial hindrance: English paradigms inhibit attempts to imagine, both in substantive as well as formal terms, an “actual” Australian mode of bildung.

The reverse-engineering of faux juvenilia may be the most honest acknowledgment of this bind, and this ultimately political context is perhaps why the extensive use of interior monologue in the novel does not convey
the same tone as it might in modernist novels, where the device is employed to give “full access” to the “mind” of the represented character. In Morpheus, interior speech displays discourses, that is, but does not redeem lives. Thus Therese’s (we presume) monologue in “Loss” is bravura in its rendering of a recently widowed woman’s consciousness, but goes beyond achievement of technique in its depictions of the unhappiness of her marriage, her relationship with her late husband, and, most intriguingly, how sensitivity and femininity in men can be as dangerous and repressive to women as their obverse. Both the psychological depths and the gender politics are unexpected, considering the characters have up to now seemed slightly cartoonish, more verbal contrivances than vehicles of affect.

The queer “hyper-sexuality” of Thomas is a surprise because he has tried to approach everything in such a cerebral and decisive manner. Like Pentheus in the Bacchae, somebody who craves all knowledge in order to suit the world to his purposes, Thomas is a figure of rational male realization overwhelmed by the world’s irrationality. In this respect, he is perhaps the avatar both of the author and of the reader as well, living out, in more ways than one, the inevitable frustration inflicted by the undecidabilities of the text. The narrative fabric of the novel implies Thomas is in an insane asylum, where either he has ended up as a result of the foiling of his own rational goals or has invented them out of whole cloth from his place within the asylum. Whatever the sequence, the novel neither celebrates total irrationality nor sees it as a simple retribution for the pride of trusting too much in reason or will. There is a lament, perhaps even a dirge, for Thomas’s failure to achieve his dreams in a coherent manner. Kinsella has mentioned that Ulysses was one of his inspirations and in a sense Thomas is a Stephen Dedalus unredeemed by totality — even if one takes the implied Jungian reading of Ulysses as sufficient (which is arguable) it is a redemption that does not apply to Thomas — perhaps only because Australia, for obvious reasons, does not have the cultural foundation of Ireland. To be
sure, there was a prominent Irish poet of an earlier generation named “Thomas Kinsella,” and Thomas does mean “twin,” but Thomas is not Kinsella, even if the former raises questions very close to the latter’s ancestry, his upbringing, and the questions he has asked of himself as a writer. For an even closer ancestor of this text than Joyce might well be Nietzsche — especially the early Nietzsche, whose sketch of the split between the Apollonian and Dionysiac well illustrates how the Pentheus-like Thomas can be driven mad by both rationality and irrationality gone wrong.

Thomas raises questions for the reader that he cannot ask himself, and the pathos of his character is that he remains at a standstill, unable to pose them, sidetracked by the equal temptations of sex, drugs, and the illusion of rationality. In European novels, this tension is resolved in a Hegelian way, by the dialectical manifestation of a higher rationality, but such an agile and comprehensive resolution is not available on the desolate shores of Western Australia. Morpheus presents young manhood trying to think differently, and perhaps failing. The poems and dramatic passages in the books are a generic expression of this aspiration to think differently. They are attempts to splay forms, yet they do not entirely escape from Thomas’s monologic grip; they are the symbol of his wishing to transcend his limitations, yet the way he continues to infuse their mechanisms demonstrates that they are in a way symptoms of self-entrapment. Thomas cannot escape from himself; nor can he communicate himself to the world in a way that would lead to a Wordsworthian mutual enhancement through interchange:

Thomas flopped onto the bed and closed his eyes. There had been no need to undress, he had that feeling; there would be no sleeping now. He would have to get drunk. He wanted to write, and could only do so at this early hour, and in such depressing conditions, whilst drinking. Drinking and writing had always worked well for Thomas. Admittedly,
he had written some of his worst pieces in this state, but more importantly, he had also written his best. It was almost exciting to look at the previous night’s work the next day, sober. He would often say to himself, “Did I write this? What the hell was I on about?” He levered himself back up off the bed, the springs stretching their coils in discord, and stood momentarily in the room’s centre, trying to recall where he had seen that un-opened bottle of French brandy. Snapping his fingers, he went through to the little jarrah cupboard which sat snuggly in the corner of the living-room, behind the card table. There it was, plump and squat, next to a bottle of red wine. He removed both bottles from the cupboard and placed them on the table. He was not a wine drinker, but this was top quality stuff and he had a strong mind to sample it. He found a glass, poured himself a drink — a mixture of wine and brandy — and swallowed a long, warmish draught. (pp.151-2)

Thomas has worlds of creativity within him, but cannot find an external milieu in which to anchor these inner multitudes — and, he, unlike Whitman, cannot contain them, he needs an external referent, which his surroundings — etiolated, emotionally parched, anticlimactic — cannot offer him. The park is one forum where Thomas tries to situate himself, a space which he at once dominates and in which his vacancy is exposed. The park calms Thomas, anchors him, but also exposes his lack of context, or his inability to satisfactorily contextualize himself.

Thomas cannot find any work despite his determination to live a life of egoistic volition. Allegory both of Thomas’s self-important braggadocio and of Australian society’s inability to accommodate somebody of his talent and ambition — as much as Thomas’s illusions are his undoing, there is, sociologically speaking, a trace of the “tall poppy” syndrome in how Thomas is not quite able to transmogrify himself into the person whose achievement is his ultimate goal.
The Hubbels represent the domestic plot of the novel — the bourgeois conformity against which Thomas and the text in different ways, wish to define themselves. The Hubbels are vexatious to Thomas but they provide what context he has, moor him down to earth so that he has some sort of social definition. So the novel, while having fun with the Hubbels and their banality, does not simply parade itself, sophomorically, at their expense. That the Hubbels themselves get mixed up in the novel’s sexual hijacks is not so much a watering-down of their stolidity but a deflation at the faux-bohemian illusion on Thomas’s part that sexual activity in itself equals sophistication — which is, as it were, one illusion down from his previous attempt to raise his nationalistic ego above his context. Indeed the ultimate perversity of the Hubbel section is not unreminiscent of the “jackeroo” section of *The Twyborn Affair* — which intriguingly was written only a few years earlier!

The key intertextuality of the novel is arguably with Marcus Clarke’s 1870s convict novel *His Natural Life*. Whereas for Clarke’s protagonist Rufus Dawes, hell is being sentenced for a crime he did not commit and forced to labour for many years in an alien continent, for Kinsella’s Thomas it is the fragmentation of the adolescent male self into a kind of psychological death. Thomas’s job in a cement factory is a form of hell, especially for one who saw himself as a master of life. But it is only a plotline; the effect is narratological, not affective; he has no way to internalize the felt sufferings Clarke’s protagonist, and thus he suffers neither his deprivation nor his redemption. But Thomas’s revision of Dawes is not just a revision of fate but of gender. Dawes affirms himself as a man by his willingness to sacrifice his self-interest over and over; whereas Thomas cannot sacrifice. Thomas can feel deprivation, he can resent life’s refusal to grant him the assurance that was once his prerogative, but the moral clarity of Clarke’s world is lacking — and lacking not out of any endemic weakness in Thomas, but because the
genre in which he articulates himself has no open way to this ethical position.

But there is a meaningful volition in this book — if not that of Thomas then that, surprisingly enough, of the fragmentary, elusive implied author (if one can impose so monadic a term). There is a strong determination on the part of the adult recompositor to keep faith with the mentality of the adolescent male, to retain its integrity while jettisoning its certitudes. It is this insensate loyalty in the midst of buoyant amendment, that gives, to cite high Modernist touchstones strangely solicited by the very postmodern mixture of experimentation and fantasy, these “visions and revisions” their complex yet genuine reach back to a primal “unimaginable zero summer.”
Author’s Preface to Morpheus: a Bildungsroman

This novel has an unusual history: I started writing it around the time of my Tertiary Admissions Exams as I was finishing high school in Geraldton, Western Australia. I was seventeen then, and it was 1980. A couple of months later, after my results had come through, I moved down to the city of Perth to start university. I had a month or so up my sleeve, I think, so I reconnected with my “novel,” which was then really a series of interconnected notes. I’d sketched out my characters — or at least, Thomas, my main character — and a rough sense of what the book was about. This clarified over the following weeks, and the book became a second life during my first year at university. Actually, I lived a number of lives that year.

As a teenager, I was fascinated by innumerable neuroses and phobias, especially obsessive-compulsiveness, and the delusive idea that alcohol and drugs were one way of “controlling” this, a form of self-medication. I wanted to write about a character who led one life in his head — a life in which dream and reality were the same thing — and another in reality. I would write to think my way through these issues.

I had long been determined to be a writer, and a writer of a very specific kind. A poet, but one who recognised no barriers between poetry and fiction, between theatre and non-fiction, and so on. (This pursuit would become a life’s interest, and in some ways culminated in my “novel” Genre, published later in 1997.) With this very early book, I wanted to write a novel that challenged the limitations of genre — I did not want to do what was expected of a prose fiction writer, and I did not want to give up being a poet while I wrote fiction. It was not an age of creative writing programs where I
came from, so I felt no inhibitions of pedagogy and “style.” I would never have set out to write this experimental work if things had been as they are now, I am sad to say. Not because I would have taken creative writing courses, but because I have taught them, and have seen how writers are doomed the moment they sign up to anything. As I spent a lot of my life in a dream state, and as I sucked up knowledge doing ancient history, English, politics, and history at university, and mixed with many different “kinds” of people, I gradually created a fiction-scape out of what was around me.

The novel took shape and I worked diligently at it. By the end of 1981, I had completed the work. Toward the end of 1982, when I was nineteen, I left university to write, and travel. I ended up in a flat by the sea, and went back to my odd novel. It had lost its appeal by that stage, but I added a few bits and pieces, and a few poems. Poetry was where I was increasingly heading. That pretty well wrapped up what was by then called Morpheus: A Paradigm. I put it away at my mother’s place, and it wasn’t touched until about 1993/4, when I was packing up papers to send to the National Library of Australia’s archives. I came across the manuscript and reread it.

Some of it infuriated me, much of it embarrassed me, and some — for reasons I won’t declare — I felt shouldn’t exist. I tore it to pieces. Of its three hundred pages, I destroyed (or lost) about 100. I fear the novel suffered further breaking-up when it arrived at the library; it has had to be collected together from different files. Somehow, another seventy or so pages have disappeared, or found their way into other places. It’s my fault: I was in a bad way then, and I probably sent it off in a somewhat incoherent fashion.

After requesting a photocopy of the manuscript from the library at the end of the 1990s, I paid for part of it to be typed up, with an idea of fixing it, or reconnecting with it. I had no specific publication aim in mind — I think it
was rather part of working out who I was as a writer back then. I’d lost a
decade or more to drug blanks and black-outs, and in recent years had been
trying to piece that period of my life back together. Morpheus seemed part of
that. I actually wrote an introductory piece for the novel, explaining that
these were papers found by someone, that Thomas had suffered death in
tragic circumstances and so on. I lost the typed material, and also my interest
in it, again. That introductory piece was eventually reworked into a story,
and included in Conspiracies, a volume of stories I did in collaboration with
Tracy Ryan a few years ago. Which brings us to last year, and the approach
from Paul Hardacre for something unusual and unpublished from my files. I
thought of my anti-literary oddity, Morpheus.

The story begins again. Paul paid for the National Library to photocopy
what they could. They found bits and pieces in the Morpheus manuscript
piles. I thought hard, and remembered notebooks and other “spaces” of the
time (back when I was seventeen, eighteen, and nineteen) where they might
be located, and sure enough, other pages were recovered from other folders.
I well remember the original, which says something about the nature of
memory when so much of that period is lost to me. I can remember what I
wrote and where I wrote it. I can remember the old electric Adler and later
IBM golfball typewriters I wrote on. I can remember the lever-arch files the
manuscript was kept in, the cartridge paper, the punched holes (and rings to
keep the paper from tearing), and so on. It’s all there in my head.

I promised Paul I would rewrite missing bits from memory.
Reconstruct, back-engineer. It has proved a disturbing process. Of course,
there are interpolations, which seems appropriate, given one of the models
for the book was Homer’s Odyssey, and another Joyce’s Ulysses, but I’ve tried
to keep them to a minimum. I have also tried to become seventeen and
eighteen again. At first it was difficult — not only to get the tone, but also to
write in a way I would consider less experienced than I might now (others might argue with this!). However, after a few days, I started getting “Thomas-dreams” — I literally dreamt whole scenarios and recorded them on waking. I re-dreamt the dream book. And thus the novel has been pieced — or is being pieced (as I write this) — back together. It is basically as it was, minus maybe one hundred pages I can’t bring myself to regather, or can’t recall “correctly.” A lot of the poetry that was part of the volume I want to stay in my head, or lost, as well!

The mixing of poetry with fictional text was a driving force behind Morpheus. I always found it impossible to separate genres. I would read poetry as I was reading novels. That first year of uni was also important for me theatre-wise. Thanks to friends, I went regularly to the Hole in the Wall theatre. I was also obsessed with Freud and Jung, and dragons. My brother, a few years younger than me, drew dragon after dragon; I picked it up a bit from him. At school, I had been much bullied, and writing had become a resistance for me. I had become highly politically motivated, but not in a positive way. I once went to an anarchist group and they suggested I leave because I had the traits of a nihilist rather than an anarchist. I now see how right they were. But politics form somewhere, and Morpheus was a space of formulation. Methodologically, I have always found fragmentations and flows appealing.

Morpheus was in fact my second novel. When I was fifteen, I had written a sci-fi novel for a Year Ten project. I no longer have a copy of it. It was a sci-fi novel driven by plot and psychology. I decided, between that book and Morpheus, that plot was a problem. Strangely, concurrently with writing Morpheus, I worked on a big fantasy novel called The Staffs of Kwarn. I had commercial — that is, “making-a-living” — hopes for that. One of my uni lecturers read a large chunk of it, and said it was a winner. I promptly lost
the entire book somewhere. About five hundred pages of narrative — of plot plot plot. It is referred to metatextually in *Morpheus*, the “real lit” I was writing. I wonder now about which writing tended to literature and which didn’t. I wanted *Morpheus* to undo “literature.” I had suitably overblown ambitions. Fragmentation in fiction and poetry seemed essential.

Two other technical drivers work this novel. First, the reading I was doing at the time. I started at one end of the Reid Library at UWA and worked my way through. Bits of that reading filtered into the novel. Second, alchemy — especially via Paracelsus. I had thought of doing chemistry at uni, but went the way of arts. I don’t think I’ve ever worked out that split. They seemed one and the same to me, and I wasn’t sure why I had to do one or the other. I still don’t.

I have always been affected by nursery rhymes, and many of the rhythms of this book are childish and informed by rhymes. I was a child really, trying to grow rapidly. The book is imprisoned in that world view. I realise now that it could also be relatively sophisticated, and “ahead” of its years, but it was also wrestling with issues of maturity.

The novel is actually set in an asylum, though this is never said, involving Thomas, and a doctor who might or might not be real. It is never decided if Thomas’s life is imagined or happening in real time. But the constraint of the asylum is clearly indicated. What role it has as character is up to the reader. For me, it was an environment of exploration of “perversity” and sexual difference, objectification, of what is acceptable behaviour and what is not, of what constitutes freedom of thought, and how much we can step outside the social condition without being hauled back kicking and screaming. Or maybe, in a hebephrenic way, we all go calmly, letting our rights to self be taken from us before we even begin. The novel’s
prime obsession is with “race” and identity. Thomas fears being misread as being racist and actively works against racism. His paranoia takes him further into a pit of fear and self-accusation: of course, the reality might well be that he is racist, despite is abhorrence of racism. The psychologies of this are the core of the novel, so I will leave it to the reader to unpick. Suffice it to say that the generator of the novel is internal conflict through self-doubt: be it a country-city dichotomy, or a confident surface hiding an immature and tense youth, it is a novel of polarisations that magnify and implode.

The book is not autobiographical, though there are strong elements of autobiography, as one would expect given the nature and ambitions of teenage “experience.” At the time of writing, I was undergoing something of a “religious crisis,” even believing at one stage that I had some kind of vocation. But I distrusted and resented organised religion, and inclined towards mysticism. This both clashed with and complemented my interest in science. Revelation, Daniel, Isaiah and Job were the books of the Bible I extracted and read with a distracted interest. Some of that is in Morpheus: A Paradigm. But the story told is not mine, and the character of Thomas is not me. Thomas is, in reality, a fictive construction drawing upon many people I knew from school and outside school, and especially upon characters I’d encountered in my reading. He contains my fears and questionings, but is his own man, or boy. Possibly, he is a figment of his own imagination.

Western Australia, August 2007.
Note to Author’s Preface

*Morpheus* was not published in 2008 as originally planned. It is now 2013, and the novel has “almost” been published by three publishers over the last five years. I guess it goes with the territory! I think this time it *will* happen. I have just turned fifty. I wrote the original version of this novel over thirty years ago.

    Western Australia, February 2013.
MORPHEUS: A BILDUNGSROMAN

A PARTIALLY BACK-ENGINEERED AND RECONSTRUCTED NOVEL
Pre-Paradigm
from Metamorphosis Book XI (lines 592-676); Ovid

Not far from the zone where the Cimmerians dwell
a yawning orifice, an excavated mountain: therein Sleep,
his mansion of lethargy. Phoebus can’t penetrate
with his best dawn, midday, or sunset. The valley
makes its fog thick and rebarbative. Always twilight,
light is shadow. The alarm clocks are switched off.
Roosters culled and dogs debarked. Political opponents
have been gagged, and the rest of the population
silent, compliant. The sheep, fed on chemicals,
barely have energy to bleat. They carry
meat that’ll feed the compliant with listless
persistence. Even silence is taciturn. The mountain
feeds a stream of tears, calling people, it is quickly
diverted — flood controlled. Lustreless waves
are saline. There is no fresh water for miles.
Gravel roads have been carved along the stream’s banks.
As you jolt along, you grow giddy, tired.
Small landholders quietly grow dope to compensate
for drought and poor harvests. Some turn
to heroin, which they can’t afford, and sink further.
They leave their doors open and nobody
watches over the stash. Each is a king or queen
of their own patch, their own cave in the mountain.
Relaxed, thousands of dream-totems drift
about rooms, dark paddocks of interiority.
Waiting to be filled, like dark chambers of silos.
When Iris swung into the cavern she swept the dream-totems away, her locust-winged clothing setting the breath-taking mansion alight. Nodding off, the god wrestled his eyelids, and persisting (he’d sussed her out), managed to prop himself up on an elbow, querying her business. She: “Sleep, you of total rest, most placid god, Sleep, chilled one, giver of downtime and vivification, muscle relaxant, resister of exploitive labour laws! Design a virtual space that’ll imitate the form of the king for Alcyone, in Trachin of Hercules’ fame. Let it reveal a simulacrum of the wreck. Juno insists.” These words said, Iris rushed from the mountain, fighting back sleep, so overwhelming, searching out her trail, the arc of her incoming course.

It’s Morpheus the father excites from among the thousand sons — wily simulator of the human figure. None walks the walk or talks the talk of people more adeptly; he knows the fashions and subtle variations in dialect and intonation of those he ghosts. He is a speech writer of men. Another god plays the roles of beast, bird, and the longest of dugites: Icelos in god-speech, or Phobetor in mortal talk. Phantasos is a third player: his diverse arts include shape-shifting the inanimate, the granite and soil, also water thin as drought and trees hollowed by termites. At night these shapes enter the dreams of politicians, while the others mangle the sleep of voters. But Sleep gives these a miss and homes in on Morpheus: he alone can do the trick,
appease Thaumas’s daughter, Iris. Mission accomplished, Sleep falls back onto the couch, passes out.

On wings quiet as hallucination, he flashes to the port town of Albany; shedding his feathers, he shape-shifts, wears the face and figure of Ceyx, pallid as a corpse, stands naked by the bed of the miserable wife: water oozing from drenched hair, his beard soaked. Tears gushing from his eyes he arches over her bed: “In your agony, can you recognise Ceyx, desolate wife? Has death so altered my features? Do not turn from me! Know me by knowing your husband’s shade, know me by knowing death. There is nothing to await. No hope, Alcyone, for I am dead! Prayers have not saved me! The treacherous Southern Ocean tore my ship apart, its dark waters grinding the hull to pulp. This is no rumour. Waves drenched your name as it struggled from my lips. This is fact, brought to you by myself. This is my end, this my wrecked and drowned body come to you. Rise from the bed and mourn me. Dress accordingly. Sing my death — do not abandon me without lament to deplorable Tartarus!” So spoke Morpheus. She could be sure it was her husband’s voice (and the tears seemed genuine), and the gestures of his hands those of Ceyx. Weeping, Alcyone groaned, roused her muscles from sleep, and reached for his body, embracing only air, exclaiming: “Stay! Where to so quickly? We will go together.”
Note: Text used is the Loeb Classical Library, Harvard University Press, 2005 reprint. Use has been made of Frank Justus Miller’s accompanying translation (revised by G. P. Goold), mainly for verification of grammatical and narrative structure, but the original Latin was also closely utilised/followed — or, maybe, departed from. This is not a translation, obviously, but neither is it a “version.” It is a hybrid of both. Maybe.
Building, Night

Thomas sat in his room at Grandma Flynn’s. He could hear the country night: the headers on the outskirts harvesting late, nightjars filling the in-betweens. He had an impulse to let loose but wasn’t sure how. To manifest blue in the red and yellow of harvest. A spark would do it. It was phenomenally dry, so the moisture levels for harvesting were okay. They could harvest late without concern. It was a bonus because the days meant shut-down after noon — the extreme heat bringing harvest bans. Kids would loll in shade-houses with precious little that was green, loll in hammocks slung between the wandoo supports, white gum greyed to less than memory, supports for the shade-house. They would drink from waterbags strung up to catch even the siccative, deadly dry breeze that would feed the ignition of the district. And here he was, in the coolest house, hot. Here he was at night looking out. Dreaming awake. All fiery in the head. It was for the best, his being there. Here. The roof fan pulsed and clacked slowly. The walls were thick. Federation-style thick. The state architect who’d designed the court building and the post office had also designed the building, the room he was in. Lead paint on the sill, over the fire-place — the mantelpiece. A treacled paint. He had his few books he was lugging around at the time a-perched there. Not in winter though — they’d combust. It gets hotter than now which is hot. It sears. Last winter he was reading about Masques. Anti-masques. But the harvest had brought no mirth and he dwelt long and innerly. I was no child in Coelum Britannicum, he said. I smell its fumes when I am here in winter, when the fire is light and I’m drinking, he thought. The lead squiggles wormed out of the paint, like closing splits in tiny shot sinkers with his teeth. That was with his father on the coast. Maybe in Albany, in a boat in the Sound. Holidaying. The harbour there poisoned
with heavy metals from scouring the wool. Heavy water, heavy harbour. A semi-trailer thundered along the main street, spilling grain. The parrots will come at dawn, said Thomas to the open empty window. They will colour the dawn and the locals will drive right over them. Kicking up a rainbow. Wheelspin at corner of pub and back road out of town — north-east, heading deep into the saline territory. Towards eroded granite domes with their skullcaps lifted off. Towards the salmon gums. Burnout on burnout. The fishtails, like the sharp tails of skippy caught from the boat, or long slender statements of garfish. Albany was their holiday town. It was less and more than real because of that. The sense in this thought scared him. He threw himself onto the raw sheets of the bed, determined to sweat it out. Here, it is sexless, he thought-spoke.

In this building, forty-eight hours had passed. He wondered if it was the same elsewhere. Grandma Flynn had flown the coop. A funeral in a neighbouring town. Someone she knew enough to stay over in the home, watching over the widow for those early days of solitary life. Thomas listened to the flow of night — forty-eight hours had lapsed and he hadn’t moved. It was where he’d left off... reading: “He read her prosy letter with a rigid face, devouring the words more hungrily than if they had been lyrical song. She would be back! She would come back! Soon.” In this room he’d been with Therese, but it was a long way back. He went further back to make it closer. Working in the lab up North. UP NORTH. That seaside rural town. That town of the magic roundabout. He loathed the romance in the wheat, with waves smashing at the edges of the continent, the sand shifting. He watched them persecute the Greek kid, changing his name to Jason. Throwing pies at the family shop. And the fights with the Aborigines. “There was another page. Weakened and relaxed from his excitement, he looked at it. There he found, almost illegibly written, but at last her own speech, as if leaping out from the careful aim of her letter, this note”: 
Dear Thomas

It’s not working, this chemistry set. All your talk of hydrofluoric acid eating glass, of spectrometers and Commodore 64s. I don’t care if you know how to use Thorium Nitrate or Yttrium to set the X-ray equipment. I don’t care about the furnaces that make samples glow orange in crucibles. I was thinking the other night. Always night. Could you even describe how I look. Could you set it to paper. Could you make that IBM golfball typewriter you’re so obsessed with conjure an image. I am more than chemicals and electricity. I am not nearly all water as you constantly say. I don’t believe you. I just don’t believe you.

Therese

Thomas could hear the telex machine pumping out data in the background. The mineral sands ship would be in harbour soon. A whole batch of assays had to be finalised. He looked at the glassy liquid in the crucible and imagined a reflection. I am neither tall nor short, wide nor narrow, and my hair is of a nondescript colour. The left corner of my lips — thinnish — twists upwards. I guess it looks as if I sneer. Therese? She’s like a letter at time of war.

A king burnout. “Fucking shittin’ it!” Thomas listened to the call to God, the mighty wheelspin. Just on the corner, doughnut after doughnut. WHOOOOOO! WHOOOOOO! WHOOOOOOOO! WHOOOOOOOOOOOO! Shittin’ it. Spin the fuck out of it. Cunt car. Plant it. WHOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO! He could see them if he looked tight against the frame, out the window. An HQ Holden. A bright colour in the headlights of other cars blanked by the darkness of shining out, of being on the outer. Active audience. Six cylinders. Rear-wheel drive. Young blokes like him. Black and white kids standing so close the spin-out almost collecting them. They’d swap cars. The lucky ones would ride with the
burnout king. Dragon imprimatur. The guy who could afford new tyres. The shearer, not the rouse-about. How did Thomas know this? He just did. Intuition. At least they’re bonding and not fighting, he thought. Bonding. At least. He realised he was becoming quaint and alone in the room. The puzzle he dressed up in, watching on, unseen. His throat in his mouth. Shaking. A trait of character.

His thoughts were broken by a telephone ringing downstairs. Phones still go through the exchange here, he thought. Even at this time of night? He wasn’t sure. It kept ringing. It stopped, then started again. He ignored it and tried to think like a preface. He was voyaging. And the river was nearby. It was low at this time of year. They’d dredged the river and altered its pattern. It was a dying river. Could he begin his journey there? Could he float down to the city, through the hills and out to sea? His drunken boat would run aground after a mile. Hit the rocks. The sandy dry riverbank. He’d seen a thylacine there as a small child, but no one believed him. He knew the farms for miles along the river-course. Grandma Flynn was a pagan goddess to them, those religious folk, those Anglican stalwarts of the vicinity. Why do I read such bigoted texts and drink them in? he pondered. Making allowances. Is that what shapes my face? As if I imagine character in my features, in “the way” Therese looks?

He began to draw all the windows he’d stared at. He drew them in an art-paper book using pastels, pencils. He drew the windows back through years, and windows that would come. He would make them fit his pictures. Make them fit. He would not defenestrate. He closed the roller blind — grey, frayed at the point where the fold-over at the base was sewn to keep the flat dowelling in place, the weight of the blind. The small plastic “kiss” with screw into the dowelling and a cord down to a ring, the device for opening and shutting, pulling against the sprung roller up high. It was dead centre, the plastic kiss. One day the roller will stop functioning. One day it will stay up or down or halfway or break free of its brackets. He admired the
contours, the boustrophedon of the woodwork that made the frame set in the stone and brick and mortar. The curating of the rectangle.

The Quakers hate war because it makes hatred. He seemed to remember Aldous Huxley saying something like this. He’d seen a letter on Grandma Flynn’s dresser in her bedroom — from Huxley about *Antic Hay*. I will donate it, she said. Donate it where? Thomas asked.

On the ships list he read in Appendix 12, “Return of Ships and Emigrants dispatched by Public Funds to Western Australia in 1854 and 1855.” His people, somehow. A death was a loss of a soul. The phone rang again. They listen through the exchange, he thought. That’s fact. Everyone knows it. They send out their unsecret secret messages that way. They secrete. They secrete secrete, bound for Botany Bay. Hooray! What works I do, what works we do, what paths we walk. *Tantum religio potuit suadere malorum*. I zeal my reading in common decency. He pasted it together and wrote it out on the blind covering the window. The wheatbins were filling rapidly, he could sense it. The train wagons already taking grain down to the port. The harbour. A harbouring of offerings. No matter how far inland, the harbour plays its tricks. When the wharfies attacked the Premier they derailed history or put it on track. Either way. Therese’s great-uncle had been there. In what capacity, Thomas wasn’t sure. But not for the wharfies, if the Hubbels were the cue. The Hubbel belly, the Hubbel swelling. “My serpent-brood shall lurk.” He embraced many terrible conceits and chimeras as the melancholy swam through the room, into the dry riverbed. No amount of studying will solve the problem. Fumes arise from corrupt blood disturbing the mind. Black blood, black vapours. Mrs Hubbel said such things. She married into the family of dictatorship and lineage. Into crests, crowns, and potions. Those soiled wrappers even royalty want... need. Even. He barely trusted himself with description, let alone a description of Therese’s features, attributes. Her contour drawing. Drawn, sitting by the dock of the bay. Grandma Flynn’s house abutted the old court building.
Mainstay. I have no diet, Thomas thought, and nothing to pin melancholy on... The smell of burnt rubber had filled the room, wafting in through the floral plaster vents. Dragon’s breath. Is that how a belt slipping in a header smells at harvest, through the grain dust and ground dust? he wondered. I used to know. It all mingled, the odours of memory. Conduits straight outside. They were at the top of the walls. Thirteen-foot ceilings. A space between the stonework and bricks. He could hear rats on occasion, scrabbling, speaking. I am sleeping, he thought.
I cannot feel my limbs — it’s as if my body’s not there. I watch the pink and grey galahs infuse a lemon-scented gum as the coffin is lowered into its hole. It’s a brooding afternoon in March — the foliage of the gum is heavy with moisture. At any moment a branch might fall, brought down by the atmosphere. The widow-maker, as they call it, will lose a limb. It won’t replace the limb but will continue its growth elsewhere, regardless. I’ve made it clear in my will that I want my remains burnt, my ashes scattered over the sea. He didn’t leave a will, which, given his propensity for scribbling, might come as something of a surprise. Everything I have is yours and our marriage contract seals that, he’d say, without irony. Feeling must be returning to my legs, as I sense my dress scuffing at my ankles. The Fremantle Doctor has come in, almost on cue. I think the minister is saying something about it in hushed and solemn tones. The corpse has been covered. It seems to have happened so quickly, but the tree is empty of galahs, so maybe much more time has passed than I have allowed for. I hope I’ve done the right thing, burying him bodily intact — that is, as intact as might be expected, given the post-mortem. Seems strange that he never mentioned what he wanted done with his remains; he usually had opinions on everything. Maybe it’s just that I can’t recall. I don’t know; I don’t suppose it really matters.

It’s not that this house was a “full” place. It always seemed rather empty, even when we were going through one of our close periods. He’d always been austere, and I suppose I went along with it. Why, I don’t know. It’s not that I’m particularly interested in material possessions, but I’m not against them either. What bothers me, though, is that he always seemed so accommodating to the way I felt, as if everything were on an equal footing in
our territory. But I don’t think it was like that — rather that I let myself feel
it was the case. It’s not a criticism of him, but of myself for not really
noticing. Or wanting to notice. So now, I’ll drink strong coffee and go over it
all. I’ll dismantle our collective life piece by piece, separating him off and
discovering what it is of myself that’s left, or what’s been made, or maybe
what was there in the beginning. I’ve taken a fortnight off work, though I
don’t think I need it. It’s for appearances, so the guys won’t think me a
callous bitch. See, I do care what they think. T. would have been indifferent
to the aftermath of an incident like this — like death. He was like that.

I’ve known women who have kept whole rooms dedicated to the
memories of their loved ones. Every piece of clothing, letters, even scraps of
paper with reminder notes on. I’m not sentimental, not in that way. I’ll keep
his books — and they were his books, though he always referred to them as
“our” books — and will probably preserve his papers. This will be more out
of superstition than anything else. He wrote constantly — “scribbling” he
called it. But he never showed it to anyone and told people it was just a
hobby. I’ve no reason to doubt this. Death suggests that I should burn these
papers without examining them, but I’ll read every word. I just know I will.
That’s part of my grieving process. I’ll read them and see what light they
throw on our relationship, whether they fill in any of the blanks that have
accumulated over the years. Suspected infidelities, fantasies,
disappointments. I expect they will tell me much more about him than they
will about me, but you never know. He had a way with words.

But I’m in no hurry to get to the papers. I’d rather start with the garage.
I’d rather put the power tools in a box and send them to my brother-in-law
who dropped an unsubtle hint regarding their destiny after the funeral. He’s
not a bad bloke, just a little blunt. T. suspected me of having an affair with
him about ten years ago. I was twenty three then. If I had been attracted to
him in some sort of muscular way than it went no further. It had more to do
with T.’s insecurities than anything else. It was the only time he got
physically violent with me — you know, I walked into a door knob. The shame of it nearly killed him and I ended up feeling sorry for him. It’s wonderful the way you can make yourself suffer again and again when there should have been no suffering in the first place. He never touched me again, and rarely lost his temper — and actually, I lost my temper plenty with him, and even stuck my stiletto through his foot on one occasion — though nothing ever changed the attacker-victim mentality that existed within the relationship. He could make me guilty just by thinking something.

I wonder what it would have been like to have had children? How much would it have altered our relationship? Would it have made us closer? Could we have been any closer? Maybe we were as close as people get, at least a man and a woman. I have been much closer with girlfriends over the years — especially school friends. He never liked my friends, though being a reasonable bloke didn’t say so. Or not often. When we first met he took a dislike to my best friend of the time and things boiled down to a “me or her” situation. But I did the same thing with T. and my mother. Yes, my mother. That’s how we met. At my parent’s place. He’d been having an affair with my mother whom he’d met through my father. I’m not sure how he met my father. Dad was pretty seedy back then and drank a lot. T. drank a lot as well and they probably met in a bar. Dad liked students and often drank down at the University tavern. I guess they met there. I never asked him — my father that is — and can’t now as he died ten years ago. My mother’s still alive but lives in the States and we’re only in contact on Mother’s Day for a few minutes by telephone. She rings me, just to make sure I remember her. She rings on America’s Mother’s Day, so it seems even more bizarre. I’ll tell her T. is dead when she rings next Mother’s Day.

You don’t tend to think in terms of men’s underwear. But there’s a drawer full of it. He’s got as much here as I have and yet I was always the one “buying underwear.” Mainly for his gratification, I might add. I’ll feel weird wearing “the kit,” without him around. Sometimes he’d wear them,
but that was just between ourselves and a kind of act. He did it to break
down the barriers between us. He suffered from guilt, but still loved exotic
lingerie. But then he’d always quote Walt Whitman’s, Do I contradict
myself? Very well, then I contradict myself. He softened with age. When I
first knew him he treated my cunt like it was going to bite his cock off. A
cunt was something you punished gently. It was the gently that was
dangerous. It kept you hanging on, just knowing the sensitive feminine guy
was in there somewhere. I guess Mum had mauled him, but I think it cut
both ways. He was an arrogant bastard. A dandy.

There’s a pendulum that was given to him by one of the bunch he was
hanging around with when I met him. He told me a story about H. once that
made my hair crawl. The pendulum cracks like a cranky heart. He reckons
that he was sitting on a bus next to H. who was sitting next to a guy who
was sitting next to a young girl who was lying asleep in her sleeping
mother’s lap. It was at the back of the bus late at night. H. noticed that the
guy he was sitting next to was feeling the young girl up under her skirt. The
girl kept sleeping. H. pushed his hand into the pants of the offender and
began massaging his penis. H. told T. later that it was bliss, that he had the
guy by the balls so to speak.

I cannot say that I like men. Something tells me they’re a necessary evil
but I can’t really convince myself of this. And it’s not the aggression — I can
be as aggressive and angry as any man. And I know about power.
Sometimes T. spoke of doing something so radical that it’d change the
course of history, or undo history. He spoke to me as if I could barely
understand what he meant. As if I wouldn’t like history to skip a beat. I
joked one night that Lorena Bobbitt was a revolutionary and he nearly hit
the roof. She acted out of jealousy, without political motivation, he shrieked.
Well, not quite shrieked, but it seemed loud at the time. I said, just a
different agenda dearie. He didn’t speak to me for a week.
In the corner of the kitchen stands a worn whisk broom. It’s almost past its use-by date so I don’t feel guilty trashing it. He picked it up in the Islands last year. We went there for a holiday. I stayed for a week and he stayed on for another six. He got it into his head that there was an answer to be found there. And cheap booze — duty free. He started collecting oral histories. Reckons he was going to make a radio documentary out of them. He could have I suppose, given his position at the station, but I knew it would come to nothing. He reckoned the Islanders should take up arms and shoot the Western bastards who had their hooks into the place. He might have been right.

I find a doll. It was his, believe it or not. It’s in a drawer with one of mine I’ve kept all these years. I was given mine on my sixth birthday. He bought his from the local newsagents with his pocket money when he was eight. It was an act of bloody-mindedness, by his own confession. He just didn’t like to be told he couldn’t have something. A fly lays another speck on the eyelid on mine. That lid has been jammed shut for twenty years. I suspect my father glued it shut — he was like that. He said, Keep your legs shut, you slut! That was at fifteen. He didn’t like anyone else knowing what I looked like inside. He’d have torn the kid next door limb from limb if he knew I let him have a look for twenty cents a pop. When the hair started to appear I gave it up as a bad joke. It just made me feel dirty. What I really hated about T. was that this story really got him off. Sometimes he’d make me repeat it over and over while he fucked me. I made the mistake of telling him not long after we met.

The television was never anything to do with him. Just me. I love the television. I love watching the crap. I know it’s crap, I’d say, and he’d say, well that’s just an excuse. Crap popular culture. That’s what art is deary, history’s postcards of pop culture. Even now I can’t resist turning the soapies on. I don’t get the chance to watch them that often — work keeps me out of trouble until evening most times. This afternoon I’ll revel in Young and
The Restless, The Bold and The Beautiful and Days of Our Lives. I'll wear my hair rollers and fluffy slippers and scribble over the already-written boxes of the newspaper crossword, despite the heat.
The Hero

Travellers would have been surprised to find a consecrated bishop wandering the dusty desert road to Sodom had not rumours been afoot that the Second Coming was at hand. Dressed in the adornment of the High Church, he laboured persistently against the biting winds, his holy robes prey to the whims of nature.

THE MESSAGE OF SALVATION

One last chance … take it or leave it … through death you will find life. A hero, just like the noble golden heroes of old, has come amongst us … accept, cherish, or perish … there is no simple formula for survival — self-sacrifice is a prime necessity. The Synagogues and Mosques are opening their doors.

THE TASK

Night was coming and Sodom was a long way off.

A PROPHET WITHOUT KNOWLEDGE … A HERO WITHOUT FAME

The gyre, that whirlpool in the sky, sucks wildly, drawing pre-destined souls into its immortal depths. The mythical purpose of our existence: to perpetuate the myth itself, the victims of evolutionary hallucinations.

THE FACTS

An indifferent buzz from an electric razor echoed through the austere bathroom, the non-mildew plastic painted walls tingling with the oscillating sound-waves. Thomas Icarus Napoleon lavishly splashed green after-shave over his chafed skin, the anaesthetic sting glowing through patches of redness. Glug, glug, glug … the porcelain bowl rhythmically emptied its
bowels. From the misted mirror (the exhaust fan having broken down) stared Thomas’s pallid face, thick black hair framing the whiteness of his hollow cheeks. His bloodshot eyes, their limped lenses focusing on emptiness, were set deep within the bone of his head … murky brown frames.

Wake Dryads of insipid Dawn, speak Muses of Olympus, come wash the dusty cobwebs from my sleepy mind … may Zeus send sweet portents at breakfast time. The Germanic tribes hurled their gods against mixed-up Romans. Oh love, true love … may Cupid shoot silver arrows through Aphrodite’s red heart … love is an exercise in nothingness. Hark, I hear Saxon messengers cobbling the cobbles of the cobbled courtyard. What news do you bring? The Geats have been attacked by a wicked fire-breathing dragon, eh? Well, serves them right. Have you heard of a wizard who can interpret dreams? No? Some say they are Divine inspiration, messages from the Creator … what do you think? Who’s Sigmund Freud? Craaaaaaaaaappppp. Slaves, tell the world that Thomas Napoleon greets the sky … Thomas the Poet, the poet of true life. These new houses have no feeling … time for prayers … the corner block … the chapel.

Thomas walked the carpeted marble floors of the Doge’s winter palace, the fragrance of cherry blossom wafting through the spacious corridors. The orchards are full of golden fruit in mid-spring. The laden boughs, earthward bent, offering the food of gods to mortal men … the snake curled in sleep wakes to the desecration, munching firm green apples. Thomas shuffled his feet through the thick pile, its softness tingling his body, a warm sensuous tingling. He dragged his fingers along the golden banister of the great staircase, making his grand entrance to the ballroom, his denim jeans rubbing against the lace of princesses. Great staircases in Thomas’s bungalow.

The kitchen looked very ordinary. Eight corners guarded the room, while the stove and fridge were traditionally set on either side of the sink.
Large oak cupboards (imported from some foreign country) shrouded the walls, and an oak table, with veneer top, sat exactly in the room’s centre.

“Thomas, what would you like for breakfast?”

Who dares use my name? Some miserable kitchen wench? Haaaaaaa. Sizzle eggs in fat-caked frying pans,
Chops baked busily in gas-filled ovens,
Boil the oil, bubble and squeak: the Oil in the naked witch’s cauldron …

“Eggs mother, and possibly a nice rasher of bacon. Be sure to remove the rind, they say that it harbours nasty diseases. That’s skin of a pig for you. The little squealer, with its privates lopped off, grows fat with age, planning its revenge by rolling in disease-filled dirt. No! This conspiracy will not succeed!!! And make sure that you don’t break my eggs.”

She shuffles her feet. Be casual she thinks. Bob said that the boy is going to be thrown out if he doesn’t get some sense into his head.

Incense sense burns seriously.

“I hope you’ll make an effort to find a job this week. You can’t expect to laze around the house during your holidays. All you ever do is sit in that room of yours or visit your silly friends …”

The time is ripe she thinks, let him have the whole story.

Moan and groan in unison. Up down, up down, the rhythm of the jungle … they rape my brain …

“Wouldn’t it be nice to have a little extra money? … You could feel independent. Wouldn’t it be nice…?”

Can’t even speak properly. Terrible sentence construction. Oh, roll out you bitter tirade.

“Actually, I think you mean that it would be nice for you … me keeping me, instead of you keeping me,” said Thomas.

“One man’s labour … Thou shalt work six days and take a good rest on the seventh. On the day of rest you should refrain from drinking fortified
liquor, it deadens the nerve ends. Smoke opium instead. Actually, ambrosia, bred in Aphrodite’s womb, is well worth trying. Wait! If we rest on the Sunday are we really resting on the first day? Oh, you heathen god, may the pagan rituals banish your chronology to the dungeons of Asgard.”

Mrs Napoleon ignored her son’s ravings. She bustled around the kitchen with alacrity, taking pride in her house work. She thought women’s liberation was a load of rot, it had definite socialist undertones. Her nimble fingers gingerly stripped the offensive rind from the meat, she did not want to be accused of being unclean. What a juicy rasher. Ten lumps of butter in the fat-filled pan. She knew Thomas was strange. She was having a dinner party and certainly did not want him around … he could be so rude to guests.

Fat bellied mothers drinking sherry and talking gossip. She was sure she would be able to sell a lot of plastic-ware today. Five dollars for three large plastic dishes was a real bargain. Her dark hair had only been brushed seventy times this morning, thirty more strokes of the ivory brush would do the job.

Greasy hands wiped on virgin apron cloth.

Thomas pondered. We are perpetuating an instinctive myth, we are trapped by our animal desires … shapely thighs and firm breasts … we are evolutionary extensions of our primeval selves … female monkeys offer sexual favours in exchange for a banana. We may very well be tomorrow’s myth.

Light and Dark are separate entities … we can distinguish the stars from the night’s nothingness: the stars are Light, the night is Dark. A lot of Celtic truths were Catholicised by pious missionaries and corrupted priests. The “Celtic Twilight” is a lot of Tom-foolery … mysticism does not manifest itself in dirty chastity belts. Cú Chulaim did not kill the charioteer for his insolence, only his master, whom we shall call Master Orlamh.
Thomas often wore his white shirt … the one with the name “Cú Chulaim” embellished on it.

Look, it’s no good destroying the followers of Darkness, you have got to strike at the top … it’s time to rotate the crops … where’s my breakfast slave?

Gas bubbling on the hotplate of the electric stove. Sizzle, frizzle … sizzled, fizzled … the bacon, kosher flesh, fries merrily. The worn washer in the kitchen tap hears the water dribble by … drip, drip, drip … splattering against the cold steel … peelings, trapped in the plug-hole, bloat with added water.

Tapeworms and slaters make their homes in soggy plug-holes … warm, mushy, vegetable scraps bloat with squirming, squiddly squirchy worms.

Slaters and tapeworms, along with many other beasts, are produced by the earth. When the sun warms muddy plains and soggy marshes (a result of the Great Flood), the process begins … clinically planned gestation.

AN EXAMPLE FROM CLASSICAL HISTORY …

The receding waters of the Nile left thousands of half-formed animals squirming through the mud.

HYPOTHESIS …

This shows a primitive form of test-tube rehabilitation, proof that spontaneous re-generation is a viable alternative.

THE HERO’S ROLE …

A fifty mile long tapeworm crawled from its earthen womb with the aim of destroying all other life … into the universe’s rectum … itchy, itchy. Thomas responded quickly, emptying his quiver of silver arrows … a dead fiend … ANOTHER CHAPTER IN THE ANNULS OF GREATNESS.

Mystical myth: nymphs enjoy flagellation …

The present is future’s myth …
The cutlery was clean … Thomas washed and wiped it the night before. “Don’t touch the ends, hold the handles. Come on mum, try to be hygienic.”

The bacon, floating in fat, was set in orderly fashion above the perfect rounds of the fried eggs … the two eggs with the golden orbs. Heavy mist rising from thick black coffee. Gobble, gobble … slurp, slurp … the busy breakfast table.

Circe made a great breakfast, a breakfast worthy of pedigree swine. How did she do it? She struck them with her magic wand and struck them in the sty. Such fine looking beasts, big-balled bonza boars, great for sacrifice. THE PLAN:

INTUITION
Sure, drink the wine, but be blind to its blinding wisdom, reverse the truths to falsehood. Nice gold goblet, better than my mother’s collection of decorative tankards.

ELPENOR (addressing the audience): Please save my soul, the psyche in Purgatory.

THOMAS (standing in the witness box): That’s a Biblical incursion.

ELPENOR (turning to face THOMAS): What else do you expect, it’s only bardic poetry … hero talk … things have a habit of changing in translation.

THOMAS: And who is this hero?

ELPENOR: The man who opens the door to Hades. We have to die to release true-life-giving-energy.

THOMAS: I’m in the middle of my breakfast.

ELPENOR (on his knees, his eyes full of tears): Please, please, I beg of you!

THOMAS (hesitantly): Oooooooh, alright … here’s the plan … parts two and three.

SYNTHESIS … ANALYSIS
One thing at a time. First, deal with Circe … and her beguilmental scental bodily potential.

CIRCE (undoing the top of her robe): No other mortal man has resisted my drug …

THOMAS: Pure strength of character, I’m a hero you know.

CIRCE: Yes, yes … to bed, to bed … Nymphomania, you know …

THOMAS: But first the oath.

CIRCE: Anything … hurry, hurry.

CIRCE AND THE OATH: I PROMISE TO FREE THE PIGS.

DEDUCTION

REVIEW THE PLAN: Screw Circe, drink some more grog-a-floozy-booze, and rescue the pigs.

Circe’s bed chamber was very cosmopolitan: black and white temptresses poured sweet mind-honeying wine down gasping gullets. Fresh linen, a refreshing breeze, and an experienced nymph completed the breakfast programme. A hero’s life: eat, sleep, drink, take, bash, and copulate.

HERO STORMS THE CYCLOPEAN WALLS OF CIRCE’S BED CHAMBER.

GRENDEL’S MYTH.

humans, in ready supply, stuffed through gaping jaws … laughing tirelessly. The dragon’s memory digests Greek gods of Roman stone …

NEWSPAPER HEADLINES: NEW SEWERAGE SYSTEM PROPOSED BUT OPPOSED.

“I’m going for a walk.”
His word was final ... she trembled. Would he be back before, or after lunch? Didn’t know. What about her guests? Stuff them. Tears.

It was indeed Napoleon day. Great deeds could be done, great words spoken, although they would have no purpose, their immortality doing him little good. The crisp morning air reached into his lungs and swept the brackish breath of yesterday into the growing skies. Breath in, breath out. The primeval rhythm of jungle life permeates all aspects of man’s environment.

Watch the cracks … the cracks of doom … falling, falling … floating in oblivion for all eternity … tortured by an elusive Cheshire Cat. Haaahaaahahahahaa … as Beowulf slayed Grendel.

It is true, all dreams are essentially erotic in content but we are afraid to admit it … latent dream thought shrouding manifest content. I wonder if my dream-lovers ever dream of me … or have even heard of me? I have a habit of running into people who I don’t know … a cyclic repetition in a fate-bound world.

It was just another city … Paris, London, or Mycenae. A black and white mongrel lifted its leg against an oil treated lamppost … the second line of defence against insidious termites. What was the purpose of creation? What is to be the future? Yeats guided Thomas to the museum … Thomas often visited the museum when he felt like escaping.

“When a vast image out of Spiritus Mundi
Troubles my sight: somewhere in the sands of the desert
A shape with lion body and the head of a man,
A gaze blank and pitiless as the sun,
Is moving its slow thighs, while all about it
Reel shadows of the indignant desert birds.”

The truth of existence lay in the riddle of the Sphinx … the only truth.
Mrs Napoleon watched him wander down the street. It was such a nice street... except for that wretched house across the road... thank God, it was displaying a “For Sale” sign. She looked anxiously at her watch. He was contemplating the history of debauchery ... the sacrificial daggers from moon-lit forests ... one night, with only the fire light to comfort him, he had heard cried of a thousand civilizations in their death throes...

Mrs Napoleon despaired of him.

The Romantics have always got plenty of mileage out of the poor old Druids. There they were, running around with their daggers drawn, waiting for the solstice, when some nut-case suggested they try-out Stonehenge. Some people dream dreams of truth ... Freud: fulfillment of childhood desires, infantile sexuality.

“Come on, five laps of the oval and then a bit of footy,” grunted the physical education teacher (the one who wore the tight football shorts, the one who wiggled his arse in a provocative manner).

“Hey, Thomas,” called one of the over-developed school boys, “how about a little tackling practice.” LAUGHTER.

No thanks ... bloody ignorant swine.

“Queer, pansy, poofter.” LAUGHTER.

The teacher screamed (in his manly voice), “What’s wrong with yu’. You a girl or somethin’?”

Thomas ignored him. Push ... shove ... thump.

“A good clip around the ear-hole is what you need.” Push ... shove ... clip ... the rhythm of the jungle ... Macbeth downs young Seward but dies at his own game ... just a scratch killed Hamlet.

Mrs Robins was talking to Sister Sarah ... Sarah is a very pious name, of this there can be little doubt. Mrs Robins had an oil pit. When dad changed the oil in his car he took the dregs to Mrs Robins.
“Got some sump-oil here, Mrs Robins, not much good for anything.”

Mrs Robins, the widow of an evangelical preacher, spoke like a canary, her frail body quivering with every multi-syllabic word, “Oh, yes, I have just the place for it, I have an oil pit. My husband used to do all the repairs on our little car, he dug a pit you must understand, a very deep pit. Over there, under the wooden cover. Yes, he made the cover, and a very good cover it is.”

“Would you like to try some of my home-made marmalade … just like mother makes. Pure ingredients.”

“Oh, bless ’e, thank you,” said Sister Sarah, clutching a pot of marmalade.

Sister Sarah was a tall, stately woman of middling years. She often walked our street … the cathedral, you must understand. I wandered past these merry women and gave a sharp nod. There was something magical about Mrs Robins’s kitchen … the little jars of jam, neatly stacked on the shelves, the pot-belly stove … I felt touched by her dignity … she held her aging head high … made ends meet with little to spare. Humanity is a paradox … one reads the paper, lurid media, and eats hot-crossed buns when it is cold … a surfeit of revelry. Mrs Robins sipped tea from a mustard-yellow egg cup … lots of bric-a-brac, parsley, thyme, and sage, in a wild potpourri of folk-lore.

“Oooohh, come on, it’s a wild and wooly day,” she would say. “And how was school today?”

“I hate school. Dad is angry with me. I’ve been reading comic books again.”

“Poor pet, never mind, a cup of hot chocolate will do the trick.”


A PROPHET WITHOUT KNOWLEDGE … A HERO WITHOUT FAME.
Nightshift

Thomas scored a job in a cement factory. He was on nightshift and was the general shit-kicker — sweeping the floors, picking up broken sacks of mix, and cracking set concrete with a sledgehammer. He copped a fair amount of abuse, and soaked it all up. He liked the noise of the place because nobody could hear him think. He kept his aggressive, vengeful looks under control, the only real giveaways his glazed eyes and the twitches in corners of eyes and mouth. But mostly he wore safety glasses, with his regular glasses locked behind the perspex, rattling and sweating with vision so impaired he set the pattern of his work before getting stuck into it, and a face mask that didn’t keep a particle of dust from his lungs but hid his expressions. At smoko he would sit on his own while the other blokes showed each other shots from porno mags. Each meal break, he ate the same roll and carton of juice bought from the canteen. For three weeks he did this before throwing it in, blisters on his hands and lungs setting hard. He placed the foreman on his list of the condemned bound for hell, and spent his cheque on Therese, wine, and books. His treasure was a Penguin edition of Marcus Clarke’s *His Natural Life*. A sparkling new 1980 paperback. After their shopping spree, Thomas quoted Dawes to Therese: “No, not here. Hold up, my lad. If you fall, we must fall over you, and then you’re done for.” Thomas refused to wash the two sets of work clothes he’d been given with the job. He’d worn the first set for one week and the second set for two weeks. Filthy little bastard, the other workers had said. He found this hard to take as they were all much smaller than him, but he told himself it was a Job-like testing. One night the men flicked him with tea-towels from the smoko room. A good flogging for the little shit, they said. He squirmed under the assault but enjoyed the mutiny that was brewing not so deeply
within him. It would all keep. The reaction belongs/belonged outside the narrative. Revenge is a tale, not a plotline. Guilt will be their awakening, their burden.
Epiphany

This climate is not particularly suited to holy pilgrimages — thick suburban dewlap confuses the star-navigating astrologer. Eric the Red’s bronze plated astrolabe was soused in an ocean full of sedge-strands and a belly full of whiskey when he made his daring crossing of the lemon-sun sea-lips a thousand years back … while red-feathered scions died in their droves, all sand-blown in the Great Desert. An efficient railroad network is what’s really needed, with time-streaking comfy carriages to bless the blessed burden. Christopher Columbus, backed by a sexy Spanish Queen, had the right idea: soften the sun-worshipping natives with a blunderbuss full of buck-shot. On the other hand, a renouncement of faith would reduce the complications and expense. No, better still, pray to the weather god for a safe journey … slit a few goat throats and swallow some baboon’s blood. Ahhhhh, the sages arrive on the stroke of noon, the gods have answered their prayers.

Shuffle shuffle, scuff … ding dong dell, pussy’s in the well, who put him in? Little … chime chime … Tommy … the sound of cathedral bells at Christmas time.

“Glad you could make it, just about to start, come on in. Hang your jackets and hats over here.”

The bold brassknobbed hat stand greeted the fustian lice-blankets with a garish grin. Heavenly gargoyles.

Thomas could hear them bleat … pause … bleat … the rhythm of the jungle. It is definitely cruel to keep battery hens … they eat, sleep, digest crap … trampled acids eating into pitiless concrete. Cluck, cluck … time to set the cat amongst the birds. The revolution will wipe-out all trace of this
reactionary fervour. Don the red-headbands and off to war … long live the ashes of the Bastille.

WHEN JOHNNY COMES MARCHING HOME AGAIN

… harrah …

Kick the doors open with steel-capped booties and swing the truncheons vigorously … oh, you heathen housewives, fear the sword of Damacles as it watches you stuff your pudding faces with self-appraisal.

HOUSEWIVES GET BAD RECEPTION

Beg forgiveness for your sins before I unleash the terror of truth upon you: your existence is by chance, not design.

SHOCK! My god, who is this hooligan? That’s her son. Surely not? Wait until I tell my hubby about this. I think he looks rather cute.

Babble, babble you great bags of bloated pestilence.

Drip, drip … the kitchen tap unable to control its motions.

Embarrassment … blood pumping, blood pumped … pump … pump … blood rushing to all corners of the body … scarlet cheeks with a scarlet skirt.

Mrs Napoleon was very good at funerals … the wake had commenced … animals around the plastic dish.

Ashestoashes … boom boom ba boom, boom-ba-boom-ba-boom-boom ba boom … black and white ivory keys play a mournful little gigue.

Lower, lower … cedar-wood coffin, eh? Must have left a bit of cash.

Pious … salt-water godly tears … one does when one is bound to end up in cedar wood, what’s a funeral without mourners? Lover after, never before … sodden stiffies are better than talkative mobile flesh-pots.

Dust to dust … a chemical contradiction … the door has not shut … that is utter crap …

Five black arrows, all in a row,

THOMAS AT PATROCLOS’ WAKE:
THE CAUSE OF DEATH …
Jack and Jill went up the hill
To fetch a pail of water,
Jack fell down
And broke his Crown,
And Jill beat her breasts in
mourning, Thetis sending orders from Achilles’ bed in the milky-green
(ten days old) sea.
Locks of severed hair …
a fat wrapped corpse … oil and honey …
BEES IN JARS …
Buzzzzzzuuuuzzzzuuzza-titillate dead senses …
nine dogs plus four
horses is equal
to twelve boys plus Patroclus, which equals Thomas.
Pray for blustery burning breezes from the Asian mainland … The
Bosphorous gets a little savage with an easterly.
"Er, I would like you to meet my son, Thomas.” Quick, some excuse …
going to a fancy dress ball … having a good laugh, was always a bit of a
joker … help. Mrs Napoleon’s mind struggled infinitely within the space of a
second, too weak to cope with the pressure … bleat … bleat.
"Good afternoon ladies. I’m so glad you could make it. My mother is
very proud of the products … you’re going to make her rich … wiggly
rubber tubes.”
Obese … flappity flap, and covered in jewels … cleptomaniac … middle
class drop-out.
Thomas (to the obese dame): Ahhhhh, Lady Gwenhwyrfa, great to see
you … you randy side-saddle seducer. I must thank you for that wonderful
night we spent together under the moon-lit elm tree-leaves. You have such
sweet lips. French perfume? It was such a beautiful experience … real
natural like. Pity about Arthur and that chastity belt ... he's such a jealous bastard.

Disbelief ... embarrassment ... giggle, giggle, squirm. Quick, change the subject, draw their attention, thought Thomas's mother.

Writhe you fat bag, caress yourself with a pointed diamond.

“These dishes come with a ninety-nine year guarantee.”

Thomas left the fat bag (she stank of nervous-fluid) and seated himself next to a young woman (she had a red nose ... a cold no doubt).

“Hello, my name is Thomas Icarus Napoleon.”

Giggle ... giggle ... giggle.

“Do you have a cold?”

“No ..?”

“Red-nose.”

“Powder.”

Who says a leopard never changes its spots?

THREE WHITE LEOPARDS SAT UNDER NINE BLACK LEOPARDS

L-e-o-p-a-r-d ... leopard ... plural of leopards is leopards.

Brrrrrrrrrrrrmmmm ... woosh ... brake ... car racing past the window (Now curtains) ... screeeech, barely able to negotiate the corner. A thin lady with a fat face excuses herself ... big bladder.

This young lady has lovely tender skin ... it smells of mulligatawny ... myrrh.

There had been a look of distress on the girl's face when Thomas had singled her out, but this vanished as he chatted with her. He said such strange things, but his voice was soporific.

“You are my queen, together we will rule Hades. Down, down, down ... my loving Persephone, with you alone I share my kingdom of death. Spread your legs across the peak of Mount Olympus and swallow the virgins of the world.”
With this last sentence the girl became alert: he had said something rude, she thought.

“Crudeness” is but a set of social conventions, a state of mind.


She wanted to go for a walk … the garden was full of roses … yellow-white grafts leached by aphids … pother … pothery.

APICULTURAL CULTIVATION

Cute: straight from a soppy daytimemagazineshow.

True-to-life romancelustiness … not just a fleeting figure in the night … watch it … I’m the venom of love … one bite and your fate …

your goodness will seep into consecrated ground.

Thomas picked an ancient red rose and pushed it through her hair … stiff nipples.

Gigglin’gertie, just like in the books.

“You haven’t even asked my name, Thomas. I can call you THOMAS, can’t I?” (a sickly emphasis on the “can” and “Thomas”).

STRAWBERRY FIELDS

My god, I hope she’s not going to swoon on me. Oh, you heathen hussy, using the subtle Victorian approach: first names are symbolic of sexual desire in Dickens … imagine addressing Miss Havisham by her first name. Now, look at Estella, all that desire trapped in a stone heart, waiting to spill over the world.

“Sure, call me Thomas.”
“Well, thank you. You may call me Catherine-Anne.”
This is getting worse. She thinks she’s a queen, Catherine the Great.
Note the tone, the airy pronunciation of the “Cath” and “Anne.”
The Russian god Rod busily ate offerings of bread, honey, and cheese.
FATE.
“Well then Catherine-Anne, would you like to take a short walk to the
little museum... the little house... down the road. It’s private, a friend of mine
owns it, he’s a retired millionaire ... Communist. He’s got a lovely pressed-
flower collection.”

Thomas bowed and lifted her hands to his lips ... giggle, giggle ...
pump, pump.
“That would be great. Isn’t this fun.”
“Not ‘fun,’ just part of the Grand Design. We are tools of the cosmic
expanse, tools of a faceless god ... don’t believe it, it’s all random choice ...
that’s what priests confess at confession.”
“I’m a Protestant ... what’s the ‘cosmic expanse’?”
“Forget it ...”

STROPHE 1

CHORUS:  Cú Chulaim is very reckless, Ares ... dip him in water.

ANTISTROPHE 1
First I call on her sense of responsibility.

Strophe 2
We can all have a cup of tea ... apathy.

Antistrophe 2
After many bee stings her face and throat will swell ... choked in
sense.

COURT JESTER:  Look, everybody, Helen of Troy walks with our
guardian and friends. Beautiful ... lithe limbs peep from behind a
silken robe, golden hair hangs in locks around delicate shoulders.
Brittle bones, face of ebony, too precious to touch. Up the marble steps, through the corridor ... “Ancient History” reads the plaque. “Look,” said Thomas, pointing to a battered manuscript. Touching the glass case which protected the relic, Catherine-Anne asked, “What is it?” “Can’t you read it? It’s an early Latin copy of Homer’s *Odyssey.*” “The what?” Thomas frowned, “Pardon?” “What is Homer?” Thomas reeled back, Helen’s clothes had turned to barb-wire and her soft skin had peeled. Imagine breeding with it ... genetical retardation ... oceans of confused placental jelly floating through seas of emptiness. Phew Gog ... thicker thick ... and her with her electric rollers-cum-vibrators wriggling round the fibres of her ready rolled tobacco ... radiating shafts of broken glass ... thicky wicky sticky mange ... boom boom ... hubby playing death drums in an early grave. Ga, ga: the kids ... throw King Billy’s balls at dear old dad ... boot the doggy’s brains in despite the brand-new flea collar, oh woy, oh woy. The hamburgers would be garnished with parsley, home grown homely green flecks of healthy parsley ... dog shit fertilizer tastes gritty on a starved palate.

**THE FAMILY: A MERRY TRINITY**

**DAUGHTER, MOTHER, FATHER.**

**MOTHER:** Stick the needles through the woolen loops and suck measles through the eyes, my mother’s old recipe for garlic bread. **VAMPIRE.**

**FATHER:** I own a truck ... I carry scrap metal and the wheels go a sloop a sloop on a full loaded stomach ... want a cig? **PIG.**

**DAUGHTER:** What’s a television? **PITIFUL.**

Thomas walked home without saying another word.
Thomas spent the rest of the afternoon in his room. It wasn’t worth abusing the visitors, they were too ignorant to appreciate it … Little Jack Horner, sat in the corner … disillusionment … wa, wa, wa … big baby bawling in his crib, all these nasty visitors … sore head … a slap from Uncle Hymen … a slop of hyssop soothes the Jewish nerves … what a good boy am I.

Brrrrrrrrrrrrrrmmmmmmmscreeeechhhybangothumpdamnthing … clump, clump …

“Hello dear, have a nice day at the office?” KING CLICHÉ! Oh God, he’s home. The crap rolls smoothly off his slanderous tongue. “You’ll have to speak to the boy, he was terribly rude to the guests this afternoon.”

THE BOY … THE BOY … what the hell is she talking about? I’m twenty years old … old as Time … fresh baby bunting … the baby spies a pot, a big pot which he must have … crawl-o-crawl … run, help THE BOY … pull, make matters worse … pot on head, baby dead.

“Thomas, get down here!”

Get stuffed. Hope you had a good day selling Life Insurance: the Death of a Salesman.

Thomas sat down beside his father.

Bob Napoleon sucked at his jowls … Jonah’s jowls scraped the blue-whale’s mouth with waves of plankton substitute. The tobacco blistered in the bowl of his spit-fat pipe. It was time for the trial … morose defender … Bob banged the weighty maul. He wasn’t sure if his son was an atheist or an agnostic, but one way or another he certainly wasn’t normal.

Get out there, bash their bleedin’ heads in. Tackle him, tackle him … kick him … leave school and sell insurance … make lots of money and marry a good cook … it’s normal to get a bit on the side … look after yourself and nobody else.
BOB’S SON: THE SCORPION … you do everythin’ for them and what do they give you in return? Poison, that’s what they give yu’, sting yu’ when your back’s turned.

HANG THE JUDGE

So it came to pass, baptism in a mother’s tears and Father’s fire … afloat amongst the bull-rushes in a pitch-bound mummy brig, the rigging pulled by the wind to the east, to the west … “What a queer fellow is he.”

And the street lights still chew electricity despite the cheapness of gas which is drawn from mother earth pumping its energy in rhythmic thrusts, and don’t forget the oversupply of candles, what is needed is a reliable sort of bloke who can change the star-brightless candles, but he will need a horse to carry the ladder.

Cú Chulaim was the son of Lug; Fergus was strong as seven hundred men and wielded a sword as long as a rainbow.

Herod sent the wise-men to worship for him … Thomas saw Herod everywhere.
The Mind Amorphous

Thomas wrote and re-wrote his name on the opening page of his notebook: Thomas, notebook 101. Thomas’s collection of quick-minute-thoughts was becoming quite comprehensive. These notes were usually scribbled down during these old moments between lectures at university — observation, thought, recollection, prediction, and so on.

Notebook 101 — Bloomsday

Page 1: For Henry whose lone sojourn in a concrete garter-box isolates him from the trivial wonders of day to day lifelessness.

Bloomsday Book.

A line for future use: sun dripping phantasmically across the azure blotched landscape.

Life-exigious.
What is fantasy?
Ans: A logical extension of logic.
— fantasy embodies reality 0 reality embodies the stuff of fantasy —

Page 2: all fantasy is allegorical, whether through intention or not, e.g. Steerpike — the Hitler image, Nazism / probably crap, but seems possible.

“Wind in the Willows”
“Alison in Wonderland”
“Gulliver’s Travels” etcetcetcetc.
Page 3: The image or symbol of the rainbow — at one end reality, at the other fantasy — yet the colours intermingle and form each other, self-productive — fantasy-reality-reality-fantasy-fantasy-reality.


— stained-glass window — light-beams from plated colour intermingling with the soft spread of the afternoon sun: reality running into fantasy.

— images / archetypes / dreams / Calvino’s suit of armour
— what is which?

Page 4: muslin — a sweetly coloured print dress — red, orange, yellow against the darkening sky — the loss of soft afternoon rays — mottled glass.

— the key to life is colour.
— fantasy is Descartes’ true perfection.
— real writers glimpse true glimpses directly from life? Ref Keats.
— Hello, how are you today?

Page 5: The colour of an umbrella / raincoats out.
— another rainbow — “The Pot of Gold.”
— Taking shelter from a horrendous downpour — next to the billboards.

—

EAST MEETS WEST

STUDENT UNION — JOIN NOW!!

BARTOK RECITAL
Page 6: — but the sun is shifting above the rain — rivulets of light creasing through the crevices and wisps of cloud-downing … a sea of phosphorescence and a diamond playground.
— high in the sky.
— time running into more time

EXIT

Page 7: Time, time go away
back to back all the way.
— Shakespeare and his time-obsessed sonnets:

“Yet, do thy worst, old Time: despite thy wrong,
My love shall in my verse ever live young.”

“And all in war with Time for love of you,
As he takes from you, I engraft you new.”

And such is a couple of couplets.

Page 8: Red-fire ablaze in trees of flame, burning furiously against the rain. Drizzle-down and Buck Mulligan gazes across the coasted curve of Dublin Bay — and the White Boys and the torn sinews all around the county Mayo.

See next page —

Page 9: — in my Buffalo-less notebooks: notes taken in the quick flash of five minutes —

“Pluck the keen teeth from the fierce tiger’s jaws,
And burn the long-lived Phoenix in her blood”
— but I’m not a Romantic.
— but not in an Irish university — my great great grandfather went to one I should say ... possibly.
— And Aquinas in all the stone-hearts of learning.

VOTING

— the dreg-washed

Page 10: gutter flowing with the sacred streaks of spring-flame.
Hardy’s dairy maids in beds of thistle-down.
— the nerves of the tempest.

THE TEMPEST

— ye cannot discover that which rises from the flow of passion in one writer’s veins.
— Mann: Walpurgis and Snow.
— Snow on the Rainbow.
— A SPIRAL NOTEBOOK —

Page 11: — is what I now have in hand — scribbling meaningless symbols — all fantasy.

FASHION QUEEN

SCHOOL OF LOGIC

SCHOOL OF NOTHING
Page 12: — and thus spoke the rain, all ended now — a dagger in thy brolly.
— what of umbrellas in literature?
— seated in the blight-infected stone corridors of endless learning.
— EXIT glowing red.

Page 13: — observations of friendly (or otherwise) passers-by:
(a) Navy-white frocked and slithered in a stockinged face, made-up green fabric.
(b) Bell-topped in pure white, wired hair, sandal-stalking.
(c) Bun-nut, menopausal grey-down, lengthed misery.
(d) High-stride, straight blue-legged, straightened muscle strands.

Page 14: Question and Answer:
— What are you doing?
— Taking notes for an original novel ... well, not exactly a novel — a whole old-new literary form, starting where others have already begun.
— Ye?
— Yeee e e e e e e e e e e ... 
— Good luck!
— Thanks.

Page 15: Two apair a-passing in a sweet lovey-dovey couplet of lovingness — swans in the air.
— wet water-bound ground.
— watery brain.
— the fine game of cricket.

Page 16: — order a book at the bookshop.
— brisk walk progressing.
— What?
— “Chamber Music”
— Not in stock.
— Oh ... are you sure, I know where every book in this shop is located
— I think you’ll find the one in question is just down by your feet.
— Oh, yes, sorry. Very astute of you. Hhhmm, yes. There we go. What
are you doing?
— Recording your conversation.

Page 17: — Is that allowed?
— Why shouldn’t it be?
— Well, I suppose it’s alright if you use no names, make it anonymous-like ...
but I can’t say I like it.
— Do you think my shoulders are slightly hunched? From work you
see.
— They look perfectly alright to me.
— Good. It’s a bit of a complex with me I’m afraid.
— Oh, I see. There you go, two dollars ninety-five.
— Thank you.

Page 18: — That was a successful exchange of repetitions: “me,” “like,”
“see,” and “I.”
— the trendies and progressives — the dialectic and the rest of the
Hegel bullshit can be brought in here.
— a swiftly executed bicycle dash: good for the health.
Joyce and Bloom (and, possibly later, Stephen) are / were / will be /
Everyman, whereas I am Noman.
Page 19: — Away, away, away, from rigidity of style. A writer should never be tied down to anti-spontaneity — such as in “Oxen of the Sun.”
— Shem and Shaun the gingerbreadmen
— A Wakian Complex: paranoid over the abuse made by critics.
— Critic-making in universities. Tea for two. Failed writers.
— The sky again bluing.

Page 20: — The human psyche is like one of the planets in the solar system, or a solar system in a galaxy, etc. Fixed in a spiral orbit; an orbit vulnerable to external forces but with its guiding principles unchanging.
— Johannes Kepler.

THE END IS NIGH.

Motherland England — for Henry. Marlborough showed old Louis XIV at Blenheim, Ramillies, Oudenaarde, Malplaquet.

— being hassled by a clutch of ugly teenage girls. Ignore them.
— You’re one of those student fellows, aren’t you?
— No.
— We know you are.
— Good.
— You think you’re smart, don’t you? A freckled fatness slipped in funneled pants.
— Have you ever heard of an I.Q. Test? So quoth I.
— Yeah, I got 95%. Her royal fatness spaketh.

Page 23: — Percent, eh?
— Yeah. I suppose you got no percent. Four buckets dribbling with giggles.
   — They are all pulling faces as I write.
   — What are you writing?
   — Material for a psychological paper.
Drone, drone, drone.
D.N.A. — Ha, ha, ha.

Page 24: Mimsy-minds are reflected through Christ and fire-giving Prometheus, and are undone in theocratic, aristocratic, and democratic, with the final given over to chaotic resolution, else known as “sin.”
   — “Robinson Crusoe” and “Milligan Stew” represent the progressive development of hero-image: a process of building upon the previously created.
   — and, in any case, all writers write about the same thing.
   — what is, what must be, and what always was.

Page 25: This is called the “rise” and “fall”: the ladder in the historic apple tree.
   — columns of light and pillars of salt all point to ourselves.
   — thought is an irrational process — writers have got it all wrong.

Thomas filed notebook 101 in the “Personal” section of his library. Rows and rows of books spanned across the walls …
Shelf upon shelf upon shelf, books catalogued from A to Z …
… I could do with a drink … … A for Aesop
ouch, bloody in-grown toenail
the frog with the big croak was crushed …

that girl at the recital

yum, yum … under foot by the lion … the other day

B for Blake

red bicycles, have to use that

orange juice is full of vitamin c, to pee to pee … bursting for a piss,

scrunch

the eyes 

don’t feel like getting up … like in bed when

all is breezy beyond the covers, tired and warm

innocence

and experience 

Lewis Carrol, screwing-like and experience, solidly.

cross the legs

Archaic language

must put down “slittle slats” innocence as

victim for

experience, yes, innocence as the innocent victim of screwing and

use “blood brimful” Going to have to go …

up, up, and away … going, quick, fifteen steps …

uhm … now, move quickly … da, da, da, da, da …

right, now, medium pace …

before ten … 1 2 flaccid flesh a-dangling … 3 4 5 …

ahhhhhhhhhhhhh

5678 … shake, shake, shake … 9.5 9.75 … no fractions, all decimal …

finite 10

15 back again, down upon your seat now, cdefghijklmn …

m or M, as it should be, M for Marlowe C for Coleridge

she looked like an Arabian maiden

“Dr. Faustus”

Immigrants all around the station,
with dulcimers …

what was it? On the edge of my mind … need a point of reference … for sale,
chocolate, the dog … kennel, moo, music, shit …

ah, Henry.

Tell the tale for all posterity — write it down, a sacred journal
saw “Dr. Faustus” with good old Henry last year — his mind was like
Pissed, pissed, pissed
cream-puff mountains and
crepe-desserts …

Yes, I wrote a short story about it — somewhere … filed …

Thomas rummaged through a number of files before he found the story:

“The Exile.” He read:

The Exile

I killed a man once upon a time. And he was dead. It could have been an accident but it wasn’t. I don’t think. Anyway, it wasn’t worth it. For a French harlot when the frontline had moved a hundred miles further during the night. Or maybe the week. It doesn’t really matter any more, and I suppose it didn’t really matter then. The words come when they want to now, although I can still speak to my friend Thomas. Thomas and Hector and the poetry. He appreciates it. But there’s nothing to feel sorry about because I can’t feel it most of the time. I pat the bottle with my grizzled hand. And I have a dog, a yellow mongrel which pisses on the wall so the whole place stinks like the Phlegethon when it’s full of escaping bodies. That’s not true, they don’t get far. I’m a romantic I suppose. And then Thomas is always on about the Renaissance and the importance of the classic. Unclassics. Un-Renaissance. Un-Henry. And then I swear a lot,
especially to the neighbours who don’t like my front garden in its weeded
glory. Full-weeded. Golden clutches. I can still snatch a few words. And
images. I’ve forgotten about symbols, but I also knew about those, and that’s
a fact. My bed is black, the colour of my boots. I haven’t got any
underclothes although I can well afford them. Greened fields, all grassy
green. Snatching glimpses, glimpsed yellow. With the blue sky.
Bluuuuuuuuuuuuede sky. Skying. But that was in England. They say
Australia is a hard country. They said, but I’ve had to make it so. I used to
have a few ex-patriot friends but they’ve all long since gone. Peter was
buried with sepulchral grace, and Thomas came along for the show. There
were some of us there. But Thomas is coming around, or should I say across,
today and we are going to see a production of Dr. Faustus, an English
production. I shall grow weary with drink. Tugged-down batton-lids
scooping the swimming strokes of redness. And the bus shall be full of
people who will look at me and sigh. Some will feel sorry, some will despise,
and some will just sigh for the hell of it. My story is much the same as a
thousand others, it’s been done before. The bookshops will zip past and
Thomas will drool at the smoothness of the hard-covers. My glands have
dried and I can’t drool. My boots are nearly forty-years old, but of course I
only wear them on special occasions. I shall have them with me when the
people on the bus grope at me. My bottle in the brown paper bag. I like the
bag, it makes people wonder. Especially the scrunched neck, the fluted skirt,
and the stretched lip. The opening of a spring rose. Thomas got his
fascination for pillar boxes from me. I am an immortal. And the squeaky
seats. In the bus. The new buses whirrrrrr along. I don’t remember the old
ones. Knights and silk-white steeds up to their necks in putrefaction. On its
eccentric orbit. And Hyacinth spread roots through the life-giving earth and
grew tall. Taller. The bus step is always tricky, especially when one is
superbly smashed. Thomas will help me, if he’s not pissed as well. I
sometimes wonder if I haven’t been a bad influence on the boy. Sometimes
the bus driver offers … tentatively … and then I fall on my face. I pissed on the rubbery surface once. That’s so you don’t slip, but I don’t think all busses have it. Only those that whirrrr along the road. Roman road-makers. In bitumen. Asphalt: a black thread spinning through … mountain’s eyes. Others will watch you fall without a word. Decent chaps, don’t beat around the bush. The two-faced bastards get right up my my back. At the theatre door. Plush velvet for the English.

Henry jumped up and applauded the actors in the middle of a speech by Faustus. At half-time he dropped his bottle of red on the floor. It broke silently within its wrappings. The redness was just discernible beneath the dim-lighting as it stretched out through the tissues of carpet. Sucking hungrily. He rubbed at the growing stain with his boots, his face matching the hue of the wine. Red carpet outside, white carpet within. Nobody took much notice.

I suppose it was the angle, its state of inclination on impact. Just touched a thin spot. They’re usually fairly reliable bottles, especially on the bottom where the cooling glass seems to settle in a thick curve. Something like honey I should imagine, glass when it’s hot.

(Thomas thought to himself as he read the story: But Henry’s not very mathematical.)
Caught in the half-drowse between sleep and waking, dreaming and consciousness. It is cold, I can feel the thermometer hit rock bottom. Need a shot of whiskey — it will have to wait. I’ll pretend I’m under siege — protected, safe and secure. Nothing quite like whiskey paste — bread and whiskey rinsed between the teeth — my secret, my idiosyncrasy. I should go and see Henry — I’ve been neglecting him … no, I don’t feel like going today … maybe tomorrow. Touch of indigestion — truculent guts, warm bed. Reminds me of a lecture last term — politics, guest speaker. A “Man of Gravity” the slogan had read. A “Man of Action.” He was a red necked politician — a mouth without a head. The rolling hand movements — timed to perfection, straight from the belly. A deep, booming voice which mumbled nauseatingly at the ear, grinding the bones. Social reform was his platform, although the lecture was supposedly apolitical. And the comparison — red neck and the teacher (the one with the nervous arms and twitching lip). “Come down and have a cup of coffee,” he’d said. Everybody knows that coffee shops are the soul of radicalism. Peter, an associate, spent the whole time staring up a German girl’s dress — he was very fond of white legs and blue knickers. She’s a health freak — into various sports and vegetarian food. What a waste of time. I live in a country of health addicts who all die of heart attacks while taking their early morning jog around the block (despite the risk of being mugged, attacked by rabarous dogs, stubbing toes, or missing the breakfast show on the television). Tradition is to blame — the Olympic Games — austere Spartans slapping each other to death. Imagine working during vacation. Was there a Tojan war? The Hittites have been subjected to increasing scrutiny. Was Helen good in bed? Was there contact between the Egyptians and Trojans? Benozzo Gozzoli —
Aristotle … I’ve an uncle who looks just like that — long beard, concerned eyes. He’s the family clown. Dad = positive, Uncle = negative: questionable conclusion. My uncle is very poor. Poverty is a myth according to knowledgeable sources. There are numerous slums — although they are given a good coat of paint every so often. The Aboriginals are ignored — leave them in their Dream Time and give them a bottle of booze, experts say — fuck the experts. Face to face with a pure, intricate, pragmatic culture — kick a dog when it’s down. So tell me Muses, in plain English (Dada), who the chief men and kings of the Danaans were, for we are totally blind and unable to recognise or recollect who they may have been. Leitos and Peneleos, leaders of the Boeotians … oral composition … a double Dutch answer. Plenty of markets in Europe, especially Italy and Greece. Have to give the vegetables a good clean — in boiled water. Who wants to catch some cultured disease? Anyway, memories of bomb shelters and the World Cup are the dominant features, the true culture. Memories from childhood — memories never change, only the interpretation of them does. A fairly healthy child, though very reserved. Christ that bloody dream just won’t leave me alone. Diversion therapy. Fancy dreaming such a thing — a soldier back from war, thirty years later, swimming in guilt. Henry had committed a crime — it is a questionable honour being burdened with another’s guilt. An art of exogamy. Self exoneration, we all do it. Confession was offered as a reprieve by God — he felt a little guilty at making us all so miserable by inflicting minds upon us, giving us a conscience. Get it off your chest. I mean everybody has those little secrets which turn into complexes. Masturbation can be a display of guilt. After all, he had killed the girl’s husband, he was about seventy, she was just twenty. It was an accident in truth — a loaded gun — but there was no regret so the end result was undoubtedly a contravention of the Commandments. Mrs Hubbel dabbled in High Church for a while — she doesn’t talk about it much, religion embarrasses her. He married the girl, she died young. He is a lonely bard now, without family or
true home. How many days to “Bloomsday”? Across the sea-lanes, the Roaring Forties, the thriving spice trade, the Banksia, convicts, and prisons: giant fences. Macbeth with the tangled hair of wild thorns and barbed wire, a soft undercoat of velvet purple embellished with the noble crest of ambition. I remember my first kiss — it was Mrs Hubbel, months ago ... on a bus, talking about her old man ... gently parted lips and a protruding sponge dripping tastebuds over my clean linen. Macbeth is a favourite play — Lady Macbeth’s tenderness alludes — “Out, damned spot! Out I say.” Is life wasted in all circumstances? — religion’s validity ... hedonism is the greatest source of guilt. That’s the strangest thing — why should I be acting the part of Henry? Henry wasn’t there. I was there in his place. Thank God I’m my own man, attached to nobody but myself. Time I found my cultural roots.

THE DREAM: A FORUM

(Sunset — broken gyres of yellow, a plain, common sunset. The park (that ubiquitous symbol) is cold, bare, and isolated. Thomas sits alone, by a temperamental fire. He is an old man — dressed in a greatcoat, upon which are two medals. One of these is

UNICORN:  But ahhhh, that’s not the point.
WILLIAM:  It was manslaughter. In any case, what right have you to judge me?
UNICORN:  You were judging yourself.
WILLIAM:  Was I a ruthless killer in my previous lives?
UNICORN:  Not rally — a thief, traitor, and generally undesirable person in a number of case but never a murderer. Actually, you have led a very diversified existence. In one manifestation you had an unbelievable Oedipus Complex.
WILLIAM: But that entails murder.

UNICORN: Not in that case. It was perfectly legitimate. You were a victim of foul play. Occasionally some of the demons slip by God’s guard and rise to the earth to wreak whatever malevolence they can — this is what happened to you.

(Pause.)

UNICORN: Amongst other things you were a Greek hoplite at Marathon, one of the knights who searched for the Grail, and even an alchemist — though you never succeeded in transmutating lead to gold.

WILLIAM: But please tell me why that wretched chimney sweep is sent to plague me year after year.

UNICORN: Oh him … a funny case I must say. Saw the whole business, didn’t he? Watching through the window. Oh, incidentally, how is Catherine? Was she worth the effort?

WILLIAM: She has lost her beauty.

UNICORN: I’m sorry to hear that.

WILLIAM: They’re plotting to get rid of me. I can feel it. She’s in cahoots with that bastard and my sickly daughter.

UNICORN: Which bastard?

WILLIAM: The chimney sweep.

UNICORN: He’s a bastard, is he?

WILLIAM: How would I know?

UNICORN: I can already see your basic problem.

WILLIAM (violently): Leave me alone! Get back into my head. I could drown you with a few swigs of whiskey!

UNICORN: Your temper is continually betraying you.

WILLIAM: I have a strong grip on my temper.

UNICORN: Well, that’s a start. Let’s try some word association.
WILLIAM:   Piss-off.
UNICORN:   Surrealism.
WILLIAM:   Bullshit.
UNICORN:   Truth.
WILLIAM:   Crap.
UNICORN:   Rorschach.
WILLIAM:   Smudges.

UNICORN (with flamboyance):  Congratulations. For three indecisive answers you have won a cupie doll.
WILLIAM:   I can’t see any doll.
UNICORN:   Well of course not. You haven’t paid the management yet.

(William gets up and lunges towards the figure, screaming “Foreigner.”
There is another crash of thunder. Blackout.)

CURTAIN
The Dream

The Chimney Sweep

(A one act play for four players and an audience).

Characters

ANDRE: An old man.
CATHERINE: His wife.
MARY: His daughter. She is about thirty and single.
A SALESMAN: About thirty and single.

SCENE ONE:

(The room is tidy. It has a dresser, a dining table, and a comfy-chair — all but the latter are covered with white sheets. The chair is at the back of the stage, facing the audience, and just to the left of an open fireplace. ANDRE is sitting in this chair. He is dressed in a dirty army greatcoat. On his chest are his service medals — two. He is drinking whiskey.

The stage is black.

A spotlight on ANDRE.

Enter CATHERINE and MARY through a side door, quietly chatting to each other. They are wearing light summer dresses.

The women stand beside ANDRE — in front of the unlit fireplace.)
ANDRE (with anger, still facing the audience): You’re taking the warmth away from me. You’re blocking the warmth. It can’t get through you, it can’t escape.

(Silence.)

ANDRE (pointing to the audience): Now I’m cold and it’s your fault. Somebody’s got to take responsibility. The facts can’t be ignored.

(Pause.)

ANDRE (almost to himself): We must be heading for another ice age. You can’t escape the past.

CATHERINE (suddenly, and appearing not to have heard ANDRE): Andre, you’re going to have to move.

ANDRE (angrily): Not this year. I’m not going to move.

CATHERINE: He’ll be here soon.

ANDRE: I’m not moving.

MARY (sharply): Come on, move.

ANDRE (adamant): No. This is my house and I’m staying put.

MARY: Senile old fool. His brain’s going watery.

CATHERINE (weakly): Come on dear …

MARY: He should have been put away years ago. He lives in his own little make-believe world.

ANDRE (pointing at the audience): Last time I moved you took away my chair.

CATHERINE: Nobody took away your chair, dear.

ANDRE: They did.

MARY (sighing): He’s at it again.

ANDRE (turning to MARY): You moved my chair! You moved my chair! You bitch!

MARY: Pathetic.

ANDRE: You put it in the shed when I went on holidays!
MARY (to CATHERINE): He’s mad, listen to him.

(Before CATHERINE can answer ANDRE knocks his tumbler of whiskey from the arm of the chair.)

CATHERINE (wiping at the whiskey stain with the hem of her dress): Now look what you’ve done! I’ll never get that out. And I’ve run out of detergent. (Getting up, almost frantically) I’ll have to go next door and borrow some.

(She rushes out through the side door.)

MARY: You’ve done it again. You’re a trouble maker.

ANDRE (laughing): She’s mad. A spot of dirt and she’s off.

(Spotlight on ANDRE, rest of stage blacked out.)

ANDRE: I’m not moving this year. That chimney sweep thinks he owns the place. Comes in here and takes over. It’s madness.

(Pause.)

ANDRE: And he’s a Frenchman.

(Pause.)

ANDRE: The French have no idea what life is all about. They live in an unreal world. The French are an absurd people.

(Pause.)

ANDRE: I know that I’m here, because it is cold. Somebody is blocking the fire.

(He picks up his glass which is still on the floor and pours himself another whiskey from a bottle that sits on the side of the chair farthest from the fireplace.)
ANDRE: I’ve seen life. I fought in France during the last war. And I saw death and destruction …

(He looks cautiously around. Apparently, he sees nothing and jumps up from his chair, followed by the spotlight. He begins to sing to the tune of “The Little Brown Jug.”)

ANDRE (singing): The Slavish terror that all men have,
And thoughts of Hell to fear
Is unto us a laughing stock,
We give it no ear.

Which we enjoy with sweet content
A short life and a merry
Is all the heaven that we expect,
Let’s drink off our Canary.

The fellow-creature which sits next
Is more delight to me
Than any that I else can find
For that she’s always free.

(Hearing something he rushes back to his seat. Blackout. Spotlight on MARY, who has moved towards the front of the stage, but is still in front of the fireplace.)

MARY (annoyed): This room is sweltering. I can hardly breathe. The smoke is getting heavier. The sooner that chimney sweep gets here the better.

(There is a short silence as MARY looks cautiously around. Satisfied that she is alone she begins to speak.)
MARY (solemnly, holding her belly): Deep within my body is an unborn spirit, crying to be let out. It is faceless and lost. Its future is doomed. Its future is my future.

(Silence. Then a sudden change. She becomes unpredictable, almost insane.)

MARY: And now I have no father. My father who has seen life as life is. He fought in the war and saw death and destruction. He saw love and hatred together. I have lost my anchor.

(The whole room is suddenly bathed in a hellish redness. ANDRE is still in his chair but is covered with a white sheet.)

MARY (pacing back and forth between the front of the stage and the fireplace):

The frayed edges of land,
A Hellish black land,
Are tugging at my soul.

(MARY begins singing, to the tune of, “The Little Brown Jug.”)

And will’a not come again?
And will’a not come again?
No, no, he is dead;
Go to thy deathbed;
He never will come again.
His beard was as white as snow,
All flaxen was his poll.
He is gone, he is gone,
And we cast a way moan.
God’a’mercy on his soul!

(Silence.)

MARY (rubbing her palms): There, now it is done.
(Blackout. The stage is lit with a weak yellowish light. ANDRE is no longer covered with the white sheet and is facing the audience. MARY is in front of the fire.)

ANDRE: You’re not my daughter, you’re your mother’s child, I disown you.
MARY: It’s warm in here.
ANDRE: It’s getting colder.
MARY: My father died in a drain. It was a terrible death — drowned in the sewerage.
ANDRE: I had a daughter once but she was burnt to death.
MARY: He just got up and left his chair one day.
ANDRE: She burnt like kindling wood.
MARY: His lips were a kind of soggy blue.
ANDRE: She was like a Joan of Arc to me.
MARY: If only he’d talked to me about it.
ANDRE: She didn’t need cremating.
MARY: Nature is a vicious thing.
ANDRE: I should never have gone on that holiday. After that everything started to go wrong.

(CATHERINE returns with a bucket and sponge and begins working at the whiskey stain.)

MARY: You’ll have to move him yourself mum, I’ve tried everything.

(Blackout.)

SCENE TWO:

(The same room. The furniture is still covered with white sheets. The only difference is that ANDRE’s chair is missing.)
The same reddish light.
The action begins with MARY entering the room dressed as a prostitute
— stockings, etc. She lies on the table, waiting.

CATHARINE enters, pushing ANDRE in a wheel chair. CATHARINE is
dressed as a brothel Madame. ANDRE is wearing the same old army
greatcoat.)

CATHARINE:  Come on in. It will do you the world of good.
ANDRE:  It’s too cold in here.
CATHARINE:  Nonsense.
ANDRE:  And I can’t see properly, it’s too dull.
CATHARINE:  I’ll take you to Rose, she’ll soon have you warm. (She
   laughs.)

(CATHARINE wheels ANDRE over to where his chair has been and leaves him
there — facing the audience. She then walks over to the table — also to the left
of the fireplace.)

CATHARINE:  Rose, I’ve brought you a man.
MARY:  Good, I need a man.
CATHARINE:  You’ll have to go to him, he’s in a wheel chair.
MARY:  Where is he?
CATHARINE:  Next to the fire.
MARY:  But the chimney sweep will be here shortly.
CATHARINE (lightly):  Then you had better make it a quick job then.

(CATHERINE leaves. MARY walks over to ANDRE and stands in front of the
fire.)

MARY:  The name’s Mary but you can call me Rose of Butterfly — my
   working names.

(There is a silence as ANDRE ignores her.)
The Chimney Sweep

ACT 1

(The room is scrupulously clean — with the exception of a shabby old arm chair and its owner, WILLIAM, who is seated by the open fire-place. He is dressed in an army great-coat, his service medal pinned to the lapel. There are two others in the room — MARY, WILLIAM’s daughter, and CATHERINE, his wife. CATHERINE is a dull, uninspired person — WILLIAM had only married her because she was pregnant. She is obsessed with cleanliness. MARY is a thirty-three year old virgin. She has been repulsed by post-Second World War decadence — she prides herself on her strict moral values. As a member of a local church group she is able to help those who are morally corrupt. The two women are in high spirits — they are covering the furniture with white sheets, tackling this task with noticeable alacrity. WILLIAM, on the other hand, looks grim and depressed — he is grudgingly slurping at a tumbler of thick malt whiskey. The room is bathed in a yellowy light — the whiteness of the sheets is muffled, the resulting hue is nauseating.)

CATHERINE: William dear, you’re going to have to move sooner or later.
WILLIAM: This year I’m staying put, as firm as concrete.
MARY: You’re being stubborn again daddy.
WILLIAM: I’m not moving.
CATHERINE (jocularly): Well then, we’ll just have to wrap you up with that smelly old chair, won’t we?
WILLIAM: You won’t touch my chair. This is mine. You’re not taking this off me.
CATHERINE: Who said anything about taking your chair?
WILLIAM: You put it in the shed when I went on holidays.
CATHERINE: And when you asked for it I had it put back, by the fire, just where you like it.
WILLIAM: I went and got it myself.

(Pause.)

It’s always the bloody same. Pathetic, that’s what you are, pathetic. It’s like some bizarre ritual … (He grumbles with disgust.)

(CATHERINE and MARY go to cover WILLIAM and his chair with one of their ominous white sheets. WILLIAM growls, waving his hands in protest, spilling his whiskey.)

Get out of it! Now look what you’ve gone and done! Just leave me alone. Let me be for God’s sake!

CATHERINE (on her hands and knees, wiping at the stain on the floor with her hanky): You’ve stained the carpet — I’ll never get it clean. Why can’t you behave for once? As clumsy as a bear. I’ll have to go next door and borrow some detergent. I used the last of mine cleaning the tea-stains on the coffee table. (She frowns at WILLIAM and then leaves the room.)

WILLIAM: It’s the bloody chimney sweep’s fault. Every year it’s the same. Upsets the whole household.

(Pause.)

Why does he come? I certainly don’t invite him. (He turns to MARY who is straightening the sheet on the lounge.) It’s your bloody mother’s doing, that’s what it is — one speck of dust and she’s a wreck. Fancy getting a chimney cleaned every year. If she was younger I would have thought … (He shakes his head and slurps at his whiskey.)

(Pause.)
He’s a Frenchman, a bloody Frenchman. Same on every year. Same old Frog.

(Pause.)

Nobody listens to me. I’m the man of the house … the man of the house! Smithy’s gone … I’m the only one left … surrounded by neurotics.

(Pause.)

What has happened to tradition? Can’t trust the French. I remember my first night on the ship, that’s the ship to Africa. The sea was rising and falling like the ebb and flow of the seasons. Back and forth, up and down.

(Pause.)

They fancy themselves as great lovers — along with the Eyties. Sycophantic bastards. Their women aren’t too bad. (He laughs to himself and smiles.)

MARY (apparently shocked): Father! You’re forgetting yourself again.

WILLIAM: No I’m not.

MARY: You’re in mixed company.

WILLIAM: You! Mixed company! You’re no woman. If you saw a man naked …

MARY (cutting her father short): Dad! (She blushes and busies herself arranging her hair.)

WILLIAM: He’s a Catholic at that. What about the Edict of Nantes? What did they do? They revoked it, that’s what they did. Can’t be trusted.

(Pause.)

Champagne and brandy … I’ll give them that. Always pay respect where it is due.
(Pause.)

Only a Catholic would think of Indulgences.

(Pause.)

Christ was a Jew in any case. There was a Jew in my regiment. Not too bad a fellow.

(Pause.)

It’s cold in here. Why isn’t the fire burning?

MARY: The chimney sweep will be here soon.

WILLIAM: There’s nothing like a roaring fire … tufts of flame flickering … smoke wafting … through the clouds … just like a camp fire.

MARY: You do go on. Just like a Romantic.

WILLIAM: You live in a warm climate, you never feel the cold.

MARY: I am thick skinned.

WILLIAM: Yes.

MARY: I take it all in my stride.

WILLIAM: All in your stride.

MARY: It’s my strength of character.

WILLIAM: Strength of character.

MARY: Fortitude … you must have fortitude.

WILLIAM: You have a lot of fortitude.

MARY: I order my own life, providence has no hold on me.

WILLIAM: Self-control.

MARY: Moral values.

WILLIAM: I’m still cold.

MARY: You’re a parasite.

WILLIAM: A cold parasite.

MARY: Religion opens the eyes, it allows you to make choice. You have chosen the wrong path.
WILLIAM: I’m a victim of Providence.
MARY: I chose my own path.
WILLIAM: Religion can be very hypocritical.
MARY: You are self-obsessed. What have you ever done for anybody else? Haven’t you heard of charity and benevolence?
WILLIAM: I fought for my country.
MARY: It’s not you personally, it’s what you represent …
WILLIAM: What?
MARY: You wouldn’t understand — you are too narrow minded.
WILLIAM: He’s still a Frenchman, nothing will change that.
MARY: If you had died for your country that would have been different.
It would have shown your sincerity.
WILLIAM: And a Catholic.
MARY: You were drafted. Now, if you had volunteered …
WILLIAM: It is usually quite warm along the Riviera.
MARY: It’s a question of conviction.
WILLIAM: In summer that is.
MARY: Devotion to a cause.
WILLIAM: Making love by the fire.
MARY: Purity of soul.
WILLIAM: Now I’ll get chill-blanes … bastard.
MARY: I don’t drink, smoke, or … *(she blushes)* … indulge.
WILLIAM: Transubstantiation.
MARY: Only at Communion. Mind you, it is good for men to have a small drink after dinner. A pipe looks very distinguished.
WILLIAM *(working the toe of his shoe)*: Bloody rheumatism …
MARY: A little wine maybe … *(She is sitting on the snow-white lounge — contemplating.)*
WILLIAM: These shoes are too tight.
*(Pause.)*
Could be arthritis I suppose.

(Pause.)

Aggravated by the cold.

(Pause.)

But I’m no doctor.

(CATHERINE enters.)

CATHERINE: I didn’t need to go next door, found some in the cupboard ... a stroke of luck I’d say.

WILLIAM (speaking to CATHERINE who has begun to clean the floor): Why did you call the police?

CATHERINE: It was for your own good dear.

(Pause.)

You could have died of exposure.

WILLIAM: I know all about survival.

CATHERINE: You were wet and shivering. And what about those bruises and lumps? You just can’t look after yourself.

WILLIAM: I was a damn sight warmer in the drain than I am here.

CATHERINE: It was filthy. The doctor said you were lucky you didn’t catch some dreadful disease.

MARY: Fancy sleeping in a stinking drain when you could be snug and secure in your feather bed.

WILLIAM: I’m allergic to feathers.

CATHERINE: We were all so worried.

MARY: Disgusting people — drunkards and vagabonds. Wallowing in self-pity ... I despise them.

WILLIAM: I’m an alcoholic, a drunkard. (He deliberately pours himself another whiskey.) I belong in the gutter.
CATHERINE: Now don’t be silly dear, you’re not an alcoholic. It’s true you like a drink but so do a lot of men, and they’re not alcoholics.

MARY: It’s self-pity.

WILLIAM: I can’t understand why you and your mother get on so well.

MARY: Anyway, I couldn’t care less if you do pickle your liver.

WILLIAM: You’re unpredictable, that’s the sign of a psychopath.

CATHERINE: Now don’t get to upset dear, she’s only joking — you know what a kidder she is. (To MARY) Now tell Daddy you were only teasing Mary.

MARY: Of course I was.

(MARY leaves the lounge and gives her father a hug.)

WILLIAM: I’m lost … you’re trying to drive me insane. Why is it so cold?

CATHERINE: There, clean. Now I want you to be more careful in the future.

(She leaves the room again. Meanwhile, MARY has returned to her seat and resurrected her knitting from beneath the lounge.)

MARY: Reverend Smothers is coming to dinner this Thursday, Father.

WILLIAM (muttering to himself): It was so peaceful.

(Pause.)

The birds chortling at sunrise.

MARY: I do hope you’ll refrain from telling him about North Africa.

WILLIAM: At night the moon shone white — whiter than I’ve ever seen.

(Pause.)

From my bedroom window it looks pallid, yellowy, sickly … as if it were made from some foreign cheese.

MARY: He is such a nice man. Full of integrity.
WILLIAM: Green cheese.
MARY: We share the same moral outlook.
WILLIAM: There were thousands upon thousands of stars bursting with life.
MARY: He is trustworthy and honourable.
WILLIAM: The French aren’t trustworthy.

(Pause.)

I once knew a French mystic.

(Pause.)

I’ve always been interested in dreams. I often dream the same dream … an open night-sky, peaceful and reassuring … then the darkness begins to close — claustrophobic … the stars growing faces. When I was a youth my dreams were full of dragons, fire-breathing serpents. I would slay them with my gold-tipped lance — gold paint that is, solid gold would have been too soft — I’d always feel guilty in the morning, they were such beautiful creatures.

MARY: Whoops, I’ve dropped a stitch.
WILLIAM: And conjurers.
MARY: What conjurers?
WILLIAM: Don’t interrupt!
MARY: What are you talking about?
WILLIAM: Mind your own business!
MARY: Who are you talking to?
WILLIAM: I met a conjurer when I was on holidays.
MARY: You should be certified.
WILLIAM: At the fair.
MARY: Clergymen are allowed to marry these days.
WILLIAM: Three shells and a pebble — I missed every time.
MARY: They earn enough to support a family.
WILLIAM: He was a craftsman.
MARY: A small family.
WILLIAM: He didn’t look French.
MARY: John, ah, Reverend Smothers, has even got his own car.
WILLIAM: But even if he were I would pay him due respect.
MARY (fumbles at her needles): He has asked me to marry him.
WILLIAM (raising his voice): He’s not going to clean my chimney this year — I’ve had enough! (MARY does not even look at him. She just stares at her knitting in contemplation. WILLIAM coughs. His next words are practically whispered — in a consumptive, rasping voice.) This year I’m going to put my foot down.
MARY (suddenly looking up, with a cheerful expression): It’s not too late to have children.
WILLIAM: He won’t get past the front door.

(WILLIAM stands up, looks up the chimney, and, having satisfied himself that it is clear of foreigners, stands in front of it rubbing himself with the cold).

WILLIAM (without malice): He could have an accident, it’s a dangerous job.
MARY (noticing her father has left his chair): Can we cover your chair now father?

(WILLIAM returns to his seat.)

WILLIAM (turning to MARY): I embarrass you.
MARY (looking up): Are you speaking to me?
WILLIAM: Of course.
MARY: That’s reassuring.
WILLIAM: What are you talking about?
MARY: We are all very proud of you.
WILLIAM: You hide me from your friends.
MARY: That’s because of your temper.
(Pause.)

And your language.

(CATHERINE pokes her head through the kitchen-lounge-room door.)

CATHERINE: We’re having meat and vegetables for dinner.
WILLIAM (obstinately): I don’t like your cooking.
CATHERINE: Now don’t be silly.
WILLIAM: I hate vegetables.
CATHERINE: You love vegetables.
WILLIAM: Especially carrots.
CATHERINE: We’re not having carrots.
WILLIAM: What’s wrong with carrots? Carrots are good for the eyes.
CATHERINE: You’re being difficult again William.

(CATHERINE crosses the room and wipes some dust from WILLIAM’s regimental photograph with her apron.)

WILLIAM: Why did you plant roses in my vegetable patch?
CATHERINE: It’s too late to grow carrots.
WILLIAM: I hate thorns.

(Pause.)

Where’s my other medal?
CATHERINE (pulling a medal from her dress pocket): I cleaned it for you.

(She hands it to him. He examines both sides and then cries out.)

WILLIAM: What have you done to the inscription? You’ve ruined it!
CATHERINE: I had to use steel-wool to remove the grime.
WILLIAM: You’ve destroyed it.
CATHERINE: It was absolutely filthy.

(Pause.)
I did it for your own good.

WILLIAM: It’s lost its soul, its character.

CATHERINE: The other side is perfectly alright. Just turn it over.

(He stares at it. CATHERINE goes over to him.)

Here, I’ll pin it on for you. (She pins it on such that the damaged face is against WILLIAM’s coat.) There, the good side is showing now, nobody will ever know about the scratches.


MARY: I’m going to wash your mouth out some day.

WILLIAM: Bloody chimney sweep. Hen’s he coming? He’s late.

(There is a knock at the front door.)

CATHERINE: That’s probably him now. I’ll answer it.

(She leaves the room.)

MARY: You’re going to have to move now.

(CATHERINE enters. She is followed by the SALESMAN.)

CATHERINE: This young man is selling encyclopedias. He would like to speak with the man of the house. That’s you William, you are the man of the house.

WILLIAM: We don’t want any encyclopedias.

CATHERINE: Now don’t be rude — listen to what the gentleman has to say before jumping to conclusions. (Whispering to the SALESMAN.) It makes him feel wanted.

(CATHERINE and MARY leave the room. CATHERINE winks to the SALESMAN as she leaves. He nods in recognition.)

SALESMAN (to WILLIAM): An encyclopedia is like a microscope — it reveals truths and details ...

WILLIAM (interrupting the SALESMAN): Crap! I don’t want to hear crap!
SALESMAN:  For example, do you know how far the moon is from the earth?
WILLIAM: The moon is made of green cheese and is covered in rat droppings.
SALESMAN:  Three hundred and eighty four thousand, four hundred miles ...

(The SALESMAN notices WILLIAM’s medal.)

Where did you fight?
WILLIAM:  What?
SALESMAN:  The medals I mean.
WILLIAM (interested):  Oh, North Africa, Normandy ...
SALESMAN:  Proud of them?
WILLIAM:  Damn proud.
SALESMAN:  Clausewitz, under C, volume three ...
WILLIAM:  I had a lot of friends.
SALESMAN:  You enjoyed killing?
WILLIAM:  No! It was them or us — survival of the fittest.
SALESMAN:  Ahhhh, elitism, definite Fascist overtones.
WILLIAM:  Sometimes I wonder if we won anything ...
WILLIAM:  You lost.
SALESMAN:  So did you.
WILLIAM:  I can’t be sure ... I mean ... I don’t know.
SALESMAN:  I’m an embarrassment to my country.
WILLIAM:  I’m proud of my country.
SALESMAN:  Yeah? What has it done for you?
WILLIAM:  I’m not interested in your books.
SALESMAN:  I was forced to fight.
WILLIAM:  So was I.
SALES­MAN: It was the end of my university education — I could never go back.

WILLIAM: I can’t remember what it was like before the war. *(He pours himself a drink.)* You want a drink?

SALES­MAN: Drowning your sorrows?

WILLIAM: You don’t want one?

SALES­MAN: It would be a confession of weakness. I’ve got my self-preservation to think about.

WILLIAM: I remember drinking whiskey while under air attack.

SALES­MAN: In the Orient it was opium and napalm ...

WILLIAM: I had a friend who lost his legs — they put him on morphine.

SALES­MAN: Volume twenty two — V for Voltaire: “Famine, plague, and war are the three most celebrated ingredients of this world of ours.”

*(Pause.)*

What about that drink?

*(WILLIAM goes to the drink cabinet and removes a glass.)*

WILLIAM: What would you like?

SALES­MAN: Brandy.

WILLIAM: You’re leaning against the fire-place. *(He pours the drink.)*

SALES­MAN *(staying put)*: I don’t usually drink you understand.

WILLIAM *(pointing to a chair in the corner)*: Pull a chair up, the chimney sweep will be here soon.

*(The SALES­MAN places the seat near WILLIAM’s. WILLIAM hands the SALES­MAN the brandy and returns to his own seat.)*

It’s that time of year.

SALES­MAN: You’re lucky to have your own place.

WILLIAM: Security is very important when you’re raising a family.

SALES­MAN: I’m not married.
WILLIAM: Interesting.
SALESMAN: I sleep with a lot of women. I don’t believe in limiting myself.
WILLIAM: Do you enjoy it?
SALESMAN: What?
WILLIAM: Sleeping with a lot of women.
SALESMAN: Not really.
WILLIAM: It’s years now.
SALESMAN: That’s your business. Don’t cry on my shoulder.
WILLIAM: Discussing sex embarrass you?
SALESMAN: I’m very broad minded.
WILLIAM: What do your books say about chimney sweeps?
SALESMAN: Do you know anything about eclipses?
WILLIAM: Dangerous things eclipses.
SALESMAN: What did you do after the war?
WILLIAM (slowly): I can’t remember. What I mean to say is … well, I’m not really sure. There were opportunities … you just had to look for them, make something of yourself … I had a family to think about … I made enough money to buy this place … the furniture … money was worth more then … I was good, the best … it was just a job. (He throws back a glass of whiskey and pours himself another.)
SALESMAN (shaking his head as he watches WILLIAM pour the whiskey):
You’ve got no will-power … no self-discipline.
WILLIAM: My daughter tells me she’s got self-discipline.
SALESMAN: It is a good thing to have.
WILLIAM: I’m sure it is.
SALESMAN: I intend to make something of myself, they haven’t defeated me yet. Relegated me to the scrap-heap, that’s what they did, relegated me … (He cuts himself short.) They don’t like positive thinking — I’m a threat.
WILLIAM: Don’t cry on my shoulder.

(They both stare at their drinks. WILLIAM breaks the silence.)

I met my wife in France — we made love in a barn amongst the horse-crap. By God it stank.

SALES MAN: Every soldier falls in love with the same whore.

WILLIAM: She was beautiful — nobody would have denied it.

SALES MAN: Beauty is not everything.

WILLIAM: You asked about these medals?

SALES MAN: No, I only used them as a point of reference — symbols to activate your subconscious.

WILLIAM: This one’s mine (he points to the damaged medal) and this one was a friend’s.

SALES MAN: You look the shifty type, it’s in your eyes … never trust a man with blue eyes. Murdered him in his sleep to get it I suppose.

WILLIAM: He bequeathed it to me.

SALES MAN: I learnt to be careful in Vietnam … needed eyes in the back of my head, couldn’t trust anybody.

WILLIAM: He’s dead now. I can’t remember when or how he died but he’s definitely dead. I know he’s dead because he bequeathed his medal to me. I went on a holiday but even that memory is fading. We were great cobbers, great mates. Looked after each other.

SALES MAN: These books were five years in the making. Very well indexed.

WILLIAM (thinking): Now what was his name?

SALES MAN: For example, take D, D for Democracy.

WILLIAM: The inscription, I’ll look at the inscription. (He looks, rubs it.) Damn! It’s covered in grime, can’t read it. (He scrapes it.) Nope, on for good.
SALESMAN: Related articles: Locke, Rousseau, Burke, Bentham, Mill, Hobhouse ... hundreds of them.

WILLIAM: What’s the time?

SALESMAN *(looking at his watch)*: Twelve minutes past twelve.

WILLIAM: Blast! I’ve missed it. I’ll have to wait until two o’clock now.

They give the results at two.

SALESMAN: What for? What results?

WILLIAM: Had a fiver on Star Gazer at ten to one.

SALESMAN: Pretty steep odds.

WILLIAM: I had inside information — a friend of mine who knows all the ins and outs. Lives and breathes horses — knows them better than their owners. He bets big, real big — thousands of dollars, that’s how big.

SALESMAN: That is big.

WILLIAM: He’s made a name for himself. A respected gentleman.

SALESMAN: Respect is a very important thing.

WILLIAM: Rarely loses.

SALESMAN *(increasingly interested)*: What’s his name? I might know him.

I’m well thought of in business circles, I’m a young “up and coming.” I intend to go to the top.

WILLIAM: Can’t remember his name ... let me think.

SALESMAN: Did he give you any tips for the five thirty this afternoon?

WILLIAM: Yes, they’re marked on a paper. It’s in that drawer over there.

*(He points to an object hidden by sheet.)*

SALESMAN: Under the sheet?

WILLIAM: Yes, the top drawer.

SALESMAN: I’ll get it.

*(The SALESMAN goes across to the cupboard and removes the white sheet. He opens the drawer, which is full of papers. He rummages through these yet finds nothing.)*
SALESMAN (*irritated*): Well I can’t see any paper with names of horses.
WILLIAM: It’s at the bottom, beneath the other papers.

(*The SALESMAN looks again and finds the paper. He glances at it.*)

SALESMAN: Well, here’s Stargazer … five thirty, now let’s have a look … (*He studies it more closely.*) … What? This paper is ten years old. That race was run ten years ago.
WILLIAM: Now I remember, he gave me his medal.
SALESMAN: You’re bloody mad! Mad! What’s wrong with you?
WILLIAM: It wasn’t a French name … bloody cheek coming into my house uninvited.
SALESMAN: What are you babbling about? Are you going to buy these books or not?
WILLIAM: I don’t want any books … his name …
SALESMAN (*furious*): I ought to sue you, leading me on … I thought you were a prospective customer … crying on my shoulder, telling me your problems … wasting my time! I suppose you do this all the time! Is this how you get your kicks?

(*CATHERINE and MARY rush into the room.*)

CATHERINE: What’s happened? What’s wrong?
MARY: Has father upset you?
SALESMAN: He’s mad, bloody mad. I’m getting out of here. This is no place for a young “up and coming” …
CATHERINE: I’m terribly sorry.

(*The SALESMAN rushes out followed by CATHERINE.*)

MARY: I hope you’re proud of yourself. (*Vehemently*) Look at you, “the man of the house” … a sight to be feared, a strength to be reckoned with. You make me sick. You’re just a dribbling old fool. Why Mother tolerates you I don’t know.
WILLIAM (looking down and adjusting his medal): For the life of me I can’t think.

MARY: I don’t know how much longer I’m going to put up with you! I dread Thursday!

(She storms out leaving WILLIAM alone. There is silence for a moment as WILLIAM pours himself another whiskey.)

WILLIAM: Rhymes with Faust …

(There is further silence. After a moment WILLIAM leaves his seat. He examines the wet spot on the carpet, rubbing it with his fingers. He then walks over to the hearth and examines the chimney. Satisfied that all is secure he returns to his seat and the light fades.)

WILLIAM: Why is it so cold in here? It’s cold in here — the chimney needs cleaning and then we can have a …

CURTAIN

NOTES

1. Books — [Unknown] the Past

The Second Act is identical to the First — though WILLIAM becomes CATHERINE and the SALESMAN MARY, while CATHERINE becomes WILLIAM and MARY the SALESMAN.
Thomas wrote down his dream. He would offer it to Therese as a keepsake. She will see that my mother and father are not — weren’t — what they purported, what they seemed to be. All that mum and dad and sister and brother thing. Seaside and loss. The ongoing life processes. The neatness. That each house we lived in pleaded for a nurturing it couldn’t get. Therese: Why do you bother remembering, Thomas? Isn’t it best to forget when you wake? Thomas: I sleep so rarely, I treasure what I am told. I would like to cut a curve of bone from my skull and replace it with glass so you could watch the electrochemistry of my sleeping. Therese: Yr fmstbyes. Thomas: High grade. Masquerade. Life of the Twelve Caesars — “offering sacrifice on the morning he was slain.” I am slain in the house. I am slain as punishment for the absent sister. It’s what I am missing — it’s where my penis comes away from my body. Mini skirt — Mary Quant, 1964. It came after I was born.

* 

Not long after they had moved in, the boy-Thomas discovered a trapdoor in the linen closet. It was hidden under the rug, and its twin slabs had worn into the rest of the floorboards like healing skin, worn but healing skin. Spotting the wound, he knew... he confirmed that the house was a living organism. Its breath was stale and old, but there was breath. It had lungs and a heart. It had its own mind. He’d known it the first day, the first moment he’d walked through the massive front door with its leadlight panels, twisting the light against the high walls of the corridor; he’d felt its will. Shadows stretched along the floorboards, dense pockets of air had him
gasping — it was swarming with antibodies. It could be malevolent, he thought, but it’s not. Just protecting itself. He was a kid who couldn’t get enough sci-fi and horror, a kid sharp enough to know he was projecting his fears and desire onto the flesh of the house. I am not going to close my mind to this house, he determined... but I will play my cards close to my chest and won’t let it know entirely where I am at.

They all loved the town. It was renowned for having the most sunny days in the year of any coastal town in the region. Mother had always insisted they holiday there, even though it was a day’s haul from the city. It’s got everything, she’d say: amenities, privacy, nature, the sun. Then, after she had gone, it seemed like the right thing to do. To go. To be there. The family would drive around looking at the old historic houses. I’d love to live in one of those, she used to say, the one we live in is so new, so “suburban.” I’d love big verandas so I could shelter from the sun when it’s too hot. That’s the trick of verandas! she’d add, nudging whoever was closest. The concrete pad in our modern houses stops the earth’s spirit getting through! Modern houses require life support: plumbing, electricity... Thomas used to agree with her: no life in there, he’d say, gleefully parroting his mum, just mortar and bricks.

After Mother had “gone away”, when Father had “scored” the house, as Thomas and his sister liked to say, the estate agent had said, “Location location location...,” and then watched the scepticism in Father’s face grow before adding, “Location and heritage... location and heritage,” thinking he’d discovered the chink in the armour. He had. The place had been an “old settler-family’s place” belonging to one of the early officials in town. Maybe a circuit judge. Father would research it. The architecture was 1870s limestone and hardwood, with corrugated iron roofs, six bedrooms, each with its own fireplace, a ballroom, vast kitchen, bathrooms (modernised just enough), central corridor that T’d out into a back corridor, wrap-around
verandas... It wasn’t a house Mother had picked out in their tours around town, but she would have loved the place. They all knew it. It was her, right through to the ground it was built on. True, it did need a lick of paint on the outside and some surface repairs to the external woodwork — you’d have to expect that with so much sun, wind, and sea air — but otherwise it was in good repair. Old place just needs to be made to feel that it looks its best, father had said.

The house stared out over the sea. It breathed in the salt and vapour, took the strong sea breezes face-on. The wall inside the corridor was damaged where the wind had caught the front door and slammed it against the plaster. A small pile of paint and powder cogitated eternally on the wood between the skirting boards and red tapestry rug that stretched the full length of the corridor, like Gene Simmons’s tongue. That’s Gene Simmons from Kiss, Dad, said Thomas. You know, “that crap” you tell me to turn down every night. *Detroit Rock City.* A few days after moving in, they set up heavy chairs on the front veranda, to watch the cray boats coming in, to watch the huge metal ships of the mercantile world, to watch the sun blaze and set. Occasionally, trains interrupted their meditations: the line ran through to the port not far from their doorstep, just down the gentle hill. The trains sent muffled vibrations up through the limestone and floorboards into the furniture. Thomas liked it best when he was teetering on sleep. For some reason they reminded him of his mother. She liked old things. She used to say they had learnt to speak.

Every day after school, they had to do their chores before homework. Their dad made dinner when he got home from work, but it was all hands on deck to make things in the house run smoothly. It was his sister’s job to fold and stack the linen, though Father said that girls shouldn’t get stuck with that kind of work. But she asked for that chore, Dad! Doesn’t matter, you’ve both got to learn to do... well, everything. Make you rounded people. There wasn’t even a decent joke in “well, I don’t want to be rounded, or she’s
already rounded...” or whatever. So Thomas took the sheets from the line
beside the Moreton Bay fig tree, distracted by its arching branches, its
shapes, trying to identify the birdcall from within its dips and folds, its
mountains and valleys... Once you get past the wind-levelled ranges around
here, once you leave the valley, it gets so flat. Flat all the way out to the
desert, I bet. They say we cling to the coastline at school. I don’t believe that.
It is easier to move and see what’s coming where it’s flat. It must be safer, in
some ways. Hills hide you but maybe they make you nervous, make you feel
the need to hide.

As Thomas pondered this, the clothes basket slipped from one hand
and half-spilt the crisp white sheets onto the parched lawn. He quickly
gathered the contents and made for the back door. And then, as he was
folding, and stacking, and whipping the basket up, he noticed. He just
noticed. I should have thought... it’s so high off the ground, off the hill, the
great foundations of granite, and the hollow sound, the aching cavernous
sound of all our footsteps, echoing long after someone has passed, sat down,
gone to bed. He kept his thoughts close to his chest.

Furtively, late that night, Thomas went out into the corridor, the top of
the T, just outside his room. The linen press was to the right. He clicked his
torch on. His sister and father were sleeping in the front part of the house
and wouldn’t detect the light. If they did hear anything, they’d probably
think he was moving about in his room — if they were even awake. Wasn’t
unusual. He was an insomniac, and always experimenting with something,
or doing weird stuff, as his sister said. His dad had enough on his mind with
work. He asked himself, Why at night? Why secretively? Why not during
the day at a time when the others are out? It bothered him. He didn’t know
why. It had to be then, late at night, alone by torchlight.

He used a screwdriver between the slabs to prise them apart, to open
the house. Putting them aside, he shone the torch into the darker than dark,
musty cavity. Bad air flowed out, like blood returning along a vein to the
heart to be replenished. He thought that as he lowered himself down, torch in hand, pivoting against the floor. Inside it was burnished stone and sand. It all looked rubbed, even polished, by constant movement. Shining his torch along, he could see the head of the upright of the T from beneath. It cast a shadow out of darkness into the thin torchlight. He began to crawl towards this halfway-point of the stretch ahead, on hands and knees. His fingers caught a piece of metal. An old coin. Stuff would have fallen down between the floorboards. Most of the rooms had carpet now, or rugs, and there weren’t any visible cracks between floorboards anywhere in the house. He’d checked thoroughly. It was sealed shut like a tomb. No, it wasn’t dead, it was never dead. It was closed up like a body, or parts of the body. People think of entrances and exits on the body only from the outside. Not from the inside out. The closed spaces inside the body fed through walls, absorption.

Thomas turned into the main under-corridor. An artery. The various below-room chambers branched off. He crept under his sister’s room. He could hear her shifting under her bedclothes. The house moved yet remained entirely intact, like the heart muscle. His fingers found other items. Something sharp. He checked his finger in the torchlight: it was bleeding. There was no question of his exclaiming; he was suspended, subdued. His heart regular, reliable. The blood ran, and he wiped it on his clothes. He was no longer breathing anything like air, he was flowing in the flood of his own body, the house. After backing out into the corridor, he found his way into the cavity below his father’s room. Silence. He moved quickly. Getting back to the opening seemed to take forever. He dreamily thought over his day, the day before.

That day had been sunny. It was always a sunny day in his town. The people of the town bragged to each other about the sunniness of their days. To outsiders, they sold the town as the sunny place in the country. Day upon day of sun. The sun shone even when it rained. Sunshowers. The wind blew with the sun, and when you went diving, the sun streamed down to the
depths, into the cracks and crags of the reefs. Thomas had ridden to school in the early morning sun, he had worked on his science project with the sun spilling into the room. He had lunched in the sun, his glasses tinting blacker than ever before. He’d ridden home in the mid-afternoon sun. He’d collected the laundry in the late afternoon sun. The whole family had watched the sun set from the veranda, the glint of rays winking off the windows, the guttering, the iron roof. How many words describe the sun, make sunshine, speak for it, worship it, taste it, drink it? The vitamin D town. The cancer town — “don’t take anything for granted, but Slip Slop Slap, and you’ll be right, mate!” In the end, we still all need the sun.

By the time Thomas reached his point of entry, the torchlight had almost vanished. Funny, he thought, I see better in the dark. I breathe better without air. The blood spilling from my wound which must be deep, because it is still flowing warm and fast, lightening me. It is like the joy of the sun. Down here, I am the sun, I am the heart. The sun is a house. The heart is a house.

Shining the dying beams of the torch towards the wound he’d made in the house, he laughed at his loss of memory, and at his skill: how on earth did I seal that when I came down? It’s such a smooth, tight fit, as if it’s grown over again, healed into place. I don’t recall doing it...

But Thomas was comfortable as the torchlight went out. He decided to show his cards. He had become inside out. His mum would have loved it in there. No doubt. He decided to love the house as he loved the sun, as he loved his mum. The spirit comes up from the earth, Mum, Thomas said. And the sun shone on through day and night.
Hell in Season: a miniature

I have tested the shifting sands and found them wanting. I dined under the banksias and the New Holland Honeyeaters picked at my flesh. I looked and tasted like nectar.

With school friends — all eleven — I became tribal in the swamp and hurled spears at the cameraman. We all whooped it up. Super 8 movie of wild O wild Aborigines coming out of the paperbarks to drive the white bastards out. This happened. I can’t rewrite the script.

I embraced the snake. I embraced the redback. I embraced the dragon.

I thought of sinking into the swamp mud, of slowly watching the light go out. Of being preserved for when the life drained it out.

I walked the cracked skin in summer.

I mined benevolence as the ultimate high. I scrutinised the deadly sins. I found evidence in the memory I’d inherited: the poison I drank, mixed up in Florence flasks, the swirl the round of liquid gives, the colours. The vapours transformed me. A fierce headache set in and everything became black and white. I was a war movie. I climbed the towers of Wireless Park and looked out over the river, the bloodworms inching through the flats. Pelicans with warped hearts staggered on navigation posts, hooks in their throats.

I tested the waters of others; I trampled the garden beds of neighbours; I hummed tunes with no scales.
I invented miniature catapults, watched ants crazed — tunnels sandwiched between sheets of glass. Insects pinned to balsa wood, lumps of asbestos on the bedhead. Meccano steam engines. Robots. I melted lead into shapes, forced mercury apart, denying its rejoining.

I watched the United Irishman fight Londoners of good standing and let their conjoined blood thicken my veins, thin my skin. I colonised with psoriasis.

I shot all animals, including those in heat. I filled the wheelbarrow with the insides of rabbits. It steamed. Flies blitzed. Parrots exploded in white gums. Colours everywhere.

I peeled paperbarks down to the bare bones; burst blisters so water ran over the bare tree-flesh.

I couldn’t break through the narrowest barrier, though tried and tried, convinced angels were egging me on. I rubbed pigweed on my warts and was told my gums would recede so far my teeth would fall out.

I inhaled all vapours
like seasons and steered
the boat into the sun.

Kingfish ran fast in the river,
and parodies of love feathered
the banks with yellowish foam.
My reading was impure. I hunkered after pornography. I watched aliens copulate in the garden and knew it was really happening. This was no back-engineering, but fact. Adults would make more if it. But I watched them land. I watched them glow like ghosts we charged up under lamps and mounted on our fingers.

The minister grew red, frustrated with my conceptions: and I was a good boy, confirmed to order. Circumcised. But I met the sailors at the Flying Angel Club, and alchemy became my mainsail. The Armada altered paternal trajectory, blow off course, hitting the coast of Ireland.

I believe in science as I know it’s my downfall and I will inevitably hate it to the point of indiscretion. Of no return. I will hide in Eden and worship purity, always thinking filth. God is the Roundhouse of my soul and I am its traveller. I can’t stand still, though have infinite concentration. I learn from photographs, obsess over eternity, board ship to jump ship, dream of the Shanghaied.
Chapter 7

Why couldn’t you find another job, I hear you ask. I blame the wretched economic climate. I don’t think it really matters which country or which city you’re in, people are just the same everywhere, when you think about it. There were many interviews, I remember one in a red-painted room with a large wooden design, there were flowers on the table, I think, yes, there were definitely flowers. Offices, after a while, and a long while it was when all has been considered, look the same. But some are different, I mean some have a company photo, while others have a picture of the boss’s wife and kids stuck on the wall. It was funny really, all of a sudden things began to change. Well, it wasn’t really sudden. I’d had similar dreams before but they were never so frequent. My dreams were more real than life itself, that’s conscious life, you understand. Freud says we create barriers, repression, well I don’t think that’s a terribly healthy thing to do … bring everything out into the open I always say, well I haven’t actually said it before but I’m saying it now. Anyway, I began to dream more and more, or maybe it was just that I was remembering more and more … the dreams were probably always there. What sort of dreams? Well, that’s difficult to answer. There were the ones where I played the leading role and there were others where I was just an onlooker, you know, a kind of audience. I have always dreamt in colour and stereophonic sounds, there is nothing like the big screen. Where I was a child I had a dream about a polar bear. Not surprisingly, this was set in the wastes of Alaska, although I had never seen Alaska, in fact I can’t recall ever having heard of Alaska before having this dream, but I suppose I must have. Anyway, I was in Alaska trudging through mountainous snow drifts, I was wearing a thick fur coat and plastic boots, the ones my grandmother had given me for Christmas, when I saw a small black smudge through the haze
of the snow-flurry ... there was a lot of haze. Having never seen a polar bear before I thought it was a lump of Coal or a spot of oil which had spilled from a hole in a jet aeroplane’s engine, I was very concerned for the safety of the pilot. Isn’t it incredible what they can do, I mean those planes, they can loop and loop and dive to the earth ... wooooosshhh ... thump-athump-thump-a-thump-a-a-a-splatter-splat-thump ... and hurl their bombs at shelters hidden deep below the ground. Actually, I’ve seen the movies showing the effects of such attached ... standing on the chip and curbing watching a poodle piss its yellow waters over charred remains. Anyway, all of a sudden this black smudge began to move up and down, closer and closer, I knew I was in danger, I’ve always had a fairly good perception ... senses ... animal instinct ... I mean, I know when I’m being threatened ... funny, the polar bear (I didn’t know what it was at this stage in the dream), was a symbol, I can tell this, I mean to say, you only had to look at its face, a face as old as Man himself ... it was a human face ... the face of my mother and father and playmates and of Romans and Greeks and Spaniards and English ... and blacks and whites ... and big men and small men and women and boys and girls and mean; anyway, knowing I was in danger, I turned tail and fled and I ran with all my heart, my soul was calling to my subconscious, WAKE UP, WAKE UP, but I couldn’t shake the dream, and then I tripped from the top of the building ... a magnificent building, (a nice little cottage with a shingle roof, tucked away in the folds of rolling hills ... well, they looked like hills but you can never be too sure, could have been another military device), and as I was falling this bear, which had run much harder than me, threw its great oil-black claws around my chest and held me close to its body. The bear hit the ground before me, breaking my fall ... I have a deep respect for nature, after all the gods control its work, I think. The other sort of dream? Well, they were the most frequent ... like real life, you know, the Rape of Helen etc ... I had to watch, usually tied to a chair ... it is very uncomfortable being tied to a chair, especially an antique chair with
unpolished wood, bristles up the bum, a very sore rectum ... now the army will get the wrong idea, and those ropes! I mean to say they bite through the skin and throttle the flesh, blobs of blood bloating constantly through engorged veins, I mean to say, the doctors would have a fit. Ever been in the operating theatre? They call it a theatre because they’re all perverts in there ... yes they are. Anyway, there is an antiseptic smell, the nurses have been swabbing their grizzly sores, and bright lights ... the laughter from pressurized tubes is not much good for a truly painful ailment. So, that’s what the dreams were like, they lasted for ages, I think ... No, I don’t dream much now, I mean who would at my age? So, I couldn’t get another job, I’d been thrown out of home, and had withdrawn from my university course. What did I do? Well, first of all I sold my stereo gear, this was a terrible loss, it wasn’t all that bad, after all, I had excellent stereo reception in my dreams, and then I rented this flat sort of place and stayed there until my money ran out. Oh, about six months, it was then I gave up looking for a job and went to the country. Life during those months? Well, as you know I looked for another job and couldn’t get one, there are very few jobs available you know ... What else did I do? How did I live? Predominately on unemployment benefits ... that’s how I live ... it was very difficult, by God it was difficult, no different, I don’t suppose, to the Great Depression. Look what they had to put up with. They destroyed food supplies to retain the price levels, not that they were worth retaining. Who were they? Well obviously there were two different types of “they,” I mean to say, why on earth would hungry people destroy food ... no, the other animals did this ... fruit fermenting in the gun-gaureded dumping grounds, and the potatoes, what about the potatoes ... Moulding by tons ... piles of rotten mash, army issue ... officers pissing over piles of potatoes ... eating fifty thousand dollar notes, at least it was greenery, very necessary for a balanced diet ... It always sounds to balance mine ... baked beans and mucous. Does mustard gas rise from rotting vegetables ... wait a minute, chlorine’s a heavy gas, it fills shell-deep craters
... a misty green atmosphere, there is something very devilish and demonic about the colour green ... the inferno ... Dulce Et Decorum Est ...
regurgitating green spew, coughing black, (and green), lamps from the depths of decomposing guts ... see what Horace did, he caused the Great Depression and, indirectly admittedly pittedly wittedly, the present unemployment crisis ... did Herbet get a Nobel Peace Prize for inventing dynamite, well ... developing at least ... helping to develop? NO! HE DID NOT ... more’s the pity ... if dynamite had been invented four hundred years ago then the nuclear bomb would no doubt have been in existence three hundred years ago and I would not have had to worry about unemployment. Well, as I was saying, there were two races of “they”: the starving “they” and the sadistic “they,” (also greedy, inhuman and practical). So, I survived for six months on unemployment benefits. EHH? Sure the sale of the stereo was a big help, I mean to say it paid for the rent for six months ... yes ... I only had to pay for my clothes, food, health insurance, electric, gas, transport, personal effects, and entertainment (the cost of library membership), out of this ... yes, that’s perfectly true, I DID NOT HAVE TO PAY FOR MY RENT ... IT’S A BIG BLOODY JOKE ... PISS-OFF. Still there? Did I read much? Shakespeare? Naa ...... stereotyped ... porno and violence is all the craze ... collect all the great works of art and burn them ... HA, HA ... all is lost ... the museum on the corner block was closed down ... old Henry croaked it ... my life-force dissipated, strangled ... months passed before I heard ... months of misery. Potatoes are nice done in their jackets ... just scrape the dirt from the eye-sockets (the prisoners of war have already removed the eye-ball), and pop in the smouldering coals. I still meet with Helen, but I know its all a dream ... she began to come so regularly ... the dreams increased ... in other dreams my father chased me, threatening my virginity with a birch wand. Oh no, I only dreamt at night ... I never dream in the day. Actually, I haven’t been telling the whole truth ... back then I didn’t know there were only dreams, which became more
frequent, I think. I prefer talking about the dreams in which I played an important role ... yes, I realise there weren’t as many of these. It was a grotty little flat. Two bedrooms, I should have bought a cat to fill the vacant space under the table ... oneroomwasall ... but he, by he I mean the cat, would probably have farted and stunk the place out, although it stank anyway. I should have found myself a female cat, they wander the allies in great numbers, rutting over the rubbish bins, their lice-lined tails standing high, spilling scent. You should see the toms, balls-a-jangling, chase these indiscreet sluts ... ripping each others ears and eyes apart. I’m glad I never had a cat, or a polar bear. Across the passageway there lived two prostitutes, next to them a married couple, I think they were shoplifters. It was really very funny having people like this for neighbours ... our street had been so sterile, yes, that’s the only way to describe it. Actually Silvia and Celia (the pros) were quite nice ... should have see their room, the pad they called it, I think. They used to work shifts, Silvia operated the round double bed in the main bedroom during the day, Celia at night ... the other room only had a single bed but, when business was thriving, it had to do. Every garish colour had a home at Silvia and Celia’s. The carpets had been hand dyed yellow, the walls painted purple, and the ceiling orange. The chandelier above the main bed was like some friendship gargoyle planning his vengeance on virginity. I hope you realise that I never partook in the obscenities, in fact I never even wanted too. They went for a check-up each week, Silvia on Mondays, Celia on Wednesday. I fixed it up such that both rooms had piped music, good for business. Here’s a laugh: one night I heard a banging at my door ... bang a bang the banging said. Who could that be? Surely not for me at this time, probably some lonely stranger in pursuit of love and comfort. Drag yourself out of bed, don’t be a bastard all your life. HERBERT...what a joke. What do you want? I’m looking for a,a,aaahhh cousin of mine her name is Silvia. Oooh, Silvia, cousin Silvia, she lives across the passage. Herbert had been very embarrassed. The next day I found out that Herbert
was kinky... he had paid both girls to pretend they were roosters. The room had an old black and white television, being furnished when I signed the lease. I signed the lease with my serious signature, the one I use on special occasions, I think. It doesn’t really matter I don’t suppose. I’m a bastard you know. Do I think I’m Jesus? I very rarely watch television, then was no different. The news was always good in black and white, much better than colour. You can have much more fun guessing the colours of devastation, not enough is left up to the imagination. Yes, I suppose the same applies to radio, but I didn’t have a radio so what you’re suggesting is ludicrous ... bullshit. The Japanese make a lot of televisions, don’t they? A petulant race ... running round with red blobs on their brand new shirts, screaming banzai and swinging samurai swords. When my lease was due to expire the landlady came to see me. Do you want to extend for another six months? I can’t, I haven’t any money. She was an attractive lady, she had eyes for me, that was easy to see, she was still young but reaching the age where it becomes the inner-desire to seduce younger bodies. Her eyes were full of lust. You could stay on a little while. No, I don’t have anything to offer you. You might have. The kitchen-living room began to close in on me, that’s where I discussed my business, she seemed to grow ... and grow. It’s funny to be staring someone in the face when they’re getting excited and you remain limp... a face full on innuendo ... but I couldn’t, could I? I had promised Helen and Cleopatra, yes they were only part of a dream (I think), and what about the other ... she had vanished. I’m sorry, miss, I can’t afford the rent. What? A refusal ... anger swelling swollen nipples (she was wearing a see-through dress). Do you have a cat? I asked. She sure had a cat: if we got together ... I’ve got the clap ... that changed her mien ... whiteness, red is complacency. The door slammed in my face like the slap of steel gauntlet against naked flesh. Actually, there was a lot of Tess in her, but I don’t think you could really say there was. She and Tess were completely different ... are completely different, speaking metaphorically, of course. I
never went back home but one day I saw Mum at a supermarket. When she saw me she controlled an urge to run up and throw her arms around me. Her eyes filled with tears as I gave her an indifferent nod ... Man always learns when it's too late. What about the married couple? Oh yes, they had two children, both boys. She was an ungainly character, large feet, thick hands. He was a thinly fattened man, a broad belly but little chest. He said he used to be in the navy, sailing in great metal battle ships, sailing across the deep blue seas. What about the oceans, I asked. I first met them on the landing. I was carrying armfuls of books from down below, taking the stairs step by step, wiggling my toes, testing my anchored security. Security is very important they tell me, never cared for it much myself. And up and up I went. The steps were redly carpeted and not so wobbly or troubled in those early weeks ... and up and up I went ... like the scriptures really. I was climbing the steps of sanctity. Should really install an uppetty downy elevator with an electric kill button which could stop the menace if it threatened life and limb (if this were the case they would have had to install an elevator kill button operator). As I stumbled over the edge of the top of the wooden platform I fell in to the arms of that burly missus of the Captain Bligh. For Captain Bligh he must have been, for more assuredly there never has been such a reputable sailor as he. And into her red-haired arms I fell, unable to halt the downward trajectory of my plummeting books. Her arms were very thick, very thick indeed. They carried about them a motherly assurance of security. They say security is very important. Ahhh, I’m sorry, the load was too much, thank you for saving my neck, I am indebted to you for life, let me kiss your navel. She lifter her jumpy (you must understand that she was not partial to dresses nor jumpers with long sleeves), and reveled her navel. I love having my navel kissed. I couldn’t possibly, I was only joking. JACK, that’s what she called Captain Bligh, this little swine’s calling me names. Me? Never ... we shall fight them on the beaches, in the streets, on the front gardens, in the back garden, in the houses, between the
houses, on top of a lump of cheese, I love cheese, in the toilet, in the beds, up their bums. Out came Bligh, his hands rummaging in his pants ... balls and more balls ... rinsing saliva between his brown teeth. What yu’ doin’ t’ mu missus? He looked like the type who might strip you bare and suck your teats, Romulus and Remus. Expiate my devilish deeds, sinful, sinful me. There was a cake shop on the corner horner full of piddly pies and dirty flies, such a haughty man was the baker man, such a haughty man was he. You could do your laundry in a Chinese free Wong-Bong washing room where stripling teenagers would roll and roll about in vats of soapsuds, L’Assommoir style. The boys at the local police station could swear in Greek, I was verily impressed. An unusual neighbourhood. Especially when Silvia lent against the lamppost, lifting her very short skirt at each side, showing just a glimmer, just a slither, of cotton knicker (she was allergic to nylon, more’s the pity). My thoughts are much better directed these lonely lonesome never ending days. The postmaster was the best by far he was. An old bugger, a bugger in the true sense of the word. He’d fought in the trenches. The rattattattaatarat staccato, the gun with the unfortunate lisp, spewed bullets from its red hot muzzle in irregular bursts. The trenches used to stink from the GAS apparently, all that farting from drinking brackish water, not good for the digestion. Used to do a lot of wanking under the concrete tops, boom, boom, wank, wank. Anyway, as I was saying, this old post-master had a theory which he called the theory of Sex in Trenches. It may be briefly surmised as the following: all life begins, all life ends (this seems like a very valid statement), all human life begins in the womb, where god places all the ingredients in frozen form, when a male meets a female enough heat is generated to thaw God’s frozen ingredients, although this takes nine months. There were also a number of amendments and appendices but I have forgotten those. The slums weren’t all that slumming really, I mean what’s the occasional rat. At first I was petrified to leave the kitchen table, but I eventually got over this. The best way to cure a
fear is to face it directly: rat-tail soup spewed over laundry white sheets is a yellowing experience. Operation Yellow, the Invasion of France. I mean to say the motive was there, it’s wholesale slaughter during the Frog’n’Snail season. There were often a few snails crawling over the grassless footpath, I presume they were heading for the building’s roof, the landlady told me the grass is always greener on the other side. Was that all a dream? When was I dreaming? No, Virgil never saw the flat. Paris had a real good laugh, he screwed Helen on the table. Cleopatra refused to go near the place ... my mind was genuinely on survival, don’t you believe me? I should have become part of the Irish Community, worn shamrock-green underpants. I always wore clean underwear. Therese was ever with me, her dragon spirit. The lonely mountains spread against the evening sky, its blood-red hues dipping in and out of the rocky crevices, dancing the dance of the sacred sun in its dying moments. A female fire-breathing drake is a rude contradiction of the laws of nature, but that’s exactly what she was. I could see her home from the top of the fire-escape, an enchanted cave in the ancient Byzantium. A street vendor by day, selling love-potions in the Arab-crowded streets, could have been Jerusalem, this is perfectly true, and a dragon by night, sweeping her talents across the empty closets of my eyes, opening the doors and illuminating the blackness ... the prostitutes humping up and down across the passageway. Their two children were real shit-eaters: Bildo and Typhus, I think. They had wooden blocks to play with, they had to be taken from some forgotten neighbour’s kids, I’m sure of that because that’s a fact. They used to build buildings, they built violently, always the Leaning Tower of Pisa, never the Taj Mahal. They say there is a fair bit of money in photography, I suppose I could have become a photographer ... I couldn’t afford the camera. The photographer walks into the bright-light-white room, the slab of polished lens reflecting light in and out ... the rhythm of the jungle. Shut goes the sliver slip of a shutter, a beam of solid light, the glow-worm’s eye spied the outside world, the cousin to the fire-fly. I was caught
within the vortex of the oscillating shutter, spinning ever inwards, my aperture may have been a little skewiff but essentially on line. The sliding clockwork of the digital watch, well oiled in its movements, a viscous, ever-mobile, body mechanical energy from chemical is a contradiction of these factless facts. The whir of the snap-a-flash-a-snapshot, the girls sticking their pliant fannies, little pots of fast-set jelly wobbling with vanity, heavenward, lactiferous breasts, abortions being so goddam expensive, oozing their cheesy fullness over the teensy tips of micro-bikini tops. A more provocative pose please, definantly … ten bucks more to drop the top, great, twenty bucks to crouch, your libido washing the canvas floor. Great, the big fat roly-poly business shit, imported from Havana’s dripping ash over red-titted secretary’s tits. A shot of vodka, a bottle of whiskey, totally pissed on a glass of Guinness. Essentially life is based upon the sexual phenomenon, nobody can deny this. The sexual urge is the reproductive urge. Look at Roman orgies … the emperor popping polyp bags through his blood-black lips, the grapes busting their sensual sweetness over his decadent tongue. I would have expected all of my models to keep their legs crossed in public places, and especially, especially at confession. And watch that Judas bloke, he’s up to no good, that I can clearly see … Bang, BANG. The door severed from its rusted hinges, the elbow joint is a hinge in essence, falls to the floor, a stage upon which the enraged citizens can dance. Decadent, decadent. Father Fatamid leads the day-time ladies into the studio, great bags of contrived goodness who play with themselves in private, using thingamajigery to stimulate the hard to get to parts … the inner ear etc. Gargled gutturals erupting on waves of froth-lispume. Ah remember the prodigal son, his father still loved him, he was the son lost and found … there is a chance, can’t you see? … You’re all really blaspheming. For example this young lady, yes, the one with the golden pears, you can trace her ancestral tree all the way to Eve … go talk to Darwin, the Italian Fascists really loved old Darwin … quite devoted to the faith they say … Noah served the same God,
he was quite confused by the different names … Allah would call you Hypocrits, you seek to block my path, my one chance to be saved … you want heaven all to yourself? Greed too is a sin. Oh, yes, I blame it all on Ms Guntal Withers. She had been my teacher at six-years of age. She was only twenty-three, still hunting for a domesticatable husband-type-of-bed-fellow who could be cherished in God’s understanding eyes. What were the names of my school mates? It’s funny, I can only remember their nick-names, it was all the craze then, along with mini-skirts and the Revised Spin The Bottle. There was Suck-Hole, Arsey Face, Tom Cuddles, I think Ms Withers wore a chastity belt, and Saint Sebastian. Anyway, as I was saying, I think, this bitch-of-the-grandest-order made me sit in the rubbish bin, in front of my nameless chums, day in, day out. You know the sort: hate little boys, loved the little girls, who had much neater handwriting (they also placed a ruby-red-ready-skinned apple on her plastic-topped desk). My parents were, are, I’m not sure, very religious. When I was too young to object or accept they dragged me along, screaming from the pews with childish aggression. Sometimes I would merely acquiesce on the promise of sweets and other goodies after the service, this was after we had been condemned to rot in Hell with only an onion, a dehydrated onion at that, to keep us company. At communion I would kneel in silence, the sheer enormity of Reverend Imhran’s blue eyes perplexing me, and watch the symbolic ritual … the blood of Christ. I’m a bastard, you know. In the High Middle Ages you could be sentence to death for not expecting the wine as blood and bread as flesh, these people must have been cannibals and vampires. Look at that funny man’s torso, I would have said, I’m only fantasizing, I’ll have you know, I’ve never seen a Cistercian monk, not a monk from the house of Cluny, come to think of it. Those monks practiced penitential flagellation with whips of horse hair and bridles of leather, sexual innuendo, spiritual sexuality watched nuns abort lust-conceived Heavenly brethren. A googoogoo, come on bubsywubsy, shake the rattle … shake, shake, shake,
ohhhh, little wubssyy wubbbssy doesn’t like hissy wizzy’s little wittle wattle. The Church has always been the soul of war … eight knights and four sergeants elected the grand master of the Temple, one soldier for one apostle, the thirteenth member, the grand master, was worthy of Christ himself. When Constantinople fell in 1204 the Latins ransacked the ancient city in search of sacred relics: chopped off the arms and legs for the fingernail of Mary Magdalene’s sixty-fifth cousin, twenty-five times removed. Nothing very exciting happened during those six months but it was the turning point in my life, I was ready to break away from the city. When you have seen life from every angle you tire of it, it was in this sense that I tired of that city. It was an empty place, but how do you define culture. I mean to say, it had an art gallery, twenty theatres and a dozen or so cinemas. Saw some good films there, saw some good exhibitions, and, of course, you forget the museum. Why should I cast it from my mind? Do you realise how important it was, in both stages of my life. Old Henry taught me the transience of life, the mysticism of history, the timelessness of existence. So the old fart dropped dead, he couldn’t have given a shit. Henry had always been looking forward to death. Yes, I know, I inherited the museum … the government took it from me … should be for all the people … WANKERS. They never understood … all that modern art … Ahhhh, but they can’t destroy memories. What do you mean you’re imagining it? There was a museum. I did take up modern art. OLD HENRY, that ubiquitous recluse, LOVED ME FOR WHAT I WAS. What else? Oh yeah. There were some drama groups, bit amateurish … and what about the university? … Neo-Gothic, one’s laconic tongue grows weak and weepy in old age. Who’s old? Age is only a state of mind, look, I’m thousands of years old, a thousand more in the making. I’ve truly felt the richness of life. One night I found bed-bugs shacked up in the curlicues and wisps of fabric deep within the belly of my mattress. If you can live with bed-bugs you’re invincible, I really believe that. In the evenings I would often wander down to the front
steps and talk to Silvia, the smog-smuggled sky sauntering blindly 'round the sign-posted street corners. In the summer the evenings were unbearable ... I was there from mid-spring to mid-autumn so I well and truly know what I'm talking about. The muggy air clings to drops of sweat like flies to flypaper, shit to toilet paper. Oh god, why did you have to bring that up? That blowfly. You don't understand, it came at a time when I was condemning the inherent violence in human society. I am, was, am, A MAN OF PRINCIPLE. You don't believe in principle? No, I don't expect you do. Do you wear fur-coats ... chopped up minkywink? I should have known. You have to be blacgard to keep bees, there’s skullduggery afoot I tell you. By god it gets nippy in Autumn. I was always cold, well I mean to say, there was no heating, no pearly red sausages waiting to spill their guts. And that bloody window, never closed properly, shoved a towel into the opening, a bit like staunching legless leg. Oh, I forgot to mention the facilities, communal, the worst thing of all. Those little bastards would throw lumps of soap at my exposed willy and spit into my orifice when I turned my back. The toilets! Black fungus crawling across the seat, always crouch above the bowl myself, fill the porcelain with paper to prevent the splash ... anyway, they say you can’t catch clap from toilet seats ... people get very upset when this sort of problem is discussed ... funny, if they didn’t procreate so profusely, I believe that is the polite way of putting it, they wouldn’t have to worry about it. Who pleads guilty? We all do, its human nature, nature’s nature, random chance, sow as many seeds as time permits, where one soil is barren the other may be ripe. Victorian morality is the root of the problem. I mean, you’ve only got to ask Wild and Shaw. Dunkirk was a glorious retreat. Modern warfare is so efficient, great to watch on black and white television. What happened during the time between leaving the flat and living in the country? Didn’t I tell you? No? Where did I live? I’ve forgotten, I went straight to the country, didn’t I say this. Let me think, oh yes, a couple of weeks. That was where Therese reappeared ... the transition ...
Cleopatra, Therese … a vicious triangle, threesomes never work. Well, Therese found me on the landing, my belongings, few they were, heaped beside me. I went with her … she had a brand new sportscar, red I think. Yes, I stayed at her house in the city … she had the house in the country, the one with the battery hens and automated pig-trough scourer. Yes, that was the transition, from one home to another.

**Flat by the Sea**

I

There are the white walls,
that fresh-laid carpet smell
which could take months to fade,
clean ceilings despite red wine
beginning to spoil, a penultimate
entropy, the window-box is bare.
Four layers of six, iron-girded, 
cemented into the one solid block, 
without perspective. Salt has chafed 
the skin of window-frames, guard-rails, 
and door handles... frosted glass.

Often day edges its way under doors 
and breaks into darkness, comforting, 
strangely peaceful, it stretches out 
from its foothold and settles itself 
randomly — a chair, a face, a painting.

It is the place where an old man 
wanders the walkways opened to sea, 
his face that of Grunewald’s Christ, 
and in a thick voice chants 
along with the dull thud of the waves, 
“It is fitting that He increase 
and I diminish...” over and over.

II

Ours is the first 
in a long line that climbs 
up and over the hill 
and though others
do their best to crouch
low in its wake,
away from the weather,
driving winds, winter seas,
at least part of them

is forced to nudge its
gaze over ours by virtue
of the land’s incline.

III

Sea Rescue

Somewhere out there beneath the smoke
a pleasure-craft is burning to the waterline.

On the horizon’s edge, straight out
from the harbour’s mouth, sits a larger
vessel — a container ship.

Overhead, an aircraft lumbers slowly by,
curving back through its flight path.

Flares, mirror signals and facsimile
pleasure craft combing in-fleet. Nightfall.
Onlookers wonder at the thickening smoke, thicker and blacker than darkness.

In amongst the feeding embers a knowledge that sooner or later fire, smoke and hulk will be lost.
Paradigm 1
Thomas’s Dream of Heritage

Coiled in forest
not vast enough,
celestial palace
plagued by heroes and timber
cutters, bullockies
and group settlers:
wherein history
outside timelines:
hoard, treasure
of namesakes
open among the tall stuff,
gathering hems, tales
told when young
enough to forget: long teeth
of the sawpits.
Reversed street-posts glared sharply back, barbed-wire shrouding the interior. Thomas dragged his slender white hand across the gold-embroidered image and then over the grizzled flecks of brown paint which clung tenaciously to the splintered door-frame. Flowing through the heart of Tengri Khan. From within, the dust covers of the window display revealed glossy photographs of the authors and alternative works in print. Life in the Indus valley. The lady behind the counter lifted her wedged brows into the mire of a lined and pitted forehead, resting her dull, hollow eyes on the lacquered rim of her bifocals. Earth: cultivation, an ice-age away. After a brief moment, which encapsulated both an inspection of Thomas’s body and a judgment of his character, this ashen-faced creature returned to her romantic novel. A vociferous volcano spewing fire into fossilized rivers. The street glared through the smeared window with un-nerving, critical eyes, and the shop, for a second, became a prison, with Thomas its prisoner and the shop-assistant its warder. The old court-house, a cubicle of stone, grinned feverishly ... like the ancient grin of stone dungeons and castles ... locked deep, deep within, numbered by an uncomfortable haze of sleep ... the room growing chill, summer fading into Autumn in winter, ... Voss Castle ... mid-day collapsing ... into mid-night, guards open-eared in their drunken sleep, royalty squirming with guilt in their beds of depraved lust, and dream-drawn images floating like thick, black clouds through the cold wintry air, an air deprived of its crispness by the curlicues of smoke from stale, pig-roasting fires, and the effusion of a musty acridity from the damp skin of mildewed stone ...
A country town grinning at the rest of the world. Threatening, protecting its family beneath the spread of its mottled wings, like a feather-thick, fast brooding eagle. An eagle caught in a storm. Magicians and dragons fighting with fire and symbols. Thomas laughed back at the laughing face, mocking the mocker. Boronia, waratah, bottlebrush, eucalyptus, and banksias, inextricably bound into the tangle of poplars and pines, roses and daffodils, which laced the road-sides. Mock-turtle.

Mary, Mary, quite contrary,
How does your garden grow?

It was a good year. A sea of yellow engulfed the island town. The full ripe wheat-heads rattled in the soft afternoon breeze; blacker than black crows harvesting the odd grain from the rich, brown soil. Grain swept from its shell by a sudden gust or pre-mature birth … which flower gathering at burnt edges of snapping beaks. The town, a fragile museum-piece, was a slab of ringed, edged colour, sporting ochre floors and mud-brick walls — a storehouse full of memories, ripe for the picking by greedy beaks of lucid silverness … rusted wheel-spokes, and decaying plough-shares.

Brown town, grey-walled,
A thick clay granary.

Thomas paid the lady and left the shop. He retrieved his traveling bag from the coolness of the long, overhanging verandah, and swung it laboriously over his shoulder. Eye of newt, frog’s horn. Book in hand, he set off down the street, occasionally substituting a quick glance at the path ahead for a word or two.

Linear B, Minos, Pylos, Linear A, back to back, hieroglyphics, Knossos, London, Bethlehem, manuscript, Ventris, monologue, Mycenean, Sanscrit, gold, lies, chariots, guns, apple-pie, officials, Athens, and mud.

Two youths leaning against a freshly painted verandah, its white posts stark against the blackness of their T-shirts. Four blue eyes following the slow, irregular stride of the literate foreigners. An elbow in the other’s ribs.
A reply. Two blobs of nicotine-stained mucous slapping violently against the ground. Just a warning, a predatory show of strength. Two girls appear and select a blacked chest upon which to rest their vacant heads ...

In bright array, sporting the spoils of buccaneering, Dampier unwittingly established the convict tradition — one grade above the natives (or alternatively, one step ahead). And so, years later, here they are: shackled in freshly forged manacles, boasting Cuban cigars and muscle shirts ... minor, faint specks, against the gloriously coloured and embellished cartography of Gerhards Mercator and Company ...

the stuff of epic works, of narratives tour de force, trekking through deserts and steaming jungles, ominous mountain ranges and ...

An Aboriginal man similarly watched the stranger’s progress. His sad, drawn pools of redness sketched the picture over a screen of emptiness with clear ink ...

a dazed numbness and a broken pride constructed in his look by onlookers. A Portrait of Thomas.

The youths, having conquered Thomas, impulsively thrust their girls aside and proceeded to collect an assortment of sharp, jagged stones from the graveled roadside. Arms cocked to the full, they hurled the salvo at the slumped body of the DREAMING Aboriginal man. Startled, the body became rigid and erupted into a fit of drunken abuse and nervous scratching. Laughter echoed torturously against the afternoon air ... his body slumped again and the DREAM re-grew. This was how the youths thought it. This is how it had to be. This was not. This is not. This is not was.

Thomas entered his grandmother’s shop.

A girl, whom Thomas had never seen before, was bent over the softness of a black chiffon, picking at the threads with the tip of a knife... snicker-snack ...
Thomas glanced at the golden-haired girl and then back out into the street in time to see a big black Mercedes cruise slowly by, with the owner of the local hotel bent proudly over the polished steering wheel. A big shit-faced business man, self-made millionaire on his way to a knighthood … Thomas mused … a fascist and a racist no doubt … very popular on campus at the moment. Obsidian spearheads and bone-tipped arrows. He turned back to face the girl, who looked to be about twenty — the same age as himself.

Cynically, Thomas said, “Is my grandmother in? I’ve just got off the bus. He looked down at the floor and focused his eyes on a swirling knot in the wood. This induced a spell of vertigo. By forcing his eyelids apart to their outmost extremities he enhanced this effect. There was a long pause before the girl answered — with a yellow ribbon around his waist, Thomas presented an unusual portrait.

The Sun-God, rise shower
of golden blue, a flash
bright in the eye of the
Oxus, and the Sphinxes
of Susa: an Exodus
of Philistines, Gold.

The girl answered Thomas in a clear, sophisticated voice (which surprised him), “She has gone out for the afternoon. Visiting Mrs Freeson down at the rectory and making arrangements for next week’s agricultural show.”

Thomas straightened the strip of yellow satin which swept across his hips, and said, “I want to stay with her for a few days.” He stopped, and then added vehemently, “To get away from my fucken’ parents.” He had emphasized the fucken’, hoping to shock the country girl. No reaction. Annoyed with her indifference, he asked curtly, “Would you know if the spare room is in use?”
“I don’t think it is.”

“Well, that’s a start,” he said sarcastically.

Thomas nonchalantly dropped his bulging bag to the floor and slipped into his grandmother’s old wicker chair. She was a challenge, this golden-haired girl. A game: the object: to destroy her removed serenity. Act one: shock. Attach the nervous system.

With poetic flair, he asked, “What colour knickers are you wearing?”

No answer … fuck it … wait …, yes … she answered complacently, “Red.”

Perfect, perfect stillness. Perfectly unaltered. Puissant nerves. Probably thinking, Christ, how bloody pathetic. Totally wooden … lacks reality … a walking laughing box … canned human. Anyway, what does it matter? I mean, who has got the right to say what is realistic behavior and what is not? And, as for motive, nobody knows what my motive is in asking what colour her knickers are … it might be genuine concern. Bloody hell. I wish she’d stop fiddling with that bloody chiffon. Ludicrous, ludicrous, ludicrous. Knickers is a much abused word. In fact everything has been abused. Repetition, repetition repetition repetition repetition repetition. I hate chiffons I hate chiffons I hate chiffons I hate chiffons one-hundred times in blue ink and on straight lines.

“You’re new here?” he asked. (An omniscient observation — a brief glimpse. E.g. He would put her in her rightful place. He wasn’t going to be defeated by some golden-haired harlot.)

“Yes.”

“Do you enjoy the work? It’s always struck me as being rather boring,” he said, rolling the rather across his tongue with absurd exaggeration.

“I need the money.”

“Capitalist. Hemlock may you drink,” said Thomas.

“Maybe,” she said.

Talk about evading the point. Shit, won’t move. An iron butterfly.
A conversation developed which had no logical progression or trend: the spontaneity of distance — there was a tangible isolation for both subjects. Subjects in the Greater Scheme of things. A piece of silk. Silky down. Stockings.

An absurd flight into further absurdity.

A deliberate pseudo-panache ... a unprofundus Oscar-Wilde ... Over Quotation X. O. Q. X. Where X equals Fu Hsi and/or Utility.

“I used to eat tea-cake under that counter,” he said, pointing to the slab of worn wood which lay buried beneath a sea of dresses. “That was when I was a small child. I’m not sentimental about my past, don’t get me wrong. I’m philosophical. There is a great deal of Coleridge in me. Collective inheritance. You see eating tea-cake under my grandmother’s shop counter was an act of defiance towards my parents. They disapprove of the old-girl, I was only allowed to visit her on the understanding that she make a large portion of her will over to them.” He rocked back into the two back legs of the wicker chair and stared at the ceiling. It was a dull, fetid ceiling — lumps of congealed paint, spiderwebs, blotches of dirt, (and other contemporary stock epithets). Transfixed in this position he said, with vacuous solemnity, “In any case, tea-cakes make me nauseous.”

“You look like a student,” she said quietly.

“Yes, I’m a student,” he said, surprised that she hadn’t asked why his parents disapproved of his grandmother.

“Of what?”

“Oh, everything really. I’m studying literature but my interests are very diverse. I’m an artists of sorts. I sell a few painting and sculptures every now and again. I love music. Sometimes I go into the laboratories at uni and dabble in a bit of chemistry. I’m a writer you see, and I believe that it is essential to be knowledgeable in as many fields as possible. That’s the problem with contemporary educational trends, too much emphasis is placed on achievement within one particular area.
There was a brief moment of silence before Thomas continued, “I enjoy writing in all creative fields. I’m very interested in avant-garde literature. Don’t you think avant-garde has a hackneyed ring to it?”

“Definitely. Have you had anything published?”

“No, but I haven’t submitted anything. I want to wait a while, wait until I’ve developed some firm philosophies and a definite style. I think it is very important to adhere to a strict discipline.”

“I disagree with that. Writing should be an experience of the heart, not of the mind. You should write as you feel. There is no reason why your earlier efforts shouldn’t convey as much feeling as you later ones. It sickens me to think that feelings take second place,” she said, there being a distinct note of irritation in her voice.

Now, let me think about this. Her thoughts are confused and obviously lacking in experience. Raw-thoughts. Plenty of fire and passion. Still, there is a kernel of truth in what she said, and I’d be the first person to admit it. She’s a passion-brick. And still, moreover, we have a bite. She’s obviously interested in my body and soul. Quite impressive really. Probably never met anybody like me. I’m a unique species, a self-made species. Rising up out of the quagmire. Like Basil I of Byzantium. A prophecy: Please Mr Theophilitzes, can I purple your saddle imperial? Before and after Constantine there was sand and village smithies. And then came the mighty trade-routes. Rooting around the then-known-world. The key-stone of un-civilisation: ivory, aloes, ginger, musk, amber, diamonds, and rubies, damask, and silk, spices, and slaves … oh, and relics … John the Baptist, St Luke, St Timothy, St Paul, and St Andrew (all having the statue of Apollo cum Constantine in common).

Thomas came out of his daze and said, “I think it was Eliot who said that when technical experience, gradually acquired, and ordinary human development chance to meet, a masterpiece is born to the world.”

“What does it matter it it’s a masterpiece or not?” she asked firmly.
Annoyed with this, Thomas said, “Fuck! Writing skills are very important. You have to be able to communicate. Can’t you get that through you head?” He looked at her sharply but she continued with her work unruffled.

Thomas grew suddenly bored with this girl, and said, with indifference, “I can pronounce fuck in thirty-five alternative ways, dialects, whatever …” 

She looked at him with a tranquil skepticism — a peach face with hazel eyes. He was mocking her.

Thomas watched the chiffon roll over in her soft hands. Boredom, boredom, boredom. One should never be bored.

Complete silence. Relief, back to the real world.

Thomas opened the top of his collar, releasing a gasp of humidity. The shop was overly warm — the sun beating against the white-curtained windows, an occasional beam seering through the rents which covered the cloth as a gust of wind removed the shade of an over-hanging branch. It seemed unusual for a tailor’s shop to be in such great need of new curtains. Not a very good recommendation, but nobody ever seemed to notice.

Flicking through his book, The World of James Joyce (an amazing find in that little bush culture bookshop), Thomas suddenly said with fresh vigour, “My friend Henry says that I think too highly of Joyce¹ and Beckett. We often argue about it …” He pondered on these words for a moment, and then said, “I think Henry is cracking up. To much booze. He has difficulty remembering things. He’s always criticising me for using long-winded sentences. You know, like Henry James. And my constant references to water: pools, streams, oceans, rivers and so on. It’s because I live on an island. We are surrounded by water in Australia. Well, what do you think? I mean about Joyce, Beckett, and Aquarius?”

Pools — especially in the case of eyes and in.

¹ Post Freudian-Joycian hang-up over the low flow of the stream of consciousness — a sign of modernism, just as the novel itself was once original. But what is the novel? The novel is a
Seas — constant references to corks and bobbing.

Streams — readily found issuing from wild mountain catchment areas, dripping with sweet honey-dew.

Oceans — symbol of voluminous sins.

River — esp. of dreams and death.

Thomas did not expect an answer. He continued to rock back and forth on his chair, thinking about the time when Henry had tried to commit suicide by slashing his wrists. Suicide fascinated Thomas. One of his cousins had jumped off a bridge after failing his finals in medicine. Virginia Woolf had taken her own life. A common occurrence amongst writers and artists. Too intense.

The girl continued to work busily at the material. She made no indication that she had understood or even heard Thomas’s question.

A shriek of laughter erupted in the street outside. Two families, who frequented town only on rare occasions, had chanced to meet, and, having not seen each other for many months, were indulging in a hearty exchange of personal gossip and second-hand jokes.

“I’m not very fond of Beckett,” she began, “and I only like Joyce in so far as *Portrait of An Artist* is concerned. I’m not a fan of either *Ulysses* or *Finnegans Wake*. You see, the problem is not so much with the actual works themselves but the unfortunate habit people have of quoting from them in order to impress others. It seems to have become the legacy of intellectuals to collapse into paroxysmic raptures on reading the names of Leopold Bloom and Anna Livia Plurabelle.”

Thomas looked shocked. He inwardly crumpled. She had obviously read them. Disturbing.

“And,” she continued, “in so far as Joyce’s other works are concerned, I cannot confess to having read anything more than a smattering of his short stories, and a couple of brief extracts from *Exiles*. Actually, I must say, I think
the *Boarding House*, and *The Dead* are two of the finest short stories I have ever read.”

A *smattering*? A what? Good god. The *finest*? Probably the product of some prim and proper boarding school: sophisticated on the surface, but in reality, possessing the character of a sponge. Thin-skinned. Nobody has the right to speak about Joyce in such a condescending manner. Education ... regressing at her own pace: De-Montessori method.

“I find Beckett verbose,” she said, “although I did thoroughly enjoy *Waiting for Godot*.”

What the hell does she mean by verbose? Crap! Crap crap crap! Odalisque, slut, whore … Grieg-lover!

Thomas felt cornered. He lashed out at her. “What on earth are you talking about? Christ Almighty! The language isn’t verbose, it’s rich. Rich language. Savvy? Both Joyce and Beckett use this rich language to create a clear, vivid, and intimate picture of life.”

The girl remained calm. Irritated with her lack of reaction, Thomas rested his chin against his chest and closed his eyes. He has closed the book and placed it in his lap. When she next spoke to him he remained in this position.

“It is impossible to create a clear, intimate picture of life,” she said.

Still with his eyes closed, he said, in a slow, indifferent voice, “That’s probably true, but at least you can gain a glimpse. The stronger the writing, the stronger the glimpse.”

Thomas thought of Andrea Odoni’s collection of masterpieces. And Giotto’s Anne and Jo in golden gate. Constantine and Justinian and so on. Squeezing sandy toes in a scrunch-scrunch sandwich at the sea-side, waves curling in white lips, full-bloom blueness, scrunched haunches, bent knees, anemones with cream frosting, crabs and haunches, Caligula gathering seashells by the sea-shore and the ragged rascal rounding the rocky rug.

Wasn’t she going to say something? Disagree with him? Nothing.
Murphy’s Celia, that’s who she reminded him of. Celia had been a prostitute. Do all prostitutes have good legs? Or bad legs? Thomas could not see the girl’s legs because they were hidden behind the counter. She was a determined worker if nothing else.

“Hey, what’s your name,” he asked casually.

Looking up, she said, “Therese.”

He waited for her to ask his name. Nothing. This annoyed him slightly. Still, if she didn’t want to know, he wasn’t going to force it upon her.

“Have you always lived here?” he asked.

“No, I’m from Sydney. My parents moved over here last Christmas.”

Ah, a migrant, of sorts. Foreign blood like myself. This town hates change, and strangers mean change (a stranger being any person not locally born).

“Do you like living in a little country town?”

“No. I hate the place. As soon as I’ve saved enough money I’m leaving,” she said. He could see that she was becoming agitated, as if mere mention of country town disgusted her.

“I don’t blame you for hating it. It’s like an in-grown toe-nail. But I find it a good place to escape to, away from the hassles of home. As soon as I can I’m going to Europe. Australia is culturally dry. It’s lacking in h-e-r-i-t-a-g-e. Henry feels it strongly. He’s English, and misses home very much. Bad-luck.”

“I’m going to France,” she said. “I feel much the same way. I’m French by birth.” Having said this she placed the chiffon on the counter and left the room. Thomas thought this very strange but did not let it bother him.

He did not see the girl during the remainder of his stay. According to his grandmother she only worked casual hours. She was not very well liked around the town. The local boys were told to steer clear of her — hot flesh, stock to the local sheilas.
Grandma Flyn had been exiled from the rest of her family for over thirty years. In their opinion she had remarried too soon after the death of her first husband. *No respect for the dead*, they’d said. Thomas could just remember his grandmother’s second husband, who had died when Thomas was barely six-years old. He had been a kind, wise old gentleman with a great bushy red beard and a broad Irish accent. The couple had been childhood friends in Ulster, and when her first husband died the old friend travelled out to Australia and married her immediately.

Grandma Flyn had a certain feeling of magic about her. She was full of vitality and uniqueness. She could mix with every sort of person — from professor to farmer, from adult to child — without seeming fake. She was a genuine friend to everybody. Thomas regarded her as the only character in his whole family worthy of any consideration (other than his cousin who had jumped off the bridge). She didn’t seem to grow older. When he had been young Thomas had imagined that she would live forever, and that she was as old as the world itself. She had even been on the Town Council.

That evening Thomas and his grandmother sat around the card table. The old lady enjoyed talking over a game of solitaire. The window was full-open, such that a fresh evening breeze filtered through into the room, fanning the gold-framed leaves of the old Family Bible. In the dim light the old colonial furniture felt natural and secure.

Thomas had been complaining to this grandmother about his parents and his frustration at being trapped in Perth, a little city on the edge of the world.

Grandma Flyn flipped over an ace of spades and placed it in the centre of the table. Satisfied with her luck, she said, “Patience, that’s what you lack my boy, patience. You must first complete your education. You must know how important it is to do that. Without a degree you would be like a feather in the wind. In the end, it’s only that piece of paper which will keep you fed.”
“That sounds very conservative,” said Thomas.

“It’s being realistic, I’m afraid. There’s very little else for you to do,” she said.

“One day I hope to live on my writing. I know I’m good enough. And if I need to supplement my income I could always pick up some short-term work on the side.”

“Such as?"

He thought about his for a moment and then said, with enthusiasm, “I could work up North. They earn big money up there. I could work on the roads. I’ve got a friend who’s working up there right now, and he’s pulling in around four hundred a week. Four hundred a week!” Thomas checked himself. It was unusual for him to get excited over such a trivial thing. He prided himself on remaining outwardly calm and composed. It was all part of his indifference towards a society lacking any depth. It was the second time in one day that he had grown excited. Perhaps his character was changing. Perhaps he would become more demonstrative as he grew older. That girl had angered him, upset his indifference.

“Hmmmm, even if you’re lucky,” said Grandma Flyn, “it will be many years before you can hope to support yourself through writing alone. And, as for roadwork … well, just take a look at your hands.” She watched Thomas slip his silken hands beneath the table. An uncomfortable look covered his face. He seemed to be in a strange mood this evening. She had rarely seen him so worked-up. Something was bothering him. Frustration probably. Not such a rare thing at that age: wanting to branch out, create an identity, be his own master. She knew that his parents were difficult people to live with.

“I’m afraid you live in a fantasy world most of the time, Thomas. Still, that’s not such a bad thing really,” she said with a smile. “Come on, you look quite dejected. I’ll say something anyway, you’re good company and interesting to talk too, which is more than I can say for some people.”
This was the first time Thomas had ever heard his grandmother speak of others in an un-complimentary way. It pleased him — she was, after all, human.

Thomas was about to say something when his thoughts were interrupted by his grandmother, who let out a little shriek of joy:

“Haaaaaaa, there! I haven’t lost my touch yet!” Thomas looked at her in amazement. How could anyone get so much pleasure out of solitaire? There she was, clasping her small white hands to her laced chest, with a smile so broad that it threatened to swallow her face. There was a lot he could learn from Grandma Flyn.

With amazing agility the old lady swept the cards into a pile and whisked them off the table.

“I shall look for a good play for us to recite. A happy play, to remove this odour of melancholy,” she said, and with this left the room.

Thomas left his chair and walked over to the window. Flicking the curtains aside he placed his elbows firmly against the wooden ledge, balancing his inclined body by cupping his chin in the arch of his tendrill-fingered hands.

The evening breeze had all but vanished. The curtains, which had been sucking in and blowing out earlier that evening, now rested motionless on Thomas’s bony shoulders.

An old bicycle was leaning up against the street-post across the road. Thomas thought it a symbolic-looking bike.

It’s amazing how often something as simple as a bicycle can become an emotional fixative. *The Third Policeman* and *Malone* are full of bicycles, before and after. I used to have a tricycle, but that’s not the same thing really. Henry’s got an old racing bike in his garden shed. Irish authors are obsessed with bikes. But, of course, the Irish are fond of myth. I’m Irish. Bicycle tyres and pumps have developed strong personal identities, and can stand up to the most severe scrutiny without the support of the bicycle itself. Sarintino
paid me thirty dollars for a sculpture based on a bicycle wheel. I welded chicken wire over the spokes ... no, soldered it, not welded, that’s right, soldered the chicken wire onto the spokes ... much the same thing anyway — just a technicality. I called it Conquest. A load of absolute crap. Maybe everybody should ride bikes. It’s healthy, and a good way of keeping in contact with the rest of the world. But walking is much safer than riding — stick to walking old son. Cars are an abomination. If I remember rightly, solder is a combination of tin and lead, or copper and zinc — but I think that’s brazing solder. The French Resistance used a lot of bicycles, but mainly underground.

The moon was glowing. From the window Thomas could see the fields bathed in an orange-blue darkness — the main street stopped abruptly: right at the edge of Patterson’s farm. Thomas enjoyed staring into the moon, tracing the bluish landscapes with his eyes. There was something mystical in this ageless god which attracted his sense of adventure. Blood tithes to the moon. Black Minnaloushe staring at the moon. Sometimes he would walk out into those fields and feel the moon’s warmth as its rays danced across his body. It was like a magnet, drawing his spirit towards it. As a child he had know the names of its major features — Sea of Conflict, Sea of Fertility, Sea of Nectar, Sea of Vapours, Bay of Rainbows, Ocean of Storms, Plato, Aristotle, Archimedes, Clavius, Appenine Mountains, etc.

There was music playing against the moon’s silence. What was it? A barn dance? The polka? It seemed to be coming from the town hall. Thomas loathed dancing. To him it seemed a very crude form of entertainment — a clear sign of low intelligence. He could picture them, stumbling and falling, laughing and crying. Stone jaws. Sibilant dreams. Some fourth-class dance band with a tinny jazz piano and a fiddle or two, belting out request after request. Belly after belly slumped over belted trouser-rims with quart upon quart of ice-cold beer. No class what-so-ever. Beer is for the common man.

Grandma Flyn returned with two little paperback books in hand. They looked much worn with their dog-eared corners and yellowed pages.

“Now we shall read a play together,” she said, with just a trace of accent. Thomas loved his grandmother’s lyrical way of speaking. He thought of Ireland and what a magical place it must be. You don’t want to go there, his mother had said to him, it’s a violent country — and full of Catholics. He hadn’t bothered to argue with her.

Thomas accepted his copy of Twelfth Night with sepulchral gravity. He knew his grandmother took play-readings very seriously, and disapproved of irreverent behaviour. This was her substitute for the live theatre she was rarely ever able to see.

“It’s such a merry play,” she said, “And I think we could both do with a good dose of merriment. The parts must be divided evenly. You shall take Olivia, Maria, Valentine, Curio, and Sir Andrew Aguecheek, Thomas, and I shall take the rest. Now remember, a different voice for each character. You must feel with your character, let he or she become part of you. Okay?”

“Uhm, hold on,” he said, quickly running his eye down the list of characters inside the front cover.

“What are you doing?” she asked impatiently.

“I was just checking to see if the division of roles is equal,” he said. (His grandmother had the habit of loading the bulk of work upon her own shoulders.)

“Well of course it is,” she said sharply.

“Okay!”
“Good,” said his grandmother, who then began to read in a strong, but frivolous voice ...

II

The glossed landscape was drifting into the new day when Thomas retired to the solitude of the spare room. He flicked on the light-switch: the tassled lampshade glowed an eastern red — as if it received inspiration from the stench of foreign market-squares. The morning had brought with it a thick oppressiveness: the freshness of the evening had been whisked away by the approaching storm. Thomas drew in a deep breath, half gasping. The air filled his mouth with the taste of stale fish and rotten vegetables, and lodged itself firmly in his throat. Everything was still, deathly quiet. The music had long since stopped, and Thomas almost regretted that there had been nothing to take its place. As it was, he felt totally alone, isolated, stranded. Before dawn the clouds would unleash their fury, rolling across the world like a pack of over-fed judges, sentencing the land to a sound flogging, swallowing the moon. The sun would not shine throughout the next day, only the sullen glow of the black sky would reveal its whereabouts. Thomas flopped onto the bed and closed his eyes. There had been no need to undress, he had that feeling; there would be no sleeping now. He would have to get drunk. He wanted to write, and could only do so at this early hour, and in such depressing conditions, whilst drinking. Drinking and writing had always worked well for Thomas. Admittedly, he had written some of his worst pieces in this state, but more importantly, he had also written his best. It was almost exciting to look at the previous night’s work the next day, sober. He would often say to himself, “Did I write this? What the hell was I on about?” He levered himself back up off the bed,
the springs stretching their coils in discord, and stood momentarily in the room’s centre, trying to recall where he had seen that un-opened bottle of French brandy. Snapping his fingers, he went through to the little jarrah cupboard which sat snuggly in the corner of the living-room, behind the card table. There it was, plump and squat, next to a bottle of red wine. He removed both bottles from the cupboard and placed them on the table. He was not a wine drinker, but this was top quality stuff and he had a strong mind to sample it. He found a glass, poured himself a drink — a mixture of wine and brandy — and swallowed a long, warmish draught.

When Thomas was confirmed, the minister had held a sparkling silver chalice to his lips and poured the burning wine down his throat, making him cough slightly. The cold metal had made his heart flutter: feeling foreign to the softness and warmth of his mouth. He had felt like this when Sandra Parkins had kissed him behind the school toilets back in the second grade. But, on both occasions, the excitement had been quick to pass, and the end result disappointing. The minister’s words had been meaningless. A great many thoughts had rushed through his mind at the sacred moment, but were soon forgotten: Was the chalice made from real silver? Was it really the blood of Christ? How many others were being confirmed at the very same moment? Both the minister and the congregation had seemed uninterested in the proceedings. His father had fallen asleep, while his mother had spent the whole time studying her little blue-cloth hymn book. Before entering the church, Thomas had seen a plump little man in shorts breaking bricks with...

*Thomas withdrew his pen and surveyed his work. He was still sober enough to write legibly. He was not pleased with this poem; it seemed to lack fluency and control. Some of the lines contained a nice music, a lemony texture, but failed to convey emotion and sensitivity. (Thomas associated the word lemon with something both sweet and bitter. It was a palatable image, having a smooth consistency, but also one which contained discrepancies.) The music of the storm was reaching a*
crescendo. The atmosphere was bloated with violence. The rain crashed against the iron roof, and the wind screamed as it funneled up under the eaves and through the rafters. The harvest would be a disaster. The heads of wheat would be shattered and showered over the muddy fields, the grains

...the blade of a cement trowel. There had been a cement-mixer beside him churning a grey, sloppy mixture with a slop, slop, slop. “Why isn’t he in church,” Thomas had asked himself, “Today is a day of rest.” This had troubled Thomas — that fat little man seemed to be mocking him (was he the devil in disguise?). And that had been his eleventh birthday. The minister had said a special word, a gesture of goodwill: the congregation had murmured and smiled. Towards dawn the storm broke. The air had a lemon-fragrance about it...

**Prelude**

No crop out of the chalice is gold. Rust runs from ear to root, and capillaries.
How far a tune carries
out into the fields.
Where the book falls
open,
the drill
works overtime.

Each generation
is less productive:
driven from here,
the evergreen secrets.

Whose spirit
entered into the trees?
We will clear
last from here, the spirit.

The church
decommissioned.
Storage space
for hay.

Watertank: latticework
run-off, nothing holds,
the chalice.
swelling and rotting in their murky brown puddles. Thomas felt irritable. He hurled his pen against the wall, and watched with satisfaction as it exploded, spraying flecks of white plaster over the polished floorboards. He turned to his poem, and, as he ripped it in half, his anger faded into humiliation. He had known it all along — he had made a fool of himself in front of that girl.
Odyssey

Ambience. Cockeril lips, like scrunched rose petals, folded around a sparkling fountain of garden water. The child spits, laughs, and runs — all in the same action, all in the same moment. Like the clashing of thunder, rent of lightning, and splashing rain. A second of life — an action with infinite permutations like dots breaking down within a never ending straight line — dots between dots between dots. A flicker of wind, leaves and sand scattering. A naked body spread open-legged across a blanket of yellowness, a nest of spring. A bundle of fur curled in a tunnel of frost, the brittle roots of a frozen oak sucking nutrients with rigid mobility. A village from a height — sodden thatching, greys and dirty yellows running with mud — clutches of greenness — green weeds. The splotch of the water pump with an open stomach, a dribbling orifice — muddy wetness in a steel bucket going splash splash against the silver walls. To the seaside, where blocks of tailored flesh push into the sinking softness — the face of swallowed sand bent and buckled time over by a herd of fat milchers hoofing black pats of steaming dampness in and out — the golden sun of morning flecking the occasional grey hair with a shimmer, a special brightness. Tittering faces, jerking shoulders, shrugging necks. A coin set in gum on Roman street corner with foot upon foot leaving it lodged just the same — permanent, ignored, unrelenting. Across the Alps with their giant clefts and jutting buttresses, snowed deep under with drift upon drift of snowy fossils, and shapes, and ice. The border of two worlds — the barrier between the ice and the skate — the sliding of warm water, pulsing molecules, pulsating fibres, bouncing breasts. To feel the filth and smell the wafting fragrance, fragrance wasted by continental winds blowing into the
open cases, the Broken bags, of blackish polyps — polyps growing in open drains and feeding on sceptic sores. And back again.

Thomas was talking in his ordered monotony — words running into more words — indecipherable words. He was fascinated by her coolness, removed serenity. An amiable smile and the flick of flowing blackness, hair shifting across the delicate frame of her shoulders, riding the curve of her spine. This was no slut, no mindless romantic. So removed, indifferent but not judging, just existing.

She had travelled abroad — across the Agean — the richness of Constantinople. This tormented Thomas who desired, beyond all else, to walk the paths of heroes.

Bodies ache with pain and fatigue as the soil aches with loneliness and sadness. Surrounded by stranded companions — self-pity. The thought of purpose had trouble Thomas for the two long days since the Sunday service — Henry had remained neglected. On the third, when the rosy-fingered dawn aroused animal desire deep within his loins, Thomas supplicated to the will of his dreams. Across the sparkling sands of Aiaia with its burial mounds and street lights.

A thin wispy taper of silk smoke drawn against the sky by a blackened chimney pot. Early morning dampness — lurid fires.

Through the new buildings, standing proudly like toothpicks lodged in stone, to the inner-city — picture heritage hidden beneath corrugated iron and blankets of rust. Two-story squeeze boxes playing concertina with fat and thin bodies. In a nutshell.

Houses full of swine. Blind visionaries who had spied the golden lighthouse set against the horizon offering laden tables and eternal pleasures.

Two Circes in the one house — sitting on each other’s lap. Mind protection — a memory test to prove that the mind has control over the body. Wiggle left toe. Yes. Right toe (left foot). Yes. Passing the book shop …
the real test, resist or not … the elements: Hydrogen, Helium, Lithium, Berilium, Boron, Carbon, Nitrogen, Oxygen, Fluorine, Neon, Sodium, Magnesium, Aluminium, Silicon, Phosphorus, Sulphur, Chlorine, Argon, Potassium … etc … in fulfillment of the scriptures “On the third day” … my Blake should be in, “O Rose, thou art sick.” Yes.

THE GOLDEN WAND: Dirty windows, doors, and walls — the literary flower.

“Songs of Innocence”
Milton, Paradise Lost — a few bob.
Hesiod, Theogony, Works and Days — a few bob.
Hugh, behind the papyrus counter, talked to the pages of a thickish book through his bottles — proof of a miracle. Head up, eyes swimming through bulbous refractors — contorted whiteness.
“Good morning, Thomas,” he said flatly, returning to the yellowed page. Secondhand and brand spanking new, if a book, with its hieroglyphics scratched carelessly over the fresh paper, can be described as such.
Thomas appreciated Hugh’s dissociation, isolation — he and Hugh were much the same, except that Thomas felt the need for both spiritual and physical adventure — the separation of these being of prime importance.
Inclined obliquely to the vertical case with its horizontal slants, books pile high, Thomas jibbed.
“The cashier with the lovely fronds, nestled amongst the mother of pearl fluttering with the piles of cans set daintily against a mirage of frozen peas and loin chops. Safe and secure, the rest of the world passing on by, beyond the hardened plates of painted glass — ten for a dollar, or a dollar for ten. Little speakers singing in immature thoughts, screeching crescendos, listening and talking — the sounds of money bags jangling in plastic purses, skin tight jeans. Clinging.”
Hugh ignored him.
Please yourself, cryptic mind games.
Steel shelves perched on wooden floorboards — ever sinking, wearing, curving, ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ back to D, D for Daniels:

“Come, worthy Greek, Ulysses, come
Possess these shores with me”

Yes, the memory returns.

KEEP OUR CITY BEAUTIFUL: NO DOGS ALLOWED — not wet, cold muzzled flea circuses dropping gritty lumps on the filthy footpaths. Cigarette butts — crests of sticky redness lacing the paper, transparent skirts and supported dumplings. Wolf whistles. Woolfless wants.

“My book in?”

“Not yet.”

“It’s late.”

“Sorry.”

“What are you reading?”

“Dante.

“Ugh.”

Alfred Stanton jingled the brass bell chime, green corrosion shattering the stillness, spraying cupric greenness across the bristled “Welcome” mat.

An ancient man, a deteriorating mind dragged from step to step by weary bones. A Fabian — a dying race.

“Morning Alfred. I’m looking for a book, what would you recommend?”

Alfred propped himself against the door. A grey face, white beard.

“Good morning boys. You have youth which is in your favour. My copy of The Times is late.”

The pride is in him — “famine, plague, and slaughters” — the dreadnought. Never spoken outward rejection, but in his blood. Red blood, purple blood, green blood.
“Did you hear the broadcast — on the wireless last night? Nationalisation of banks …” He paused, the memory fading … “wait and see.”

“Would you recommend Bernstein? What do you think of Revisionism?”

L, L for Livy — *The War With Hannibal*. Out-think the opponent — caution, Fabius Maximus, born 1884. And so did Minucias, the master of Horse, despise his master’s tactics. Lines of soldiers staring through mountain mist at the fields of rolling turmoil, a deep river of consummation, bridged by the smiles of acid smoke clouds. Numidians and Moors leaping loops and walls of purple with ashen stallions, their brazen spear-heads sparkling with rebirth. A mountain’s tear — a welling ocean like a drop of clear ink spreading through the tunnels of blue blotting paper — quenched by the conflagration.

Alfred feels his pocket — no tobacco — he leaves.

“Funny old chap.”

Battleship grey — a freshly painted patch, an island for the clock with its precious hands swing circular — full three hundred and sixty degrees, stopping occasionally as if out of breath. Rewound. Restart. Underneath the grey is smooth white plaster clinging to crumbling masonry, slowly slipping.

Traders selling pernicious wares. Strumming fingers stroking steel guitar strings — bards from distant lands singing tales — stories with music, melodic epics.

The faithful saving souls, too early in the morning — cupboard drinkers. A sect for octoroons, one for quadroons, another for half-castes — the peak of deliverance, purity. From the cradle of the world through Jerusalem, Rome, East, and West, across the clouds of misguided spray — now here, preaching life and death. White robes, white colours, white bodies.
A grey-haired lady enters the shop, remnants of black dye lodged on dead cells. Muffled nods. “Quiet Please” swelling the tongue and crushing the nerve. Frost pink from filed edge to creamed cuticle tracing the edge of shelf, tickling the book spines with suggestive down strokes. “Religion” — “The Truth” — a genealogy traced back through Lamech, Mathusael, Mehujael, Irad, Enoch, Cain and Adam, to God himself.

Ringing bell — the world filling fast. Digging dugouts for the treacherous journey. No Blake — time to leave — dark inside, light out.


“I need to travel but financially it is impossible. I’ve got this feeling almost a tension … I’ve got to find my roots, my character.”

May 1787 — a shop of fools bound in chains and locked in barrels of rotting wood. Old gold sailors, salt-legged. Shiny red apples in a shiny red orchard — the bard strumming his lyre under grapevines capturing the breath of like with each fingerload. Pluck, pluck, pluck. A bright start, a guiding star with savage, lustful teeth. A light for a sunburnt land. Supply for added brightness. All in the line, via Tenerife, Rio de Janeiro, and Cape Town, eleven white dwarfs (dada being a little bigger, as has been previously mentioned). And who were the others? The grownups first with their soggy craws — Fishburn, Borrowdale, and Golden Grove. The children, with every-empty bellies, holding onto the coat-tails — Alexander, Friendship, Prince of Wales (the royal scepter of Mother Earth), Charlotte, Scarborough, and good bubbly, Lady Penryhn. Miles into litres, metres into pints, the whalebone seashine burning, burning, burning. Sardines in a milk-shake maker, being made to shake. Shake, shake, shake. Bye, bye, pig spit, brains for dinner being just a happy memory. Scurvy for the lice to feed on (if lice are partial to the taste of course). The happy companions Capen’
Fillup, all aboard and waiting, sir. God has come again. Jackson, by Jove, all the way to Sydney Cove. Lop, bunt, thump, desecration like a knife through molten butter. Up the tree with a cloth, a Jack of a chap — blue, red, and black (sorry, white). Reverse it for the sale of family trees.

Therese watched a white bird dive into sun flare. “I have contentment.”

“Yes, but you have seen the world. You have experience. Fish and chip paper in Crete, brown, wet, and sticky.”

“Beauty is everywhere, if you look.”


What about Persia? The brave ten thousand. Iran, sorry.

Question?

Answer (softly, amused).

Question?

Question (yearning)?

Question (self-pitying)?


Question (suggestive)?

Answer (smiling).

Statement: I’ll guarantee there is no beauty in hell.

Answer: a letter, a small girl’s letter from her big brother — a week before death. Beautiful beaches, it said. (Smile, curved lips, white teeth, arched spine).


Answer: Statement (Deep breathing): Forced to enlist, a patriotic mother, a true-boy’s father — visions of power.

Stumped.

A breeze, lifting like a parachute — straps for legs and legs for straps desire. The kiss, stolen between glimpses of moon rise and shafts of sunlight. Lips upon lips into mouth. Tender flesh rolling on a bed of moisture, over and over and under. Corrugated teeth in a slide of tongues. The Knight’s Tale. A flashing memory through the traumas and delights of an innocent Dedalus. Rushing, rushing, rushing. A sun equidistant from its planet’s moon — closer than further. From hag to princess, the feeling of the kiss in its perfect simplicity. The kiss from mother to son … a lost experience, a barrier. Hate … Love.

Black — nothing — White

Black — grey — White

Black — grey — yellow — gold — red — purple — blue — sea — green — yellow — grey — White

Emotional whirlpool: Panacea: a passing crisis:

Past influences — anti-parental complex, school rejection, rejection of school — rebirth, renaissance of sociability, screwing-around — unfelt emotion.
Faces parted — hypnotic trance of fused retinas, perfect blissful, timeless silence. Further apart. (Crrrrrrrraaaaaaaaccckkkkakkkkraa-aaccccakak): a blue boy coated in playground grime rubbing an unpolished stick along metal sheets — a hidden building site: an Eruption of jackhammers, words, and lungs. Broken peace, broken emotions, crisis past. Safe, immune — physical pleasure ... or unconscious softness, latent tenderness?

“Met an old Greek homosexual last year. Lived in Athens, Vienna, and Berlin. Berlin was his favourite city. Character, character and atmosphere. 1924: the flowering decay of an ill-fated republic.”

“Where are we going?”

“To Berlin.”

“Okay, that’s alright. I don’t mind.”
“I drink a lot. Lying in a gutter or outside a beer-hall in Berlin. Kicked to death by Nazis.”

“Watch the clouds draw themselves across the face of the sun.”

“I’ll probably end up laying in bed with a belly full of wine, forcing bile through the gullies by working the rubber of my paunch.”

A vapour trail shooting parabolically.

Erik, through a heritage of Fichte, Hegel, Treitshe, Nietzsche, Bismark, Lutheranism, Anti-Semitism, and lurid ladies (to keep out the cold), established a New Order of Professionals on the ice-swept shores of heathen Gronland. Let’s hear it for Rosa Luxembourg and the crucifixion of Spartacus! Canada was settled mainly by the John Bulls and Gauls, following the route used by Julius Caesar. The Cape from the Dutch, Jamaica and Trinidad, crumbs of the Spanish, Mauritians from the Gauls, Australia from the natives: silver-studded swords and gold-plated primogeniture. A billybong full of fine white sheep, rolled in folds of fat and guarded by a one eye ogre, the son of God. Weary bones, dropped from the hide of horse, blisters and frost-bite going pop, pop, pop. So, with his father’s blessing, Leif left the balmy shores of night-clad Gronland, with Preuss as his guiding star. Across the frosty waters, watching the sleek crested herring sheet through the angry blueness with slippery ferocity, heading towards unknown lands and Hindenberg giants. Towards the failing earth, tipping ever downwards — the dancing girls rustling their whiteness across red noses. The Acropolis has fallen down, fallen down, fallen down … my fair Athene. From Helluland to Markland to the land of wine — wine on the Rhine. Tyrkier clutched the juicy droplets in his weather-beaten fingers — Vinland. Then came Thorvald, with his broken kell called Kjalarness. Indians, Indians, Indians. A grave at Krossansess. As new, with Eyre and Loius and Clark and good old Karlsefni, back to
Vinland. Death to the Skraelings! A belly full of cow’s udder, squeezed through the teats of a bull. Milk-butter, milk-cheese, milk-yoghurt, milk-chocolate, and lumps of congealed cream. Calves nuzzling at milk, drowned and starved simultaneously. The betrayal in Vinland — Christianity a thousand miles away, searching, casting loops and wires. The Depression.

The Spartan heritage — another myth.

Religious festivals at Marathon — for horses with four hooves.

Across the Alps, searching for a new Homeland with a pack of elephants. The application of hot and cold, warm and cool, frozen and molten ... a strange feeling in the core, in the pit of the stomach. Curdled butterflies.

Cemetery on the left. Fresh flowers — the smells of spring.

Dead natives and dead Romans — Cannae, but later Zama. Newton’s Laws raise their ugly heads.

“Hear the voice of the Bard!” The innocent is in his coffin, the Experienced in his grave. Libations for Hades begging protection in the endless pilgrimage towards lilac trees and cauldrons of boiling nightshade — all afloat, afloat on peels of molten lead, portents of change. Drinking the blood of sheep-throats in its turgid warmness, bubbling in the pit.

Henry’s friend had had a funeral, a meager affair, a scrape of margarine on lamington and meringue.

Imagine Therese at a funeral. My mother loves them — she can wear her best black frock and hide her wrinkles under a mirage of black lace.

“Wind lilly laced locks”

Peter the Englishman was buried in loose yellow sand (damped for the occasion by a squirt of salty water), windswept desert dirt from the inner depths of a great spinifex plantation. East of Pergamum. The sand of a foreign land — lifeless rocks of infertility, crystals of sea-grown
silica and sun-baked mica, done to a crisp. Heat haze on isolated roads. Shifting dunes of shiny silveryness. Silvery night-moons arched in a double crescent of morning, peeping from West to East, glancing from North to South. Spray on painted strips of iron beach. A quaint window into pre-antiquity, the horns of Minos, bull-leaping and assorted blood sports. Aztecs through orbital telescopes. Crude manners, crude customs, a wild tribe in wild isolation — it goes for one and all. Far away from family crypts and communal burial chambers. Beehive bone pots. No guard of honour, no guard of dishonour. Lonely last stand. A garland of stolen daisies and a hiccup. A dozen onlookers listening politely.

Peter was an historian and literary expert. He was, by way of marriage and indirection, of fine artistic blood — a lineage forged by golden furnaces and Grecian smithies. There had been some mention of Blake. For Peter history ended with the death of William — oscitant modernism. The death of Latin and Greek, the final blow by blow by blow — blown over, haunches pressed hard to sand. Eisegesis (of Homer and the Bible). Although a strict Protestant Peter had insisted, with great passion. The Requiem. Gruesome rhetoric.

Livid features — fetid odour of luke-warm sullage.

The inscription wrought on the silk-smoothness of imported marble.

“The history of England,” read the stone. (To be planted at a later date but displayed by the masoner for the sake of inciting lucrative trade — all manner of headstones: crosses, slabs, statues, marble, plaster etc.)

The Script — a Dedication.

2. Crow trust — “and you to Brutus?”
3. And thus became the whirlpool.
4. “I’ve only eyes for you, Sweet Cordelia!” More baby-blue
6. Inheritance.
7. The assault.
8. Boadicea with whips.
   Distress.
   Exhaustion
   Withdrawal.
9. Have your cake and eat it too.
10. Edwin and Morcar Insurance Policies
11. Subjection.
   A collection of Vatican nudes.
13. Royal brothels abroad.

A rabid humour. The last laugh. Ha, ha, ha. A gutless life from six-foot down under. Breathing through the silica, the smell of mica. An eccentric.

After the funeral Henry and Thomas had gone to Peter’s flat to tie up his business affairs and eat the last of his all-English muffins and Ceylon tea. Henry carefully removed Peter’s leather-bound Shakespeare for his own use and pocketed various other nick-nacks. Thomas felt inclined to adopt the widower’s Indian scrapbook with its snapshots of Indian servants and British genteeeeeelmen, but decided that it may haunt him in later years.

Peter had hated Australia — he lived amongst the “convicts and natives” in a self-imposed exile. The reasons for this he had never had cause to divulge. He made a special point of reading imported English newspapers, listening to BBC broadcasts on his shortwave radio, attending only British theatrical productions, reading purely British literature (with the exception of pre-Renaissance writings: he was very fond of Plato and Ovid), and drinking warm English bitter. Henry had been Peter’s only true friend
— they had fought together. The other occupants of Australia were “crude beasts” only worthy of subordinance. Slaves them all.
His Philosophy: Parables and Revelations

The garden is full of wild dandelions, their pollen pulps mushy with the night dew. Bird beaks attack tree trunks, no insect, too cold, more habit than purpose. The cloudless sky, blue spiraling ... air sharp and tangy ... the smells of spring. A burning sharpness, red snot-flow from hot snozzle, tingling hands drawn warm by the rising sun. Clean atmosphere ... DEDUCTION: the power strike ... belching furnaces choked, belly-ache in disease-filled smoke stacks.

There were a number of zealous green-fingers tip-toeing through their leafy green arrangements ... a straightened pot here, a bit of fertilizer there.

Why is everyone so fond of apple trees? ... Black-spot everywhere.

Warm beds are especially warm when you have to get up ... cold room, freezing floor ... alarms crushed under feather-a-la-goosy duckling downing ... lumpy pillow.

FIRST LESSON

THE DISASTER (“In the name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful”):

“... On that day men shall become like scattered moths and on the mountains like tufts of carded wool. Then he whose scales are heavy shall dwell in bliss; but he whose scales are light, the Abyss shall be his home.”

WEIGHT ... SEVENTY KILOGRAMS ...
MOTHS: Plenty, under the bed, trapped between the window and the fly-wire. Flies are sacred, especially blowflies, they clean the hard-to-get spots.

MOUNTAINS: Wool circlets slip through crevices on high Tibetan peaks when the blustery storm blows sheets of snow against the age-old rock.

Feet cold, frost-bite warmth ... trickery, feet cold. Thomas pulled the ivory chess-set from the top of his cheap hard-board wardrobe. Booom, thundering lead slug downs big dad native-sqasher, ivory crashing ... ivory ripped from fresh flesh. It was covered in dust. Should have a cat to Mewwwwoew, to lick its mouse-red chops, saying, “time for dinner dad.” Record on ... speakers pump-out Back ... Baroque splendour ... music to his father’s ears ... the diaphragm wiggling back and forward, in and out. Solitaire, Thomas against the rest of the world ... pushover ...

“When the hurlyburly’s done,
when the battle’s lost and won.”

Icarus Caesar was an arboraceous man: tall and spindly, but stalwart. Caesar was one of the condemned, doomed to wander the earth until its extinction. For this reason, and this reason only (actually he was a bit of a sadist) he sought to lay the seeds of destruction, to promote the Armageddon. Caesar had a black cat and kept bees.

Caesar finished hitching-up his leather trousers and then signaled the advance ... white-plumed eagles shooting through the blue sky, bursting, fragmenting ... aerial ballet. His white men (olive-Caucasian) marched towards the King’s Arms, that great gold-spired fortress in Hastings. The adrenaline pumped wildly through their warrior veins ... slip slurp, slip slurp ... blood clot ... slurp slurp. Their masculine muscles, all butch and brawny, tightened with excitement ... their bowels relaxed. Boom, boom, boom, the artillery barrage ... crunch, crunch ... crashing shells smashing beer glasses.
“Did my little moggy get a big bee sting on the honker? Diddums, there there?

The lemon tanks onto the plain, their tracks biting into the dusty desert floor.

When on campaign Caesar was accompanied by a well-stocked harem … lots of porky rump … Caesar liked more than just a hand-full. The battle was raging, time for a break … CLEOPATRA.

Oh, Cleopatra, you with the sexy thighs … a dimple in noble Flaubert’s eye: she was beautiful, tall and shapely, with cheeks like rose-buds, and had loads of charm.

THE SEDUCTION
(Five months earlier … AUTUMN)

A small, silent explosion of true-to-life soppy magazine love … no sexual base, just true harmony … eyes fluttering, hearts-a-flurry. His golden breastplate (a present from the Druids), shooting reflected rays of creamy sun-mist through the morning nettle-dew … her burnt retina, all frazzled and singed, begged her to sue the Imperial Roman Treasury, but love’s bonds were far too strong.

Rich Roman Concubines for Arab Harems.

“The difference between king and emperor? That’s an easy one, surprised you should even need to ask.”

Caesar was destined to become a star, a fiery-tailed comet.

A king is God’s representative on earth, an emperor is a god in himself … I am an emperor.

The Inca considered falling stars … Comets and meteors … omens of bad luck.
The Mediterranean is not rally romantic ... the casinos are filled with dirty prostitutes and filthy paper money ... the gold dubloons of the Emperor are at the bottom of the “gong tormented sea” ... Jews fight amongst themselves. Olives still grow well, in fact, the Pizza trade is thriving. Thick bowls of gamboge-garnished luke-warm fat only twenty lira ... red-rivers flow by Red Sea, through the Suez, fat flats in Mesopotamia, running through the indigo caves ... the land of epics.

Hot sticky climates are good for breeding big-juicy blowflies ... membrane tubes sapping sweat from clogged pores.

Mr and Mrs Hubbel always spent their holidays on the Riviera. Mr Hubbel was a connoisseur of the human body, he spent most of his days studying varicose veins. If he found a really first-class specimen he would fit his telescopic lens to his camera and click-shut a whole roll away ... he kept the rolls of film in his sporran. Mrs Hubbel studied obscure artforms, provided that they had been done by obscure artists. There were always plenty of these young dumplings around .... she would spend her days studying their source of inspiration.

Phrygia had been a noble country, but it too has vanished ... the rising moon has swallowed the cult of the sun.

It was a beautiful city. The salt spray filled the sky as waves thundered against the stone walls, the sun shooting rainbows through the delicate mist. Flame-throwers industrialized the tavern’s walls ... downtown Tyre.

THE SEIGE

BLACK’S MOVE: Pawn to King’s Bishop four ... Queen takes pawn ... King castles ... come back to me my loving Queen ... Queen me ... piss off, you got yourself into it ... Black Mulligan loved gizzard-stew, lots of lumpy
giblet … but remember our wedding night … lots of lovely honey-cakes … how can I forget it, you and those bloody scribes … Pawn takes pawn …

Thomas was Augustine, definitely not a romantic.

Salty ague cakes blackened lungs
with a thick grisly green fungus …
the world’s belly rolls and writhes,
crippled and cramped with pain …

“Howver through the fog and filthy air.”

Soldiers tend to get over excited after the battle as been won. Six men from “B” company were had up for rape … they were let off, the 6.0. had been very understanding.

Private Bill Hope picked his way through the bomb-blast debris, babies scuttling back and forth, sucking at dead mothers’ teats. Police station on the corner, just like home, fire station without any fire engines. Refugees handling five day stale cookies through shreds of shattered glass, red arms … “Madeline’s Bakery … Best to try Madeline’s wares … stut, stut, stut … three shots above their heads will send them running … empty shop. The shop was battered and bloody … Hope picked up an apple pie, wiping a smudge of blood from its soggy top … galumph, not bad, considering.

“How me … help me …”

Someone squashed beneath the rubble … nearly finished … crumbs licked from fingers … “What do you want?”

“I’m over here, under the counter … I’m trapped.”

“Serves you right … oh, alright, I’ll give you a hand.”

Looks … young girl. The counter propped up vertical, she struggle out … bruises, shaken, but still whole.

“Thankyou.”

Her skirt caught … rip … Hope’s emotional trauma … Hope cleared of rape.

“Bring up the catapults! Bring up the battering rams! Rip their guts and spill their blood. Bring up the rapists! Bring up the thieves and murderers! Men I want you to understand that your efforts today are going to have a profound effect on posterity. War shall become society’s religion … society War’s soul. Fight until your bones ache, fight until fighting takes you to the depths of death.”

Rah, rah … that’s the spirit … long live Caesar … long live war!!

Funny, when we were in Rome they convicted us for evading tax.

Throng, crunch … slip, slip, left right left … no, that’s not right … the leftists are surrounding democracy … the right must fight its way to freedom … salute the flag, kiss the monarch, and off to war.

For we are jolly good fellows …

Caesar loved Egyptian porno-magazines, their soft papyrus pages were far more stimulating than the hunks of freezing marble they used in Rome … and there were no censor-ship laws to inhibit the artist’s craft. Rubbing softness … small-breasted figures in wild profusion … nymphs incarcerated in strong leather bonds … indomitable … over the page … defeated. Rumours told Caesar that the Spartans ran some pretty hot presses … fun.

Caesar stood naked on the open plain, the ants tickling his fancy: Civil war raging by holy shrines, up the mountain, all around … crumbling walls, blood-filled throats … apoplexy … pregnant tears tempt re-incarnation … bonuses in an emperor’s search for TERRITORY …

Thomas returned the chess-set to its lonely home, the game had ended in a stalemate.

“So foul and fair a day I have not seen.”

Thomas stared through his window, palm swirling concentrically, droplets dropping from the misted pane … cold. The front path was covered
in weeds ... night dampness spinning ... music spins its gyre. Damned expensive things diamonds. The whips which lash the backs of blacks are made from imported leather. Christ, bursting bladder. Swish, swaddle, swaddle, swish ... they only touch the uncut stuff. Itchy bum.

War's not all fun and games, the refugees are always a problem, especially where there are a few million of them ... can't do a Swift, not hungry enough. Some can be sent back to Rome as slaves, but the others ... well, they aren't much good for anything. Too many to chop up ... the men are worn-out ... the slaves, you see, got to break them in the wild. Oh well, might as well leave them here ... so, they may revolt occasionally ... it provides good sport ... (MEMO ... GENERAL PLUNT TO CAESAR).

P.S. The older refugees always die of the cold.

The mild bottles were still on the porch ... mid-morning, weekend ... everybody snoring and grunting, dreaming of the dreams of desire, a gurgle gurgle of saliva.

Thomas left the misting porthole and reaching under his blanket strewn bed, produced a half-filled (some would say half-empty), bottle of vintage whisky, (whiskey being no different from wine in that both can leave you staggering in a drunken stupour, spewing crud over the clean carpets and ladies silk stockings). The label read: “Prepared from an age-old recipe, finest barley money can buy, family business, interests in the preservation of honest alcoholics.” Alcoholism: getting pissed out of your brain every day; early morning drinking bouts reflect the inability to socialize when Lady Henkel holds a cocktail party ... tea for two ... drinking at funerals, drinking toilet water ... understanding is not frequently spared, people having to dish out what they have to those who deserve it .. not a disease they say, just weakness, self-inflicted ... “help yourself you lazy bum ... wash yourself, stop playing with yourself, don't piss in the bath water ... ” If you break a leg they put you in hospital: lots of greasy sliming visits by people you've never seen, nurses giving you a little peck on the cheek at Christmas time;
but, if you’re half-dead, your guts spread through the gutter, they block their noses and call the police … whiskey is no different to wine, it just smells different.

    Oh, you amber fluid, drown my father’s clients in your cloudy numbness.

    Rummaging through his cupboard Thomas found a lump of stale bread. Breaking a piece of crumbled dough from its mother-hunk, Thomas filled his mouth with the body, following his procedure with a swig-a-gul-a-glug of whiskey. He kept the two substances from sliding down his gullet but arching his tongue larynxward … swishing the whiskey-wheat-barley-bread mixture back and forth between his grill-sifting gnashers … pump swish … through the cheeks, through the teeth …

    Brrrrrrrrrrmmmmmmmmmm a cough a cough a shhhoooooooo a vacuum cleaner sucking soil from shaggy pile … Thomas’s mother was up and busy. BUSY AS A BEE.

    Swish, swish, swish … a thick brown paste squeezing through the gaps. Thomas stopped swishing, the mixture was ready … he spat it into a jar and locked it away behind the tight-fitting lid … and energy giving stimulant … preparation for the coming siege … bang, bang, bang … refugees banging on the door … get lost, I feel no guilt … rack off … bang, bang … PISS OFF!

    “I hope you’re not speaking to me Thomas, because if you are I’ll tell Bob.” Mrs Napolean thumped the mouth of the vacuum cleaner against the bedroom door, waited, then returned to her cleaning.

    Clean the fluff from dirty minds.

    REVELATION

    Hieronymous Bosch had painted “The Garden of Earthly Delights” with divine approval. The sins of the world captured by the strokes of his cynical
brush ... the wild sexual orgy: strawberries ravishing defenseless men, siren-plagued lolly water guardian prisoners in gallant pink palaces. Thomas stared at the allegory which covered his feature wall ... the three-becoming-four panels brought the room to life, the world encased in that brittle bubble, waiting to burst its wretchedness over the carpet ... arms and legs seeping through the cracks in the floor.

THOMAS HAS TAKEN UP “MODERN ART.” There was a little place on the corner of Elm and Heston ... the slummy part of the city, grimy walls and graffito ... lot of Germans, Jews and Indians ... Grimm’s Law. Paper-boys were exceedingly fond of this junction, leaning against street lights, calling truths and slander at the tops of their voices ... ten pence, twenty cents, a few thousand lira ... twenty pages Hedonist’s Wonder Guide. Mrs Fritz owned the pastry shop next door, Mrs Yang owned the laundry across the road. They detested each; both were racist.

“Ah, that Mrs Yang is a slant-eyed slut, much from the gutter. She’s a Chink you know, breed like bloody rabbits,” Mrs Fritz would say, always determined to over-pronounce her German accent when finishing a sentence.

“Mrs Fritz, Mrs Hitler Fritz ... she’s a racist Nazi ... thinks she’s really good, well, look what happened to her lot ... hanged they were, democratic justice, I say. Now, take the Chinese ... reliable, diligent and, above all, wise. Hey, listen young fella, you look as if you’re in need of a good time. You shouldn’t associate with that Dago fella, you want a girl ... thirty Houston road, flat three, second floor ... say I sent you.” Mrs Yang was indeed a diligent woman, her middle aged wisdom was worldly-wise.

Limestone cliffs loom
like algebra. Stuck in simile,
the craft knifes into the black
bay: dragon boat stripped
of festive spirit: Qu Yuan
hears the drums.

Survival is perpetual battle.

The gallery, if it could have been called that, was exceedingly small ... an interested customer had to crouch low, the depressed ceiling laced with tight-ropes and hanging canvases. Other canvases had been carelessly stacked against the wall, some laying disregarded in the middle of the room. However, there was method in this madness ... Saritino knew what tourists wanted, he gave it to them ...

“You should see it, a work of genius, bought for a song ... one of those little places ... very few customers ... the bloke doesn’t know what he’s got ...

Saritino only displayed his own work ... neo-Surrealist ... old hat, but fun.

“Ahhh, Thomas come in, come in. I’ve just been studying your lastest work ... brilliant, brilliant ... coffee?” Saritino was a roly poly dwarf with greasy skin. After spending ten years making hard-core porno films he decided to become a fulltime artist ... some of his movies were considered, by the knowledgeable, to be classics in their field.

“Thanks Saritino ... any criticisms?”

Saritino loved to criticize, especially when asked too.

“The work is almost perfect ... almost, I say ... ” He remained silent for a short while, as if to reflect on his observations, “If it were mine I would have had the ribbon a little more to the left ... about ten fingernails from the left edge, along the line which bisects the corner angle. I think this would emphasize the revolutionary side of the work, you know, the contained revolution, the subtle pink which turns red when the box is opened. I love the way you control your symbols ... the box ... the cross made for the ribbon ... foreboding ...”
— newsboys call with the child-shrill pitch, harbingers of confrontation realization and much much more —

“Thanks … I’m very interested in your use of spirals, the swirls seem to draw the world inward … ” (Mrs Yang leaning on her doorway, abusing Mrs Fritz), “as if nothing really matters … I can talk to you … sometimes … to everybody else my life is … ”

MR BOB JUDAS NAPOLEAN CALLING FROM DOWN BELOW …

REVELATION 2.

“Thomas! Get down here! Your mother is terribly upset! She says you were rude and callous!”

“BLOODY HELL!” … She couldn’t resist making trouble … this will be fun … silly fat bag.

Buy my policy of rot in purgatory.

Bob Napoleon, king of reactionaries, but only a representative … a great fact rear-date lover. Thomas found his father in the dining room panting over an early morning pipe, he was flustered and panting uncontrollably.

Looks like a mangy fox, especially with that balding head. Look at that face, and offensive stubble laced with sweat.

“You’re going, we’re not supporting you any longer. You’re a disgrace to the family name!”

Ha! Family name … rotten titles. Nobody could give a stuff about our family name. Oh well, time to bring out the big guns … the ones which fire high explosive shells.

Thud … thud … shells fall to the depths of empty minds.

“If you throw me out I’ll tell everybody that I’m a bastard. I’ll tell everybody how you desecrated the trust of God.” This was Thomas’s vindictive side.

Bob’s glass jaw dropped-a-plop, his eyes wiggle wogged wobbled in their sightless sockets. Bob was a Godly man.
“Who told you this rubbish? Nobody would believe you.” He was worried.

“I checked my birth certificate against a paper clipping …”

“What clipping?”

“The one which announces your wedding two months before I was born … found it in the back of mum’s old photo album … nice pictures.”

He knows. What if anybody should find out? What will God say? Silly bitch of a mother-in-law … had to have a proper wedding, the missus baring a brazen belly, old Wes the minister giving me a quick wink … dirty old bastard … announced in the local rag.

“You can stay,” said a dejected Napoleon.

Thomas kissed the flag of revolution. A bloodless victory … they said it could never be done … electric brass bands clapped hands with thunder while lightning smote approval.

They will go to church and pray for forgiveness.

Drip, drip, drip … the kitchen tap sings the songs of silence.

Thomas returned to his room … the siege, temporarily at least, had been relieved.
Feasts and Fate at Gilgamesh

Thomas had left the party early, Saritino was great but his parties were sickening ... a temple full of heathen swine.

Mr Hubbel loved parties, especially when they tumbled through the leary hours of night into the gestation of new-day. Splitting headaches were part of the magic, the throb of bongo drums mixed with goblets of honey-wine. Saritino held great parties in his little Houston Street flat, huddled thigh to thigh, harlots just across the passageway, a raunchy public house just down the road. Sunday morning, staggering around the communal bed, its tiger-skin bedspread bound like a mummy cloth around the table of desecrated bodies. Saritino was still a director at heart.

Sunday morning ... Mass ... paper ... cup of coffee.
- hoohooha purple port slip-slopping lipless lapis-lazuli, mighty heroes feast wildly, from high places gods peer at pleasure, natural debauchery ... night black relapse with morning-dewspring, steamy steppingstones in fields of peat-bog, dogs cock scrawny legs and pee yellow streams ...
fatalistic awakening with fifty-five thunderclaps ... so our corkscrew heroes semi-drunkenly stagger templeward, the divine chalice blessings heedless heard, watch wood-carved pews dedicated to the memory of Charley Belbed and Mama-Ricardo shift sideward as canvas-topped stalls seek to fill the drunken-coffers, shields and helms to sons of Jewish heroes, innocent, stall owners condemned by those about, enough is enough ... our semi-god son, Gilgamesh of Uruk, Uruk of the stone-brick burnt walls, and brave Enkidu who was suckled by gazelle and ran grassy nativity free, quest the life-loss quest to strike evil from druid-futured cedar forests ... full of giant-guardian Humbaba ... success was met by divine lust, the Heaven’s Bull did ravage and offend the land but died hornless by strokes from Gilgamesh’s sword,
but Ishtar, that scarlet harlot, brought death to Enkidu and misery to Gilgamesh … the Doric columns of the temple, pushed inward, broke the brother’s neck, beware Ishtar, beauty is in the eye of the beholder -

Mr Hubbel slip-slopped handfuls of cold water over his whiskered face, glasses laying on the table. Ooooohh, Arctic chilly winds, anti-Chinookian (the snow-eating desert draft), teeth chattering rapidly, body’s internal heating … goosebumps sprouting, must be bucketing out-side … listen … silence, no rain. He pulled a trouser-leg from beneath some foetal-dreaming body and readied himself for CHURCH. With the honey-wine’s winemist drowning in sobriety, Hubbel became repugnantly conscious of an unsavoury odour … booze … micturation. Hubbel knew about smells, he sold all sorts of scents, perfumes, deodorants, and personal effects at his apothecary, he new a baccy smell when he smelt one. Someone had piddled their pants. Hesitantly he looked down at his trousers, half expecting to find a tell-tale patch of wetness … nope, high and dry. Should be able to hold your liquor, don’t drink if you can’t hold your liquor … two flagons, two full flagons of white-wine … no, sherry … two flagons and I can still hold my liquor … don’t see me chundering over the carpet, don’t see me pissing on the door-step … not bad for a man of fifty. Christ, money for collection … oh, and the bloody poor box, pennies for heaven. Mr Hubbel’s thick hands sifted his tailored pockets … hanky … keys … business card (HUBBEL’S APOTHECARY … DRUGS and ASSORTED GOODS, 54 ELM … PHONE … ) … ah, a few choppers, that’ll do … just the thought that counts.

Meoweoeow … hungry pussy-cat cocking its tail … seducing Mr Hubbel’s leg.

Here puddy puddy … oh, that’s a good fella. Mr Hubbel took the cat in his arms and gave it a firm hug, Mr Hubbel had very strong arms.

Oh, you’re a lovely little pussy, all alone you were … catching mousies and fleas I dare say … we should get you a flea collar … you’d like that wouldn’t you? Yes, you would.
Mr Hubbel put the cat on the table and picked up his glasses. Now I can see you much better ... want a drop of milk. Meoweeow. Ahhh, here some milk ... poohhh, smells a bit off, never mind, beggars can’t be choosers can they? Mr Hubbel was very fond of clichés, they made him feel knowledgeable.

Kitty cat lapping green creamy milk sprinkled with ammoniated spew.

Hubbel was to meet his wife at the cathedral, Centaur street, ten-thirty ... God ... ten now ... half an hour ... rush, rush, rush. Mr Hubbel left the cat to drink its milk and lick the faces of the dozen of so sleeping bodies scattered throughout Saritino’s flat. The street was fairly quiet ... one of two drunks staggering blindly, window shopping for their missus ... the occasional car church-bound ... cars were totally out of character ... horses crapping on the cobbles would be far more aesthetically pleasing. Mr Hubbel would make it just in time, all that rushing for nothing.

Thomas watched his mother and father leave for church, Bob in his best suit, Mrs Napoleon in her new coat and gloves. The car screamed out of the drive and tore off down the street. They were furious ... their son, their son the traitor, was going to a Catholic church ... Romanization. Thomas was no Jesuit, Jew, Protestant, or Muslim he was a free agent, choosing for himself.

The bus shelter was of precarious design, consisting of a roof, supported by two metal pipes, and a wooden seat; it offered no protection against the wind and breezeflown rain. Thomas sat sunback, lucky, no rain ... ten to ten, bus whirring God-ward. The street was still quiet, time for a chapter from “Tess” ...

... to city-folk the way of the country is the way of peace and tranquility, reticent rustics languishing in pastoral solitude, mugs of amorous cider perched on leather leggings, druidic shadows from brown corpses with the fresh blue air spiraling into a clear horizon ...
Exploitation

tensions flowing from stoney edifices left
cityback with its impotent lechery ... THOU
SHALT NOT COMMIT ADULTERY ... rustic-
wise squelching fat heifer-cows look wantonly
at mothers chewing grass and nuzzling
wobbly-legged calves ... inimical domestic
thirtieth floor secretary ... the vulpine
sensuality (actually, they stink from tredding
in mulchy horse-crap) erupts in rushing juices
and oozing whiteness ... bastardly interest, a

Aesohylean

“vessel of emotions,” the sport of gods in

Migration ...

Hellenistic terms, stuck piggywiggy styles with
sizzling pork-fried over the open fire on
Satan’s redhot trident ...

“Dairyman Dick
All the week:
On Sundays Mister Richard Crick.”

Luther, Zwingli,
and Calvin,
on transubstantiation.

Calvin and Luther
had heard little of “modernism” with its
bowel-pills and threshing machines, gaunt red-
brick buildings and new religion, of the
heedless turnips strewn ground-bound on
blasted heaths with chalky outcrops and mud-
grey skirt tails, of omens called “Cross in
Hand” and new shoes on the table ... austerity
remains a strong friend in the evangelist’s
camp, THOU, SHALT, NOT, COMMIT,
ADULTERY ... “good men” wandering the
pagan countryside converting quivering field-
The Faith of a Catholic Capitalist …

mice into moral-citizens and charitable
socialites … OLD HENRY shrine-worshipping
Biblical historian (his strength in Krak des
Chevaliers devoted faith-mindedly to crippling
Seljuk Turks and propagating Fatamid
ubiquity, Germanic tribes ply Tiber-up river,
round bend, bringing hope to millenarian
Jerusalem) considered himself Puritan-true,
complying to historical (Hegel downing
money lenders) discrepancies over sobriety
and sexual reproductivity, a Bible-clean
owning man, Scriptures cleansed of physical
flesh and blood, emphatically pre-destinarian,
bamboozled crutches are universal skeletons-
kept-cupboard-bound, no R.C. good deed
bought indulgences, oil-well drowned
peasants, pre-history in Lockian nature-state,
capitalism with faith, progressive four-
hundred years, Darwin-wise with oil-painted
horizons flaking vermillion through moon-
shift (Celtic-phase) and village-lemon
charmshops, Weymouth-way, cauterizing
love-boils with Mrs-Robinson’s facsimile
country-air sponge. The body sat dripping red-
blood stuck-pig like, dialectical revenge,
romantic druids on solstice-annual-bi picking
Christian bones, but what do they do with
back-prune-bloated air-bags which swell and
pale at cheap funerals, a speck of dust, chipped
head-stone?
| Sisyphus on Dialectical Idealism | Mr Hubbel’s Uncle Caesar, the Greek satyr enthusiast, had died two-months-back in similar circumstances with bed-side icon-o-clastic confessional. With thoughtflow projected (Zola-passion) Sisyphus-way one is back-brought to the Hubbel-Everywoman, a noble Joan of Arc in artistic circles; parable: Hegel-belly swollen … (Monkeys spine-heaven-bent and gobo-hairless, don’t know conflict in conflagration), fat-belly thinbelly black-and-white, and woe is me when little paddled feetings say hello Daddy-Hubbel gooogooogooogooogooogoo … thesis and antithesis synthesizing barrels of green backs (with American dollar signs) and French-hoses (Black with knobbles) … hahahahahah ha … two bastards pub-drunk swapping materialistic idealism with collier-chappies and railroad proprietors — Mr Hubbel frequented silk-draped whore-houses with gay-abandon, rutting ambience … and the three little ready-made Hubbel siblings thumping spinning-tops on the landing ’round and ’round and ’round and singing ring a ring a rosie and crying worms so loud that mummy’s hand-trembling jumps concentration, hump-back more persistently inback up-again while belligerent bell-banging customers scream and scream and more and more; first time. Caesar Hubbel was |
more readily certified with a Hubbel back-stab and would sit gabbling sweet Helen’s secrets, listening through one-ear and de-listening with the other (while bed-side-sitting in beads and charms singing sweet praises): a distant relation … INCEST … Oedipus thirty-three times removed complex …

The death of 
Caesar Hubbel

RELIGION: Pagan-Catholic
DATE OF BIRTH: 23rd of March, 1893.
PLACE OF BIRTH: Minsk off Weymouth, Thirty-Second Street,
Imperial, Room 1001.
POLITICS: Hybrid: Anarchist and Peripatetic sympathies.

The Funeral

May Caesar rest in peace, his life documented administration-wise … wheezy anarchist brethren sighing comrade-lost, bomb-black silence-shadows a brass-gun salute with shop-bought medals. Helen’s (Helen in anarchical Hades) starry lover’s-eyes gaze tree-ward, apple love-run to Eve’s canard printing press … Caesar relished chitterling on Helen’s navel when world-wide-god Morpheus allowed … “OSTIUM SEPULCHRI ANTIQUAE FAMILAE D’URBERVILLE.”

Thomas looked up just as the bus was negotiating the corner. He pulled his book-free hand from his jacket pocket (all woolly warm)
and hailed ... something in his hand:
HUBBEL’S APOTHECARY ... a drunken momento. Whhhhhhiirrrrr ... jig a jig ...
rummum omnibus racing chariot-style riverward. River crossings are very Hellenic ... a
glug a glug a glug the river says, rushing seaward, recalcitrant waters pushing pebble stones in a convivial roulade: Xerxes gave the uncooperative Hellespont three hundred lashes and locked it in fetters, self-delusion; the river out-lived him.

ACHILLES’ SHIELD, A Tragedy in Seven Acts.

CHARACTERS

XERXES, King of Persia
THEMISTOCLES, an Athenian Leader
WHORE
THOMAS ICARUS NAPOLEON

CAST

MR HUBBEL
SARITINO
MRS HUBBEL
A BASTARD, A HERO (CÚ CHULAINN), and A MONK, also author of this fantasy
A SCIENTIST
A COBWEB, an attic cobweb

MR HUBBEL
GRANDMA HUBBEL, whose husband founded Hubbel’s Apothecary (anti-contraception, pro-abortion)

MRS HUBBEL

SARITINO

MARY MAGDALENE

HIS MOTHER, whom SARITINO has been trying to bury for ten years: inheritance (she’s 104 years old)

THERESE

IDENTITY UNKNOWN, never speaks but is seen standing in a corner … disappears when THOMAS leaves

ASSORTED DRUNKARDS AND SLUTS

ASSORTED DRUNKARDS AND SLUTS

ACT 1

(SARITINO’s flat: a raging piss-up. The stereo is belching, possibly Wagner’s “Flight of the Valkyries.” The lights are very low, encouraging shadow-play in harmony with the music. THOMAS NAPOLEON can be dimly detected making advances to the WHORE; shoulder wall-smug, whiskey clutched-mouthward. XERXES, dressed in pin-stripes, is corner-angling a young nymph, while THEMISTOCLES is discussing Nietzsche, religion, poetry, nationalism, and favourite foods, with DR DARWIN and PRIVATE BILL HOPE. The air is ammonia-thick and guzzled grog is inebriating rapidly: drunken slander.)

XERXES: Mature! Mature, not “old.”

Little bitch.

WHORE (rubbing THOMAS’s leg with her silk-gloved hand): Them rubs-o-
randy’ll cost you a handful of francs up front ... you ain’t got pox, I hope, just had me check-up.

(THOMAS, somewhat embarrassed, is on the verge of soothing her doubts when a jilted XERXES interjects.)

XERXES (giblet-chitterling laughter, rolled in two layers of fat): Come off it, Thomas, she’s not your type.

(XERXES puts his arm around the WHORE and leads her into one of the bedrooms. THOMAS, respecting XERXES’ insatiable sexual needs, seats himself within ear-range of DR DARWIN, PRIVATE BILL HOPE, and THEMISTOCLES: three Wise Monkeys discussing the woes of the world.)

THEMISTOCLES: I love the taste of victory.

PRIVATE BILL HOPE: It is important to have a meaningful world view ... for example, take an attic ... THEMISTOCLES: To believe in your country, to die for your country ...

PRIVATE BILL HOPE: The attic represents the human predicament ... the cobwebs
(attics always have cobwebs) are unpleasant memories …

THEMISTOCLES: I love caviar (iodized sturgeon’s guts) and lobster thermidore (lumps of creamy cow-bellow cheese-moulded sauce) …

PRIVATE BILL HOPE: I joined the army in high spirits; off to see the world of Lord Byron (not my period) …

DR DARWIN (increasingly sozzled): I am a rational man, you all know this, but I believe in the kingdom of Heaven … I love marzipan with lots of worm-free almond whites …

THEMISTOCLES: But the kingdom of God is all in the heart.

DR DARWIN: Listen to a rational man … I believe in progressivism and transformationism and understand the Biblical interpretations of the East-West dichotomy …

THEMISTOCLES: Are you running for council next season?

PRIVATE BILL HOPE: Well, my mother told me to soak them in luke-warm water, not too much soap-powder. Colourful labels they
A death in the Family

Darwin’s theory of life:
Deoxyribonucleic acid floating in seas of Bacillariophyceae and Dinoflagellates.

have ... butterflies and rainbows
... I love tongue-numb ice-cream
all creamy like ...

DR DARWIN (smashed in the convivial sense): Shakespeare was the greatest party-bard in gaskins ...
“If music be the food of love, play on.” (Our illustrious drinkers are in high spirits; the heart, brain, and liver, pumping briskly to-and-fro with clinking rye-brown pewter, the Clown-logic (Pigrogromitus, Vapians, and Quebus), spirit-free.)

No, it’s true, I’ve not told anyone but you who claim to be my drunken ... buuuurrrrrpppp ... comrades. (Bottle grammar.) And me a doctor ... with angels flip-flapping time with lutish dirges all Orpheus-like (dramatic irony).

Who was to get the Christmas-fat gobbler along with those whitish-cream thing-a-ma-jigs (?), was the first thing my rational self had to ask. I mean, how was I to sleep for maternity-shift with those green-stringed bones on the dinner table quack quack quacking (Muscovies I now recall) and that Turkish chopping-block
gobble gobble gobbling? *(He spies THOMAS sitting by.)* Ahhhhhhh, young Thomas was a good patient. Do you know that nurse-blush was in regularity when she felt his scrotum for the two dangly dingle-like things? Or that his eyes show deep things future-told? Sacred is our Thomas, like Siva’s old dear cows which wander steak-threat free. Oh yes, I love parmesan cheese dangled sherry-cocktail like … phallic Krishna style; Vishnu wing-spread ’round our fragile souls. *(All laugh, except THOMAS, who is thinking Kalkin … egotist.)*

Rationally speaking, Mr Hubbel-bubble’s apothecary is very good: condoms well use-checked. *(Raucous laughter.*) He and Thomas-a-Becketty are in the same Odyssey at the university … Hubbel’s doin’ it just for kicks. All that violence with spears tearing sides and armoured hearts, blackness descends.

PRIVATE BILL HOPE: They’ll kill me with chlorine when my head is trench-set. Biological warfare will
be the genesis of new life ... all bent and twisted like.

**ALL (except XERXES and the WHORE who are life-making):**

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**Mysticism and Punishment**

DR DARWIN *(totally heaven-up):* I love jambalaya, hake, fried lugworm, and thick curried steak ...

**A prophecy**

THEMISTOCLES *(laughing spasmodically):*

Quick, one needs an empty jordan ...

too much uppity-juice from a potent jorum-full. *(His laughter is sniffle-mixed.)* Oh bothery, I’ve waste-wet my knickers.

DR DARWIN *(with waggish jocundity):* Into the pillory with you! I love stomach-pumped oyster and entrail shish kebabs. Wait, a brain message from
Morpheus ... dreams are truth. Soap! Soap and warm water will drive that lotion from your soggy dungarees. Paper! We need paper! High school chemistry, it’s simple. *(He finds a pocket-pen and begins to write plaster-blue.)* Anti-cohesive:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{CH}_2\text{O}-\text{CO-} & \text{C}_{15}\text{H}_{31} \\
\text{CH}_2\text{O}-\text{CO-} & \text{C}_{15}\text{H}_{31} + 3\text{NaOH} \rightarrow 3\text{Na}^+ + 3\text{C}_{15}\text{H}_{31}\text{CO}^- + \text{C}_{3}\text{H}_5(\text{OH})_3 \\
\end{align*}
\]

**SOAP**

**DR DARWIN:** There you go; saponification. Knowledge keeps you on high ground. *(Snivelling laughter.)*

CURTAIN

*(So, with narceine drunkenness (SARITINO had promised the Eastern touch), the night nattered drunkenly, the guests, ground-grounded, rising mirror-like to heightful heights of hater-pun narcissism. THOMAS, the nattier-blue walls throbbing clear warning, went homeward-bound **ACT 2**, while a pious **MRS HUBBEL** vacated **ACT 3:**

“Hubbel-man, church ten-thirty ... hands off soft nappies!” The Acts passed through deep morning until four o’clock brought fingers of unconsciousness ... till **ACT 7.**)"
(A guuugggle a blurtlle haze eeee googgglee … scrounging gregs from blood-guzzled bottles.)

MR HUBBEL: Howsy is youry oldy dearo Sariiii?
SARITINO: Stiltel kickling, bugged it …
MR HUBBEL: Where is thatal party bardit? Privy Hopeless, a poem, a romanticalitical typical poem!
ALL: Ye, ye, a poem Mr Billlll!
PRIVATE BILL HOPE (still able to stand): Okay … a poem all about attics and cobbled webs … widdle in an attic up stairs and in nanny’s trunkle … skeletal cuppedboards:

(PRIVATE BILL HOPE, having completed his confused recitation collapses to the floor amongst dying cheers. Within minutes the room is quiet. MR HUBBEL, SARITINO, XERXES, and a number of other dream-bodies, pile tiger-skin bed-down.)

CURTAIN

Off-step with quaestor blessings while
The coming of Enkidu: the Judicial Proceedings. tepid air flows thermally draft-down bland-masonry, judicial in its disposition. Cold stone, all dross and grayish dreg-like, sharpened grossly eye-sore against the Sabbath sky. From courts, turning full half-hemispherically, one
faces peacock hedge, quaffer-bed, ringletting bars around the holy poor-box (where-from emaciated natives buy fertility drugs).

Bromine-pungency, the sky channeled through tree-less corridors while night-dew lingers green-puddled brogues and flannels of chilled flamingo-nosed money losers, is kicked visibly fog-forward with every stirring step. Thomas crossed the auto-asphalt swiftly, leaving cedar-slab witness-boxes toffee-like and dreary juries rear-back. Oh yes, there was an official trial with dignitaries well-guarding proceedings.

Johnathon Merry-Weather’s plumpish wife caught him fondling a young lass’s nipplets passionately, so the accused needed a character witness from near-aged, long neglected, twenty-first cousin Thomas. Ooooh, quickly ... breath in: a warm melee Föhn-style: savour spring smells rarely city-spent. Yes, there’s lilac and gooseberry, hazel-nut, and mulberry ... musk

as well. The rataplan bouncing pistons pull the bus up Gazelle and down Grass: naked head lolling a swish-mouthful of brackish creek water ... mountain lions baying with the fray. Watch the trappers trap with sets of steely jaws and lengths of leather thong: once snared, life will fleet on by, leaving you nothing but rusted cuts and wind bleached bones. Thomas caught
this five-pronged image more readily than most, his faculties in tune with natural vibes. There can be no critical-crap prescribing creative rights and wrongs of literary pen-pushing. The quadriga rolls time-back and time-forward, relevant to the chronology of the respective observer. We could accept this without question, but such blindness would be un-scholarly. Physics holds the answer …

Newton’s First Law of Motion spoken in times of peace. All men being theoretically equal in times of peace, Cú Chulainn struggles to clear-up loose ends … problems in his arguments are obvious. His faculties in tune with natural vibes. There can be no critical-crap prescribing creative rights and wrongs of literary pen-pushing. The quadriga rolls time-back and time-forward, relevant to the chronology of the respective observer. We could accept this without question, but such blindness would be un-scholarly. Physics holds the answer …

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1 History is obviously not at rest and nor is it in a state of uniform motion in a straight line. If there is conflict there cannot be uniformity. COUNTERCLAIM: why can’t there be uniform conflict? Answer: conflict; its causes, disposition, and results, are unpredictable, and cannot therefore be considered uniform.

2 Since there would be no conflict it may be assumed that ‘inequality’ would lose all meaning, that there would be no nationalism, no wars, no exploitation. It must, however, be realised that there could be no conflict on any level: whether physical or psychological.

3 Thomas loved illogical philosophy: total crap, but still thought-provoking. Lost time is time ill-spent when mortality is the name of the game: future planning rewards the wishful thinker. EXTRA, EXTRA:

PAPER I: SHEEP RUSTLERS AFOOT: GOLDEN CUTLETS LOST
PAPER II: MADNESS STRIKES AT THE TOP: IS THERE ANY HOPE?
PAPER III: SHEEP RUSTLERS GO MAD: FEED FOXES TO LAMBS
PAPER IV: KING GEORGE III ALL FRIENDLY-LIKE WITH FOXITES
Thomas, swallowing a gulp of regurgitated whiskey, sauntered church-ward, crossing the road opposite the topiary Crucifiction: the pride of Our Lord’s parolee horticulturalist. The hedge, all carefully pruned and baptised, ran up the street and around the block … the sad remnant of His Jewish Estates. It stood like an electrified halo (gas tends to soot), a mighty Popish bastion protecting moral citizens from native depravity. The psychological understanding of “siege” relates to the maternity syndrome: the Mother Goddess protecting her children against dream-threats from carefree divinities (Ares, Loki, Apollo).

With head down low Thomas passed under the zariba’s palm fronds, emerging amongst remnants of a Saturday fete. Sagging with a damp bed-sheet sign stretched between two chocolate wheels: Saint Aquinas’ Annual Monster-Fete: pastries and cakes; chocolate wheels; quoits, coconut shies; hot tea and scones; stalls galore; prizes and gifts … AND MUCH, MUCH MORE! People babbled … proud with success … trestles heaped together, a visiting priest plucking yellowy papers from

PAPER V: KING ILL: PITT AND CO. LIKE LAMBS TO THE SLAUGHTER
The news-boy picks his palsy hooter all follicle-lined and wipes a strippling germ-length through ‘prophyria’ … hereditary crap.
“Thomas! Thomas! Look dear, it’s Thomas, you know, Thomas from the university … been to the shop a couple of times. Thomas! Yes, yes, I think he’s seen us … here he comes.” Mr Hubbel had mustered every scrap of his haggard strength for this spritely outburst.

“Hello, Mr Hubbel … Mrs Hubbel,” replied Thomas, surprised to find the festive-Hubbel up so early.

“Thomas, or should I say Herodotus,” Herodotus being Thomas’s Hubbel-given nickname, “you didn’t last long, I caroused for many more hours than your sapling bones.”

“No, I was feeling a little tired.”

“Oh well, no harm done … didn’t know you’re a Catholic.”

“I’m not, just trying it out.”

“Very good … you’ll be very impressed, the only true faith.”

“Christians all believe in the same thing … Christ. A god is a god. Is there really any difference between a Christian God and a Muslim god, or a Hindu god?”

“There most certainly is … the Christian god is the only God, the others are frauds. Furthermore, Catholicism is the only true Christian faith … Christ accepts us.”
The Betrayal

“Christ was a Jew.”

“Was a Jew ... was a Jew. Look what they did to him ... Crucified him, that’s what they did. Crucified him. He renounced the Jews in favour of Catholics.” Mr Hubbel loved religious arguments.

“Who knows, you may be right.”

“I am right my boy, just you wait and see. We have a great bishop preaching this morning, he’ll convince you.”

“We’ll see.”

Shamanism

Mrs Hubbel, who was obviously irritated with her husband’s unswerving devotion, interjected. “Thomas, I’d like you to meet my niece, Therese. She’s just over there, by the red poppies. She’s staying with us at the moment, parents died in a motor crash.”

“I’m sorry to hear that.”

“Oh, don’t be ... she couldn’t stand them. Anyway, she’s twenty years old, and quite capable of looking after herself... she’s just staying with us until she can find a flat.”

THE COMING OF

ISHTAR

And in the falling, to crush among the poppies, cushion betwixt hairy stalks and petals, rattling little capsules as hung in drying places to make arrangements, an echoing or ringing of Culpeper, “The herb is Lunar, and of the juice it is made opium; only for lucre of money they cheat you, and tell you it is a kind of tear, or some such like thing,
that drops from Poppies when they weep, and that it is somewhere beyond the seas, I know not where beyond the Moon,” and so in falling to the suburb of poppies, lacking the opiate oomph, mere ornamentals, not the fields nor remembrances of things past, or other misnomers, he forgot, for the blow that was struck, a raining down of blows in fact, his being beaten, his beating by the gang of rocks — ROCKS RULE — in black t-shirts and ripple-soled desert boots, was not a class action, was not a revolution of the moon but a pleasure-sourcing. It would be better for me to bleed, he told himself, down in the bed, to be bled among the red and white, to let them see their études played out upon my body yield fruit; a parados of blood loss lest they come again, a rear-guard delaying action, to excite and grow woozy to sign off from a battle you don’t know you’re part of. Getting in practice for the Kwinana Skins. The sleepy god and the death god mix the picture and the rocks move off as a pack, confused by the flowers: they are anemones, they say, and the wind has picked up. Green ginger wine. The Fremantle Doctor come in from the sea, over which the migrants come with Union Jacks and shaved heads, with bovver boots and knives. We are the last line, the keepers of the flame. The breeze has come in to dirge this poofter’s funeral. We know the music. He sees them stand over him and over the flowers, test his pulse with their boots. Adonis. All wars are fought for chicks, he hears them say to the
crush of poppies, and the sympathy that can be milked from such brutality. He wiped the lucre from his cheeks, an automatic choice of the ducts on nose-bone impact, compression. Left dead I will rise. I will rise I will cheat death I will dedicate my life to waking-sleep, a zombie expectorant, that sees a refusal to rise up in the bright light of the sun and waits until night closes over and blood has set its paths to a state between compliance and cracking, body stiffened to new shape, new form, to be dug up and replanted where people can visit, read my name or no name on the plaque. And in the ears the shell-hollow-waves roaring off the beach of the flower bed — a deafening sound that slows evolution. The pleasures and illuminations of being bashed.

Thanks. Thanks, again.

Freyja, bride of the Vanir: a Goat amongst Bucks.

Therese loved heavy-scented poppy-petals, all soft and sensual. Therese was a True Helen: golden hair, fresh white skin, and crystal blue eyes ... but, although very attractive physically, she shied away from people ... isolated, self-obsessed, and mysterious.

THE SEARCH FOR EVERLASTING LIFE: the Seior ...

Easter wings spread red-robin-like over the sacred oak-grove (the classical reference) ... a spiraling ascent through chariot-drawn clouds ... an immortal Odysseus: Circe’s randy stag. Devotion is a question of need ... young and searching, drawn by waving incense and
Bach-filled copper pipes.

THE DEATH OF GILGAMESH ...

A cedar-wood coffin
with opium-bearers
bearing drunkenly ...

They enjoyed the act of “meeting”, and, to cap a good day off, they discussed it over a cup of coffee at Henry’s museum.

THUS INCHOUNI-AIILT WAS CREATED:
OR, MORE PRECISELY, DISCOVERED.
Enkidu Poemuzeeek

“tune of the cock in the briskness of morning”
Antonin Artaud

As love is nothing but poetry and poetry is blood you press your flow against the resistance of glass walls in Uruk, this vent-icle edifice mixing high in the ambient lushness of blood the blood the vascular hum, spillage of poema in overdrive as Ninsun in a dream ill-uminates and grows gaseous in the dance mix and fatuous as the City of the Living as a train continues its sub-terranean blitz and someone records the sounds of their own lovemaking playing it back out of synch as if references might devolve into bliss - purging it of envy and hatred and taking all in its path, knowing glory and not eternity - and so it is when Enkidu lies down with The Woman and ignores the grass-eaters around him and the stuff of Anu flows out, the stuff of the firmament, and soon it is that the wild creatures reject him and soon it is his experience is made into poetry and is taken and engraved into the tablet as if he too has become like a god whose flesh will pass with glory as outflows the stuff of the firmament and all traces of godliness - wild creatures re-jecting him as you are led to the place of the temples, temples of love and heaven, of Ishtar and Anu; as the brothers bond and wine is served the forest beckons for there lurks evil among cedars and skyscrapers, among villains and priests and Isidore Ducasse and the Count of Lautréamont and Gérard de Nerval and even Artaud stinking bastard at the centre of the whole traitorous factory yelling to the tune of the cock in the briskness of morning, wrestling the lash and God, as strapped-up with bow and sword and axe and shield and having an abundance of mucus you set to ritualizing the victory perpetually, in a present tense
(The scene is set in a small coffee shop ... it is just down the street from SARITINO’s studio-gallery. The room is poorly lit, although THOMAS is shrouded in a strong yellow light. THERESE is sitting opposite him, in this half-light she is very attractive: occasionally flickers of light etch around the velvet outlines of her features. The music is mellow, although it is occasionally interrupted by crashing cymbals, these are mimicking human-conscience.)

THOMAS (relaxing over a cup of hot black coffee): I really enjoyed that picture.
THERESE: Yes, it was very good.
THOMAS (staring into his cup): Have you found a flat yet?
THERESE: No ... well, to tell the truth I had an offer to share ... nice flat, shit people.
THOMAS: Do you have any plans for the future ... the future is very important.
THERESE: In what respect?
THOMAS: You know ... education, career ... that sort of pedantic bull-crap.
THERESE (obviously shying away from THOMAS’s question): Do you believe in God?
THOMAS: I presume you mean Christian God ... one god for all?
THERESE: Just for argument’s sake.
THOMAS: Heaven and Hell are in the hearts of men.
THERESE: My uncle, that’s Uncle Hubbel, loves half-cooked meringue ... to him meringue is Heaven. He hates taking baths ... to him baths are Hell.
THOMAS (having just sculled his hot coffee): Didn’t you say that you lived in the country before moving in with the Hubbels?
THERESE: Yes, I did.
THOMAS: Did you like it … enjoy the out-doors?
THERESE: It has its advantages and disadvantages … too many hobby farms and tractors for my liking. I’m happy enough to be in the city, for the time being. It’s a new experience anyway. I’m now a city person.
THOMAS: The city has its place … when it becomes un-desirable nature will reject it.
THERESE (interrupting THOMAS): Man has a strong hold on nature … napalm.
THOMAS: Napalm is a product of the earth … just having you on. Do you believe in Christ?
THERESE: Technically speaking, Christ was a bastard.
THOMAS: I’m a bastard, but let’s not be prejudiced.
THERESE: Do you believe you are Christ?
THOMAS (drifting with the euphoric drug): My Aunt Jenny used to keep bees … they never touched her. My father also kept bees … he sold them after being stung. I am a result of that prick.
THERESE: Jenny … funny name, sounds like a donkey.
THOMAS (accepting the morose remark as a joke): Donkeys are sturdy beasts. (Noticing the THE WAITRESS.) Feel like another coffee?
THERESE: Thanks … white, no sugar.

(TOMAS attracts THE WAITRESS’ attention. She is O-r-i-e-n-t-a-l and very s-e-n-s-u-a-l.)

THOMAS (to THE WAITRESS): Are you busy?
THE WAITRESS: No … you’re the only ones in the shop … why ask?
THOMAS: Two coffees … one white, one black … very cosmopolitan … remember Vietnam. Oh, no sugar.

(THE WAITRESS exits.)

THERESE (noticing THOMAS’s arousal): She’s very striking isn’t she?
THOMAS *(slightly taken back)*: You and her are lovers?
THERESE *(smiling)*: Only in fantasies.

THOMAS: Masturbation …
THERESE: Question or answer?

THOMAS: Both … neither … crap. Being human is speaking crap … the negative attitude.

*(THE WAITRESS returns. As she hands the coffee to Therese and Thomas, THE DRUNK, THE WHORE, THE NUN, and MRS YANG enter the shop. They seat themselves around THOMAS and THERESE. The music has changed … Punk, the light is as before, a half light, with THOMAS in a shroud of yellow.)*

THERESE: This music is fascist … Neo-Baroque, I should say.
THOMAS *(angry)*: CRAP … a-crapawapacrap-a … Pseudo Baroque … love the beat: da, da, da.

*(THERESE reaches across the table and grabs THE WAITRESS’s hands. They both make their way to the space between the counter and table and begin to dance.)*

THERESE: *This music is fascist … Neo-Baroque, I should say.*

THOMAS: *Is she your lover?*

*(The others — excluding THOMAS — join THERESE and THE WAITRESS, forming a circle. THOMAS, protesting loudly, wanders into the middle of the circle, the others join hands, trapping him.)*

THOMAS: What are you going?

THE OTHERS *(singing)*: Ring a ring a rosie,
A pocket full of posie …

THOMAS *(frustrated)*: Just like a bloody deer hunt …

THE NUN: Just like Vietnam …

THE DRUNK: Sometimes I need a drink real bad … metho, turps, even napalm …

THOMAS *(pointing to THE WHORE)*: Hey you! I know you …
THE OTHERS (including THE WHORE): ... And we all fall down ...

(The music stops, everyone returns to the table ... the light shrouding
THOMAS illuminates MRS YANG ...)

MRS YANG: Let me tell your fortune ...

THOMAS: Oh, come on ...

MRS YANG (taking THOMAS’s hands and staring at them in quiet
   contemplation before speaking): Disappointment is the true test ...

THOMAS: What?

MRS YANG: The past always catches up ... whether for good or for bad ...

THOMAS: What?

MRS YANG: You know without being told ...

THE WHORE (pushing MRS YANG aside): Don’t listen to that silly old bile-heap ... you owe me ...

THOMAS (trance-like gazing): What?

THERESE: I hate sluts ...

THE WHORE: Bitch! (lunging at THERESE.) I’ll rip your bloody eyes out.

(THERESE ducks, THE WHORE, defeated, falls across the table.)

THOMAS (to THERESE): Come on, this is getting heavy ... come over for a
   bite to eat ... Mum and Dad are out until late ... very domestic ...

THERESE (looking at THE WHORE in disgust): Thanks.

(They make their way to the door. THE WHORE shrieks out ...)

THE WHORE: What about me you bastard?

THOMAS: You’re too Renaissance ...

THE WHORE: You’ll be back ...

(They leave.)
Demonography

Thomas found Henry smoking bongs in the loungeroom, Therese sucking his toes. Henry was in his favourite chair, one he and Thomas had pulled from the rubbish tip a year earlier and strapped onto the luggage rack on the back of Therese’s car. As Therese drove them back with it to Henry’s place, Henry had sat on Thomas’s lap. Roomfill. Thomas recoiled at the sight of Therese’s glitter-purple painted lips wrapped around the growths and distortions of Henry’s toes. They said I had flat feet but still let me kill the ENEMY, caterwauled Henry, laughing and coughing, and then choking as he exhaled a pungent smoke. Shit gear, he spluttered. Better than nothing, though. In the background the television muttered. Hmmm, Play School. Therese’s rear was pointing towards the screen, bobbing gently up and down, her short skirt doing its tricks. Thomas wanted to get out asap. I need to leave this stinking country, he said quickly. I hate it here. Hate’s a very strong word, my boy, said Henry. There are box trees and lantanas along the road-verge, the council clips them neatly every year... what more do you want? Thomas didn’t like Henry’s flippant moods. He preferred the maudlin, decaying Henry, always at the point of imploding and becoming grave fodder. Therese here told me my horror-scope today! She might tell you yours if you’re nice, Thomas. Thomas recoiled. He hated horoscopes. He had taught his eyes to skip over them in newspapers and magazines; he denied his sign. You’re an Aquarian — hey Therese, what’s in store for Thomas today? Therese stopped, licked her lips, and stared at Thomas. It’s a skill of mine that Thomas denies, she said crisply. It was true, Thomas would block his ears and go yeah yeah yeah as she tried to discuss her talent... her inclination. They’d agreed to disagree. Thomas didn’t believe in the depth of her character. He changed the subject. I fear I am trapped inside my
reading and my note-taking — trapped inside my journal. That could well be true, said Henry, but I’d celebrate that fact if I were you! Henry began to wail and holler: *Aghhhh yoyo voodoo!* and to laugh... a consumptive cancerous laugh. Therese rubbed Henry’s feet, scarecrow-like out of the torn cuffs of his trousers. My Henry is the Strawman, the Tinman, and Cowardly Lion all rolled into one today, she quipped. Henry tried to balance the clay, penis-shaped bong on the edge of the couch, watched it crash to the ground and spill its sludgy green-grey tea over the carpet squares, then lent forward to rub her plumes of hair. And she is my gorgeous little Dorothy who will melt the wicked witch. They giggled. Henry flicked his silver lighter on and shut off the orange flame with a flick of the coffin-like cap. He did it again and again. It jaded Thomas. I’m out of here, said Thomas, and turned on his heels and left. Outside, he noticed how hot it was. How stinking hot — so hot the bricks sweated and smelt. Inside it had been so cool... the high roofs? Henry had no cooling system — no air-conditioner, no fan. And yet it was so cold in there that Henry’s toes had been blue coming out of Therese’s steamy mouth, and Therese’s legs had been bespeckled by goosebumps as if they were written over in the Ice Kingdom of Mongo. I am a victim of all that is low and base, he thought.
The dead of Thomas’s family were buried in the wheatbelt, or going further back, in the seaside cemetery near where they arrived from Ireland. He and Therese drove down, open-topped through the tuart trees, from the city in a little red MG Therese had borrowed from the Hubbel stock. To Busselton, and the jetty of Thomas’s childhood, of his imagination. A cyclone had since gone through and lopped it. They floated out to its new beginnings. Walking water. As child he’d ridden all the way out and plundered the seas. He wanted Therese to walk with him as far as they could go, along the splintered wooden planks, with pylons that staggered back and forth, encrusted with sponges bright as the tropics, bright because of the Leeuwin Current. I came here as a young tacker, he said. I rode out in the cold mornings and stayed late into the night, riding back in for hot chips. I trawled the sea for lightning-fast bonito, for herring and squid. It’s the squid I most remember, jetting through the torchlight we shone deep to draw them towards the jag. He wondered how it was — with a stiff breeze blowing from right to left as they walked out into the sea, deep into Geographe Bay — that he felt so close to her. He was on the windward side, and he was being blown towards her, and yet against the salt he could smell and taste her. I don’t know you, he said inside. And he didn’t. Her hair flurried long like seagrass, whiplashing. You are more to me than a character, than character, he thought. They approached a young boy fishing with a squid jag. It was mid-afternoon and yet the squid were being taken. A pair lay eyes-up on the planking. Therese showed more of her personality, more of what made her tick, in that moment of seeing, of perceiving what they were, than in all the time he’d known her. She flinched. Those eyes, she said: caught unblinking in a moment of horror, looking through the sea, into
the air, fixed. Do they see at all down there. Just light? What of shape? How much of shape is enlightened? He didn’t know, though he could find out. The large black disks encased in rings, shielded behind... Perspex, flesh... in their mitres, in their regalia of terror. Tentacles trailed out. The body drying to a flatness that tells the truth about water, volume, content. They turn them inside out, sometimes, Thomas said. The kids. I did. She recoiled from him and snatched her hand away from his. Quit pawing me, she said. And that black stuff is its ink, he added. The stuff they use to camouflage themselves from predators...? she said and asked at once. Yes, it is their death-mark here. Notice the black stains along the jetty. Death spots for squid dragged up on multi-pronged jags. Their flesh slices in rings across their hood, their pointed helmet of head and body. The rest they trail to embroil their own victims in the water. The boy trailing the squid jig jerked the line. Got one! he yelled. Thomas wondered at himself watching Therese’s curious horror. Will she watch it climb the jag, the line, fail on the long climb up out of the water to the jetty? he wondered. He didn’t like himself at that moment, and wondered what Mrs Hubbel saw in him. My relatives — my ancestors — were early in here on to the beach. Long before the jetty which was built in the mid-nineteenth century. Longest wooden jetty in the southern hemisphere. They came in and went into the tuarts and cut them down to make a farm. They took over, they evicted, they remembered Ireland and buried their language in the sands. Therese was clearly not interested.

“Abhorring all company and light,” Thomas said — the dead. But I don’t think that’s true, they are lonely as well. Out there, sea dragons move through the sea grass. Squid jet down to lower reaches, changing colour. The ebbing and flowing of ink. Cyclone Alby... Alby... it had destroyed the preface, the preamble, the beginning of the tale...
Ranting: Falling: Paracelsus’ Alchemy

Star in the Body, Alchemical Melting pot: Galen, Rhazes, Hippocrates, the Montpellier School.

So ends a fugacious sojourn in an alien climate, the travels are perpetual. Through climbing mountainous mountains, Arthur. Lancelot, Lothario, a Creole, Romeo, an Eastern man from Constantinople, a Western man from Rome, Faithful, Christian, an English opium eater, and the Three Musketeers, came to understand the virtues of modern faith-healing: the firmamental body doing sarsaparilla-like somersaults while bound in love’s payrim manacles: blood is brimful with erthrocytes, leucocytes, thrombocytes, and haemoglobin, and through scientific consideration it has been confirmed that erthrocytes are oxygenated beasts of the first degree, which indicates that there are hundreds of billions of trillions of microcosms hidden with microcosms reflecting profound reflections on the world’s recirculation of defensive warhol stratagems and damaging waste products: the A and B (or a AND b) of repetitious patterns in history and nature: cyclic: violence above nature, violence in nature, nature’s violence (speaking anthropomorphically), and moral issues.
akin to snootish flunkeys (his Old Dear
didn’t even shed a tear: a secret smile,
enjoying the distress): a quick glance
through the trusty loupe, post-strabotomy,
revealed the truth: two hundred dollars
had to maintain an empty belly and a
sensitive body … no room for a doctor’s
fee: The A and

Caught in the
act: the real
world

B (or a and b) of defence: tank
divisions in a messy conglomeration of Rio
Pacts, Warsaw Pacts, and theories of
limited civilian casualties (LCC, or ATOL
… CC): Collective Security and Defense
amidst fornication and SLBMs, SAMs,
ICBMs, and botulism … Thomas’s
acuminous sensitivity perceived that Bob’s
belly was Heavenless: all Hell and fury,
ulcerous malnutrition: mindful like rusty
crabs, rust eats iron consumptively, gold
escapes to be worn during the eclipse:
transmutic and transformation. Thomas
clutched his swiveling orbitals: a sickened
Sol, a faithless distraught Luna (Sol plus
Luna = Terra cum eclipse), slip slap sloshily
of the Venus-pair, Jupiter under pitiless
assault: all gross-legged and bile-baggaged.
Face up to it in the civet mist of
colloquialism …
atolcc, ATOLCC, ATOL cc, AtO, Cc, at, At, TOL, tOIC, etc.

a grizzle Gothic Horror in the vein of Frankenstein: THOU SHALT NOT SCREW AROUND (especially with Carina, Columba, Corvus, Cygnus, Delphinus, Draco, Perseus, and Virgo the country lover): hypocrisy, the pages are roped and gabbled with slander: a climax, climactic, climamamcilimacticallyy resurgence of non-Arian fertility rights (gametes, zygotes, budding, regeneration,

CLAUSEWITZ

meiosis, diploid, haploid, sporophyte, and gametophyte, to be used in Thomas’s defence): a neological crisis … the song of a Ranter:

Jonson

Helen beguiles Zeus
"The Slavish terror that all men have,
And thoughts of Hell to fear
Is unto us a laughing stock,
We give it no ear.

Which we enjoy with sweet content
A short life and a merry
Is all the heaven that we expect,
Let’s drink off our Canary.

The fellow-creature which sits next
Is more delight to me
Than any that I else can find
For that she’s always free."

For the sake of historical accuracy the
chronology of Bob’s conviviality sets right
emotional discrepancies:

- an open door, a transparent
  Garden, a limp bundle of Earthly
  delights —
  - butterflies flapping red-rose
    stamens, gut response rolled back
    and forth, giggling Mrs distressed
    Therese —
    - Therese leaves, Thomas
      follows, cuts his hand against a sharp
      door lock, returns in dismay, Bob-o-
laughter in a sickening ha, ha, ha, ha, ha —
- Get out, bastard or no bastard, you’ve upset your poor mother, giblet roll ha, sell your noise box, you’ll never see her again, ha, ha, ha, ha, I’ll write you a cheque for two hundred, we’ve done our duty … your fancy education’s down the drain now … ha —
- Piss off —
- Bandaged hand … the wound will heal —
- end of siege: broken defences — Gold has the greatest purity — the basic elements were in abundance (water, earth, air and fire) but the distillation was marred by pollution … the ingredients (the smouldering sulphur of desire, the tremulous mercury of emotion, and the controlling salt of reality) had been tainted … an impure elixir. 

The Philosopher’s Stone is lost

the Philosopher’s Stone is a myth
“Hubbel’s Apothecary” was a portentous-looking niche in the side of a narrow, unsavoury lane. Its decayed exterior vividly conveyed the strongest characteristic of its owner: slovenliness. If Mr Hubbel had desired to increase his patronage he could have done so by merely cleaning his window panes, which were coated with a spagyrical carousel of dust, grime, and fungus, with the climate of the moment emphasising one or more of these individual qualities. However, Mr Hubbel was perfectly satisfied with the standing of his business — the last thing he wanted were hoards of strangers disturbing his privacy. Thomas, having successfully negotiated the narrow lane pushed the grimy door open, revealing a well worn coffin-like counter, and shelf upon shelf of nefarious looking mixtures in bottles, jars, and pots that had the appearance of having well and truly passed their use by date. Green and yellow powders, rust-red pastes, and nameless liquids were the main-stay of Mr Hubbel’s stocks, although one could see the odd bottle of aqua fortis and jar of sullen quicksilver leering down through the dust with vicious eyes. There was something distinctively insidious about these substances, and indeed the whole shop — its dimness muting even the brightest colours.

Even though a “customer” had entered the shop Mr Hubbel remained inert, staring at the buckled floorboards dazedly, his sagging paunch resting on the coffin’s unimpressionable wood, his thick arms bracing it firmly. His assistant, a waspish looking girl who grinned constantly, left-off preparing venereal prescriptions to serve Thomas.

“What can I do for you?” she asked, her toadish green eye wavering in rhythm with her dull brown eye.

“I would like to speak to Mr Hubbel.” (She grinned suggestively.)
On hearing Thomas’s voice Mr Hubbel lifted his patch of baldness, which had been staring Thomas in the face, and greeted his visitor, “Ah, Thomas my boy, how’s my Catholic brother today?” An enthusiastic smile ravaged his repugnant features, the uneven light revealing shifting splotches of redness and mushy polyps of flesh around his cavernous mouth.

Thomas smiled at Mr Hubbel’s reference to his visit to the Catholic Church.

Without giving Thomas a chance to answer his original question Mr Hubbel asked another, “And what can I do for you, my very good friend?” Hubbel stretched his spongy body across the counter and whispered to Thomas, “Bet you want a few rubbers? Ha, ha, ha … I say, a few rubbers? Ha, ha, ha.” The Cheshire Cat grinned feverishly. “Bet you’d like to have my pretty little helper for a play-mate … ha, ha, ha, not bad, you know … so smooth, so smooth … ha, ha, ha.”

Thomas smiled and said, “No, no … I’m looking for Therese … haven’t seen her for a few days.”

“She’s not here.”

“What? Where is she?”

“Gone. Just up and left.”

“Where did she go?”

“ Took all her belongings. In one day, out the next.”

“Did she leave any message for me?”

“Look, it’s not very comfortable down here, come up stairs and have a cup of coffee … bit early for grog. Yes, that is a good idea, we can talk about Therese and you can say hello to Mrs Hubbel … that’s the wife, not my mother … ha, ha, ha.” Mr Hubbel turned to his assistant, “Keep an eye on things. Don’t forget those prescriptions, they’re for some very important persons … ha, ha, ha.” They grinned at each other. “Right, come on then Thomas my boy … ha, ha, ha.”
Mr Hubbel led Thomas up the rickety staircase, the narrow slabs of tacky wood creaking and shifting with every step. Thomas was no stranger to the idiosyncrasies of these sleazy stairs and knew precisely where to put his feet to avoid tumbling through their frail skin. Thomas had mastered this skill during Mr Hubbel’s absence — the dim electric sun casting its pallid hue over his lecherous flesh. He felt very little guilt — his betrayal of Hubbel’s trust did not deposit a permanent sullenness over his character, after all, Mr Hubbel’s infidelity was well known in itself. It was, nonetheless, regrettable that the woman in question had fallen victim to that monthly denizen which prays on the carelessness of both passionate and indifferent lovers. Couldn’t have been him, she said, wouldn’t let him touch me … all the same, I told him it was, during one of his drunken stupors … he believes me.

As he watched Mr Hubbel’s ample buttocks slide back and forth over the creases of his trousers, like rivulets over gentle undulations in pastoral country, Thomas thought little of Mrs Hubbel — his lover of five months.

Mr Hubbel glanced over his shoulder, his piggy eyes squinting under their blond brows, and said, “I must show you my new gadget … it’s called an o-r-r-e-r-y … my Uncle Caesar bequeathed it to me along with is diaries.”

Thomas acknowledged this with a slight nod.

The Hubbel’s lounge-room was as dank and oppressive as their shop and staircase. The atmosphere exhibited by the Hubbel-home was similar to that of a cemetery — a decaying wreath of red roses seemed to hover above it like a decadent halo. The room was uncomfortably small and unnaturally cluttered — the tattered chair, stained coffee table, and black and white television allowing little room for manoeuvre. The ceiling was low and covered in a rank mildew — the product of luke warm breaths which had condensed and congealed, attracting the drifting spores to their soft, matted bodies. Mr Hubbel seated himself in the big green chair under the
mantelpiece, which, with its tacked on appearance and collection of bizarre bric-a-brac, was a curiosity in itself.

“There you go, Thomas, take a seat ... anywhere.”

Thomas sat in the red easy chair, more out of necessity than choice, the blue chair being buried beneath a pile of dog-eared paperbacks and magazines.

“There, on the coffee table ... the orrery.” Mr Hubbel pointed to a plump finger towards the tangle of metal arms, rust, and dented sphere which was precariously perched on the table’s battered surface.

“Look, I’ll show you how the bugger works.”

Mr Hubbel leant across and started the obstreperous beast which began to jump, groan, and jolt about.

“You see, it represents the solar system ... this one is very rare ... so small you see ... that’s the sun in the centre and those little globe things are the planets, although Pluto’s missing, built before that little fella’ was discovered. Watch the planets revolve at their relative velocities ... and ’round and ’round ... very clever little gadget ... named after a bloke called Boyle, the Earl of Orrery, they say.” Mr Hubbel rewound the orrery, the din of which peppered Thomas’s ear-drums. “And, yes, as I was saying, my Uncle Caesar left it to me. You should read his diaries some-day. I found his Mycenaean expedition most interesting. Caesar Hubbel was a great philosopher, he believed that we are ‘un-living’ until we isolate our traditional spirit — not that he believed in living by tradition, no, to the contrary, he simply believed that we must understand it ... funny man.”

Hubbel reached down with a big paw and scratched his ankle. “Yes, that was it ... Mrs Hubbel and a cup of coffee.” He bellowed with a swampish throat, “Mrs Hubbel! MRS HUBBEL! It’s THOMAS, he’d love a CUPPA! I say, he’d love a COFFEE.” There was a suggestion of a reply from a room towards the back of the flat and having satisfied himself that he had succeeded in conveying his important message Mr Hubbel resumed his
prattle, giving Thomas no chance to speak, “Picked up a great bottle of port the other day, beautiful stuff, you’ll have to try it … bit early for grog I would say … grog is very climatical stuff, taste depends on the weather, time of the day and numerous other um, um … what’s the word I’m looking for?” Mr Hubbel stared at his socks — he had scuffed his leather boots off with aggressive thrusts against their heels — and sought to bring the two provinces of his mind together: that which held the missing word and that which was in the process of constructing the sentence. During this lapse in the Hubbel-tirades Thomas interjected.

“You were saying that Therese has left.”

“Can’t think of that bloody word.” Mr Hubbel turned his toes inwards, clasped his hands together and frowned. “For the life of me I can’t think.” His face suddenly broke into a smile. “That’s it, I’ve got it.” He didn’t convey his discovery, just rubbed his hands together. He looked up at Thomas and said, “What? Therese, yes, that was it. Her old man, fine bloke, had a cousin-in-law named Slaughter. Big chap, used to smoke heaps of grass … camped out under the stars smoking the stuff and watching the ringlets of smoke encircle the moon … Slaughter: killed sheep part-time, smoked grass the rest. Never liked the stuff myself, too docile. All those hippy blokes smoked it … not me, peaceful I mean, that’s what I’m studying about the Romans and Greeks … they drank gallons of piss, wine that is … I like wine, and beer, and girls … just like Caesar and bi-sexual Achilles — they liked girls, big girls, Cleopatra big … nymphomania, the word I mean … Greek origins, everything has Greek origins. My great, great, great grandfather married a Greek nymphomaniac … East of the Euphrates …” Mr Hubbel had said all of this without drawing breath, his spacious lungs driving his vocal cords at a horrendous pace. He only stopped because Mrs Hubbel had sauntered through the door, clutching a tray of coffee and biscuits suggestively. “Ah, my good Mrs Hubbel, we thank you.”
Mrs Hubbel was wearing a loose crimson gown and a pair of bunny slippers which seemed to lap wantonly at her dove-white ankles. “Hello, Thomas, your coffee. Black or white? How many sugars?”

“Black, no sugar thanks.”

Mrs Hubbel’s loose crimson hinted that her pregnancy was passing the initial stages. Red is a funny colour — it is symbolic of so many moods and feelings. Witches, fairies, hob-goblins, and gnomes relish wearing red velvet hats, especially when eating rouge scraped from the flesh of some illustrious panjandrum. Red’s versatility is not in question: a crucible can glow red, scarlet, or vermillion, while its bubbling brew can conjure carmine, ruby, or blood-red vapours. A few facts on “Blood-Red”: an enigma: it can be any shade, depending upon the sugar level and general state of health: in scientific terms it belongs to that section of the spectrum defined as “red light,” which includes all light within the wavelengths of 740 and 620 nanometres. If, therefore, we accept that red symbolises blood-violence it is logical to hypothesise that Marathon, Salamis, Issus, Cannae, Bebracte, Catalaunian Fields, Jerusalem, Hattin, Hastings, Bornhoved, Bannockburn, Bosworth, Agincourt, Sempach, Kosovo, St Bartholemew, Marston Moor, Trafalgar, Austerlitz, Waterloo, Crimea, Gettysburg, Ypres, Verdun, Somme, Jutland, Kursk, Ardennes, Guadalcanal, Saipan, Okinawa, Korea, Vietnam, and the Middle East, were the aftermath of an angry ozone layer. This is seen in the equation: E1 — E2 = hν, where c = λν. Presumably it is something to do with absorption, but this is best left to those who make it their business to know such details. (Thanks to them we may be able to avoid “red days.”)

Red is heat, red is molten gold, heat is fire (fire is one of the four elements which constitute the elixir of life), fire is love and passion, fire is violence, fire is the stuff of sun gods, fire is crimson, crimson is “the invisible worm.”

When Thomas was in second-grade he was punched sharply on the snout: gallons of lolly pop and carpet red. Red is Devil red … muttering recited
prayers ... red is inferno ... red is victory ... red is life ... red is birth ... the world is red, like a red pillar box.

“I suppose you’re looking for Therese?” said Mrs Hubbel as she handed Thomas his black, sugarless coffee — Thomas accepting the cup and refusing a biscuit all in a single revolution of his head.

“Thank you. Yes, Mr Hubbel says she has left. Did she leave a message?”

“No, she just up and left ... muttered something about a nice flat.”

Mr Hubbel crammed a handful of biscuit into his mouth and washed it down with a flood of coffee. “I’ll tell you this, she’s a strange one, probably never set eyes on her again.” Mr Hubbel licked some crumbs off his jacket sleeve. “Old Caesar was a fairly religious man, Christian I mean. Always carried the Good Book when travelling. Cousin Slaughter was also a devotee, used to sing the psalms under the influence. I don’t think Caesar was a grass-man but he did dabble in opium-eating. Therese’s mother grew some fine pipe-weed once ... in the vege-patch I think. Nice farm they had, very idyllic, you know, get away from it all. They kept cows, milked them in the barn. That butter churn was a real monster. Fancy being able to change a liquid into a solid ... transmutation, that’s the word.” Mr Hubbel slurped at his cup.

Sensing a chance Thomas said, “Well, if you see Therese could you tell her that I called?”

Mr Hubbel spoke solemnly, “Will do my boy, will do ... won’t we, Mrs Hubbel?”

“Yes, we will,” she said.

Thomas drew the past of the dregs from his cup and lay his head back against the redness of the easy chair, his ebony hair spreading across the fabric like a grim gorilla’s hand. He screwed his eye-lids together, protecting himself against the arrow of sun-light that was lancing through that chink in the wall which Mr Hubbel called a window. There was a noisy silence in the
room as Hubbel digested his chocolate biscuits, massaging his squelching blubber with dirty finger-nails, and Mrs Hubbel rested her gaze on Thomas’s lap. Suddenly Thomas opened his eyes, muffling the sun with an out-stretched hand, and said, “Mr Hubbel, I was wondering if you know anybody who is looking for an employee … prepared to do just about anything. Jobs are very hard to come by.”

Mr Hubbel relaxed his stomach muscles, “What? Who wants a job? Who’s prepared to do almost anything?”

“I’m looking for a job,” said Thomas.

Mrs Hubbel, who had suddenly become very alert and attractive, said, “Why do you need a job, you’re a student?”

“I’m withdrawing from my course this afternoon.”

“What do you mean withdrawing? Don’t tell me you’re going to desert the ship,” grumbled Hubbel.

“I have to I’m afraid. I’ve been thrown out of home, with only eight hundred dollars to live on. I’ve managed to find a cheap flat, just around the corner from Saritino’s studio. Eight hundred is just enough to support me for three or four months.”

“Too bad, too bad,” sighed Mr Hubbel, snatching another chocolate biscuit. “You never did get on with your old man, did you? I mean, not really...” Mr Hubbel did not wait for a reply. “Well, I know a man called Pendar-Wiggle, chief clerk down at Umbrage’s Stocks and Shares. I’ll give him a ring tonight, try him tomorrow. Hmmm, Pendar-Wiggle, a capital fellow … don’t think he ever smoked grass … hmmm.”

“Thanks very much, I appreciate it.”

“I’m sure you do, I’m sure you do, my boy,” said Hubbel.

Ringadingaling rang a bell from below. Ringadingaling it sounded again. Mr Hubbel, suddenly alert, jerked his ear towards the source of the noise … ringadingaling it came. Mr Hubbel pulled himself to his feet and weaved his way through the furniture. “Off down below,” he said. “Must
answer the ring of the bell, my helper’s calling me to the scene, surely something is in the air. Keep Thomas amused my love … behave … ha, ha, ha.” He disappeared below the floorline, his stockings padding at the tacky slabs of toffee.

Mrs Hubbel drew a chintzy curtain, covering the chink in the wall and bathing the room in nativity-blue. She turned and faced Thomas. “Don’t bother visiting me any more, I’m not interested.”

“No?”

“No! I want this child, I don’t want any complications.” Mrs Hubbel had married Mr Hubbel when she was twenty years old — Mr Hubbel had been over forty and as such was unwilling to have children … too late he’d said.

“Shall I go?” said Thomas, in a taciturn voice.

“Watch Therese, she’s a strange girl …”

“Everybody’s strange, the whole world’s strange.”

“What will you do if you can’t get a job?”

“Rot! No, seriously … I don’t really know. Have faith in the fairies I suppose,” he said cynically. “Could sell some paintings … but I won’t — you betray yourself, it’s like selling your soul.”

“It’s a practical world, not a philosophic one.”

“Apathy … the practical side of life.”

“What?” asked Mrs Hubbel, slightly confused.

“I’m not going to change. Yes, I think I will rot, at least it’s creative.”

“Suit yourself.”

“I will.”

As Thomas left the shop he thanked Mr Hubbel — who was arguing with a dissatisfied customer over the quality of his eye-ointment — for his help. Hubbel returned this civility with a frustrated smile.

Thomas remembered his repetitive falling dream: soaring through an empty blue sky … plummeting towards the hazy ashes of burnt-out bile pits.
Pure, primal, or Ur-red: seen in furious tongues, with their blood-engorged taste-buds, and fire-breathing dragons. The hero-dragon conflict illuminates the darkest shadows of an insecure personality: a matter of self-awareness and regression.

Beowulf and the Dragon
Saint George and the Dragon
Perseus and the Dragon
Poliphilo and the Dragon
Thomas and the Dragon
Thomas’s Dragon
A thousand Dragons
Dragons and shadows
Thomas’s shadows
Faust’s shadows
Faust’s Dragon
Latin: Draco
Greek: Drakon
Chrysosperm and the Dragon
Fading Sanguis Agni
Dragon anima: cryptaesthesia
Dragons in the Rorschach ink blot.
A red Macbeth

Dragons have scaly skin; pointed tails; emerald eyes — which lance their seering gaze through the security of our subconscious (three personed God, two personed mortal); sharpened teeth — which glow with the mercuric spume excreted by the fire-belching glands; a sensual tongue; and wings (an optional extra). To kill a rancorous dragon it is essential to reject reality, or what appears to be reality. Wallow in self-pity and disbelief.

Despite recalling a falling dream from the night before, Thomas caught the bus full of hopes.
The Coming and Going of “Zec”

And there was Zec — leaning pointlessly, without obvious purpose or hidden reason — an obelus against the “w” of a red-brick wall. The world is full of little people — Everyman who appears, lives, and disappears in the space of comparatively no-time. Zec, however, was no Everyman. Zec was Zec. First there was God, then Adam and Eve, Jesus, a few prophets, and mid-way to the end of eternity there appeared our very own individualist — Zec. Zec, a Dadaist fundamentally (but not a Fundamentalist), was held in high esteem on the local campus scene — his incredibly rapid rise to fame stemmed from the exhibition of his first masterpiece in the library Male toilet. It was called Pye in Recline and, according to the artist, was a re-interpretation of Cartesian philosophy.

Zec was not his real name.
Thomas was Zec’s good friend.
Thomas Zec’s friend Thomas’s friend Zec and Thomas were friendly.
In truth Thomas realised that Zec created a façade. Zec was alone in a hostile world — it is not true that money buys friends. Friends always need amusing. Bitter, bitter, bitter Zec. Zec was Bitterman.

Zec said he was perfectly at home in Australia, being of German extraction. Home is the land away from home he would often say. Black top-hat and polished spats.

As Thomas walked past the leaning figure it began to move — (Zec was frequently to be found by this wall which formed the part of the bookshop which overlooked the comings and goings of university-bound-departing buses). A hand on the shoulder.

Prelude to “The State of Nature”

There are in our existence spots of time,
That with distinct pre-eminence retain
A renovating Virtue, whence, depressed
By false opinion and contentious thought,
Or aught of heavier or more deadly weight
In trivial occupations, and the round
Of ordinary intercourse, our minds
Are nourished and invisibly repaired;
A virtue, by which pleasure is enhanced,
That penetrates, enables us to mount
When high, more high, and lifts us up when fallen.
This efficacious spirit chiefly lurks
Among those passages of life in which
We have had deepest feeling that the mind,
Is lord and master, and that outward sense
Is but the obedient servant of her will.
Such moments worthy of all gratitude,
Are scattered everywhere, taking their date
From our first childhood ...

William Wordsworth, “Imagination and Taste,
How Impaired and Restored,” from The Prelude (Book 12)

(The scene is set in THE PROFESSOR’s office at the university. The room is
smothered in pictures of nineteenth century Britain — factories belching
black smog and dribbling slag; Queen Victoria dabbing her royal proboscis
with white lace; hooves and buggy wheels chipping solemnly at grim cobbles;
cannibals at Viennese balls, running their black hands through the wired-hair
of prudish widows; the Prime Minister inspecting conditions in the Debtor’s
Prison; bowls of gruel spread over financial fortune telling … “The City” in
all its splendour — and portraits of Charles Dickens.

THOMAS is seated opposite THE PROFESSOR, who is wearing his
customary uniform: a tuxedo with gravy stains on the lapel. THE PROFESSOR,
who also goes by the name “PUMBLECHOOK” — a dedication to his favourite
fictional character — is gazing at the weather-worn gnome in his weed-full
window box.)

THE PROFESSOR (still looking at his gnome, the only communication between
the two having been PUMBLECHOOK’s telling THOMAS to stop “that
infernal knocking” and to come in and take a seat): What do you want?
Who are you?
THOMAS: It’s Napoleon, sir. I’ve come about ...

THE PROFESSOR (having leapt out of the chair and huddled into a corner):
Napoleon? Where? Quick! Call Wellington! Listen to me, Napoleon,
you had better watch out — remember Waterloo? And what about Trafalgar and the Hundred Years War?

THOMAS: I would like you to sign my withdrawal form.

THE PROFESSOR (disappointed with THOMAS’s lack of response): What?

Withdrawal? Who’s withdrawing?

THOMAS: You’ve got to sign along this line.

THE PROFESSOR: What’s wrong with you, Wopsle, my son?

THOMAS: The dotted line.

THE PROFESSOR: Look here, Wopsle, if you can’t read the psalms who will? I certainly can’t, I’m a Hindu.

THOMAS: You see, I’ve been thrown out of home and it’s impossible for me to pay my fees for next terms … I’m really in the shit.

THE PROFESSOR: Wopsle! I say, Wopsle! Stop cuddling Estella!

THOMAS: So I need this form signed.

THE PROFESSOR: The Greeks were an educating people.

THOMAS (discarding his inhibitions): Naturalism, Bacon’s devotion to the Eucharist, the Thomists, Augustinians, Aristotelians, and Platonists are all vital cogs in the mechanism of Time. Nationalism is a load of crap … mushy pig crap. I wonder if the slave-traders of old were educated?

THE PROFESSOR (pleased with THOMAS’s reaction): Solon had slaves, I think, I’m seriously thinking of re-instituting the Dionysiac festivals. The sophists probably made enough money to buy slaves on the open market.

THOMAS: But what about mathematics?

THE PROFESSOR: Arithmetic was a vital breakthrough in our progression towards the logic of algebra. Algebra is made up of signs and symbols — even this pure logic has its subconscious side. Calculus is not so important … well, not in comparison with the wonders of phonemes and allophones. Newton and Leibniz were undoubtedly
wise men — Newton believed in aspects of alchemy. It’s all a question of progression. *(He points to an engraving of a Mississippian paddle steamer.)* We start at one end of the river, with its myriad sources, and progress towards that endless expanse …

THOMAS *(to himself, as PROFESSOR PUMBLECHOOK takes the withdrawal slip):*

It was late afternoon — the sun nestled amongst the reds and violets of the horizon. The raft was pretty-well ready — the logs had been cut and spliced together with measured lengths of spiny jute. I was just adding the finishing touches to the rudder when I heard the howling rustle through the tangled undergrowth nearby. After a moment I realised that this was not the cries of a trapped animal but the caterwauling of some dejected human. I decided to investigate … I peeped through a thorny bush and saw a black-man cradling his head in his hands.

“Oooooooohhhhhhh, I is gonna … I is dun fa’,” the stranger cried.

I stepped into the clearing. “What’s wrong?”

He looked up slowly, not the least surprised by my sudden appearance. “Oh me oh my, I is dun fa’.”

“Why are you done for?” I asked, in my best English accent.

“I is a black fella … I is a gonna.”

“I’m sorry. Is there anything I can do?” I said, unsure of what to say.

“I’ve lost mu Speech Improvement Book … now I canna go tu Heaven.”

“Well, of course you can,” I assured him, “You only need faith.”

“But hu’ am U goin’ to shuw Him U’m faitful if I canna speak prop-ly?”

“That’s a tricky one, I’ll give you that.”
The black-man stood up and said, “Are yu’ a sportin’ type?”
“I check the taps carefully before going to bed. Leaky faucets are a great worry.”
“I can pronounce “Booze” and “Sewrage” in accordance with Speech Improvement.”
“Shit!”
“I canna pronounce shit proper.”

THE PROFESSOR (signing the form): Battle-ships are obnoxious relics.
THOMAS: The bosun had a heart attack, preceded by palpitations, when the guns were fired.
THE PROFESSOR: A waste of talent.
THOMAS: I’ll catch up with you. Thanks. (He leaves.)

Depression — from the pavilions of the unemployed issue forth Hope and Security. Waste-paper money. Fiscal policies for one and all. A few bob — a drop of grog. Pub-bound for a quick watering then off to see the world. Serious times are upon us — Pendal-Wiggle and a clerical position with an “IN” tray and an “OUT” basket (modern variation). A man’s own man, a woman’s own woman. Black and red walls, sprayed and chipped. Slashed seats, cracked vinyl. First class — torn leather, weather-worn. Scuff-marked footpaths.

hidden private life away from the stink of masturbation, a broad smile lost with lost necessity.

A dozen drinkers reclined, inclined, and declined. Supine amber, an ancient fossil. A dozen drinkers with dull eyes, watching a meretricious Calypso. The eye of the beholder — drunken slander. Pseudohermaphroditism, laughing unseen. Flickering eyelids with long lashes lashing from top to bottom, head to toe.

Thomas sauntered through the bold arms of the armless King’s Arms ... to be found intermittently throughout Europe, the Americas, and the Southern Lands. The King’s Boozer in New Holland. Canvas flaps flip-flapping in the evening willow-wisps. Free chips and pretzels with every grinning face. Hot bowels.

Thomas collected drink-mats and pretzel bowls. It was not an intricate art — to extricate the nursery from beneath the eyes of motherly matrons. Careful study of Murphy’s character had revealed the secret. Jolly Helja’s tits with a rasping smile, grasp the pot in one hand and swing it violently towards a drooling jaw — a laugh, a dribble, a gob full of gold and a pocket angled with the soggy coaster. Pretzel bowls were far more difficult. Laugh along with the group, dropping shoulders flush together, glasses clinking, the surge inward, bowl gone. Pregnant jacket. Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha.

Saritino in the thick of it, his olive hands clasped around the delicate buds of an artist’s breast — young, in need of a patron. Distracted. Open eyes, Thomas.

Fuck Therese, temperamental bitch. I’ve only eyes for you — Repeat No. 22. Will she or won’t she? Yes, I’ve definitely been noticed. Flashing pink come red. Rolling a pretzel bowl in her digits — inviting. Tight jeans, sparkling hair. Ah, the dragon spreads its wings. Dragon meets Crow. Blake’s Raven — another obscure but vital reference. Sliding exhilaration. Lavender soap has never lost its inexplicable popularity amongst our female brethren. Lavender candy. A big box of rich chokkies. My windows are full
of your dewy locks. Mary Mary, how do you grow such lovely locks? Through screwing Georgie Porgie. The Mother-figure had wanted to call me “George,” after the memory of some deceased foreign gentleman. With the strength of ten contemporary men the Father figure crushed this rebellious desire. A Georgian character. Bigger teeth? No. A name couldn’t possibly effect the canine calcium deposits. But, then again, science is there to be rejected … Thomas is a good Biblical name. A name of strength. My grandpappie’s name (American blood) — a decent enough sort of chap. Anyway, back to the subject in hand. Apples in sugar. “Naked in sunny beams delight.” Fingers through that hoary patch of brambles — long legs, a good sign. Firm cleavage. Straddled bar stool swiveling aimlessly … no, signs of tension, an uneven twitch of the lip — Saritino’s hand slipping beneath the soft folds of sun-clean black sheep’s wool. Intervention.

Above the chatter, through the dimness, “Hey, Saritino! How are you doing?”

Surprise, neck jerked, outburst, “Thomas! What’s it like to be free? A new man, hey?”

News travel fast.

“You’ve been speaking to Hubbel?”

“Yes, yes, heard the good news just before twelve. What are you going to do?”

Helen perched on the swiveller looking dumb, left out — faking amusement.

“Try for a job — probably won’t get one. If not, I’ll spend my time writing and painting.”

A word, a beer, a few silver coins. Thanks.

“Tough time surviving.”

“I’ve got some money — enough to steer me through to greener pastures.”
“Good on you, that’s the spirit my boy.” Hands still hovering over silky skin, Saritino addresses the up and coming. “Alison Celimene, meet Thomas Napoleon.”

Sophisticated recognition — a sway of the face. Sweet voice, “Napoleon, that’s a dignified name. Imperial blood?”

A joke … a riddle possibly. Reaction: play along. Courtship rituals. “I’m of an imperial nature …”

Does she catch my meaning?

“Roman or Persian?”

Yes. Mutual amusement. Ha, ha, ha. Ha, ha, ha. Ha, ha, ha. A happy threesome, a merry trio. My Anna Livia. Saritino confused … tension …

Broken, fat dwarf speaking, “Ah, yes, very good. Alison, this young friend of mine is destined to a life of great importance. Unbelievable talent.” Nervous laughter. “Now, Thomas, what we have here, hidden beneath this beautiful face, is talent, raw talent just waiting to be discovered.” Exaggerated modesty smothered by a sip of red wine — her lips drinking softly.

Thomas continued his cat and mouse game with the young lady, much to Saritino’s disgust. After thorough cross examination he concluded that in reality Mrs Alison was of exiguous intelligence and had been encouraged by Saritino with designs of extricating physical reward. Still, she seemed pleasant enough, especially when one’s driving philosophy is to take the best you can get. Thomas had tried all of his usual methods of activism (such as telling her about his recurring desire to stand on a neighbour’s porch and speak words of love to the support posts), but had failed to stir any dormant ectoplasm which may lay buried within the nape of her neck. She was as sleek as a panther, a sleek black panther. Sophisticated, he would give her that. Probably a very experienced lover. There must be more to life than desire. Protest — Save the Whale and Solar Not Nuclear are much worthier of consideration … surely. Ahhhh, something of interest: she’s a member of
a local theatre group. A description. The director with the dirty mind, lead actor with the funny wrists … she’s in full swing now, talking busily. Therese had been the silent type. Ever quiet, brooding. Let’s face it — not very satisfying, left a feeling of guilt. Would I like to come along? Saritino annoyed, drinking heavily, hands, red-hands twitching. A room of twitching muscles. Poorly lit, stained floor, lugubrious drinkers — beneath the light-headed façade. A bout of laughter and another round of drinks. When? Tomorrow? Maybe, have to find a flat, should go and visit Henry. Loves parties. Saritino is also fond of parties. Had better go, short stay, have to see a man about a dog. Too bad? Yes, it is. Now you’ve got her all to yourself. Breast warmers, Southern Italian breast warmers.

UMBRAGES STOCKS AND SHARES …

It’s really a fad, when it comes down to it. Reaction … no … lack of respect for the finery of the English language … possibly. Thomas’s Stocks and Shares would not go without it’s a p o s t r o p h e … apostrophe … APOSTROPHE … immeasurable, innumerable, uncountable (etc.) permutations. Pernicious company, how could I work for such ignorants (not ignorance)? “Emasculation required, call before nine,” the sign should read — in the paper with careful typeset tradesmanship being bestowed upon its construction. Prognostication: Pendar-Wiggle and his office will reject my body by flinging white-blood cells at it.

The immortal office — modernised but unchanged. Unchangeable feeling (just bigger). Clerks and secretaries, one desk, two desks, all in a row, more or less. The boss, the workers — Thomas floating in his sublunary orbit. I wonder if the workers have shares in the shares company? “Excuse me, I’m looking for Mr Pendar-Wiggle,” said Thomas, addressing the old lady sitting under the reception sign. She looked up slowly, the joints of her neck grinding the nerve. A pallid face with croweyes.
“Do you have an appointment?” she asked, her crows changing into ravens.

“I can read minds — Hubbel sent me.” He watched her eyes, their dimness sparkled momentarily and then restored itself.

“Who’s Hubbel?”

“A friend of Mr Pendal-Wiggle’s.” He paused. “Do you call him Wiggle for short? Or just Pendal?”

Her ravens turned to eagles. “Watch your tongue …”

Thomas cut her short, “My dear … I think Mr Hubbel contacted Mr Pendal-Wiggle earlier today.”

Her calmness (or numbness) returned, “If you’ll wait I shall check.” The shriveled bird picked up a grey telephone and spoke to her superior. The receiver re-clicked into its click. “Go through.” She pointed to a brown door and slipped away into her interrupted thoughts.

Wiggle was a glorified clerk with a vase of stale roses on his desk and an aging black lamp. As old as the company itself. A paper pile and a stack of files. The stack of files stacked upon the neatly piled pile of paper. A linoleum floor glowing sullen green with the reflection of electric heating rods. Lukewarm room. In his worn suit with the plastic flower sits the clerk. Studying the gravy stain on his left-hand cuff, scraping at it with his pen.

The knock — distracted. Yes. Come in. Come in!

“Hello.”

“Hello — come in, take a seat.” No seat. “I’m sorry, you’ll have to stand.”

“My name is Thomas Napoleon.”

Waving his hands, “Yes, yes, I know all that, Hubbel phoned me. Good man Hubbel seems to think you’re worth employing. Are you worth employing?” His voice rasped.

Thomas studied the nervous little man. “I suppose so.”
Excitedly, “You don’t sound very enthusiastic, you don’t seem to have very much motivation. Don’t you want to improve yourself, settle down to a secure job? A job with possibilities?” He paused, waiting for Thomas to answer but receiving no reply launched into a psychotic arraignment. “Look, there you go again! Didn’t even have the courtesy to answer. Typical. What has happened to motivation? No wonder we have such massive unemployment — the world is full of unmotivated people! I’ve worked hard all my life and I’ve still got motivation. Motivation! Motivation! Motivation! MOTIVATION! My life has purpose — my work has purpose, and purpose is something you lack. Without purpose there is no reason and without reason there is no purpose. My reason is satisfaction — to be able to look back and say ‘I’ve led a full and purposeful life’ is my purpose. Purpose! Purpose! Purpose! PURPOSE! Do you understand? No, well I couldn’t really expect you to. You’ve never had to fend for yourself. I can see that. Oh yes, I can see it clearly. It’s in the eyes, nothing you can do about it. In the eyes. The eyes, the eyes, the eyes, the eyes.” He wheezed and fell into silence.

“I was wondering if you had any work?” said Thomas, unruffled.

“There’s a recession on, there’s no work to be found anywhere.”

“That’s alright, I don’t really want to work in an office.”

Mr Wiggle found enough energy to launch another attack, Thomas left the building. In all, ten minutes of his time had been wasted. Still, it was nice of Hubbel to go to the trouble.
The State of Nature

“Still as a slave before his Lord,
The ocean hath no blast;
His great bright eye most silently
Up to the Moon is cast —”

Innocent posted the letter in the red-box (the one near the Jewish gourmet shop). Foulques rose to the cause and preached the Crusade to hungry ears, sinful ears searching for cheap remission.

Legal Deaths Incorporated.

Thirsty for adventure Villehardouin followed the bunch in their expedition against the wicked Saljuks.

Men of the same colour found in the East and the West.

Sultans laughing.

Crash, crash, crash, went the stones as they ground holy Byzantium into the dirt.

Caesar laughing from his crypt.

Private Smith munching at freshly baked loaves.

Fishers of Men.

Private Smith jerking spasmodically to the nervous strains of electronic keyboards. A contemporary Bard (there being no such thing as a “modern bard”).

Songs of the sea …

Nantucket or bust …

Huge sea-monsters …

the truth of the sword.
Brown dog shit in foreign streets:
Ovid, Vergil, and Horace.
Home grown brown dog shit.
Let Cato skewer himself.

Private Smith with indigestion. Later, diarrhoea.

Enlightenment is the aftermath of turbulence. Cultural disorientation — after a number of revealing upheavals.

Thomas found a cheap flat near Saritino’s studio. He lived there for about a month.

Although Thomas’s mood changed his daily routine remained constant. It never altered over the four weeks — despite his drift into a state of absolute depression.

The Daily Routine

7.00 a.m. — alarm / start / waking process begins with harsh language flowing freely.
7.07 — rise and fall begins: feet touch floor. “Shit.”
7.10 (and a little bit): Relief.
7.15 — Groan.
7.16 — Touch the canvas — a little painting with hog-hair brushes.
7.30 — Clothing process.
7.35 — OPTIONAL: “Good-morning” or silence.
7.40 — BREAKFAST (Variation permissible)
That Aeschylean immortality comes into its own.
8.00 — Free time: writing or similar entertainment may be pursued.

“Going out,” a common option.

Possibly reading
Catching a bus
Going for a wander
Writing etcetcetetcetetcetetcetetcetetcetetc.

Meals will be taken: according to mood.

(p.m.) 12.00 — (Before or after) — bed. This was flexible: six hours either side.

Note: (Thomas always went to sleep).

After twenty eight routines Thomas left for Europe in search for his cultural heritage and literary inspiration. Mrs Hubbel dished out the dough. No blackmail was involved. It was a search for adventure, the quest for whiteness — that terror of nothingness. Nothing, less than nothing, fading nothingness, the infinite spectrum of nothing’s nothingness, fading nothingness, nothing. (Nightshade, for the working of an ideological thaumaturgy, was native to an overseas climate.)

Thomas bought his ticket from a red-headed semi-hostess who lived in a little blue booth. She lived a satisfied life.

Like soaring seagull he flew up and down — in a ship, over the waves: THE EQUATORIAL HUMP.

First, from Australia through Whitehall to Dublin Castle. A drink or two with the United Irishmen, a toast to Wolf Tone, and off to the other side of the Union. A progression down the coast by galley, rowing chained to the deck, bloody wrists. Migration — throwing up to and fro. Inter-national-ism. A history written in Latin: scrawled in red paint from Spain to St Petersburg. Reading: Palaeolithic, Mesolithic, Neolithic, Bronze, Protogeometric, Geometric, Archaic, Classical, Hellenistic, Roman, Dark, Middle, Medieval, Renaissance (stuck in the Middle and Medieval), Palaeolithic, etc. As an emendation: the old man was lost for two hundred centuries as he chased the little bird from tree to tree, on his return this holy person was told that he was already dead by the little birdy which sits in the space between the nose and the brain. All tourists have a fascination with history, especially the history of foundations (whether they be limestone, marble, granite and so on). Post-cards of foundations. Those available: Hyria, Aulis, Eleonos,
Schonos, Skolos, Thespeia, Graia, Mykalessos, Harma, Eilesion, Erythria, Eleon, Hyle, Peteon, Okakea, Medeon, Kopia, Eutresis, Thisbe, Koroneia, Haliartos (a meadow full of sun-lamps), Plataia, Glisa, Thebes (a big bugger), Onchestos, Arne (For the drinker: the wine-orientated slip of meat — the tongue that is), Mideia, Nisa, Anhedon, Aspledon, Ochomenos, Kyparisso [?], Pytho, Krisa, etc. — all the way to French bordellos. Open haunches, moist satin … Fat men on skinny beds: English, German, Ethiopian, Scythian, Aboriginal, Irish. Curve the Continental bend with a quick glance back to Debussy on the Kabutz and then onward to the Kremlin with its red-capped spires of fading orthodoxy, reversing through the triumph of a namesake Arch in an awe inspiring dream of wintery retreat. A Gaul — friends, Gauls, and more Gauls. Earless Romans: Europa the Wickerperson watches the shifting deposits of unwanted refugees: Queen Bull, a hermaphrodite, filling the skies with fine ideas: the life of N.E.P. Napoleon here and there and Napoleon there and here. From Notre Dame to Saint Paul’s: “No Man is an Island”: truth in misery.
Exodus

And so did the Sons of Israel (suspect translation, “children” optional) submit their theories to the Royal Society: the Origins of Earthly Magnetism. If one is going to travel the world it is essential to come to grips with its basic physical characteristics and idiosyncrasies — not forgetting that these idiosyncrasies can also be classified under the broader category (not phylum) of “characteristics,” and only a bigot would suggest otherwise. The “z” is an optional extra but it is not covered by insurance so when all is said and done it is appreciably safer to use an “s,” which is provided in the basic cover price. Doesn’t look like I’ll have time to visit Henry, so I will have to write him a letter.

Dear Henry,

(this letter was not posted),

(the red pillar box had been painted green),

(Colours again),

Bed bugs and porcupine-(European derivative of Echidna — appropriate)-quilled buttocks are the hospital’s true legacy. Hello, hello, hello, hello, hello, hhhhhhhhhhhheeeeeeeeeeellelllllllllllllllooooooooo-ooeetcetcetcetcandsoonetc. I’m off to the “Island in the Moon” and then crossing the fjord onto the main land mass — from there to the crotch of origination. From this Egypt to that land of Sin.

I shall travel to where the world began
and where the world would end —
the end of my journey
foretells my new beginning.6

6 Note use of repetition. Feel the Irish in my blood — beckoning. As in Sinn Fein.
I feel something like Glaukos, son of Leptus. I’ve carefully studied the angle of declination and the parallels between isogonic democracy and agonic dialectic, so please rest assured. The following diagrams show, both crudely and with brevity, the basic problems facing the modern day traveller. It was much easier when the world was flat — if you kept away from the edge there was nothing to worry about. The fundamental problem facing us now is how to sail over the curve of the earth without sliding back down to our starting point. Once over the equatorial hump the going is much easier. (Furthermore, although fuel costs will be greater sailing up to Europe the return costs are much lower — it is all down hill … with the exception of the hump.)
And who do I expect to meet at my first port of call? Well, Nestor should be at the front of the crowd with a squadron of warriors. The warriors: Suction the Epicurian, Quid the Cynic, and Sipsop the Pythagorean, Etruscan Column the Antiquarian, Mrs Gimblet, Inflammable Gass, Obtuse Angle, Steelyard, Silly Lally the Siptippidist, Aradobo the Dean of Morocco (heavy influx of foreigners), Mrs Gittipin, Mrs Nannicantipot, Mrs Sistagatist, Gibble Gabble (the wife of a gas cylinder), Little Scopprell, and an original book-binder, Burp. Blake is very popular in Melville’s New Bedford (with the Feegeeans, Tongatabooans, Erromangoans, Pannangians, Brihggians, and harpoons). Hoist the Skull and Cross-bones. Pirates are tyrants so therefore Periander had a cross in his skull-bone, or, alternatively, the pirate flew the Periander cross-bone from a mast of pure skull. Shall I find a treasure island? Probably not, but at least my chest can grow no emptier: ah a paradox, a paradox, a paradox even when read backwards. (The key line, read and re-read: stinks of portent and ectoplasm). But, one thing I will find: A CULTURAL HERITAGE, some true-to-LiFe (Not dinky-di) HiStOrY. Good-bye old life cycle (deeper meaning: orthodox). It is true, I shall miss you Henry — I’ll write every now and again. As good old Eliot said:

“We will take heart for the future,
Remembering the past.”

I still think you’re wrong in suggesting that capital letters should have been used for “future” and “past,” it would have made the lines far too dramatic.

I’ll say hello to Menelaos when I’m in Sparta, mention your name, just for old time’s sake.

The pioneering spirit: Duracks, rain-water tanks and the Scorched Earth policy: a xenophobic extreme. Cats, rabbits, buffalo, donkeys, cattle, horses, grass eaters, pigs with wild ivory tusks — ebony flesh: the pioneering spirit: a glass menagerie. A valley of dolls. Away from the dreaded waste land
with its manacles and shackles, chains and pillories. From the pitiless ice to
the godly rooms of Northern Asgard. Odin feasting in Válaskjálf under
awesome roofs of solid gold, the Valkyries feeding the slain in Valhalla. I
have found another Rosetta Stone.

SHIT — a destruction of the Romantic epithet. Bricks on bricks — a
staircase.

Purely practical — airline tickets, etc.

I’ve lost interest in Dragons — Crows have taken over.

Somebody has moved into your old house — saw them when I went to
collect some of my belongings — now, that little episode provided some
amusement. They pretended that nothing had happened, that I hadn’t even
left. Still, they both want me out. Out, out, OUT.

Find the missing word in the following word-game (to pass the time):

```
L A P U T A
I
L B A L N I B A R B I
L U
B R O B D I N G N A G
P G L U B B D U B D R I B
U W A T H E N S
S P A R T A A L
G G N
E N G L A N D I
U B
P T O L E M Y A N D S O O N ...
R R
R O M E T C B
Y T I
E T C
```
HAVE YOU WORKED IT OUT YET?
No? Yes? .......... No?
The answer: Shinto (the mystical Orient which had a profound effect on European literature thanks to the efforts of such noble adventurers as Marco Polo and Thomas Napoleon. The question is: Is it really necessary to visit the Orient when we can read about it in books, both hard cover and paperback? Think about this while the nurses make your bed and wash you with LaVeNdEr soap ... joke, soap, joke soap, jokesoap.)

Last week I was feeling depressed — I tried to cry but couldn’t. I haven’t shed a tear since I was about six — faulty tear ducts probably ... possibly, at least. I’m happy now and I know that this will make you also happy. Happy, happy, happy happy happippy.

I have written a story for children — a bedtime story ... there are no dragons in it, although the Crow could be misinterpreted ... Why did I do it????????????????????

“l’art pour l’art”

Dedicated to Kant and his bunch of albino rhinoceros with the white eyes: Gautier, Flaubert, and Baudelaire.

NOTE: The following tale has been Bowdlerized (optional “z” remember): this term has been used in full knowledge that certain critics may level criticism of Bombasticism towards its contrived usage: the risk has been willingly accepted by the author who fears not the wrath of the butcher’s pen but an affrontal with the clean living moralists who cohabit with the starched sheets of our modern-day hospitals.

Only to return — look for a JOB — search for Therese.
A Bedtime Story: The Freldibird (not an allegory)

The Crow clasped the soul firmly in its grip and set-off with outstretched wings for the sleepless land of Fod. Young Henry’s body twisted and turned, preserved in a state of nothingness — his thoughts wrapped in dream talons. The Crow spoke:

“Skut lekt rit pestit crupple tent te’ arch-e-type, stone axe patit enk skull tap bone, Kruskt.” It was a sharp, sarcastic voice. Laughing.

Across the Ocean of Love, above the Crags of Desire, and over the Valley of Depression the Crow flew. Laughing, cynically, Vitriol dripping from his sharpened beak.

Suddenly alert, Henry’s spirit could see a plume of smoke in the distance, growing ever closer and closer and closer. What could it be? There were traces of green tendrils feeding on the thick blackness — climbing towards the bright but sunless sky. A burning sky, burning Crow’s eye, laughing.

It was coming from a green forest — a green forest with a red heart: a fire, a red-roaring fire. A dream fire? No, growing warmth becoming heat becoming pain: you can’t pinch a soul so it’s impossible to tell what is real and what is not. Blinding fire. Laughing, laughing, LAUGHING, LAUGHING!! Shrivelling skin peeling layer by layer back from the folds of sweet young flesh. A sarcastic cackle:

“Trest fall, trest fall … land of Freldibird with the throat of fire. Krist ret pfistiktikal rewquel fitnelt rip rat cattil ac ’id! The falling downm brick by bric ’t lerkt pasteterasticatatalstisterefest. Crark, crark, crark.”

The Crow opened its security, flicking nails, falling downwards. Plummet — plop.
Eyes open, still alive — green wood, no fire. Clear sky, bright sun, no smoke.
What to do? Wait?
MOVEMENT.
SMELL.
SIGHT!!
Paradigm 2
The Room

Home again. Thomas’s parents (when did Mum rematerialise?) had not been inside his room for years; they, along with everybody else, had been forbidden entry. On washing days Thomas would change his sheets, place them along with his clothes in the laundry basket, and vacuum his room: this satisfied his mother. Big Bob Napoleon avoided him as much as possible, and consequently had no desire to enter his son’s room. Thomas had installed a top quality lock in the door to prevent any inquisitive urges which might arise on seeing a closed door. Once he had found a small cousin trying to pick it with a hair-pin, so from then on he felt justified in his suspicions.

The walls were plastered with posters, paintings, and notes (poetry, quotations, and so on), above the book-cases which lined all four walls. It was a large room — the house being of an old style — built with high roof.

He had sold some of his art to buy the books, etc. The room was a conglomeration of different worlds, etc.

Lord of the Rings, and Dune — written his own fantasy — The Staffs of Kwarn. Interested in mythology, etc.
Park Notes

I

Images are not part of the whole, the whole is part of an image. I feel humble today. Australia needs to recreate its lost music. We live in a bee-box of a world. I was reading some of my early poetry yesterday. It’s crap. Words without purpose destroy its emotional impact. Feelings are all that matter, but we live in a Nature ever-seeking to strip these from us. We need a suit of armour. Poetry is like armour. The best example of Nature is to be seen in the bee. It has a smarting sting. It will die in revenge. Laughter echoing revenge. But is it worth it? Ancient bees versed in hero worship.

Am I my own God?
Words like mosaics
Spread, spreading.
No. My spirit
looks further. Always.

I am responsible for my own thinking. Plath-bee. In the tourist season Asian brothels reek bee-smells. If I call the sky blue I am stating a fact or a falsehood. If I call it a silken sky then I am diminishing the importance of both concrete references. It becomes an abstract illusion. It’s like repeating or re-stating what has already been said. Literature as one vast illusion. A false face of feelings. In stone.

And with the yellow harvest
I discovered earthly tears …
That the earth
Has salty tears …
Noble sacrifice. I shall mmmmmmmeeeeeetttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttt
that’s getting domestic. An eye full of rotten apples. She took one look at my poetry and tossed it away. Called it crap and rubbish … for no reason in particular, admitted she couldn’t understand a word of it. But art is different, she loves art. She loves young artists, that’s why she loves me. Lovey bee. Fawning, treacle-run love. Bodily love. In any case, she knows fuck-all. She’s never heard of Wang Wei, Li Po and Tu Fu. I told her they were about dualism and a poet’s vision of nature, etc. They can be about anything, I’ve come to realise that. A transportation of Karma. Toilet brushes. Crap crap crap crap crap crap crap crap crap crap crap in light-leather blues in shoes. She’s a fake, an obliterate prodigy of the Mongol, and a Dogberry. Just to spite her I’m going to use those poems as a basis for an eppppppppppppic work. But what to call it? I shall call it “The White Cloud.” Definitely. We are still living in the Renaissance. I must try to pick up a suit of chain mail some time. It’s always best to be prepared for the worst. They were advertising for script-writers in the paper the other day. I’ll have to write something for the theatre, maybe even television. But I despise television, so maybe that’s not such a good idea. Classical television. She’ll be waiting there. She always arrives before me. Spooky. And she believes in ouija boards and astrology. Little globes of fear. Globular bees. A neighbour who’s a medium. I’ve done a little polishing since Mrs Hubbel read those poems. It’s definitely improved them. I’ll probably hate them this time next year, it’s always the same.

I
Vermillion suns,
Over Auschwitz …
Locomotives,
Wagner on H.M.V.
Legations, opium,
Manchukuo
And Buddha, Yellow
River Boat Christ.
Open Mongols.
Ming dynasty.

II
To drown through the moon
Is to feel the white cloud
Swallow the winter tree
On a fresh Spring Wind.

III
And Ch’ien, in idle fancy,
Glanced from his hunting lodge
Down through the filament sky
Toward his magic city.
Fast paling whiteness settled
On his flesh as he felt
The shifting of his spirit.
Rusted sword, powdered palace.

By the swift
Stream came that silence which rushes through clouds
Of reddish lotus smoke
and floods the mind
With mist of hazel fire and visions
Of far away blue-spired mountain domes.

From his bed of perfumed silk Ch’ien wrote:
“An orchard afloat with apricot boats
And winnowed leaves, sighs silently
Beneath winter’s icy tears . . .”

From the French

Windows an alabaster lady
Glanced down through the silk of evening
And found her divine king caressing
Three snow-white doves and sipping warm blood
Daintily from the Pisan skullcup.

IV
Father Bekker
Imperial purple
In Canton. Chalice
In hand, grew heavily
Drunk. Bitter wine.
Kung, cup in hand
Tasted sweetness.
An ancient breeze.

Bamboo flute. Song.
Steps to heaven.

But just at the moment I’m quite pleased with them. And she’ll wear her black skirt. Suspender-belt. Silken black stockings. White blouse. And too much bloody make-up. I despise it. Waxed faces.

THE PARK, OR THEREABOUTS.

Thomas advanced across the grass slowly. In fact, it appeared that he remained stationary while the world slipped casually by along the balls of
his feet. The sharp blades of grass crinkled as they rolled past him, beneath him. From corridor to corridor, from space to space. Words, words, and more words. The meeking disinherit the earth-thing. And what passed him by? Precisely?

Big-bellied athletes presiding over a red-appled cricket ball.
Rusty redback spiders.
Kite high in the sky. Dad in control.
Vegemite picnic.
Lemonade under glass. Fizzing. Flat.
Salt hanging in a blanket of moon-mist heavy between shoulders of air.
Close to the sea.
And pretending there is something else. High sun, bright in the sky.
Oiled-paper. Parched print.
Light breeze flicking the scuffs of fluted clouds.
Old-age and death hanging heavily ... caught in kite strings, lightly.
Soft and dry skin. Face-lifts. Lead poisoning.
Bare bones: ingredients in plenty: no soul. Gallons and gallons of spirit.
South American tea brewing. Variations on a theme.
King and Queen for a day.
Thundering through Norway on black chargers. Sword in hand.
De-loused.
Off and on.
Claustrophobia, in open spaces.
Fertilizer. In grains. Dry.

II: Tattoo Dream Projection

Thomas dreamt into or out of the future, he wasn’t sure. A city meeting-place. He hadn’t slept for four days. He never slept. He occupied the night with unsleep. I crave sleep, he told the street kid, the girl with many piercings and tattoos, but I also detest and reject it. She was sipping a cup of tea. I’ve had my mound tattooed. Would you like to see? He said yes, and she put down her tea, lifted her torn skirt with its chain additions, and showed him her roughly shaved cunt with a dragon tattooed on the mons veneris. The red and green dragon poked its head out of fine brown bristles. It breathes fire? he asked. Of course, she said. He said:

Tu mettrais l’univers entier dans ta ruelle,
Femme impure! L’ennui rend ton âme cruelle.

Yes, thanks, the street kid replied. Do you have any money? A little, he said. I am out of work at the moment. I have dropped out of university. I am a drop-out. Or a drop-kick. She laughed. Well, I’ve dropped out of high school. Adding, with a knowing, experienced look:

O fangeuse grandeur! sublime ignominie!

Indeed, said Thomas. You have a girlfriend or a boyfriend? she asked. Sometimes. She has a little red sports car. That’s cute, said the street kid.
Could we steal it and take it for a spin? No, said Thomas. It would be boring. I can’t sleep, he added as an afterthought. Neither can I, she said. I can’t turn off my dreams whether I am awake or asleep, said Thomas. Neither can I, said the girl. Do you know Baudelaire hated women so much because he needed them so much? she added. Yes, said Thomas. I am going to cut my penis off. I am going to unmake myself. You are a misogynist... observed the street kid. A misanthropist, he observed. I do like what doesn’t fit though. I have female organs inside, but they’ve no way of expressing themselves. I bleed internally. Endometriosis, corrected the girl. Maybe... said Thomas. Let’s steal some whiskey and cigarettes and hang out in Northbridge, said the street kid. I’ll be in on that... though I am not a thief, said Thomas. That’s okay, said the street kid, I’ll do the stealing. You are an inspiration, said Thomas. And you are a conservative... now, let’s away, let’s make for the green Dragon, just across the Horseshoe Bridge, said the street kid. She’s a romantic, thought Thomas... she will help me sleep.
I

Life in accordance with the principles of self-preservation: mineral water and plenty of under-cooked vegetables. Prunes are good for the digestion and mud is good for the skin. Fish is brain food.

Thomas advanced across the grass with long measured strides, sponging the sharpened green blades with each sinking pump-down. His mind was racing, but in an orderly fashion. From corridor to corridor, from space to space. The socialist in the quaint arcade had spoken some truth — the meek SHALL inherit the earth. Corridors always run into caverns which are full of empty spaces. This presents some profound difficulties. Words, words, and more words.

Big-bellied athletes presiding over a red-appled cricket ball.
Kite high in the sky. Dad in control.
Vegemite picnic.
Salt hanging in a blanket of moon-mist heavy between the air.
And pretending there is something else. High sun, bright in the sky.
Light breeze flicking the scuffs of fluted clouds.
Old-age and death hanging heavily ... caught in kite strings, lightly.
Soft and dry skin. Face-lifts. Lead poisoning.
Bare bones: ingredients in plenty: no soul. Gallons and gallons of spirit.
King and Queen for a day.
Claustrophobia, in open spaces.
Red-rag to two bulls. One from each end.
A pack of dominoes folding backward. Subversion.
A wad of red and brown and green. The Under-Colours.
Under-Scope.
Greasy chicken bones piled high. Botchelin flavouring.
Paper towels dripping toxaemia.
Festering sore — (then and therefore) inherited diseases.
Frilly satin under-garments and bright blue buttocks.
Said before as I and WE. Different way. All I, WE, want to say.
Codex. “Musée Des Beaux Arts,” by Mr Auden, W.H.:

In Brueghel’s *Icarus*, for instance: how everything turns away
Quite leisurely from disaster; the ploughman may
Have heard the splash, the forsaken cry,
But for him it was not an important failure; the sun shone

From coast to coast sail the great sharks with the razor-sharp gnashers.
Weather-vane adrift ... weather Vane the Ancient prepared the secret potions and elixirs for the Wizard of Voss in the dead of night. Very rarely seen, he glided about the fortress with feline grace, watching, listening, and reporting to his master.
Weather Vane helps me with my work.
Once upon a time there lived a Groll called Weather Vane. His home was Voss castle.

Obviously, somebody must die or suffer, stink of carnations or be wronged by the rest of the world. Ominous, ominous world. The tragedies of the simple man have inspired all great hands to masturbate.

Goodnight Gabriel. And up jumped Lazarus.

Streams and streams of rippling red salamanders skating through the icy eye of Hades.

Wizard of Oz.

And then there was dinner with old Ibsen (his real name was Nil, he adopted the nickname after discovering that the playwright was Scandinavian). We sat at his long oak table while his progressive young wife (imported with fifty pounds of cheese from Sweden) served platter-fulls of soya-beans and heavily garnished salads. A bottle of fine wine and he remembered “home.” But you’re just as much an Australian as I am. Your family has been out here for three or four generations. They lived in a mud-brick place with great verandahs and an out-side piss-hole, just as mine did. I have Irish, English, and French roots, yet I am still an Australian. No, no, you are very wrong my boy. I am a Teuton, whereas you are an assortment of bloods. You might say that I am a pedigree and you are a mongrel. Ha, ha, ha. Well then, why DON’T you live in Sweden, or Norway, or some other Scandinavian country? What? Are you mad? And leave my business to the claws of my grasping children! I am a respected Real Estate man, I shall not abandon my patrons merely to bring pleasure to myself. I am a man of honour above all else. We Teutons are people of dignity. Oh Ghosts.
Tulips in the bleached skull of a black man.
For the want of a rider Henry became a murderer. Horse shoe, horse shoe.
Once more.
Machine-pressed. Overalls and skirts.
Freshly mowed — bust blades ’round and ’round.
Red lights, amber lights, green lights — Porches and Rollers.
Body support. The crest of a magic mountain steers across the diamond-clad scarf of Lilliput.

Last Christmas we dined out of doors amongst a turgid swamp of blackish flies. One or two relatives and a dozen “friends” turned up for the poultry-based feast. Grace over grease, beer over wine, and blood over body, were the day’s specialities. “Wouldn’t it be grand to see a White Christmas, just like they have in the Old Country,” they had said. Party games, party games, but keep them clean, remember, we are church-going people. “Don’t tread all over the bloody presents, for crying out loud. Christ Almighty, you lot are bloody useless. God-struth!” Tch, tch, tch.

Good wholesome home cooking. Get that into you.
Conifers spraying needles into scrunches. Red, brown, and green.
Warm breaths of drifting sunshine.
Sanguine drowsiness.
A quick roll in the greenery (“Down the green hill athwart the cedarn cover!”), a carousel of tree-trunks reflecting the inquisitive gazes (“A Savage place!”). Demon-woman and her paranoid lover. Need a shower. A shadowy visitation. A slip of sacred parchment. And Thomas knew the nakedness of flesh in the prelude, progress, and epilogue: moments which are spontaneous and faceless.
Gnosis

In a roundabout way
the couple set down
rules

of spiritual
engagement.

Small notes
pasted up

around the house-
hold.

As car payments
fell due, she lamented
the drag stripe

on their Monaro:
the devout with grunt
a cataclysm

waiting to spill
out over the patio,

melting the table

and chair set,

stacked neatly

by the barbecue.
Staring hard
at the picket fence,
       they
came out
       with one word
together:

gnosis... as party lights
flickered
       long before
their guests’ arrival.

The picture: a subtle cross between Hockney’s “Mr and Mrs Clark and Percy,” Dali’s “The Persistence of Memory,” and Duchamp’s “Nude Descending a Staircase (2).” Taking this (picture) into consideration, maybe we should reconsider the “facts.” THE FACTS:

Thomas watched Mrs Hubbel draw deeply on her cigarette. She was a very physical person, not much up top. Her juices were body juices. She liked lying on the soft grass with the wind whistling over her thighs and through her legs. So much for the sophisticated “older woman.” Shattered illusion. Everybody should have Disappointment as a middle name. Thomas Disappointment Napoleon. Napoleon Disappointment Bonaparte. “I feel myself driven towards an end that I do not know. As soon as I have reached it, as soon as I become unnecessary, an atom will suffice to shatter me. Till then not all the forces of mankind can do anything against me.” The war of Nation. All brains have atoms in common. But do they have the same number? And thus molecules and chains … and chain gangs, mind bonds. Do Harpies have brains? Mrs Hubbel could be a Harpy. A woman’s face ...
and several other features. Harpies have a violent hunger. Do all great lovers suffer from narcolepsy?

Shortly after meeting Mrs Hubbel Thomas had written a number of poems and presented them to her as a tribute. A few million talents of gold. Her consequent reaction had disgusted him. Vegetable monger.

“It’s bullshit,” she’d said.

“Why?”

“It’s pointless. A lot of riddles.”

“You’re joking. It’s bloody obvious. Riddles be buggered. You don’t think art is pointless!” Thomas had said angrily.

“I like the artists.”

“But not the poets.”

“There are one or two exceptions.”

“Yeah.”

“What’s it supposed to be about anyway?” she had asked, half-heartedly.

“Dualism, essentially. A vision of nature. A transportation of the Karma.”

“What?”

Thomas had grown increasingly angry. “Obliterate prodigy of the Mongol!”

“What?” Mrs Hubbel had said.

“Ever thought of playing Dogberry?” Thomas had said with sarcasm.

“Christ!”

Could be Undset territory. Norway, fourteenth century. Bears flaked in moon speckles. Loused breasts she .................. respect each writers on their virtues. Lewis slated the greats but was still great …

the blood rushed to her face.
“I wondered where that extra burst of energy came from. Plants do it on carbon dioxide, humans do it on oxygen, and Thomas Ellis does it on carbon monoxide,” said Mrs Hubbel cynically, showing her natural wit.

“I’ve told you a hundred times to stop calling me ‘Ellis.’ I’ve changed my name to Napoleon as well you know. My father was ... is ... Bob Napoleon. My mother ... Henceforth, I emphatically insist that you address both myself and my wretched family as Napoleon,” said Thomas angrily.

There was a long silence as Thomas endeavoured to control his anger and Mrs Hubbel drooped her head over the back of the park-bench, filling her eyes with brilliant afternoon redness. Thomas was the first to speak:

“Are you asleep?”

“I was day-dreaming,” replied Mrs Hubbel, in a slow, forced voice.

“Today is a Macbeth day,” said Thomas musingly.

“Oh? That’s a funny thing to say,” she said in the same half-hearted voice.

“It is undoubtedly a Macbeth day.”

“And what is a Macbeth day?” she asked.

“A Macbeth day is a red day.”

“My eyes were drowned in redness when I closed my lids and stared at the sun,” she said.

“Exactly,” he said, executing the procedure.

“Oh, now I see,” she said, “The world is steeped in blood like good old Macbeth was.”

“Red gives me the shits. I like blue,” he said.

“I like red, it’s an energetic colour.”

“‘Wine dark sea,’” he whispered.

“What?”

Thomas, suddenly leapt to his feet and set out across the park and yelled, “Screw it,” at the top of his voice.
Thomas entered the Temple of the Golden Doom through a side door, and, even so, expected to be harangued and kicked out. The lachrymose humdinger was parading across the floor, replete with his freemasonry and instruments of torture and torment. Thomas couldn’t differentiate. He spied on this town shireman, he glimpsed the rites of harvest. He said to himself: how in this small town amidst the wheat can these rituals translate? I am the troubadour, he declared, a half-translated one, my Provençal so poor. Bertran de Born though, I am not: that is you in the yards of slaughter, peri-sword and peri-princess, peristyle and periwinkles, loving it. Wallowers. Of the curly coily tails. He felt the loneliness surge and wanted to climb the steps of this regional occultish order, so particular to the humdingery of the locale, and yet so diasporic. All the stained glass, all the lead, all the windows. Circles to the world. The twilight had ceased and a train rumbled heavy on its tracks. Yes, rich pickings had been had and the world would be fed on the goings-on. Without, these haters would lambast and drive the marginals out of town, back to the city. But Thomas knew better, and knew what shenanigans would be on offer if he reformed, became adept, Zelator Minor of the Order, Tuatha de Danaan, in the stony country where the plough hacked the soil like a broadsword. He yelled out as he rushed from the building: you seed and harvest the plains of Marathon, and you don’t want to know who the dead are, the dead that you unearth and plough back into their dirt you think you make your own! Spoilers!
II: Henry

I think that I’m like Henry, in many ways. Definitely in some ways at least. A skeleton is really all that’s left. He is fast losing himself amidst the booze. That will happen to me and I will have no excuse: we are meant to learn from others. But in his case it was not a mistake, it was a choice, a choice made in full knowledge of the consequences. The consequences were desired. Guilt does funny things. He had once murdered a man, or thought that he had: the effect is the same, on the mind that is. Whatever it is or isn’t. I’ve known a lot of people who have come out to Australia to die, and it’s always through booze. I suppose it is a contemplative death: plenty of self-pity and remorse along the way, but I wouldn’t really know, yet. I’ve watched him fight to retain his fading dignity. A lost battle. There are, and were, however, moments when he would rise to his former heights. He has retained much of his intellect, but finds it difficult to express himself, and that’s the saddest thing of all: to know what you want to say but not be able to say it. But, as I’ve said, he has his moments. He still reads a great deal and writes small snatches of poetry which he battles to have published. And, furthermore, he still loves me to read him poetry, especially my own … we celebrated Hector’s birthday yesterday … he was a classicist once, a doctor of classics … before the war. The flower of Europa, or of manhood, or of something … just like Vietnam, but that has all been said before, like everything else. He had been at his best: his faculties functioning almost normally (besides being totally pissed) and his old learning skills fully evident. It reminded me of our first meeting. I was ten or so … he moved in across the road … a run down old place. It was after school. I was crying, rejected by children of my own age, and he invited me into see his books (which are dreadfully stained and battered now — all stink of booze and urine). My parents had never bought me real books, the essential books; he
gave me a copy of *The Iliad*, simplified. A friendship was firmly established. I learnt to drink from him ... always at home. He had been drunk on that day, but full of knowledge. He taught me things about history and literature. And then I watched him grow more and more drunk over the years, and I knew he was dying. I suppose it has made me bitter in many ways ... but I wouldn't know ... I had to sneak over because my parents did not approve of him. We used to go places, like the art galleries, and he was always drunk. He made a fool of himself ... often. So yesterday we celebrated Hector’s birthday ... it was a fine day ... it coincided with my twentieth birthday: as a child Henry had once cheered me up by telling me that my birthday coincided with that of the great Trojan, and as I could find nothing that contradicted this, I believed him. It thus became a tradition. Henry had been particularly communicative on my twentieth birthday ... or have I already said that ... I was twenty yesterday, yet I talk as if it were years ago ... well it might have been. I’m still drunk ... my Grandmother Flynn would have liked Henry ... when I’m twenty-one I inherit her money ... very little ... her hospital bills were massive ... possibly a thousand dollars ... I don’t really want it, but I’d rather use it than see it go to my parents ... and, in any case, she would have wanted me to have it. It was a good birthday ... it’s only a few weeks since her passing.

“My war was not a gallant war,” he’d said, grimacing with guilt, swaying on rickety legs and clutching at the yellowed walls with short stubby fingers.

“War’s totally fucked,” I’d said drunkenly.

“That’s Anglo-Saxon, I think ... fuck, that is ... I once knew all about it, and many other things as well.”

“Did the journal accept your poetry?” I asked him.

He had burst into a fit of anger, screaming abuse at the self-interested publishing moguls: “Wankers! Wankers! They’re only interested in crap ... and they always were ... and, in my case ...” He had lost the thread of his
argument, re-emerging with, “Art, music, literature, they’ve all lost their soul. The only time they were pure was before the fucking Roman Empire came into existence. No, that’s not true, I mean after the … no, I mean BEFORE the death of Christ!”

“Come on Henry, that’s not true!”

“Well, maybe not, but you can’t deny that there’s something wrong with some of these publishing bastards can you? Can you?!”

“The value of the dollar is what’s important to them.”

“Too fucken right it is … just like that mate of yours, Sarintino … wouldn’t know a good piece of art if he saw one but makes a mint out of that shitty little gallery of his!” Henry had exclaimed, forgetting that he had introduced me to the little Italian art dealer. I am an artist as well as a writer … and a student … in a manner of speaking. Composing himself he’d said, “Well, what are you going to read me? You said you’d written some poems … a collection of poems … and some prose, some prose as well … that’s what you said, I know that for sure, definitely … and you named them after me, I mean the set, the collection … well, not after me but after my subject … ‘Shades of Marathon,’ that’s it, yes?” Henry had said this between sucking at the oil left in a stale sardine can and taking massive draughts of the whiskey I had brought over.

“Yes, I have them here … I shall read them shortly,” I had replied. I paused for a moment and then said, “I had this argument with a lecturer the other day over the purpose of literature. He said that a writer should merely observe the outer-workings of his characters … leave their minds alone.” I had been very drunk by this stage. “I told him that that is bullshit. That the whole point of literature is to enter the reader’s mind by entering the character’s mind … I think. The writer must capture the thought patterns of his characters because quiet often a character’s actions have nothing to do with what he is thinking … I mean person … person, character, they are all the same thing.”
“There, my boy, you are wrong,” Henry had said, collapsing into one of his frayed purple chairs, “You cannot capture a person’s thought patterns because there are so many things happening in the mind at one time that you couldn’t record a speck of it. And in any case, you only have your own experience to go on: how can you be sure people think or feel the same way that you do?”

“That’s what the lecturer said; that we are all unique. That is true, however, we are all human and all have certain things in common. We generally agree that that object you are sitting on is purple and is a chair, furthermore, our feelings and patterns of thinking must also be similar. We are different shaped beads on the same string,” I had replied.

“And what are thoughts? And what is the mind? And how do you know?”

III
work read and appreciated. He said, with fresh enthusiasm, “Ah, good, my poetry. Tell me, do you like this line? ‘The capricious haze of sunset …’ — oh, don’t worry. I’ll go and get my latest poems. Be back in a minute. Help yourself to a drink. There’s whiskey on the table. What am I saying, you brought it over. Expensive stuff whiskey, damned expensive stuff. Still, puts a man in high spirits doesn’t it? And there’s nothing like being in high spirits. I’ll go and get it. There are two of them, two poems that is. Oh, I’ve scribbled a few lines, a few thoughts, on philosophy, or, should I say, my personal philosophy. You know how much I love the country, don’t you? Only place you can be totally free. Everybody’s his own man. I haven’t been to the country for years. I think I would like to die in the fields, or in the woods or mountains. Not in some stuffy old hospital with tight-legged nurses teasing poor old souls with their short white skirts and bright red knickers. In any case, you’re so doped-up death just passes on by without a
word of warning.” He stopped talking and fixed his eyes upon his dog. He had forgotten about the poetry.

“So, you’ve just written this stuff then?” prompted Thomas. He was used to the old man’s behaviour — brilliance is full of eccentricities.

Recollecting his thoughts Henry levered himself from his chair and disappeared down the poorly lit passageway, returning with a dirty folio in hand. “Here we go. The first one, the one on top that is, is called ‘Return to Marathon,’ the second, ‘Five Fences.’ Both autobiographical, I think. You should get something out of them. Deep down we are two of the same. You don’t know it, but I can rely on you.”

Thomas smiled and took the folder.

“Read them aloud, they’re best read aloud.”

Thomas read them in an uninspired, monotone voice — his cynicism suited the style of poetry.

**Return to Marathon**

Metal is nothing to do with light,
he gleamed among the piled-high dead;
that was then, and swathes
have shifted their speech

to a new script. The letters
matching the words were different.
When they clashed, distant
cities emptied their granaries.

It is too agrarian, our reliance,
and laws were made to ward off
the country. The law was precedent;
and you made it with rope to spare.

Nothing like watching your choked-up silence grow into love elsewhere, for others; this Cromwell; this loss of courtly pleasantries,

pubs built by Scots prisoners of war, bundles of memories hauled in from the goldfields where Presbyterians kiltered storylines, Afghans keep them alive, as the King wanted, ruling his newly acquired motherloads, keeping records of the spoils and the clash of the world outwards.

As soon as Thomas finished his reading Henry praised him for his efficient interpretation. “Very good, the reading I mean. Just the tone required. Pessimism. I’ve had things happen to me that I could never forget. Terrible business. Probably why I like Homer so much. Turns it into a game, a fantasy, it doesn’t seem real. Anyway, what did you think my boy? What did you think?”

Thomas looked up, he had been studying the poem through again. “I liked it … I liked it very much. There’s something there I just can’t seem to touch. I mean, it’s so simple and obvious but I can’t get a good grip on it. Subtle, tacit, well handled.”

Henry was beside himself with joy. He scratched rapidly at his battered scalp and took a swig from a glass of whiskey which he had remembered
being hidden under his chair. “Yes, that’s it. Exactly what I wanted, what I was looking for. Well now you can read the second one. Will you?”

“Right.”

“Good. Right, okay let’s hear it. Same voice required, but I need not tell you that. Half the impact is the tone, the tone of voice that is.”

Henry fell into a satisfied silence, indicating with his hand that he was ready to listen.

**Five Fences**

1.

The cloud fumed
over the New World.
The snake pictured
the well run dry.
He soothed her,
hot as fire, charred
on the cross.
Chit-chat.

2.

The whirl, spiral,
willy-willy, dust-devil.
An eel degenerate
at foothold
of well: nervous.

Over the well,
sister vowed to sister:
well.. well... what
have we here?
Degenerate whirl,
surrogate swirl.

3.

Between the pictures
on my wall: Hendrix,
Klimt’s lover: redeemer.
Empty as a dragonboats
outside the festive
placebo: Trollop’s
“blowing hard”: dreamboats
via regia; microscopic:
pathogens, Old Europe,
smart money —
historical tales.

4.

I shit on my neighbours.
I toilet-trained early.
I examined — closely — anatomical
maps: plastic sheet on plastic sheet,
organ by organ. World Book:
bought at the door
from a travelling salesman.
Honest to God.
Mum. Dad.

5.

Behind the shed,
she and I:
catalytic ferment.
Nouns; vegetable
gardening. Building.
I don’t remember
pain of surgery.
This goes with this...
As civilised as a horse,
daylight robbery,
the machines
of her dad’s business:
joking about,
laughing out loud.
Jokers.

“Bravo, excellent. Thank you very much for that excellent reading.
Capital, just capital. Well, what do you think?”
“I think they’re very good.”
“Really?”
“Really. They sound ... young!”
“Fresh as a daisy! Have you done any writing lately?” Henry asked, grinning superciliously.

“Yes, I’m working fairly hard — in my spare moments that is. Writing fairy stories. I’ve been studying Irish mythology.”

“That’s my field. You’ve been taking a leaf out of my book. I am always writing fairy stories. Sorry, what were you saying?”

“I’ve been studying Irish mythology. I gave you those pages to look at ...

“I’ve told you about Irish mythology, admit it! Admit it!”

“Alright, I’ll admit you have,” Thomas confessed.

Henry was ecstatic. “It’s to do with dreams … looking into dreams. You, of all people, should know that. I’ve never met a person who dreams as much as you do.”

“Did you read that last lot of writing I gave to you?” asked Thomas, changing the subject.

Recollecting … “No, I’m terribly sorry, I damn-well forgot about it. You’ll forgive me though? An old man’s memory …” Thomas told him it was alright but Henry was not satisfied. He once again left the room and returned with another yellow folio. “I shall glance at a few pages right this minute.”

The folio read: “Reinterpreting mythology and fairy stories …” by Thomas Icarus Napoleon

The title of the first story: “Old Lady Day — A Fairy Story”

Henry glanced at the first page:

“Equipment: Metempsychosis; Heliotary; Earthly Reverence as opposed to Ideological Nationalism.”

AIM: Old Mother Hubbard (who has been a victim of Alexandrian scrutiny) often took the short-
cut to market: through the grim-walled wild and woolly mountain-pass. One day, while plodding this dangerous route — with its temperamental footholds and man-eating lions — Mother Hubbard chanced upon a strange procession of frolicking nymphs being led by a pack of randy satyrs: pleasant are the strains of the tympanum and reed-flute when played upon fertile mountain drafts. My, my, she thought to herself, these are happy folk. Mrs Hubbard felt an overwhelming desire to join the merry troupe but on trying to keep up with them she tripped over and strained her ankle — paying no regard to this wounded stranger the procession disappeared into the sun. Mother Hubbard, as is understandable, was furious. I’ll fix them she thought. I’ll fix them really good. Indecent, that’s what I’ll say ... orgies in the mountains, fouling up the fresh grass and delicate daffodils. So Mother Hubbard (who was on the town council) saw to it that these debauched Hedonists were smitten by the moral hand of society. But, alas, this did not crush the revellers’ spirits and only succeeded in leaving the Old Woman very unpopular with the young village folk.

PROCEDURE: Distillation, sublimation, dilution: Nostalgia: the truth: side-effect of depression (Ganser’s syndrome). Futuristic (Surely a product of post-Renaissance, pre-Vietnam thinking): Non-nostalgic (the “Live today, not yesterday or tomorrow” school) ... it is all a question of faith, all animals believe and want the same things — gratuitous sexual interaction.

OBSERVATIONS: Phylogenesis, Phenomenalism, Metamorphism, Weathering, Diagenesis, Espirit de Corp, Jung and topographical axioms,
Paracelsus (a prediction), Neoplatonism, and a great heap of Spirals (Reminiscent of Yeats’ Gyres).

CONCLUSIONS: The Philosophy of Satyrs and Idealists (Old Mother Hubbard in her earlier days): THE FIVE MAXIMS:

ONE: A cosmopolitan, rustic-based community. The esoteric consideration (The Banshee and sexual freedom): un-hindered personal development of the relevant (individual) myth: living the past, present and future: foresight; portents. Tradition as the driving force of change: change as the driving force of history.


THREE: Aesthetic respect: the value of art and literature: the preservation of the soul.

FOUR: Environmental reverence.

FIVE: Eight paths to the wise life: Song of Creation, God, Allah, Buddha, Hebrews, Muslims, Christians, Jews, Zoroaster … etc.

“I don’t like it.”
“I didn’t think you would.”
“Wouldn’t it be good to have a few whores around.”

IV

“What inspired the fairy story Thomas?”
“I’ve been *studying Irish mythology,*” I had said, not bothering to explain the relationship between my own efforts and this mythology.

“Oh, you mean Yeats and Joyce!” he exclaimed with satisfaction. “Why, you’re always on about those two. I must admit, I’m very fond of that Bloom character … but I’ve told you that before, haven’t I? Never mind, since this is a celebration I’ll tell you again. I also love a bit of kidney for breakfast. A nice piece of kidney never hurt anybody, and that’s for sure. Yes, there’s the butter sliding around in the hot pan, lapping at the skin of the juicy lamb’s fry with a loud sizzzzzzzze. Funny though, I can never taste urine … I’m used to it I suppose. And that’s another thing, babies born, rolling clover-leaf prostitutes, and blossom trees, are all strong moral statements … though I’m not sure about the clover-leaf part of it. Yes, he ate with relish … Yeats is a little more … no, that’s not necessarily true … no, not at all.”

I’m not exactly sure why, but I then recited the opening lines of the *Wake:*

“riverrun, past Eve and Adam’s, from swerve of shore to bend of sky, brings us by a commodius vicus of recirculation, back to Howth Castle and Environ.”

Henry had then stumbled into the middle of the room and grumbled, “Slip slop from Cereals and Distilleries, past bend of gullet to swerve of stomach, throws us by a commodius vicus of regurgitation back to the stinking piss-pot and bottle.”

We had both laughed heartily and Henry said, “I could have been James Joyce, I mean, look at my vocabulary.” He had paused a moment to think. “Ah, how about ochlocracy, or fascicle … shawm, patandrous, and oneiromancy? … there you go, what about oneiromancy?”

That had been Henry at his best. I asked him for some of his poetry: he became very excited, bursting with pride.

“Thank you … ah, yes, my poetry … tell me, do you like this line? ‘The capricious haze of sunset …’ … oh, don’t worry, you’ll have to hear for
yourself. I’ll go and get my latest poem, it’s completely different to my other stuff; not so classical. Be back in a minute. Help yourself to a drink. There’s whiskey on the table. What am I saying, you brought it over. Expensive stuff whiskey, damned expensive stuff. Still, it puts a man in high spirits and there’s no denying that. No, that’s for sure. Quite an art in whiskey-making… moonshine and government officers … there’s a really big booze industry in Australia. I’ll go and get that poem … just a few lines really … I scribbled them down with my real ink pen. Mentions the sea … I love the outdoors … but I don’t go out much now … this is my prison … haven’t been out to the country for years … I think I would like to die in the fields … or in the woods … or the mountains … but these mountains aren’t like the European mountains … but still, home is where you make it, I think … yes, in the mountains, or under the mountains … not in some stuffy old hospital with its tight-legged nurses teasing poor old souls with their short white skirts and half-exposed crotches. Just like those French whores … I once knew an ordinary French girl, she was married to an old bastard … payment of some kind … he got his payment alright … she slipped francs in and out of her fine lace knickers … crotch bank … funny it didn’t slip through … and in any case, they dope you up so much you don’t know if you’re dead, and where’s the point in that I ask you … I can’t remember being born so I certainly don’t want to miss out at the other end of the scale … it’s my right … not their right … but a bottle of whiskey would go down well … fine malt … Scottish preferably, they definitely make the best and in the last hour only the best will do … have a drink.” He had forgotten about the poem.

“So you’ve written another poem,” I had prompted.

I read the poem aloud:

Gargoyles and Roses
“When my ancient sire used to sit with me under the old dragon tree or Dracaena, I was as happy as the ephemeral fly balanced on his wing in the sun, whose setting will be his death warrant.”

Thomas Lovell Beddoes

Gargoyles on this roof
are half-formed, like staghorns
on the pepper tree.

Around me: lanterns of Cape Gooseberries,
old roses, agapanthas, a box hedge
on each side of the washed-red path
bristling with praying mantises.

Dr Beddoes: these mantises unfurl wings,
fan them outside their shells,
fly in and out of the New World
by night. They smell
of comings and goings.
They are fastidious.
I like them on my skin.
I am not compelled to wash
after they have lanced
over me.

I do not see them on the roses,
the mantises. Pruned
back each year to stumps,
new shoots like sharp arms,
cutters. Eyebuds
pivoting.

I offer roses, mantises;
but she says: you didn’t grow them,
you just severed them
from a carnivorous
garden.

The walls are washed-red brick,
trellised. Staghorns are domestic
and cling to the pepper tree:
half-formed gargoyles
unable to sleep, not
complete enough
to do so.
He prised the panel from the back of the chest of drawers. Half a dozen photos fluttered to the floor. They looked old but the fashions and other items in the backgrounds suggested they were recent. Thomas strongly objected to his photo being taken, but here he was, photographed. In one photo he wore a blue and white “Hang Ten” windcheater complete with Hang Ten feet logo. He was smiling in that, with a pair of low quality oversized headphones. Not plugged in. Only his torso was showing. In the background, a reproduction of a painting: an industrial working town in the midlands or north of England. The colours were dulled: the town was coated in soot and grime. No people, just buildings and smoke-stacks of factories. Tense shift. In another photo he is lying stretched out, a crow pecking near his feet. He is reading a copy of Ted Hughes’s *Crow*. He has just acquired the
copy from his other half. He doesn’t study that picture for long. A third photo is of his head. A head shot. He has a wispy beard and moustache and is staring through tinted glasses at the camera or the photographer or both. Tense shift. His skin has a dark-green tinge. His teeth are yellow. His eyes are wide but his pupils tiny. Another photo had had the colour entirely sucked from it. Thomas is an old man. He has changed in every way — he has been utterly transformed. Youth has been extracted and transferred. He is working an apparatus, trying to get back what he’s lost. Without looking at the remaining photos, Thomas bundled them up and secured them back within the panel. He doesn’t want to know. He says: you have crept out of Arcadia and been left wanting. The words of Thomas are ended.

*

You were as well-behaved as the Sneetches on the Beaches. Star-stomached, starless, you mucked in together as the bucks went off with the star-making machinery. In the audience of star-fuckers you watched the band go through its motions. The twitching of a wagtail in your eye. Seals off Cape Naturaliste, frolicking in what takes ships out. The rougher the better. You never respected the machinations of the Cat in the Hat, though tongue-twisters formed your poetics. Farmer Giles of Ham. Beowulf. The Silmarillion. The sheer devastation of the worm. It’s to do with ancientness, you’d argue. Your avatar. It’s a conversation. THE FRENCH took more samples in that expedition than any other — anyway? — ever had. They sampled the wares of the South Land. The west of the South Land. They named, and the names stuck. Geographe Bay? The ship from Ireland coming in with your black Irish great-great-grandparents. You have whitened them up nicely, losing their language. This injection of repression. This resistance to self-reprisal. You drew your map and left us abandoned in the mountains of... the hills of... the mind-readers, the telepaths, the victims. The forests of
tangled trees, like crossing wandoos and karris. The swamps. Vitally, the desert. That’s where you lured us. Your gold. Your fire. No fuel to burn. Herodotus clamours about the Phoenician’s flax ropes, the disasters of alphabet.

*

Peter’s reappearance took Thomas by surprise. It’s classy classicism. It’s classist, he bemoaned. The aluminium powder made the rocket fuel burn faster and hotter. The rollicking days of the Weimar Republic. The old house in White Gum Valley boarded up now where the girls practised their craft. They hooked up with some bikies and did a deal to get a baby. A disposable baby. This is what Peter heard, this is what he told Thomas. Night of the Long Knives, not much betwixt cup and lip, history repeats itself. The jewellers and other creative types snacking on a joint or two, drinking bottled wine. You know the scene. Husbands — always husbands — well enough off to indulge. You’ll get in there with that crew, Thomas, I predict. Better than the witches, though understanding neighbours. But only on the surface; they ring the cops anonymously. But only if they hear it’s somebody’s baby, not one grown in a petri dish, one plucked out of the wilds where they drop unowned. Birth as abandonment. Some of these altruistics will own cafés. All drink long or short blacks or lattes. Zing zing zing. Fuck Brücke, I am my own man. They will give you all the drugs you need and don’t need at Freo Hospital. Vienna General Hospital is a pit. Babies die there too.

*

Thomas claimed his father was a metallurgist, working on and off in the Pilbara, or at the Ports, testing materials before they were shipped out. A
gatekeeper of the ore body, of sorts. Thomas’s father was seen as being something of a trickster; maybe he still is. When asked for proof of his qualifications, Thomas’s father said he’d lost his degrees. Some weeks later they turned up. The ink looked fresh on them. They were from small mid-west colleges. He’d come to Australia to escape the racism of his home place, which he said wasn’t his home anyway. When he married, he and Thomas’s mother leapt across the threshold, promising newness. They both disowned heritage, and left Thomas adrift. Thomas claimed his real father was of Corsican heritage. No, of Irish stock by way of Corsica. Or “Black Irish” stock. The storm-scattered Armada. Spain. Iberia in general. Portugal. It is said that Thomas’s father was — or is, it’s hard to ascertain — incredibly adept at his job. That he evolved new methodologies that others have taken and will take credit for. Another line of thought, another story — as we have it — is that he was a farmer from Kent who migrated just before Thomas was born. That he had or has sympathies with right-wing racist groups in London. It is said he built a bunker on his farm. That it hasn’t been found. That it is stocked high with explosives and weapons. A twist on this is that he was a minister who had betrayed the cloth and had developed three different varieties of wheat on a property he rarely visited. All versions tell of an estrangement from his wife and child, but that he could never bear living far from them. There are other stories of origin as well.

* 

On Kwarn no one person could rule. Governance required the consensus of all staff-holders, of which there were seven. These staffs in themselves belonged to no one person, and at any given times an individual might find themselves nominated and called up to take possession. No person, no dwarf, no elf, no Litchling, no dragon, no Organism, could ever hold more than one staff at once. The fate of each race, each people, each
Organism, was tied up with the other. Wars were fought in the minds, out of the reach of the staffs which could be brought together to control and thwart physical combat. They had never, however, managed to control minds. And it was in the interests of all living things in the world of Kwarn to resist such control ever being asserted, though they were ruled by consensus... and chance.

*

Thomas reached an impasse in writing his *Staffs of Kwarn* manuscript when it came to describing the sexual fetishes of the Litchlings. Therese had said to him — he told me — that fantasy novels rarely ever dealt with hardcore sex. His novel, while sailing along in the realms of archetype and legend, would eventually devolve into the mind-games fought around sexual predilections and addictions. The Litchlings were tissue samplers, who removed single specific cells from the bodies of their lovers and melted them on their tongues while copulating. The art was in the choice of the best cells. This varies from Litchling to Litchling. There was no fixed place or rule governing the selection. Thomas cut himself off from others for weeks over this. Even within the dynamics of his room he spoke to no one. Not the Unicorn. Not the Chimney Sweep. The manuscript starved and wilted. Its final words: “I see the defective human bodies of the earth Kwarn.”

*

Thomas sat perplexed as the blind piano-tuner corrected his mother’s piano. To tune is to feel, the guy in the suit said. The man’s guide sat in a lounge chair sipping tea. He’s the best there is, she said with obvious satisfaction. It was his mum’s best china. Thomas felt very small standing at a distance from the piano-tuner. The man sensed this, and invited him to
come closer, to touch the wires in the piano as he tested them. The vibrations shot through Thomas’s body where they resonated for days, tingled like a slight electric shock. The man struck his tuning forks and they resonated through Thomas’s mouth, his teeth. The tension of the string holds a truth. The metal that holds the strings, the wood that holds the metal. They meld together. The piano is a living thing. It has rights. It needs respecting. This is what he said, and Thomas remembered. When his Mum hit the keys hard after the piano-tuner and his guide had left, Thomas begged her to play quietly and carefully, not to damage the tuning. Don’t worry, Thomas, she said. This is a good piano and it holds a tune. Holds a tune. Memory. But memories change and I remember everything different... differently. He grew afraid. The trills and crescendos made him shudder.

*

Peter beat the boy up for looking at him the wrong way. The boy said: But earlier, you touched me tenderly. Peter said: And now, to keep my tenderness fresh, safe and fresh, I must turn over a new leaf. For appearance’s sake. This made Thomas retch. He kept his desires close to his chest. It was as if his dream of Alaska had expanded and exploded. The oil companies blotting out the wilderness, taking the last lands away. Distantly, far, far south, he could see Mount McKinley in his mind’s eye. That’s the dream mountain, he said, that’s the cavern of dreams where I will retire, where I will find peace and comfort and all colours and all shapes will dwell with me. In Alaska. In the mountains. The bear-shooters will fall down and become ice. The great rigs heading north to Barrow will just stop, and their drivers go into the drinking places and drink until they too blur into the mountains, chasing the warmth.

*
Operating on the ghost body, he was called a fool. He said: It’s to do with the circulatory system. The flux of ectoplasm. Where the ghost has been, how it has moved between states. Thomas examined his skin under the magnifying glass and picked at it with the needle. Flake by flake. I will reassemble my ghost body, he said. So, amid the palpitations:

Like one, that on a lonely road
   Doth walk in fear and dread,
And having once turn’d round, walks on
   And turns no more his head:
Because he knows, a frightful fiend
   Doth close behind him tread.

And so, in oppositeness and diligence, he conducted his experiment. Oh, Therese, Therese, why should you be exposed to this? Are we animals that mate for life? For after life?

*

Therese said the prisoner had violated her. She’d seen the doorhandle of her bedroom turn and he’d come in and placed his hand over her mouth and infected her. A little something I picked up in prison I’d like to share with you, he said. We selves are. We selves were. We become we. Out of us we come. I fed him. He protected me. She grew scared, confused. He was not used to seeing her like this. He said: I will exact revenge for her. On the system. But then, some minutes later, he was talking about origami and what a relief it was for him to have a distraction at such a difficult time. He added: That was her childhood. All our childhoods are taken away from us.
It’s why we met. Like Sparta seeking to make slaves of all others in the Peloponnese. That’s what Thucydides says. Therese says to read is to lie.
Thomas regularly played the English Opening. As a small child he’d blazed away at a city shopping centre against ten others and won eight games. My mind has decayed since then, he lamented. He no longer liked the time clock, the tick tock dash, tick tock dash... but moved fast enough. Faster than his opposition, that was for sure. The English Opening — Howard Staunton, 1843, match against Saint-Amant. It was long before, a precedent, a prophecy... preter and borderline hypermodernism, but it still fitted, like Pandora’s Box with Louise Brooks towards the end of the silent era. It came long before the crew plotted newness in the curriculum vitae of chess. Réti and Nimzowitsch and the rest of the 20s flappers. Get moving. Hark back to earlier matches and start again. Like Surrealism sucking the Dada out of Dada. Or the nightmare out of the Night Mare. This, Thomas insisted, was the key to postmodernism in poetry. An issue of static. He spouted some lines Mr Hubbel didn’t understand. Modernism began anew with the peripheral, then stepped out of the back row to thwart the centre, Thomas continued to rant. But it didn’t have to go that way, it could be equally classical in its rendition. A quandary. Neither here nor there. When he played Mr Hubbel with the madness of an h2-h4 pawn move, he exclaimed that he was entirely beyond the modern. Mr Hubbel had just bought himself a chess computer and offered Thomas the same, thinking it might help. He changed his mind after losing the game, which even Thomas acknowledged came about largely by distraction. Shock and awe, said Thomas, who reverted to the English opening for the next game, quoting Thomas Paine to ease his guilt: “The authority of Great-Britain over this continent, is a form of government, which sooner or later must have an end...” Chess will go from my life one day... Mr Hubbel said he couldn’t
imagine that ever being the case and gave Thomas his chess computer
fearing he was about to lose a chess partner who could see at least five,
maybe even six moves ahead. Mr Hubbel liked a challenge. A challenge
makes life worth living, he said, patting his stomach. Thomas eyed the
machine and thought of the horse latitudes, of the gentle winds and the
horses tossed into the drink because the ship laboured too long on the high
seas. I am a horse to Mr Hubbel. He studied the chess computer. A thick box.
Sixty-four squares and sixty-four holes in the squares into which pinions on
the base of small plastic pieces would be inserted. The pinions were
cylinders, burrowing cylinders. They groped below the deck, triggered the
pressure pads that triggered the electronics. The veinwork. The arteries.
Dead man’s chest. Lights along the a-h columns, lights along the 1-8 rows.
Rank and file. The lights were tiny red bulbs. He set the board up. Slid a
switch to select the level. He chose the top, level 10. He performed an
English opening. He wasn’t sure which way on the avant-garde divide he’d
fall. The computer would stick to the book, but this didn’t mean he’d have
to. He feared the stodge that grounded him like the root-ball of a fallen tree.
Dead but for the extremities.

1. c2-c4    Ng8-f6
2. Nb1-c3   c7-c5
3. g2-g3    d7-d5
4. b2-b3    Nb8-c6
5. Bf1-g2   e7-e6
6. Ng1-f3   Bf8-d6
7. 0-0      0-0
having fianchettoed his king’s bishop and having castled and having watched the computer castle book he said to Mr Hubbel: Keep this computer. It’s why *The Waste Land* isn’t really about loss and destruction and waste but an affirmation of the very status quo that led to the horror, a lament for an old spirituality that was always the same material vacuum that is the spirituality of the modern. Nothing has changed. This little beast is a lie as much as *The Waste Land* is a desire to fill the “air” with noise. The shells are still falling and someone is making a profit out of them. He should
never have published it, he should have burnt it as soon as he’d resolved its mysteries. Then it would have been real. I am not going to get bogged down in this square peg in a round hole battery-driven smoky-plastic capped placebo. Thomas drained his red wine and left.

*

After the lunchtime screening of *Battleship Potemkin* at WAIT, Thomas caught an MTT green bus into the city. It was one of the last of the old models, and that gave him joy. The sort with an indentation in the front where the driver sat, and nooses for holding on when the bus was full, and a conductor with a metal ticket-machine that churned out the inky ticket with a whip of the handle. The conductor, ticket issued, would stay planted at the front of the bus, looking out at the stop to come, never looking back. It also pleased Thomas that his University of Western Australia student card still allowed him entry into events at WAIT as well as at UWA; not that he had any intention of going back to the latter any time soon. The students are less pretentious at WAIT, he told himself. He kept replaying the pram down the steps scene over and over in his head. I am a filmic person, he told himself. Sitting on the bus, up the back, he watched the back of the head of an attractive female student who’d been at the film session. He almost wanted to catch her attention but wasn’t sure how. He thought of injecting himself, but the road was a bit rough and he was pretty sure he’d miss the vein. He forgot about her and thought about the taste to be, the little place he had worked out for himself behind the old Perth Boys’ School over the horseshoe bridge. A nook. There was a tap back there and he carried a spoon in his rucksack. He couldn’t believe it had come to this. The glass syringe with the changeable needle was affectation, he knew, but it also spoke style. Why should I care about style? Keeping up appearances. He looked out the back window and watched a Rock in black t-shirt, black jeans and ripple-sole
DBs, who chased the bus as it left the traffic light, grabbing onto the pram-hooks on the back to hitch a ride, presumably anchoring his DBs on the bumper. The guy’s head bobbed up to look through the back window, smirked, then went down to avoid being spotted by the driver. Thomas wasn’t sure how long the Rock rode with the bus. Lamppost on lamppost, manicured box tree after box tree drabbled by as the bus worked its way through the suburbs, towards the river, the Causeway, and the city. Only a few days earlier Thomas had been out in the country carting buckets of water around a paddock, watering fruit trees. He’d wander down to the dam, scoop up the muddy dross, and lug it back down to plum trees, citrus trees, and peach trees. The dry grass, snapped off to make its own “natural” stubble, would lance his thongs, snap off and stay there. It was like walking on those metal combs Grandma used in her floral arrangements, he thought. The girl got off the bus, and Thomas lost interest in his own thoughts. He pulled a book from his rucksack. There were four in there. Stefan Zweig’s biography of Balzac, the massive Burton, a small book of chess games, and Behold this Dreamer, an anthology by Walter De La Mere Thomas had failed to return to the UWA Library when he’d “left.” I should give it to Therese to return. Maybe. Maybe not. He despised the book. Near its beginning, under the title “The Borderland,” he read: “Time in our waking state, whatever inward yardstick we may apply to it, is supervised by the world at large, and kept in order by a clock that obeys the sun. When consciousness, in whatever degree, either in quantity or quality, withdraws from that clock’s, that heavenly sun’s exacting sway, other conditions no less mysterious and more private immediately supervene.” He didn’t intend to read any more of it. Crap. There is nothing mysterious about watering fruit trees that can barely survive even with such bucketing, the 28 parrots unlocking the netting, unwedding the meagre and stunted fruit that holds no mystery and an imbalance of vitamins that would send a city slicker to the toilet or the
doctors. There are no restoratives here, and what the fruit takes from the sun it gives back as exposure. The sun we’re so addicted to is death.

* 

Thomas recited the lines from Burton: “But our patrons of learning are so far nowadays from respecting the Muses, and giving that honour to scholars, or reward, which they deserve and are allowed by those indulgent privileges of many noble princes, that after all their pains taken in the universities, cost and charge, expenses, irksome hours, laborious tasks, wearisome days, dangers, hazards (barred interim from all pleasures which other men have, mewed up like hawks all their lives), if they chance to wade through them, they shall all in the end be rejected, condemned, and, which is their greatest misery, driven to their shifts, exposed to want, poverty, and beggary.” He admired the long sentence. It is a heavy book to carry through a park, but it’s worth it. I will hunker down here for a night, he thought, squeezing under an oleander tree growing against the fence of a storm drain. This brick of a book will form my pillow. He relished the poison leaves of the oleander. As a child, he’d tried to intensify their essence — putting crushed leaves in water, placing the mixture in a boiling tube, driving off the water vapour. He drained the oily residue, and filtered it into a stoppered bottle he kept on his bed head along with the rocks of blue asbestos. Sometimes, he’d dip a pin-head into the solution and touch the pin in a glass of fresh water, which he’d drink. Will it be enough to kill me? he wondered. For some reason it now escaped him whether it had ever made him sick, though he scrupulously recorded his experiments in a school exercise book. That, too, was lost. Curled under the oleander bush, he heard music. A lute. He recognised the composer as Johannes Hieronymus Kapsberger. A pair of magpie larks plucked at the grass a little way out from his nest. He watched them intently. He was taken with an urge to masturbate, but fought it. The
body is full of self-violence, he thought. This park is my agrarian world surrounded by the city. What position, what responsibility do I hold here? Ah, Kropotkin, medieval cities and mutual aid. I will form a guild. He’d seen Kropotkin covered in sores, when he’d scored earlier that week. Thomas scratched at the black-grey white-flecked sand of Perth. He thought of Henry, he thought of Peter, he thought of Mr Hubbel. One can get dirty here. He scooped into the ground, working to avoid the roots of the sacred oleander. He unearthed a Matchbox toy — a chipped red Ferrari. He reburied it nearby, then placed his side in the hollow. It grew warm quickly. He rested his head on the Burton and listened hard to the lute music. Thomas had never touched a lute or even seen one, but knew that if someone handed him the instrument he’d be able to play with accomplishment. He scratched and rubbed himself. That warm humming scratch, bordering on irritation. Cats probably curl up under here, *making* sand fleas. His body, like the coming night, would wear away quickly, and the anger and frustration would rise. Suddenly, he feared the crimes that he could commit. A park is a place of R & R, he told himself. Yelling inside to drown out the lute. Nobody was near, nobody was approaching. He was alone in the park with the narrowing sky and damaged strands of sunlight struggling through the pines stretched along the fenceline opposite, across a sizeable patch of green lawn. The park was L-shaped. This was the foot of the L he was looking out onto. The public ends, the private begins. He thought of dashing across to the pines, and using them to hoist himself up over the picket fence into the backyard of whomsoever. A private place. They’d always be hearing the sounds of the park, though, and balls and other toys and game props would be finding a way over into their privacy. Could you please throw our ball back?! It would take a certain kind of owner, a certain keeper of land. The park: a meeting-place. The police patrolled regularly. They wouldn’t see Thomas still and curled up under the oleander, watching his every breath stir the sand, which loomed up in tiny
plumes to tickle his mouth and nose, sometimes taking a load of germs in through the openings. He was transfixed in this last light. If I wanted to dig, really dig, I could eventually unearth a sandgroper, he thought. He’d seen one as a child. Those powerful little legs windmilling through the sand. *Cylindracetids*. The State and its citizens adopt as their mascot a creature rarely seen. Sand... gropers. Thomas laughed to himself. Beach cylinders. Beach bunnies. Gropings. Thomas had never met another sandgroper who had seen a sandgroper. They lived in denial of their own sandgroperhood. Or embraced it unwittingly. The limerick of the park came back to him, backgrounded by lute music:

I was walking along one dark night
and my balls were jangling from left to right,
down up, left right...
down up, left right...

 Thomas shuddered. The park is a graveyard. He wanted out, but couldn’t move. He was too ensconced in his nest. It had him by the short and curlies. There is a principle involved in this. It was then he realised that he was the park’s medulla oblongata, that he was wired into its nervous system. He tried to forget, to think something else. He felt the need to defecate. To vomit. He listened hard to the lute. The lute is to ward off, he decided. Prevention is nine tenths of the cure. Tomorrow, I will eat fruit. Any fruit I can find. Fruit and a lute. The fruit will pass quickly through me. Collywobbles. He laughed in spite of himself. Silly bugger.

*
He thought back to some time earlier when the Professor had asked him: Thomas, what made you a poet? The Professor seemed real, seemed more than a caricature. This frightened Thomas who looked nonplussed... For Once In My Life... After a while, scratching at the teacher’s desk with his biro cap, he proffered: Dr Seuss and Lego. How so? asked the Professor, focussed on the biro cap. Well, Dr Seuss gave me the sing-along and a storyline, and Lego gave me the tools to put it all together. If you can make a house out of Lego bricks, or a plane or a submarine, you know how to make a poem. Barely realising it, Thomas had, at that very moment, made a reputation for himself as an “avertor.” His days among the scholarly were numbered.

*

Note: the point about Thomas is not that he commits crimes or “crimes,” but that he fears committing crimes or “crimes.” There is no evidence he damaged property of the logging company, nor spray-painted anti-State and anti-university graffiti over the walls of lecture theatres at the University of Western Australia.
Red Hair in the Wheatbelt

Thomas wandered the main street, back and forth, to and fro. Nobody spoke to him, including those who’d known him for years. Then he saw his distant cousin, B. She was across the road and looking riled. She was carrying a gun-case — since she was on the local shooting team, nobody was taking any notice. But Thomas knew that look, because that look was in him. She is the Red Brigade, he thought. When the iron entered into B’s soul, the town became a different place. She had put up with the taunts for years, but one hot afternoon on the unshaded and sun-blasted side of the street, the side that once attracted lower rents because the townspeople preferred to shop in the shade, she decided she’d had enough. For once and for all. Her red hair lit the shade like contradiction. Thomas sauntered over. What do you want, weirdo? she spat. Just thought you looked stressed, he said. Piss off, I’ve got things to do. Thomas remained nonchalant: I can’t sleep. Well, it’s the middle of the bloody day, why would you want to sleep? I mean, anytime, he said. Weirdo... she muttered and took a back step. Thomas thought of Anne of Green Gables:

Gilbert reached across the aisle, picked up the end of Anne’s long red braid, held it out at arm’s length and said in a piercing whisper:

“Carrots! Carrots!”

Then Anne looked at him with a vengeance!
She did more than look. She sprang to her feet, her bright fancies fallen into cureless ruin. She flashed one indignant glance at Gilbert from eyes whose angry sparkle was swiftly quenched in equally angry tears.

“You mean, hateful boy!” she exclaimed passionately. “How dare you!”

And then — thwack! Anne had brought her slate down on Gilbert’s head and cracked it — slate not head — clear across.

Thomas thought about pulling B’s hair but knew the metaphoric slate would come down hard on him and the rest of the town. He deployed his sensitive self and asked if she’d ever heard of the Pre-Raphaelites. The pre-fucking-what’s? They were painters, he said. Let me tell you about their inspiration, Lizzie Siddal. He knew he was taking a risk but plunged into it, and she gradually relaxed, propping her gun-case against a shopfront and listening intently. He noted her hair sparked less from the very first words he uttered:

Once, Lizzie Siddal “sat,” or rather lay, for the artist John Everett Millais in a tub of water. That was in the middle of the nineteenth century in London. It is reported that Millais kept the water warm with lamps spread out beneath the bottom of the iron tub but failed to notice when they went out. Nor did Lizzie mention that she was prostrate in freezing water, turning into a corpse. She was posing for Millais’s famous Ophelia painting — one of the icons of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, and a painting that defined the fey, “sickly” beauty that so attracted the necrophiliac sexuality of the day. Or maybe it created, as much as fed, this hunger. Her red hair — Lizzie’s red hair — flowed like fire through the dead water, bringing life to it, and in turn taking life away from her. It contained that kind of
power. It wasn’t dead like all hair is. It was living, like the snakes of the Medusa, but without the evil intent. Lizzie’s own health was in permanent decline and she died from an overdose of laudanum. She was seriously addicted. Unmarried to her lover, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, until late in her life, she eventually miscarried to him, and her depression and illness grew. Those years of being a mistress, of being placed in a difficult and dubious social position or lack of position... Friends would constantly remark that she looked near death. That was her beauty, and her hair lived on the living dead. That’s what’s said. But her own paintings and poems brood with a dark power — a rejection of her status. They are about love and loss, and though brittle and formulaic, have the intensity to take the reader way down with them. A rebellion of redness out of pale flesh. She was Rossetti’s muse and true love. He buried his notebook of poems with her only to have her dug up (by his criminal agent) and the poems retrieved seven years later. This act of desecration dressed up as artistic necessity and adoration haunted him until raving, paranoid madness ate him, through layers of fate, right to the spine. The state of her mortal remains was described to him, and the manuscript fumigated by a doctor — the death fluids and worms had eaten and diminished words and letters, but the manuscript was transcribed. It is said her red hair glowed out of her uncannily intact body.

Thomas had spoken fast to avoid double-thinking, to avoid B. hearing anything in his head other than what he intended to speak, what he was saying. So many different narratives and commentaries ran through his head simultaneously — no, ran through his nervous system — that he had to shut access down, seal or at least blur with static the conduits. He flamed his nervous system with redness. She would only see and hear a reflection of herself. B. stared at Thomas, then picked up her gun-case and started to walk towards her car, parked outside the pub. Thomas knew the car. She stopped short and called back so all passing would hear: You’re gauche, mate... something’s missing. Thomas smiled, though he cautiously kicked the kerb with his boot. Sometimes, he thought, stories get the better of me. I
don’t mind whose they are to tell, and who wants to listen, I just need to tell them. Strangely, he felt sleepy. It was like having a headache. He whispered to her under her breath: Fanta pants, that’s what the boys in the pub call you, lady... Germany, 1940... Nazi drink, Nazi sex-fantasy, bought out by Coca Cola in 1960. Spengler. Cities eat, and small towns eat as well.
Thomas strode the steps downward into the murk of the Wizbar. I am Thomas Icarus Napoleon, he announced to the gloom, but no one noticed. He bought a bottle of cider and parked himself on a stool at a keg-table around the corner from the bar. From where he was seated he could see the stage but there was no band playing. The retro crew would be in later and the wipe-out psychedelics would begin. Taking out a copy of Villon’s Testament, he began annotating the pages. The light was fey. He penned into the margins alongside the fate of epilogue or the epilogue of fate or fate as epilogue:

And when I took the Fall
And when I rescinded
    yet remained
Obligatory
Never questioning
Exit mosquito
And fly
Drowned
By baptism.

He felt this moment would repeat itself later, in another place, possibly a second-hand bookshop. Thwarted love. A woman in a hippy skirt with bells dangling from the hem came over and asked if she could take the stool opposite him. This led Thomas to reflect on what he himself was wearing. I always notice the specifics of what women are wearing, he thought. I am wearing jeans, striped shirt, tweed jacket with pockets large enough for
books. I have steel-capped boots on my feet. My feet are slightly sore. I have a sort of ingrown toenail that needs treating. Big toe, left foot. It’s not chronic. He forced the nail against the top of the boot. It relieved the pain, felt almost pleasurable. He took a sip of his cider, then swilled most of it down. A small boy appeared, with ratty hair. Shouldn’t be in here, Thomas couldn’t help observing. He’s the son of the guitarist appearing later, she said. My son. Looking at the kid, Thomas saw aspects of himself. The kid was reading, not looking up. Bad light for reading — the kid will damage his eyes, as I have... I constantly read in poor light. The child had walked across the room without looking up and found his exact place beside his mother. What are you reading? asked Thomas. The boy kept reading, a mop of hair obscuring his face and probably the line of sight between eyes and page. *I Robot*, said the kid in a private-school voice. Isaac Asimov, observed Thomas. Yes, I have read the *Foundation Trilogy* as well, said the kid, who then lapsed back into his reading silence. I don’t really like books with too much plot, said Thomas. The boy ignored him. Thomas persisted: I mean, nothing really happens in most people’s lives. We get up, go to work, quit work, pay things off, eat and shit and die. The boy turned the page. The woman touched Thomas on the hand. Rapidly he pulled back hand, arm, and body. You have a very cold hand, she said. And your fingers are so long and slender. People say they are piano hands, said Thomas, working out how best to escape. Yes, I can see that, said the woman. I can see that.
Dear Henry,

These are my words.

Catherine wheels, glistening steelo, withering sedgeless, a faded song paling cold in lakes of horrid mama-dew, and fast-paced honey-dreams. Yesterday the sun began its sermon with magnificent radiance, but its downfall was sudden: time spent shining retreating sullenly back into itself, and thus becoming experience. What I mean is that you can sit in your chair (or lay in your bed) and observe through windows but never enter the body and the flesh of the subject. For example, take this description: “The mushroom-headed gentleman swallowed his food in horrendous chunks.” I mean, for God’s sake, it’s a bloody fabrication. People are bound to make judgements, that’s human nature, but is nothing sacred? Anyway, it’s been one big fuck-up from the start. Blame it on life-creating Adam and Adam Jock Straps, for men who like to show their true personalities. And, in any case, Adam was merely the extension of an over-active ego, just as Eve was an extension of Adam himself. So much for creation. Today was the same as yesterday — the decline of the sun-worshipper. Actually, that reminds me, a few days ago while I was down at the university, this religious enthusiast accosted me with a slap on the shoulder and told me that I am the black side of the black-and-white spectrum. He was an Australian who plays footy. Also some Australian Buddhists hanging around (they play cricket). It’s raining this very second, and now, and now, and now, also, and etc. By the light of the silvery street-light I can see the wire-drawn droplets fingering the glass-slabbed windows. The red car is in the red drive-way. Who accused me of paranoia? A tarpaulin of silver water slopping against the
brim of black bitumen. In England one can find knighthoods; in France, good wines; in Holland, nice cheese. I had some gouda a few hours back: a big fat slice of yellowness. Mood of the moment. There are white roads in the north, also brown and mud. Victims of the environment.

He could have been somewhere, but he wasn’t. Somewhere isn’t red, only blue. When he’d been somewhere there had been three blue pyramids, and that was in the desert. It could have been the Sahara because it was unbelievably hot, but it wasn’t. It wasn’t overwhelmingly hot. The blue had scared him at first, but after a short while he had gathered the courage to investigate; curiosity had dulled his common sense. That had been tragic because it had resulted in him not being anywhere, or nowhere, which is red. The door had been black — the door to redness is always black, but always white … only sometimes, and when it isn’t black. It had opened untouched and in he went: the opened blackness being mostly in the present but still partially in the past. For convenience we’ll say he had entered. And what had he found? Redness? Nowhere? What? He felt the same suspense because he had only entered the first of the three pyramids which had (and still does) contained only a faint glimmer of glow … therefore, it must have been totally in the past: only the third pyramid’s black door leads into the present from the past, with a brief moment of partial bothness. The second pyramid’s glow had been much stronger. He had hesitated before the third. But why hadn’t he explored the source of the glow in the others? Maybe he had or not … or maybe he had … felt the lure of nothingness. The third had been bathed in red. He was trapped. He is nowhere.

I’ve just realised that your hospital was my hospital. Picture it: the hospital was predominantly rectangular, with brief glimpses of relief being offered by the gardening shed and laundry smoke-stacks. The baby was born on Christmas day — the doctor wore a party hat and blew a green-striped whistle. It cried. Through the windows of the seventh ward, the sun grinned, its brightness blurring the splotches of azure, red, and yellow,
which blanketed the hemisphere. You see, we are truly brothers akin. Oh, incidentally, I’m a bastard. Isn’t that great! Dad’s old-man accidentally … let it slip … dad doesn’t know I know … one up my sleeve … for when the crunch comes … bastard … it’s so common-place, it’s all been done before … being told to vacate … and now you’re selling your house. I’ll be in to see you next week, I won’t forget. There’s a big red-and-black “For Sale” sign growing from your weed-patch — desecration. The Firbolgs watched three Tuatha De Danam women (Badb, Morrjigan, and Macha) hurl frogs, rain of fire, and blood at the beach. Imagine being trapped in a jungle of willow-strands … without the trunks … suspended in mid-air like some pregnant tuba … with only cucumber sandwiches to eat … and she looked into the bare room occasionally … sleep and eat … something had happened … or is happening … it’s all in the mind.

Love,
Thomas
Paradigm 3
Threshold

Thomas stood on the threshold. Old Henry, Therese, his Grandma Flynn. They were all there. The essential ones. He knew they were treading over something sacred. That he — they — shouldn’t be there. Defile the church, you little bastard, says Henry. He looked at Therese and licked his lips. She is like a red sports car, he said. Grandma Flynn blocked her ears. Aconite. Subjecta. In the fire of the pit, Thomas swirled and grew addicted. His dragons were active again. The poison rose up and swelled his body, his head. He could see the stars. He read aloud, Paracelsus loud in his head, though he wasn’t sure of the source, or who was talking about Paracelsus talking about the plague. Mr Hubbel would sample the wares, would taste the diseased young and say:

“In the Nördlingen plague treatise, Mars and Sulphur as the chemicals corresponding to it, are given as the immediate causes of plague. This is a process of combustion. The body is set alight, sulphur igniting it and Mars making the sulphur burn.”

He remembered the sulphur so vividly. The light yellow powder he heaped out of the plastic bottle, he measured into the gunpowder to cauterise the wounds of the garden, the town. He made acid and gas, he poisoned the bantams. He could taste the sickness on his lips, the warding-off and contagion wrapped in one. He would travel to get away. He would flee the labours of the fields, pass through the Aboriginal — the Nyungar fringe camp — then he would call them the blackfellas. They would welcome him in, and he’d eat to ward off the contagion he himself brought. The red bricks of the old post office steaming with drought-heat, a vapour without moisture. He brought it on by indulging himself with the stars. His
jealousy for Therese and imagining her body. He needed to divine the cause, the instigation of the plague. In the appearance of a cowslip orchid he surmised enough rain must have fallen to wake it. He’d not noticed it rain at all. He drank Stone’s Green Ginger Wine with Henry who talked over the brutalities, the fantasies of seed gathered in the pod, the spillage and resultant plague. Anything can be excused in finding the source, Henry said.

Thomas watched them play on the oval. He was wandering again. He walked in through the oval’s green door, like the window into the ear. He was in the tomb of the plague. He could overhear what people were thinking — above, the players. No, he could hear them listening to his thoughts, it was the echo back. The sounding. He’d stopped travelling by train for this very reason. Looking ahead, after the passing of the plague, he recalled the train stations. He would live further down the track and not walk past and past the girl with shockingly white legs, smoking smoking smoking. Would she notice him if she couldn’t hear his loud, dangerous thoughts. His walking at night in underwear he’d taken from washing lines. Arnold Lane. Moonshine washing line. And later, trip to heave and ho. Trip to the dream dragon. Henry said, Go boy, chase the dragon, chase the dragon. And he would, all the way to the end of the line: all the way to Armadale and a block of flats for parolees. He liked the monads. He liked the inside walls of the tomb, the womb-walls, the fluids we birth from. In his sensus he felt the rocking of the train. He felt the vegetable-mineral collusions, he felt the leaking in through.

Therese took him to the coven. It was in Fremantle not far from the Rose Hotel. Up behind, between the sea and the river. A pentacle on the living-room floor. And warlocks. This is nothing to do with the occult, he said as they sacrificed him. He recalled the details: the grime between the floorboards of many such sacrifices not properly wiped down. The smell of
poison incense. The gases rising from the holes in their naked bodies. Its surfaces and holes, he told Henry, who looked on, taking notes.

When they drank, they drank Kirup Syrup. A poison, thickly set wine. It made them rant and rave about the bar, up on the stage, wear mohawks in public. Thomas was too straight-laced for that. He sniffed amyl the girl offered him and plumed on the roadside, crossing the bridge as if it were broader than the playing field. This is the new negative theology, he told them. The paper blotters had magnificent dragons on them. One dragon repeated over and over, roaring fire.

Boatlights
congest
and blow hot and cold
with the rivertide,
dragon-eyed
to navigate
up to the black reaches
they’ve taken in daylight,
wanting night
as well.

It’s a bad poem, said Henry. It’s secreta natura without substance. You need to hook it quick, anchor it to the bottom. The dying fish flipping in the bucket made Thomas sick. Grandma Flynn pushed her fingers beneath their gills, scales rubbing off, and snapped their necks back. One by one. Good to eat, she insisted. She was always there now, always around, somewhere. Omnipresent. Therese smoked a Gitane she bought from the tobacconist in the main street. She excelled at cool. One day, he said, we’ll be telling our daughter to choose one venereal disease over another as a subject for her
term paper. I will go for syphilis because of its great history, you will opt for something more contemporary. Therese is incredulous, and calls him all the names of the planets. You are an infection, she says. Or did she? The walls of the tomb below the field are membranous, and he pushes at them. I will summon up, he says. I will go with the downtrodden, the despised. I will render all poisons absorbable and I will drink first. He pissed and drank. There’s nothing cleaner than piss, said Henry. It’s what makes me dream, he added. I dream what you dream too — the motion, the movement, the travel over mountains and along valleys. I too have stayed in small rooms while the sea is rough and climbing the clifftops, dragging all around back to the liquid state, dissolving, drawn up as vapours to the sun, so hungry as always.
Saline

When I went into the salt I corroded and green-stained the white crystals and returned less than before I went, returned to the farmhouse as the sun set with a glow though less flesh. Grandma Flynn’s friend lived out there alone and she stayed with him taking me along for weeks when Mum and Dad were away. I went out each day whether it was raining or so hot my skin peeled. I did not shelter but caught the crossfire of glare ripping off the crystal growth, sapping stagnant algae-ridden waters out of gullies. Christmas spiders festooned at the appropriate time of year, and plovers and stilts stalked the marsh grasses. Naked, I pissed and shat and examined the absorption and decompositions — flies so thick the shit vanished under their weight and others flew into my hole and filled my rectum. I cut my arms and hands to feed the salt blood, the way it runs between crystals, terraforms and makes viscous solution. Naked, I lay near anthills and let them explore and poison and pincer me. I dug below the crusting of salt when it was wet and coated myself in the black sticky mud, with neither Grandma or her friend saying a thing when I got back in to bathe in dam water that was a muddy grey in itself and scarce as hen’s teeth. The violation of water was a pleasure.
Callimachus! Callimachus! Thomas could hear himself calling the polemarch. The Persians huddled against each other. Victory was close and already Thomas was running to Athens with the news. Running running. Callimachus, Callimachus! Do you live? He is dead. Callimachus is dead. He is not the Alexandrian scholar, not the hater of epics and overly long books. Thomas loves text rolling over the hills, along the valley, dusting the dry river bed, stirring the water snake in its deep fresh-water place, walled in against the salt. Thomas wandered the salt as a child, rifle over the shoulder. Security. He awaited the visitation then went north to the coast, to the port where the fishermen fought with the farmers and then worked together to drive off the peoples whose land it was. Thomas smelt Therese as he ran, spurred on by the spirit of Callimachus. Incoming. Avatars. Wargaming a bridge too far, Operation Market Garden, the philatelist hiding with his family in an attic. CJ Brennan was an anti-Semite and yet this didn’t keep them from migrating to Australia. They will cherish his and our memory, the collector said, and in that old land there will be healing. Thomas peeled the Australian Nationalist Movement’s racist posters from lamp-posts. That will become autobiography, he says. Knowing what he will write and when he will write it. He picked at Herodotus: “Without another word he drew his bow and shot the boy, and then ordered his body to be cut open and the wound examined; and when the arrow was found to have pierced the heart, he was delighted, and said with a laugh to the boy’s father: “There’s proof for you, Prexaspes, that I am sane and the Persians mad. Now tell me if you ever saw anyone else shoot so straight.” Thomas had translated that and someone else had placed their name where his should have been. He was sure of this and would tell Therese so. It would impress her. He could smell her impression. Pre-smell. He envisaged her presence alongside him as he ran, his body smeared with oils from the apothecary. He ran and his mind shuttered all the images of nakedness he’d seen, witnessed. The bodies in the Purnell’s war history — twisted, abused. This was the grotesque, he’d
learn later, and he’d write what others had already written without knowing it to be so. He would be an entirely original thinker.

Satyrs and nymphs. In the garden of Norman Lindsay handfuls of moonshine fell like cotton between the legs. Tufts. Curls. Tendrils. He spoke out loud.

THOMAS: This is a photo opportunity
CALLIMACHUS: I embraced the enemy.
THOMAS: The body is our temple.
CALLIMACHUS: Your body doubt is showing through.
THOMAS: I will love all bodies as I love my own.
CALLIMACHUS: You will drive past vast military sites. You will walk ground riddled with silos holding ICBMs. You will embrace the vastness of the underground. The kingdom come. The Inheritance. You will be held for petty crimes. You will be hated on a vast scale.
THOMAS: I will lay claim. I will dispense with. I will engage the trauma of the aesthetic and say of Mayakovsky: “French you know.” I will be translated into Russian.
MRS YANG: You will be refused a visa.
THOMAS: I will sneak in through the back door, under the bamboo curtain.
MRS YANG: You will deny me in the street. You will deny me by the Opera House in Sydney when it is complete. You will pretend I am Danish. You will watch dragons billow out of fire-eaters’ mouths and forget the tales of origin. You will be selective.

Callimachus! Callimachus! Thomas is running the school marathon. He looks forward to being stripped and penetrated in the change room. They will be rough with me and I will weep, he says. They will ridicule and
despoil me. I shall weep. I shall weep. If I run faster than I’ve run before, I will sweep in and pull my school trousers over my shorts and escape without showering, before Mr P, Vietnam veteran, can force me naked under the cold water. Can hold me at bay for the Big Boys to come and dish it out. He watches on. He watches as they play. This part of the marathon is tough — the soil is loose and my shoes slip. A rabbit crosses my path. One day they’ll develop all of this out. You can tell as you run. Callimachus! Callimachus! The victory is ours. Athens, Athens... Callimachus is dead.
Uncertainty Parallels Henry’s Death

Plague love’s bitter mystery Mr Wolfe. Pilfer pandemonium’s authentic memories of origin, this childhood fantasy as Dr Freud sends that ego-meister Breton on his way with little praise. I am the child, that dreamy child... those “negro” children born in St Decuman’s, Somerset, Watchet, late 1700s, so noted, so separated across the pond, American children, so technicoloured by precipices and towers and grammar. I am that dreamy child who sits at the feet of Old Henry to listen out his dying breath. He will travel with us alive as a fresh breath of air tomorrow, and Mr Whitlam will sweep back into power and dissolve all government within Australia, and rule by weight of personality. I am the reader of Bedtime Nursery Rhymes retold for younger readers, with a bluish colouring of black-ink drawings, squid ink, a Thursday’s child with far to go — Golden Pleasures printed in communist Czechoslovakia like an intervention, third impression, 1964, by PZ Bratislava, Buzz quoth the blue fly, inkiest blue of blue flies, rat, rat, gnaw rope... It’s then I embraced the Luddite creed and sugared the tanks of passersby. What lewd uncanny Frenchman masturbates a German expression out of translation, teasing knickers aside to look and not touch, to lap at the well of casser une branche d’un arbre? Get a grip, take a good look... yourself. And so Dora, disgusted, kissed him back. The grandfather clock strikes three at the bottom of the stairs and the portrait of the Queen glistens. Henry says he watched his fellow troopers go cannibal in the trenches, staving off the bite of human until masturbation would no longer spend its fortunes. If they could have kept ejaculating they wouldn’t have tucked in, he iterated. I know the codes for self and listened hard, Black Sabbath’s “Paranoid,” deftly jarring and syncopating out of the Panasonic cassette player. “Make a joke and I will sigh...” I ponder the dream source and I
ponder the damnation and also Eugene’s very own gasping sounds his
gaseous paroxysms. I applied petition and adoration as I could not make a
quadrangle out of my torment: sports teacher egging them on to beat the
beat. Pig’s ear and sow’s purse, the Elysian winds spewing forth. In the
crypt I mixed lovely purple crystals of a most regal potassium permanganate
with sleazy glycerine and enjoyed the heat of reaction. Enclosed in glass
bottle with lids secure it was enough to slice up the in crowd. I consider
myself peace-driven — sure — and no, Henry-death would never drive me
to such violence. I am replete with imaginings. I study deposits on gussets
because they truly matter. They are divinations. I am Peter Pan, I am
Pinocchio. Mr Hubbel prepared a syringe of morphine, sucking out the
justice from the neatly broken ampoule. Blubbering and swilling and
sludging about, ready to prick prick prick. This won’t really help with the
insomnia dear boy but will enrich it nonetheless. He intoned “ephialtes”
over my head not giving a damn who heard him, the needle pricking my
mainline. He chose my writing arm, though being ambidextrous I
instinctively clenched both hands as the tourniquet made its sprung-release,
Mr Hubbel easing the plunger up and sucking blood back into the glass
cylinder — drooling as he performed this act of amateur medicine, telling
me that this was no cheap throw-away syringe but a family heirloom
cleaned up in an autoclave with a new needle each and every time, that it
had dealt with generations of family addictions, and that well... I was
practically family, wasn’t I? — it (the blood, the blood) swirled with a
marbled glory and I understood the O so masturbatory nature of
cannibalism and all at once Henry became clear as Mr Hubbel thrust the
plunger down with steady force and epiphany did its trick. Mr Hubbel said:
LSD is not a drug of vision, that’s all propaganda — there’s more in the
poppy. This alkaloid vision of chiffon and Enkidu and remembrance. Mr
Hubbel said: the dark books are light books and therein you should read.
Your many mothers and many fathers and many siblings cease to breathe in
the ether of your conjuring so that you might live. I heard the poem music of Gilgamesh. I heard the vampire love of Mrs Hubbel grow queasy when I told her I was empathy-ovulating, that my man-eggs were coming down. Her belly parodied, she went out on the town and had photos taken of a nightclub owner and his henchman filling her up, all holes at once, the belly riding like a leviathan on the sea of their conviviality. Liberate! Viscerotonic: she has that, and the route is clear. She will give birth to divinity, on that she’s emphatic. Faith is scientific, Mr Hubbel adds with a *Rosemary’s Baby* vatic glare. I take the leftovers of carnal love and Langston Hughes’s “other worldly dreams...” That’s me, Harlem kid... here in Vic Park, here down from the Lathlain bowling club, Perth football oval where the mighty Demons fight their fights, here in Dalkeith and Nedlands, even Peppy Grove on the river eating up house after house and eyeing the rose gardens over walls of the Junk King. I get inside the local habitat and note splintered wood and torn concrete, a trail of red ants down the Bristile brickwork, the flame tree that’s reaching its end of life with a tattered show of colour. Mr Hubbel knows them all with their gold bars and tax schemes, the little stains when they’ve leaked semen from little excitements through the day, the heads of their cocks, their peeping-tom eyes welded like lips to ice, cotton in the wink where disease gets through so quickly. Membranes. Henry is gone and I will work no longer. I will feed no more “counterfeit dissemblers”:

He went he car’d not whether, mad he was,

The cruel God so tortured him, alas.

This hero took the remains of old Henry and buried them with a sign of the cross and a recounting of a journey through ice fields in a desert. Out there, searching for gold, they had seen massive icebergs floating in fields of sand and samphire, moving between them at risk of being crushed and overwhelmed by the stinking hot-cold of the dichotomy. Henry told me that
mostly he noticed his gnarled hands burning with sun and ice, frost-bitten meltdown that made absolute sense. He called himself Gordon Pym of Nantucket though he’d read no texts that indicated such a name might be relevant, and only when dining with a novelist of the Guyanese jungles had he realised the glorious possibilities of genius in hatred, in hating the extremes of cold and heat, of living the tones and games of fused circuit boards. I learnt all I knew in the moment of recounting, and was there between the bergs as they closed in, crushing the woodworks, squeezing life out of our prejudices. Henry screamed to me: abandon your noble savagery, watching your nails blacken and curl. Someone watched the whales being flensed, the white sharks thrashing at the flesh stuck with markers in the Bay. A holiday place. A point of entry. Fresh water running out of the hills, over the sand, into the green and bloody salt water. The whale chaser, explosive harpoons, narratives strung out like that glowed extra-terrestrial. Mallarme’s vibrating ballerinas skirted the blue waves of hot-cold collusion, and I recalled the prima ballerina-to-be down at the Octagon as I watched her each Wednesday going through her moves, her point taken and point made, and the lightning that fused me like stage fright in the aisles, a lone watcher wondering if he’d been noticed out of the ring of stage:

“presumptuously &

    ridiculously

    cock’d

as judge”

What tinker’s damn Henry gave I wasn’t sure as he squeezed his way through into the sheer glare of desert and fleshed out the ghosts of the Temple of God calling to all who had been “tainted” to follow him back through the fire and ice, to become one with the civilised, to slave in their houses and schools and make good the censuses, year in and year out. He said: Thomas, take Therese while you may... soon it will be too late and she will turn and become one of them I placate. Therese will betray the dragon
and love her little sports car so hard it will join her flesh and in bliss they will drive towards death. She only wishes to be wed to her relative, Mr Hubbel, she only wishes the pleasures of his mucous membranes, to have him intrude with his finger. With this, his post-death visitation, he passed out of my dream. I know him now as a hater of women, and thus a hater of me. I recall him asserting that as a child he sucked his thumb with a vehemence. Asserting that there was nothing more to it: just that he did it with greed and compulsion and assertive pleasure. Mona Lisa Gioconda. *Impatientissimo al pennello...* “The vessel in sight was a large hermaphrodite brig, of a Dutch build, and painted black, with a tawdry gilt figure-head.”
Off the mainland they hit the islands with bloodlust and vigour. The men ate the women. They took to the sea in small craft. Drinking seawater they grew breasts and lactated. They consumed each other with relish. I am the lair of the white worm. I distance myself from those suffering from a lack of architectural clarity: “… Madness in its first stage — monomania — is a lack of proportion.”

Athens and Sparta came to terms, briefly. Red crater. Huddled in the room’s corner, corner of room in the axis the transept the angle. She never jittered like him and it made him seethe. He turned to Mrs Hubbel, and her acquisitive good sense. He ran his finger along the gusset of her knickers, impressing the crease slightly to bump against the nub. Just below that, just here, is your weehole, he said inside. He had always been fascinated. Since the woodshed revelations of his fifth year. The six-year-old fruitier. This is my potato, that’s your carrot. And so began his permaculture. He knew he could never grow up.

On the boats, those great galumphing vessels that ran aground like an earthquake. He read a canto aloud to the shore, the breaking waves. Why do
I keep travelling here? I make use of the vehicular, of the travelled. Who of himself he sacrificed? These vestments. This dharma vestige I dwell in. He washed his hands so many times they bled clean. He checked the switches on the way out of the house — bakelite, they made a sharp snap, though they powdered slightly. He snapped again and again. He retraced his steps back and switched on, off, on. The bulb blew. He changed it. He remounted the ladder and checked he’d inserted it correctly, the bulb. On, off, on, off. He left the house cramming in numbers so rapidly he’d forget the switch, his dirty unwashed hands. It’s about insertions, he said. Insertions.

The nitro worked his heart and eased his sphincter. His laboratory was in pieces, tucked into boxes. His retort, his Florence and conical flasks, beakers, pipettes, and even the grand Mettler balance. The mortar and pestle tasted of sulphur. His walls were down: the semina rushed in, invaded from without. There was no time for motion, no time for the host body. On his bedhead a chunk of Wittenoom blue asbestos — a fibre peeled away every night. And the box of polished stones beneath the bed, his pornography.

When he told Therese he’d been wearing Grandma Flynn’s smooth attire, picked out of her glory box, stored in the back room for fifty years — the fabric still in tissue paper, still boxed — she got all righteous on him. He could see her thinking: I don’t want to be around this boy, I don’t trust him. She jumped back when he yelled: “But mark how beautiful an order has sprung from the dust and blood of this fierce chaos!” Do you know who said that, O glorious Therese? Do you? Shelley! It’s his defence of poetry and my defence of the soft material against my genitals. The outrage of it makes spillage, it makes sparks. It makes visible my soul and then I can work the necessary medicine. I tap into all that Grandma Flynn did. I tap in to the flows and juices, the impairments and blockages. I release it all. I pray for intercession.
The professor tells me not to leave, the professor tells me the institution is fine in its need of me. I make maritime. I offer him Dexedrine. Where did you acquire this? he asks. Joseph Conrad, I reply replied will reply honestly. Don’t you stand for anything? he asks. Do you believe in anything? Have a cause? Causality? I stand for the glory of God, I say. The glory of God at the bus stop, on the train. The travels I do. Looking ahead at stations I will visit long after I’ve left. The filling in of the spaces along the line.

When I write my homunculus poems, he tells Therese who will inevitably tell Grandma Flynn of his transgressions, I mix my own semen with the piss of old Henry and the blood of your menses I squeeze out of the tampons you wrap and deposit in bathrooms everywhere. I need time to brew it. The translation is “gestate” I need to gestate the gestalt. I need time to allow it to comply with growth. Its powers will be celebrity. This is prophecy. The university will welcome it.

I said to Henry: I am investigating pleasures. The zones, the places, the concentrations. He laughed and said he was shot through with the pleasures. I would have wrestled with him but my libido was down, way down. I was reading Jack Kerouac, that libido killer. What is stuck on me is you lot and it’s not pleasure, not like the cutting of my wrist flesh or sampling electricity in concerted bursts. I want to be shot while I am fucking. I want to be shot through hands and feet and keeping going going as the blood drains and I grow limp inside, leaving all the business of day-to-day life to the homunculus. A bit of us all.

As cruel as
the dragon in theological
space, I tremble
at the real dream,
horizon of wattles: eidetic black swans,
ruffles of feathers
foam on thin beaches,
to fly over
as scaled verbs.

The difference between them and me is the ease of access, the
certainty in the dream. Do you know Rodin’s “Bust of Victor Hugo”? Or,
How much did he love saying, Go away, leave me alone...? How much
separation of the lips? The unicorn differentiated between Thomas’s
handwriting and that of the Chimney Sweep. He declared both haunted, in
different ways. There is no one haunting, he said boldly, and with that
unicorn flourish. He has such a love of narrative and tenses. He spoke out of
the continuum, and his posturing as a philosopher drew us — Thomas, the
Chimney Sweep together, where there had been no bond before. The
Chimney Sweep recounted his acts of perversions, his peeping-tomisms, his
desire but only from a distance, a short distance, for Mrs Hubbel and her sex
toys. She entertains herself precisely but regally, he said. He was not a sex
man. He did not give the impression of caring, but now he should he did,
like everyone. Everyone has their perversions, he assured the unicorn. Not me, said the unicorn with absolute certainty.

There was a cousin called Slaughter we are reminded. All time condensed into that sentence. They simply allowed themselves to be molested by the visitants, to dance around the golden oak, objects on, around, in their genitals. Beneath the poster of Abba they vowed an odyssey, a history of reading. Their lives would be scenes from this reading. That would be the plot, entire.

Don’t get so down on yourself, said the Chimney Sweep to Thomas.

The room contracted and the soot covered them like Thomas Wolfe. “He would have fallen if Eugene had not caught him.” Thomas was propped against the wall wondering what a racist really was. He sampled his skin. It’s not skin colour. Not long back they were still sooting up for the black and white minstrels. How do they get away with it? Unicorn misquoted Wolfe: “drained their hearts and became dead shells.” That’s the Golden Fleece, he added, saying: I am the Golden Fleece. I am all voyages. I am the Helena in the Port of Geraldton taking on a load of synthetic rutile. The officers of my crew are white. Norwegians. The work is done by sailors from the “other parts of the world — you know, the middle band of the world.”

Thomas felt increasingly uneasy. They will hear my racist thoughts, analogies. He said this aloud to block the thought of it. They can’t read what they can hear. He came back with Wolfe again: “At that moment, the measure of ruin and defeat which the other young man felt was overwhelming.” Who, the other Thomas? The affirming theatrical Thomas? His mind became a rush of shapes. That’s what happens: all reduced to shapes. Disambiguation. Their filling-in.

In the paddocks of the farm he’d watched the stockers work their rows with a skill he wished he’d had. He wasn’t sure how to make conversation, and hung about in the shade of wandoos. The kids were there. Their kids.
They wanted to talk, he could tell. He never did — just watched and watched, pretending to take notes, photographs with his bare hands.

Are we all racists? he asked the unicorn. No point asking me, the unicorn replied. I can only state the obvious. None of us are. None of us. We are just haunted. Our utterances are our hauntings.

In thinking over *Quinta Essentia*, Thomas lifted himself out of the room: up through the now-clean chimney, up into the clear blue day. We are all blue people now, he said. He flew high over people’s backyards, over their washing lines. He spied through their windows and watched them backstab their neighbours, dream of moving their fence-lines that little bit further into adjacent properties. Property is soot, he thought. They all thought. The unicorn’s whiteness glowed. History is a glorious thing, Thomas thought, and the unicorn agreed. I dream of history. I dream out of the soot.
Driving up through the dry wheat to see Grandma Flynn... the time when the orange-yellow of the Christmas Trees shines in parasitic glory... Thomas asked Therese to drive down a side road to show Henry where the Dragon had burnt the crops. He burns here every year but the farmers persist in replanting, saying one day the Dragon will move on and leave them in peace. Henry grew suddenly animated in the back seat, waving his arms about so his hands struck the roof and window. Thomas said to him: I have witnessed in past years the singeing of the ears just before harvest. I have seen the Dragon rise up out of the powderbark wandoos and run fire through the wheat, fanning the flames with its great wings. We are on the cusp. Henry replied: I have seen the Dragon over London, I have seen the Great Red Dragon and the Woman Clothed with the Sun. Peering out of Camden Town, up through the smog and the fetid air that come even that far in from the river, I have seen them embrace during the Blitz. I sheltered in the low architecture, I went underground and walked through pressings of the distraught in tunnels. I lost track of the features on top, the surface topography. I couldn’t hear the planes and the anti-aircraft fire, I vomited into my helmet. But the Dragon was down there too, glowing in utter darkness. But don’t take fear from the Dragon, and don’t take fear from the Woman Clothed with the Sun. Henry then dropped his head to his chest and began mumbling to himself. I understand, Henry, said Thomas. Therese slowed the car. Should we get out for a while? Not here, said Thomas. There is fresh water down there, he said, pointing to a swampy patch between paddocks. Mostly it’s turned salt but that bit is fresh enough to drink, not that you’d want to go too near. That’s where the water dragon, the water serpent lives. It protects the water. I am not sure if it is related to the Dragon
that burns like summer... Therese turned the car on a pinhead, dropping the back end out and spewing gravel into the aftermath, taking them back to the bitumen, back to the tried-and-true settlers’ track to the old town, to the known ectoplasmic quantity that was Grandma Flynn. As they turned from gravel to bitumen, as the front wheels bit the macadam and the back wheels arced on gravel, an eagle lifted from a dead limb of wandoo. Henry saw it and started wailing. It’s okay, said Thomas, we celebrate the eagle here. It is a protected species. Farmers are not allowed to shoot it — though, I admit, they do if they think they can get away with it. Therese chipped in: Henry, the eagle is the benign form of the Dragon — it will not cast an evil eye on your soul, it will not curse you. Henry continued to wail. Therese turned to Thomas, who had his hand on her leg: Thomas, I told you that Henry would find it stressful to leave the city. He is not used to the trees, the wheat, the eagle. Not these days, at least.

Thomas had been impressed when, at Henry’s house the night before, Therese had told him she’d received a letter from a penpal, written over lunch at a London restaurant called The China Dragon. The omens seemed good. Could he have misread them? Therese insisted: Henry is a secular bird, Thomas, no use imposing your spiritual questing on him. Thomas couldn’t bring himself to think of Henry as anything but an angel, a messenger of God. Henry, terrified, cried out: I can see you both but I cannot describe how you look! I can never describe how you look, even in my mind’s eye! I do not recognise myself in a mirror. I don’t know if I am short or tall, if I am dark or light, how close-set or far apart my eyes are. Henry plunged into sleep. Thomas stood up on the kitchen table, and declared:

And as an evening Dragon came,
Assailant on the perched roosts
And nests in order ranged
Of tame villatic fowl, but as an Eagle
His cloudless thunder bolted on their heads.
So Virtue, given for lost,
Depressed and overthrown, as seemed,
Like that self-begotten bird
In the Arabian woods embost,
That no second knows nor third,
And lay erewhile a holocaust,
From out her ashy womb now teemed,
Revives, refloresces, then vigorous most
When most unactive deemed;
And, though her body die, her fame survives,
A secular bird, ages of lives.

On their arrival, Grandma Flynn assured old Henry that when the Normans had invaded, her family — Thomas’s family — had resisted with everything they had. This brightened his spirits and the Dragon was spoken of no more that day.
I am against all forms of ranting and violence when all is said and done. I know my actions don’t add up to this and I believe we should abandon all forms of technology but I know my actions don’t add up to this abandonment of firearms and cars and televisions and light-bulbs that light up the money-markets and I think we should abandon speech and writing and eat only fruits and nuts though after buying that natty panama hat I was overwhelmed by the role I was thrust into and unto what it made of me and all the wrongdoings my family committed over generations in this dry place in this zone of eucalypt oil and blue skies and stretched red suns that we think bleed their coming into escape from tyrants and making tyrants of themselves and all the wrong done to them by the censors and guardians of the State the boys will be boys and girls will be girls inhibitors and makers of blue rooms and pink rooms as separate dwelling-spaces within changerooms of footballers and netballers and cricketers yinning and yanging beneath the lintel I lurked and through the framework I equivocated dressing up and falling into the mirror watching my selves fragment and echo till they blurred and the mirror was vacant it was then in the panama hat and sunnies bought from a chemist’s twirling rack his carousel of looks that I decided to step it up a notch and take back what’s not theirs a Robin Hood’s Investments portfolio watching the market enact and in the act mattering more than an outcome such as “he would be a king to a policeman” who for a lazy loafing cowardly beating the shit out of blackfellas and migrants left the ash corner deserted pontificating emblems of true wit and beauty to serve under a flag and nation that has destroyed massacred and murdered their forefathers and those who came before and made us stand up at assembly and stand up looking at a single grey
loudspeaker over the blackboard praising hierarchy and the divine right of enslavement and singing and flagging in the heat by the greatest of torture as rolling them downhill in spiked barrels pulling their toenails and fingernails and on the wheel and burning their houses and pitchcapping and every torture imaginable that we also brought on the ships from London with our Irish brethren from counties of uprising and potato theft and lack that’s what makes me in my panama hat pass a note over to the teller and demand all the cash in the repository in the reliquary a weapon without bullets sawn-off farm stock subtracted from Grandma Flynn’s cabinet of Dr Caligari’s euphemisms such as we such as I see our lot doing as well with no lessons of waking and sleeping learnt just as they stagger from event to event never able to sleep never able to wake the murder money the money that murders the poor and deprived and downtrodden let’s say what really happens and no more bullshit politeness and analytical niceties of education the students listening and learning and going out in the vanguard to make up for what teacher lacks in him or her or itself what would people say if I became a policeman and took an oath to arrest my brothers and sisters and relations and convict them by fair or foul means so I hand over the note and take the money and dash out into the street where I walk block after block of the city, the terrace as canyon and cathedrals calling out for donations that they might send the way they send them allocating help and order and dibs on whose good is the best good as I am so tired I am hypnotised but regret nothing and enjoy the labels they put upon me without knowing what actions I have committed what images I have seen and what I have put into motion as I do a job a bank job a hands-on-deck stick-up stuck-up mortgage-belt reclamation and art attack to defend despair and torment inside the individual refuter of the masses and leisurely strolls they make over the graves of Rottnest Island which I have never visited and never will because I don’t holiday and I take to Sassella’s tavern and drink some of the freshly acquired notes and burn the rest as evidence is money and money is to burn.
Thomas questioned his compulsion to “have a girlfriend.” Sometimes he just wanted to go down the park and bowl a few cricket balls in the net. Bowl at strangers. Bowl fast and take what comes after the play. And so, the Port Jackson Painter represented the “Cameragal Warrior.” Thomas predicted identity would become big at the university, and the professor scoffed. The Second Fleet replete with death. Locally, Thomas thought, they smoked the head of Yagan, those boys my own age, roughly. The head did the tour in Britain. That’s what I am of. That’s who I am. He shifted restlessly and looked over a map of old Europe. Henry had told Thomas that in his nightmares he found himself chatting with Major Ross. Why? asked Thomas. Henry would give him back a blank look in reply.

He said: incubation. He then added: parthenogenesis. He held his stomach and wailed. I am a demon, he said to Therese, propped up on her elbow, watching him perform. Why is it you sleep so well, Therese? Why do I sleep so poorly? I go days and days without sleep. Stop using go, came her
smart-arse reply. I couldn’t sleep before that began. I started using it so I could have an excuse for not sleeping. I torment myself in the circles of Vienna when I am awake. I will travel to Vienna as soon as I can raise the money. As soon as I can get away, he added. Therese said she wasn’t going anywhere with him. You have no manners, she said, adding:

*Bis mir endlich alle Knöpfe rissen*

*An der Geduld.*

So Thomas opened up. He said, That’s dragon sex. That’s fire through the jade gate: a popping of the buttons. He so much wanted her and Mrs Hubbel together. So much. And procured by Mr Hubbel. Little was he to guess the pattern of his years. The radio announcer, the therapist, the stockbroker.

Daydreaming, he was struck by lightning. It was a Saint George scenario. He painted himself into the moment, and struck, wandered with hyper-sexuality. He imagined himself down the track, a long way down the track: I am getting older and the appeal I had when I was young is fading. I can still pick up the well-endowed older men with grizzled grey hair on their chests and large hanging penises, penises so fulsome that even when hard as iron, they have plentiful and thick skin that concertinas up and down when I pull on them, and mushrooming heads that go purple against the paleness of their shafts. It’s strange to think they’ve mainly been white. I am not sure why that is. Not crossing certain cultural barriers? A matter of respect. I am smaller than the ones I like to comfort — I am longish though, when at attention, long and very hard. But I don’t have their weight, their thickness, their heavy release of testosterone. I am, you might say, slender of cock, and my balls are neat but smallish. They are bigger than some I see, but slightly less than the average. I have a fine though dark cover of hair around there, but have a smooth body. My arsehole is pink, and once
excited, comfortably loose. But there’s a dragon in there. A spot of acid. I am the opposite of the men I like — I am slender like my cock, strong if not muscle-bound, and tall. The men I like are heavy, even paunchy, of medium height, and very needy. Their balls swarm with sperm, their prostates ache with semen. Their spark, their fire. When they come, they come in thick strings and welts, and a heavy salt taste pervades everything it touches: you can taste it through all parts of your body. I used to meet them on the beach and, after the right looks were exchanged, wander into the sand hills, washing off after in the sea. But I live a long way from the sea now, and have to make do with certain haunts: toilets, parks, cemeteries, places nobody would dream of outside the beat. And I am careful now, even paranoid about cleanliness. I have just read — or maybe I read way back.... then — the cover of *Time*. AIDS, they’re calling it. Invented by the CIA. They are using it as a hate weapon. They hate me. I know it. Front of *Time* magazine as I catch the number 72 to the university. Around Mounts Bay Road, along the froth of the river. I will be in another country, another era. Cruising and targeted by the CIA’s hate. But their buddies in ASIO and MI5 or 6. They have to keep their cocks out of my arse, though I don’t mind it being licked or touched about the cheeks — but not in the hole as much as I crave it, and I don’t mind licking or touching the same in return if it seems right. I am careful how oral I become and how oral they become, and condoms are preferred, if not essential. I like being stroked and stroking, especially from behind. I like feeling the weight of their balls and having their fingers tickle mine. What they like in me is that mentioned above. The smaller balls make them sweat and go red, and when I was younger, they almost fainted. In the half-light we work in, it still happens, but they can tell age has crept up on me also. And the ones I like, being that little bit older year by year, seem to want them a little bit younger. I am not a young man anymore. I won’t be a young man anymore. Won’t be in the zest of my appeal. In my moment. My prime. So, one needs a trick, a gimmick, to keep the fairy-tale romances of
the moment happening. Mine is wearing a pair of very small, tight panties. I wear them with bows, with love-hearts, with flowers... satin and cotton. I wear Therese’s. I wear whatever I can get hold of. I bulge in them and the grizzled fat old men like pulling them open so my cock flicks out, sticky on the end, the material damp. They lean towards the vague lighting in the park, lean out from behind the autumn denuded bushes to watch my length harden in the bitter cold. They feel its heat as I feel their heat. It’s like a furnace. They rub the panties against my arse and push them into my arsehole — I treasure the soft friction, the protective layer. They feel my balls in the gusset and then tweak them. They rub between them as if it were a slit. They have an androgynous experience they can’t quite explain. It feels taboo in so many ways they rock from side to side, swinging their sacks so heavy that even when compacted by the cold they hang down massively, billiard balls glowing in the pocket. Pants around their ankles, they remove their coats and open their shirts and actually lift your hand to their chests, encouraging you to pet them like cats, making circlets around upright nipples. It brings out their feminine selves, I guess, until the load gets so heavy, the rod so hard, they turn aggressive and demand relief, force your head down... within the rules of engagement, of course. Condom on! The regulars are always gentlemen about these things. So, it’s what’s worn underneath that keeps the world simple and reliable. This world this egg. At night I look up into the excrementum. I am there, he thought — I heal myself. Thyself.

Thomas quoted a bit from his Penguin edition of Thucydides: “This was because Alcibiades, when he laid down his command after recall and realised that he was going to be exiled, had given information about the plot...” He cut himself short. What alliance have I formed? What of the sexual mores of the unicorn, the Chimney Sweep, my gaggle of bigoted friends? He breathed in Therese’s scent and wondered if she breathed in his scent too. If she, deep deep down, shared his exile. If she knew the dragon.
Intrusions: two plus one plus none

Two from Thomas’s, one from Therese’s as recounted by Thomas, and an absence of anything from Mrs Hubbel’s as noted by Thomas...

...But you didn’t know Therese back then, Thomas.

Not personally, that’s true — but I did. You know what I mean.

No, no, I don’t. Is it an imagining?

You know better than that. Don’t patronise me.

You were there?

Of course, a fly on the wall. We are all flies on the wall.

I see. Okay. Tell me about that.

I will. But there are three intrusions of mine you need to know about first.

They are connected to the memory you have of Therese’s memory? Hold on, do you mean Therese has told you and you are recounting her memory?

No, I was there. Real time.
Okay. And Mrs Hubbel’s memory.

I wasn’t there — how can I recall it? She told me about aspects of her childhood. I could repeat them, if you like.

Only if you feel the need.

I don’t.

Okay.

**Memory 1:** Thomas had been splitting kindling for his father. Jarrah kindling. He had to stack it neatly in the shed once he’d completed the task. His father was a stickler for that kind of thing. Thomas seemed to remember they’d travelled down to the edge of the great jarrah forests, to a public firewood area. This is part of your inheritance, son, his father had said. Thomas had asked why, and could not recall the answer. I like how rough the bark is, he said to his father. It’s rough and soft at once. Splitting the sinewy wood, he thought: It is so hard and yet it splits so easily. Follow the grain, his father had said. He wanted his own body to be like that. To be hard to the elements, but easily split when he wanted it to be, when he wanted to divide himself. The splitting is to be on the inside, like growth rings, he thought. He remembered thinking. He remembered the tomahawk splitting the wood: split split split. He made the pieces as small as possible, like long toothpicks. They burn really quick, he said. His father kept a tin of kero-soaked sawdust with a dessert spoon in it. Ladling those onto the kindling, he’d say, this’ll do the trick.
Memory 2: Wrenching the sheets of corrugated iron — corrie iron — into place, he slipped, and sliced his wrist. The blood hesitated, then gushed out through the flattened wave motion slice. I will bleed to death, he told himself. He felt his heart beat faster and the blood spurt out with more gusto. He liked that word. Gusto gusto gusto. He liked it as much as the word lingo. Lingo. It caught in the back of the throat and kind of blurted out when it had passed the catch-point. At school the big kids would mock his friend the “Italian boy” whose father owned the veggie garden just outside of town. Don’t ya speaka da lingo, boy! they’d say as they pushed him over onto the quadrangle’s ratty asphalt. He wanted to get them back but stood there watching, thinking over the word. Lingo. The blood was running everywhere. He clutched it with his other hand, and it spilt through the cracks in his fingers. He took off his jacket, the blood running faster as he released the wound to pull the soaked, grisly sleeve over, catching a flap of skin and flesh. He caught sight of the inside of himself. It was not the dry-wet of the jarrah. The redwood was wet, viscous, and the sinews were woven in all directions. A clean cut didn’t mean clean contents. Clean cut? It was such an odd shape. He grew dizzy, and fell, the jacket wrapped around the wound keeping the dirt out as he rolled in the sand, his half-built cubby-house rising and falling, wavering like the house on the day of the Meckering quake. It wasn’t that far back, a few years. Maybe it was happening again. His body. The land.

Therese’s Memory: Princess. You are daddy’s princess. You are more than any doll, you are real. The princess in the garden. The princess with a Bug Catcher. Ahhhh, gotcha! Ahhhh, gotcha! Princess catches praying mantises. She captures butterflies. She captures Crusader Beetles. The cross of the crusader. These attract her most. They are my Pretorian Guard, she says, by the back hedge. The hedge is where most insects are to be found.
She Gotchas a very large crusader, the biggest she has ever seen. Usually, she looks at them, confides her plans, allows them to pay attendance to her, then lets them back into the hedge. But not this dragon-sized bug. This grand crusader with its fiery cross. This one she will keep in her aquarium. This is no mere guard of her inner self. This is a companion. This is her significant other! She empties the neon fish out into the toilet and flushes it. She dries the tank out with a blow drier and places sand at the bottom. She breaks off chunks of the hedge and decorates the inside of the aquarium. And reveals his new home to the crusader. She plays Pussycat’s *Oo Nana Haya* on her portable cassette player as she performs the ritual of introduction, revelation. You will live with me always, crusader. She bent over the tank to study it closer, she tickled its armour, its curves and angled. She noticed spines on its rear legs. It’s a male, she said. Prince. Princess. She picked it up and brought it close to her face. It shot a sticky stream of liquid into her face. It stank. Stink bug! *Mictis profana*, she cried! We are not yet husband and wife!
Ranter!

Thomas arrived at the house of the Ranter and gave the coded knock on the flywire door. The place reeked of under-ripe hash. The Ranter, in his green jocks, came to the door and stared. That you, Thomas? he asked. Yes, said Thomas. Don’t you recognise me? The Ranter waited and said: You look like a faun. And this afternoon is the afternoon of the faun. I have been collecting roses and nymphs. At this, he opened the door and let Thomas in. Thomas, who had been there before, didn’t recognise any of the furnishings; even the shape of the room had changed. It had become a field, a paddock. The Ranter locked the flywire door behind him and plunged straight into the paddock, kissing the fauns and the roses, making sonorous noises as he snuffled along the monotonous lines of the couch, the trees. Suck this wine, said the Ranter, and offered Thomas a chalice. This is my art for art’s sake period, he said. The birds piped up from inside the flowering bowl of the hash pipe.

He did not feel like he was betraying Therese. “O nymphes, regonflons des SOUVENIRS divers.” And so the they began:

Along the line of plaster ducks
the beauty of mould, a spray of reeds
on the blue walls. I scatter soft stones
of the creek, a pebble washed
by strands of blue-green algae —
I lift them in flight above
a lowering waterline, perfumed
as dandy-lions, ripeness
of orifices: ceiling fan.
For his criminal act of entry, Thomas fell into a swoon. I am addicted to
the dream, he said. This is the age of the dole. This is the age of small
payments to keep me going as a student. Tant pis! I will collect the skulls
and horns of fallen sheep, I will trace my way home at twilight by fence-line,
by hands catching the barbs with their twists of wool. Wool of the fallen. All
that’s to come, as will children. I will father, I will sire a dynasty of
agronomists who will be punished for their vision. This empty head of mine,
this succoured and drawn-out body. I drink the stars like Henry on the piss.
I embrace the shadows of the Ranter’s paddock.

So, briefly Thomas considered himself more than the sum of his
reading. I started taking notes when I was seventeen and now past my
eighteenth birthday I am more than the sum of text. He remembered the
Athenian exiles serving with the Persian army. There’s an inevitability about
that — revenge. His father left him one thing to quibble over — a tin stuffed
full of photographs. His childhood. His early childhood. The zoo. The forest.
The farm. A service station. Trucks. Some of the photos were Polaroids.
That’s technology. His father who was still sceptical of the new video craze,
of the Commodore personal computers — memory 16kB — that were
finding their way into the more elite work-places. Thomas had first seen a
computer in primary school. The son of a judge had made his own,
recording information on cassettes at different speeds, retrieving with a
series of slick tricks. Then Thomas had used a punch card Wang model at
school in the coastal town where their big house shed light on the beneath
world, when the strict maths teacher became a boy again late at night,
feeding the machine cards. Thomas had watched on, excited and thinking
over Revelation. He briefly wondered if his own father was in fact a teacher.
A real schoolteacher. Not a miner in the Pilbara. He wondered hard. Now,
he typed his notes up on an IBM golfball typewriter, though he had started
using an electric Adler he’d scored from the lab he did holiday work in
while still at school all those months back. Thomas was no Luddite. Thomas
envisaged a future of technology and adaptation. Drugs and technology spliced together, one and the same thing. Was it the borders or shorelines of Sicily? Were the flowers original seed? Did he kiss the simoom as if it were an easterly off the desert where his grandmother was brought into the world, where she kissed the feet of Afghan camel drivers and loved their camels? The desert is all blue, she’d say, and recite a ballad. He danced a jig with her and Therese. They danced until they dropped. If I were a schoolteacher I would only teach French in English classes and English in French classes. I would have no respect for grammar. I don’t care how dances, dreams, and sentences are linked together. It’s egology, only egology. It was 1939 the year of coinage and the start of The War and Grandma was watching her husband dig the backyard bunker, stocking it with all paraphernalias. They will get down here eventually and drop their Zeppelin bombs. They will. They will. They will. The sirens will wail, the sirens will call, attracting the aviators to the limestone of this old, crumbling continent. We bring the troubles with us.
Stefan Zweig. Did he die by his own hand, with his wife? Veronal? He was a pacifist. Thomas had written letters to members of an Italian terrorist group but had received no replies. He had sent the letters to their prison. He tried to write them in Italian but had slipped into German. Maybe I insulted them? he wondered. He also wondered what it would take to be a pacifist. He was, really. Though he had big plans. Big plans. He read Zweig saying of Balzac in the biography: "For a time he was fascinated by the idea of entering politics. The revolution of July 1830 had put the middle class in power again, and there was plenty of scope for forceful young men."

Therese was pure middle class, really. It’s an attitude. Thomas amorously concluded he was a nihilist. A nihilist with big, big plans. Once again, he kissed the flag of revolution — the flags of revolution.

And mum’s photo album, he thought. Therein the bursts of hope and wonder. The backyard wigwam, the tasselled cowboy suit. The cap guns. The preparation. Playing simulations without the alcohol.

*Beauty, no other thing is, than a beam
Flash’d out between the middle and extreme.*

Bob wrote that and slipped it into Henry’s service records.

Between the icebergs, the ship quivered. A narrow passage.

He mapped the tunnels he’d dug and shored up beneath the garden.

Under the house on its limestone foundations — coins, yellowing letters, hair clips. The fallen-through. The lost.

As a bed-light, he had a friendly dragon. The plastic smoked as the bulb heated up. It was probably designed for less light, less energy.
He thought over the Mrs Hubbel maxims. I imagine managing her while she is managing me. It’s the mucous movement, the flow, the going down. It is congealing in the lower body. Catarrh. I don’t know what to do with this illness. She calls me the king pin of the first-years. The king pin of the student rebellion. She says I will be on the barricades of the commune and that turns her on. She snaps her garters when she says it. She does things inside that make no biological sense. I have an addictive personality. Do you know my competition? he asks her. Do you know Johannes Reuchlin?

One day I will travel to Tübingen. I will become part of the city walls, its fortifications, its defence of university universality universalism. I will make the local in the ontological expanse of learning. I too will take on obscurantism. I will later meld with the Hölderlin house and look down across the river at the dovecote. I will talk with esteemed academics crossing the bridge to a hotel, an anonymous hotel which I will inhabit with chambermaids. Refractory elements. Extinction event. Nobody. Absolute. Nobody. Nobodaddy. Knowledge. Implicit. Object shift in world of sublunaries. The property of the house: the octagon, dye, carpenter. Zimmer. With Cook to travel. Fluvial. Hydraulics. Rotunda. I will go where the river has worn its way. Where the vapours weigh down the lungs.

Insert diagrams of fluvial action. Here.

He took the MMA flight from Geraldton to Perth. He would return with arms full of books from Mary Martin’s, including poems of Rochester. It’s predictable, in the footy culture I come out of. In the race riots of Front Beach, the Sail Inn, beneath the Norfolk pine trees. He will return to the city yet again in a Torana XR1. No, a new Commodore V8. 180km/h most of the
way. Geraldton to Perth in just under three hours. Listening to music dreamt up around Lake Michigan. Cold war music.

Will I always live in small rented rooms attached to families who don’t want me there? Away from... home? He missed his mother and Grandma Flynn. It was good being with her. Mrs Hubbel revved her engine angrily outside the place. Vic Park. The brown tiles and roof ornaments, the grand old gardens with their roses and agapanthus, the collapsing houses, the houses with Tardis-like backyards. An old suburb. Lathlain oval. Home of Perth Football Club. There was no getting away from it. Therese turning up her nose, refusing to cross a vacant block. The station a hive of cigarette butts. Racial incidents. He turned away. He turned away and it haunted him. The exiled Athenians... the Persian army.

The cave. Herein I dwell. The changeroom. He had drilled ever so slight a hole through. Therese was changing — trying out a new dress. She was in the know. They had arranged this. She would tolerate... the separation. How is it she knows about Ray D. Steckler? he wondered, watching her watch herself in the mirror, patting, smoothing, shaping the dress. His greatest period: 63-68. A run of brilliance: “The Incredibly Strange Creatures Who Stopped Living and Became Mixed-Up Zombies” (63), “Rat Pfink a Boo Boo” (65), “The Lemon Grove Kids Meet the Monsters” (66), and “Sinthia: The Devil’s Doll” (68). He loved the cult. He loved the clandestine gatherings to watch. He loathed the lack of invitations. Her svelteness mixing in such circles to lipgloss their coddled worlds. He wondered if he was a misogynist. No, just a basket case. He licked his lips and tore a piece of paper to cover the sound of his flatulence. Something he’d eaten. He embarrassed so easily. Therese wouldn’t know him if she knew he had a windy bowel.

His problem, he decided, was that he craved all knowledge — he wanted it to rush in and spill out at once. He didn’t want to make sense of it, but wanted it just to flow. To be. Being stuck in himself in microcosm, he had to address his come-down, his defilements and debasements. Whom
could he take on really but himself alone? His friend who drove the Commodore whose father owned the fast Torana? His friend who wanted to join the Air Force to attract girls, who invited him to an airline “hostess party.” His friend who kept taking the Mensa test until he upped his IQ enough to get in. When the school IQ tests were done, Thomas had a migraine. He was officially sub-moronic, and told his professor so. Professor Pumblechook — no parody could be more deadly if known by him who had been labelled. Or maybe he couldn’t give a shit, a toss, a damn? This bothered Thomas, his ineffectuality, his flyspot-self on the globe.

That afternoon, Thomas wandered the streets. He came across a salesman — a door-to-door salesman. What are you flogging? he asked. Steak knives, said the salesman. And anything else you might want to buy. War? Sex? Anything. He followed the salesman as he — descriptionless — went from door to door. Thomas was his shadow. Who is he? one customer asked. Thomas smiled from his centre. Smiled so his lips were wider than his face, so his nostrils flared, adding inches to his height. His black hair grew golden in the shadows. They bought knives, many knives, and the salesman was gleeful. You are luck, boy.

Three streets into the trade, they came to the door of William and Mary. Catherine arrived at the same time. Thomas could tell straight away that what others might call an “unhealthy relationship” was at stake here. It’s in the eyes, he noted. A father and a husband, a daughter, a mother and a wife. The father was sick, decaying. Thomas remained a shadow, though he fantasised about the possibilities when this scenario had run its course. He wondered about their undergarments, the position of their washing line.

Post-dated, he mentioned a dream. This was rare, to differentiate between his waking and dreaming states. It was a classic suitcase dream, but rather than “Women Only,” it carried the inscription “Thomas Only.” He said: I heard the instruction clearly articulated, to have intercourse with someone I found repellent. He then said: As a small child I hated haircuts; I
really hated the barber shop. Our local had the classic barber’s pole, which I felt would twirl its way into me, like rock candy inserted into my anus. As soon as I became conscious of that pole, designed to attract, I knew what it could, what it would be used for. And I hated the smell, and I hated the chair, and the very short-haired middle-aged barber with his corny jokes and leather strop, and I hated how short he wanted my hair to be. To halt its growth. Most of all though, I hated his predictions that I’d need to be back in two months, that growth would take control again and that I would become dishevelled, unkempt. That I would be in need of his assistance, his putting right. My protests fell on deaf ears.

Thomas wondered about Lindy Chamberlain. He watched over Grandma Flynn’s shoulder and said: Something is not right. It was a hot summer. The cricket had been on. The media’s vitriol astonished him. He joined in to see how it felt, to join in: questioned the way the accused dressed, he made trial by media his entertainment. The inquest found that Azaria had been taken by a dingo. He marvelled that Azaria was the entire country’s lost child. He marvelled at how maternal the nation had become.

Working in the back garden on his Ford Falcon, he heard mulberries rain softly down. A giant mulberry tree, maybe fifty years old. They grow so old, he thought, but not here, as they were only introduced at the time when the boats came up the river, when the landing parties sprang sprigs from their backpacks, hacked clearings out of the banksias, and set saplings in the sand. To grow up and out, to drop their plosive fruits, to dye the earth, to make chains across the district. He bolted the gauges into place. Oil pressure. A thin plastic tube running from the engine into the cabin of the car. Pressure engineering. He hooked it up and started the car, and the pressure grew on the gauge, then the tube blew out from its fitting and sprayed engine oil over the bench seat, over the floor. He’d love to have had bucket seats. It was a column shift. He’d love to have had a t-bar automatic. He might upgrade, rebuild. His new stereo covered in oil. The clarion
speakers pumping out Led Zeppelin *Whole Lotta Love*. He turned the ignition off, stepped out onto the gravel and backed up, wiping oil from his hands, clothes. Shit! Shit! Shit! and further back under the confused shade of the mulberry tree, his sandshoes plashing mulberries plash plash plush, stains on his soles, on the orange-yellow dust of the gravel. An awkward spreading, a bothersome staining. As a kid, he’d taken leaves from the tree to feed shoeboxes full of silkworms. He liked their webbings, the flaws in the design of white and green made by their shit. Up in the tree, his hair freshly cut, the torment of the barber’s shop in mind, he’d heard neighbours. They weren’t his neighbours; it wasn’t his house. Whose house was it? Was it down in the city? Somewhere his car would stop for repairs on the way to... the learning, the work, unemployment. Suddenly, there was no car. He was up in the mulberry tree and he could see through the occlusions of the leaves; he could see. People should not say: crepuscular. I am up a shaky, disintegrating staircase, he thought, and I am rewriting in leaves and mulberries what I dreamt last night: a story of falling, but being caught up, not being able to fall properly. He could see the neighbours. He knew they were brother and sister. Older than himself, but not that much older. He could hear them. The boy was telling the girl to show him or he’d tell that the girl had taken the money from their Dad’s pocket. A deal was being done, he told himself. He reached out and picked a mulberry. He stained his mouth. The mulberry was plump but tart. The brother was undressing the girl. Thomas lost interest. Postas patris familias. He thought: My friend is a bedwetter, is this why? He tells me: I have never dreamt of water, I have never been to the seaside, I hate taking baths. I only dream of the dry, of dust. The difficulty, the sheer difficulty, was locating himself. Where was his car? Is his car? He doesn’t like cars or televisions. He does like Led Zeppelin. His pupils are yellow. The whites of his eyes become divided along the horizon. Black skies. Red earth. It is the Tent Embassy, Canberra, 1972. He says to another child who has climbed the mulberry tree: You were here
before, weren’t you? Before the tree? Yes, they took me away, and I grew up
with the silkworms. Childhood is so much fun: you know, being tossed
around, growing giddy, flying. We wish it back. We wish our fulfilment.
Thomas says back: I was struck by lightning and no one believes me now,
not even those who were with me. It is a collective forgetting. Thomas and
his new old friend hear the neighbours at it again. The other boy says: I
think he is hurting her. Thomas says: Yes, but she’s not going to tell anyone
— she took her father’s money and he will be angry. The boy says back to
Thomas: We better get out of here or we’ll get blamed — for her pain, the
stolen money, and the big boy’s perversity.

It’s all to do with those glow-in-the-dark ghosts, he said. Standing
cramped in the wardrobe, watching them bump about, glowing green-
yellow. The bed-wetter boy slept with them. We visited him and his ghosts.
He came down from a farm and wanting to go back to the cleared spaces
they gave him ghosts to keep him company in the dark.
Thomas read of one of his home places: “War is a different country, Rick had written.” Proposition 4.03 of Wittgenstein’s Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus crossed his mind simultaneously. He found this frightening but pleasurable. The condition of truth is the storm drain running all the way from the town’s edge down to Back Beach. He went in there with schoolmates with torches. He knew they weren’t really his mates, but he went anyway. He grew lost amidst them, as all separated off and light was denied and he crawled towards an unseen, distant opening. No one will know I’ve died in this absolute darkness, because none of my friends will say anything. They will deny presence. In that dark, he travelled in the darkness of sheep, waiting for Cyclops to pluck him out of the crowding dark to swallow him hole. This is the beginning of my other kind of lust. He remembered the stimulation vividly. He might have masturbated alone, thinking he was going to die. Or maybe he didn’t think of it at all at the time. This was retrospect. Like diving off Saint George’s Beach and swimming in a half wet-suit, lead weights bobbing like corks against slim hips, wondering if the girl who danced so spontaneously at the disco where he stood square against the walls, might meet him, with her friends, with his.

Why didn’t the other poet in the class talk to him outside the classroom? He did, actually, once or twice. Thomas wandered with him. He went to his boarding-house rooms a couple of times. He saw the landlords and smelt their vices. He bought books. He swapped things. Then there was the boy whose parents owned the shop. A shop of wonderful wares. He was Greek, he said. He was Australian Greek. His parents were Greek, Greek in Australia. Australia is Greece as well, thought Thomas. This brought him pythic joy. Thomas wondered what the name of his ship was, how long it had been lost in the seas. If Poseidon was his enemy. The Greek Australian boy cut him off. Thomas went back to his Jewish friend whom he loved but was also estranged from. He wanted to understand. Together they had broken the taboos of the boy’s culture. Thomas felt included through the
offences. At times he drew closer to conversion. One day it will come, he said. I have been cut off from my roots. Mostly, alone, he crawled under small boats tossed up on the fine white sands, boats on their stomachs, battered by Poseidon, by Neptune. Thomas thought: the sea is my father but I will move far away from it, again. I am inland. Always away from the sea, my father. He’d gone to the lecturer who’d escaped from the Communists. He’d searched him out, disillusioned with the professor. The lecturer, with a rubbed and polished voice, warm soothing hands which he wrapped over Thomas’s shoulders, said: Read Pope’s *Odyssey*. It’s the one. You, my boy, will return to Ithaca, your boat wrecked on home shores.

To whom the Father of the immortal powers,
Who swells the clouds, and gladdens earth with showers,
“Can mighty Neptune thus of man complain?
Neptune, tremendous o’er the boundless main!
Revered and awful e’en in heaven’s abodes,
Ancient and great! a god above the gods!
If that low race offend thy power divine
(Weak, daring creatures!) is not vengeance thine?
Go, then, the guilty at thy will chastise.”
He said. The shaker of the earth replies:

“This then, I doom: to fix the gallant ship,
A mark of vengeance on the sable deep;
To warn the thoughtless, self-confiding train,
No more unlicensed thus to brave the main.
Full in their port a Shady hill shall rise,
If such thy will.” — “We will it (Jove replies).
E’en when with transport blackening all the strand,
The swarming people hail their ship to land,
Fix her for ever, a memorial stone:
Still let her seem to sail, and seem alone.
The trembling crowds shall see the sudden shade
Of whelming mountains overhang their head!”
Saratino. Was at the window. His flat, Thomas’s flat. He was playing his *Four Quartets* record. Richard Burton. April is the cruellest. It was April. Southern hemisphere April. South-west of Australia April. He rejected the term “Antipodean.” Sarantino was like Grünewald’s Christ. This was unfair, thought Thomas. He’d written a poem about the old man down the end of the block, same floor, all the flats looking out over the sea with their iron tubular railings and seagull shit. The guy was ill. Coughing his guts up. Saratino put it on a bit, he was less worthy of pity. He was an American sailor who’d given up on the world and come back to a port where he’d had much success with women. He envied the mansion across the toad — the one built by an old sea captain equipped with its own tower, its own bridge, crow’s nest, lookout. Sarantino says one day he will leap from the front of my flat down to the concrete below. He says: I have the dragon in me and I will transform just before impact and fly out to the sea spreading a mist to cover my escape. Thomas looked out the day Saratino had said it, and saw a small pleasure craft burning to the water line. He wrote a poem. It was an abstracted moment. Saratino was at the window. In his tank top Thomas could see the twin dragons blaring their dulled fires: each bicep a dragon with a heart and a name under it. Jill. Jerry. At least, Saratino said Jerry was a woman’s name. Thomas thought it a man’s but didn’t want to offend Saratino. Thomas peered harder through the crack in the curtains, and followed more closely the sublimated anti-Semitism of the record. Sarantino said he wasn’t Jewish, because his mother wasn’t Jewish though his father was. This disappointed Thomas. He felt it was cowardly of the old sailor not to stand up for who he was. His identity. But that’s offensive, Thomas — it is not my identity. Thomas watched Saratino move on to the next flat to bother the woman with the depression problem. A few weeks back, she had been taken to hospital, and she had only just got home. Thomas stared out to see through the narrow slit: you could see Rottnest, the air was clear enough.
Mr Hubbel had rung his friend. He had chortled at the paper-keeping, the sheer drudgery to be inflicted on his young... protégé. Mrs Hubbel was swelling, swelling, and the amniotics were on his mind. It got in the way. At least the boy would be fading fast in the piles of papers and telexes. A dead-end job for the little fucker.

Thomas caught the bus into the city. It went right along the seafront. Past the Ocean Beach Hotel — the OBH. There he scored, and listened to wipe-out surfing safari music. Perth was big on it. A guitarist in one of the bands played a gold Gibson. Thomas thought it exquisite, and that surprised him because he was not a fetishist of objects. No utility. He wanted to own little. Thomas rode on and on until the bus side-saddled the railway line and went past the dead-end stops, the stinking red and white carriages he knew so well from his old life, their diesel fumes and soot stains along the roofs, down the sides. That’s me in there, he said. Now I am elevated. My own man. Working for someone else but working for myself. In control of my destiny. And then into the city, with its slowly rising buildings. Mining money, he said. The city will get bigger, and I will rise with it. He wanted them to think that, as he inflicted little errors, little flaws in the piles of paper. This will bring them unstuck. Mutual aid. I am helping those without access. We will progress together. A vanguard that’s equitable. A sharing of the power. He was so busy with his plans, he forgot the others in the bus could hear his thoughts loud and clear. ASIO was already on to him. There would be so many arrests in the future, including the kicking-open of his flat door, Saratino standing in the shadows. An informant? No, surely not. Surely not.

But then, in the bus, on the way to the medieval city with its craven aspirations. He filed through law, through jurisdiction. He thought of that woman he’d met who’d worked in the city, who used to give head to a judge behind the panels... in a tower. She lived by the sea too. She didn’t know about Thomas but Thomas knew about her. He was a peasant made good.
He was a peasant standing up to the Lords, empowering other peasants through helping out. Today, he’d cancel some fines, circumvent some cases. Just local, just small-scale. Quasi-legal. But all the same. He had read on the screen of his mind:

“It is well known by this time that feudalism did not imply a dissolution of the village community. Although the lord had succeeded in imposing servile labour upon the peasants, and had appropriated for himself such rights as were formerly vested in the village community alone (taxes, mortmain, duties on inheritances and marriages), the peasants had, nevertheless, maintained the two fundamental rights of their communities: the common possession of the land, and self-jurisdiction.”

Why that bit? he wondered. What’s to come? The three-fissured cave. The beast. Wheels within wheels. They will hate me, he thought. Work had made him an anarchist, no longer a nihilist. He packed his own lunch. He drank during his lunch break. His boss had no problems with him smoking, being a chainy himself. Thomas envisioned a commune at Grandma Flynn’s place. He burnt his first pay-cheque in the pub. Sober, he rang his boss saying he’d lost it. So it goes.
Extract from interview with Thomas

One of my first acid trips was soaked into a blotter with small green dragon printed at reasonably high resolution. It was dead centre, which also meant the sheet of trips — designed to divide into a hundred equal portions, or a hundred small squares — had been well marked up and efficiently sliced up. Watching these sheets of manic repetition, miniature wallpaper, being divided, was an hallucinatory experience in itself. All the trips of that period contained a fair amount of strychnine, said to be preservative, but in reality a lot of the “tripping” effect was in fact strychnine poisoning. The cracking up, the gradual onset of manic laughter, speediness, and visual distortion, might be attributed to the strychnine as much as to the lysergic acid content. It’s the combination of both that kicked off, though, and that resulted in so many “bad trips.” This sounds too precise, though, too business-like. It was like the Cure’s *Seventeen Seconds*. That’s what I — we — listened to over and over. It’d only been out a year and yet it seemed like it’d been around forever. Protomusical. And I wrote poems. It’s hard to work out whether I took the trips because of the dragons, or the dragons clustered because of the trips. They had always been with me, though — the dragons. Earliest memories. I saw them over the stubble, burning along the windrows in autumn. They licked my genitals. I stuck a reproduction of Paolo Uccello’s *Saint George and the Dragon* painting over my bed. It was my night-light:

Knight heart lights
the worm a maiden riven:
from cliff we fall
our citadels where success,
brutal as gold
fall of cave-light
she won’t take me
night-black, backed-up

that muscle car
armour, horse
brainwashed

worried about
who will sing,

voyeur voyeur
Ennui

I dance a merry jig, post-imbibing. The fleshly place of Northbridge. Oh, how I like the one near the park, with its windowless windows and sulky waiting room. The rooms are one colour of the rainbow only, and I sit on the end of the bed telling tales of listlessness. North of the bridge. North of the Bride. Nor by Nor Bridge. Gare Du Nord. I wander the streets near the station. The dead are all about. There is no plumbing to the upper stories. I suggest a bidet. I like my long coat-a-swishing. My coat of arms. After my doings are done, after the chat and the clothes picked from the floor, after the eye of my old fellow has been peeked in, after a peck has been taken and a peck given, then I stroll down the crazy-paving, I take a Lebanese coffee as intense as the night, and a roll in flat bread to fill the growling belly. But I am listless, my energy spent. Old Ezra was right. Should have skipped the belly-aching on the radio and given sex advice. A sexpert as they say. But you can’t help feelin’ moved by those Pisan Cantos, lolling in the cage of rage, American bayonets pricking his characters, his caricatures, his stillness in the flutings. It’s the money, he said. Was it taxes they got him for? They all seem so similar in views. Which radio station, which way the wind blows. Ennui. I ravish these morsels, see Henry wander by the shop window, eye off the curlicues, the fumes of food. He hasn’t seen me. Should I call him? No, relish the aftermath. I know he’s on his pension-way there. On for a good rollicking. Ah,

Of this appalling suburb,
Such as a mortal never witnessed,
This morning still the visage,
Vague and distant, ravishes me.
Yes, it has clicked over. The tick of the tock. The top of the night has passed. It’s then I take my records. The cops kicking the shit out of the black guy. I note it down. They smile as I pass by. I note it down. I’ve got their numbers. Numbers for the files. I’ve seen them before, in the rollicking shop. Rollicking and rollicking. Appalling... countryside. Tomorrow I will apply for a passport. I will be Poe on the Seine, translating Charles. I will make Mallarmé teach me English so I can sing beyond the outskirts of the city, so I can tend my garden. Somebody smashed him in the nose and the waterworks opened up. He watered the washed path. He watered the drought. He watered the sun coming up over the teeth of the city. He scrabbled through his jacket pocket and found a vitamin C tablet. It fizzed on his bleary tongue. A dragon enveloping his sins.

Super Vivid

non vicit: to watch the washing of the streets. The fluid time. Even in drought. The washing-down.

non vixit: we walked through here, down from the country, to see the Channel Seven Christmas Pageant. Mickey’s ears were glowing and Pluto was chasing his tail.

Thomas failed his Latin exam. He wrote: the large horse, over and over. Magnum equus. He wasn’t sure if that was right. When his mother and father split asunder, he was told by an aunt that he was the second coming; that first there was a sister-brother, a dual-personed offspring, both parts in close proximity was the way it was put, and that it — mercifully, so they said — perished almost immediately. Then appeared Thomas, all cherubically male with gonads ready to go. Blessings.

Sitting back, Thomas thinks: The sunlight is streaming through the window. The glass intensifies, magnifies the heat. It is pleasurable. Almost
life-affirming. Ol’ Grandpa Flynn, long gone, had been the son of a pub owner in ol’ London town. His pub was a famous watering-hole, where many deals were done. It was the house of a witch from the north — her city house. She visited only rarely, but a place in the cellar was kept ready for her. She was a healing witch and kept the wine and the brew in good health. She kept the river-water from soaking in. Some nights, Thomas would call her. Standing in a corner, she’d rock from foot to foot. She’d smoke cigarette after cigarette. She’d read Wilkie Collins aloud as if she knew him personally: There was no improvement in Miss Therese, and the second night was even worse than the first. Mr Hubbel was constant in his attendance. The practical duties of nursing were still divided between Mary and myself, Catherine persisting in sitting up with us, though we both entreated her to take some rest... The moon was hideously white, as lurid as urid flour. The walls of the cellar grew mouldy, and Miss Therese’s fever worsened. None of us would give in, though... the witch would solve the problem. Her emanations chimed through the bottles. Somewhere, a vintner perished from his own concatenation. This is not the city of the grape, great-grandpa said; all bowed their head in acknowledgement, acquiescence.

Sitting back, back against the wall, Thomas will watch the table tennis for hour after hour. The balls seldom cross the net, and are even more seldom hit back. But the balls are dropped with a plink on the table. And one bat swishes, then another. That combination of events, coupled with the picking up, the rewinding, the redoing, seems to bring him pleasure. It is a sunny room. A sunny room not too far from the river.

_Intrauterine_

Litter of pups. We are what we read we are what we read. It haunted him. The cocker spaniel only bore two puppies. One male, one female. Otherwise... identical. His father took one, his mother the other. His dad shot
the one he took — the male. It had got into the chicken coop and downed a few of the trapped hens. His father shot the cocker with its mouth full of feathers, smirking when he told the tale. Bird dog, he said. The female pup was always at Thomas’s mother’s ankles. Yap yap yapping. It got up the duff to a bitzer from god knows where. A bitzer because the puppies were from everywhere, his mum said. He couldn’t recall their individual biographies. They were interesting, though, he insisted.

Hadna sailed a league a league a league but barely three. Dry as dust. Never floating. Just hunched up in the dust storm. So hard to breathe. The sun and the moon conjoined. Distinctly an upper and lower, sometimes he was tossed deeper into the sun, sometimes into the moon. He could hear clearly: cosmos cosmos cosmos went the beat. These veins these roots, induced. No history, no events, no points of reference.

He said to me: You are out of Africa. Indeed, I am. Qualified in Nigeria. He asked me if I’d met Rimbaud in Abyssinia, and I said: No, it’s a long way off in time and place. He said: There is no history and this is communicated by drums. By drums of skin. It’s to do with trade, he replied. Like the first time the lithium was mis-prescribed. It was your own mania, you see. Your discomfort at being here. I am not uncomfortable, I replied. He then said that Conrad’s Heart of Darkness was a racist book. It has nothing to do with me, I replied. It depends on your point of view. It has large themes, I added. He smiled at me, and I smiled back. He said: Your smile is bigger than my smile. I thought: Now, that’s racist. Then he added: But my smile gets bigger when I watch Disney films. Have you noticed the ethnic profiling for each animal character? I am thinking Jungle Book. I am thinking India. I am thinking of Therese’s Raj relations. Their refusal to engage with Bengali. Indo-Aryan. They read Tagore in English when they migrated to Australia. Tagore was an educationalist. I do not know what he thought of that poem. Kipling. A condition. What part of speech is it/was it? I am thinking of that toilet poem. The one you read on the backs of toilet doors as you shit. I put toilet paper
on the seat, even at home. Homes. Wherever I am. A long way from Nigeria. Nothing to do with Nigeria. I apologise. Sometimes I fear I will think something that might be misconstrued as racist. Sometimes I let people listen to my thoughts. I never hear their replies, but I watch their faces. Such simple reactions: approval, disgust, perverse interest. My dream-thoughts are up on a screen. the big screen. I just resent salt. Salinity was my early childhood. That’s where it centres. It’s where the creeks begin, fanning out to rivers. Polluting the entire system. Our place was eaten by salt. How does that toilet poem go? It babbles on about a dream. It defines manhood. Was manhood important in your village. I was born in a city, a very large city. Lagos? Yes. The poem was about boys becoming... *empires*. Yes, I know it. It’s a famous poem. I studied it in Nigeria. It’s not set in Nigeria. No. Then he said: I know it by heart... I can quote the last stanza, which he did:

“If you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue,
Or walk with kings — nor lose the common touch;
If neither foes nor loving friends can hurt you;
If all men count with you, but none too much;
If you can fill the unforgiving minute
With sixty seconds’ worth of distance run —
Yours is the Earth and everything that’s in it,
And — which is more — you’ll be a Man my son!”
In the days of keeping his parents outside his room, Thomas felt complete. He and his parents were together then. What changed? His father bought the house next door when they lived in the city, then the property next door when they lived in the country, then the house next door when they lived in the country town. Having said this, his father was often away so he didn’t see him. It was his father who bought him his twenty-two rifle, who took him to get the gun licence. Thomas felt the policemen staring into his mind and he did his best to block them. He assumed he was successful. He only wanted the gun to look good out in the paddocks, to shoot himself if things ever got too bad. It was never intended to be used for revolutionary purposes. The room. Which room? Wherever he lived, he occupied a single room. In his flat, it was the lounge room. He slept and ate there. He left the bedroom to itself. His forays to kitchen and bathroom were just that — they weren’t part of his zone of conscious habitation. Why did he lie to himself about his places of being? What was so difficult about admitting his room wasn’t what he described? This room was before he had the job, before he was by the sea. It was his old room in his parents’ house before they split. He wasn’t sure if it was the country or the city. It was just his room. He described it to himself. An act of certainty.

A rug over floorboards. The floorboards had sealed together with the grime of the years, but here and there, cracks still remained. He let things falls through them. That was around the edges of the rug. A red rug with a pastoral scene woven in and out. It was a hunt scene, maybe. A Diana in there he had fantasised about, on occasions. It wasn’t a large room, but had high ceilings. This said something about its age. Above an old stained-pine wardrobe, a manhole. He had, over the years, climbed on top of the wardrobe, and as it rocked, punctured through the manhole and lifted himself into the dusty, mouse-dirtied ceiling cavity. There, he’d crouch and rock. The room became the vista, the caves, the geography of his secret project — the fantasy novel he was writing to knock Stephen Donaldson off
his perch. But then his politics shifted, and he wanted no success, even under a pseudonym. He trashed the novel, though he kept the map. Even with its mountains and rivers, it was a map of his room. It was a single bed, the bed of the asbestos lumps and the built-in reading light. A few stickers remained unpeeled, some fragmented, from his showbag days. Car stickers, biscuit stickers, whatever was going. Oil companies were prominent. Eveready batteries. He liked the logo. It reminded him of Rilke’s panther stepping out of the bars of its cage, though Thomas feared leaving his room. He ventured out at night. He had a secret compartment beneath the wardrobe for storing his “gatherings”: the underwear that kept him perky. He knew people knew about this, but the facade of secrecy was a delight and comfort to him.

Later, when he couldn’t get work, because he didn’t want work, they said, this room of before guided him: a survival kit of memory. It was the source of his spice. The worms in the woodwork, in the food which rooted in precise places: apples left to bring forth moths, silverfish out of the rug, a pantology of living things that make their own spice in the air we breathe, these were his vision. The rain on the roof drilled holes through his head. Somewhere, in one of his lives, he often crossed the trestle bridge over the Swan River. At the base, oil on the banks, down from the racecourse. Trashed, burnt-out cars. The boys drinking from their flagons, fucking women they’d got drunk down there and left. You’d see it in the morning with the commuters, crossing over, flicking a louche eye downwards then back to the paper. That’s how long it takes to get a thrill at someone else’s expense. Then into East Perth past the power station, making the river toxic. The air. The air of his room was alive with space and he travelled. There were many things about his room. The old experiments that lingered: solder burns on the rug, the smell of batteries, the taste of zinc paste and graphite rods, of thin wire between terminals flowing, short-circuiting until combustion and withering. The chemicals poured. The leads and
phosphorous, the potassium permanganate and glycerine explosive, built indoors to explode without. Tossed out the window — a hit parade. The potassium chromate volcanoes.

Each book on his shelves was arranged in Dewey Decimal order. He signed a book out when he took it to his bed or desk for a read. He borrowed from his own library. He was the sole borrower. In the polluted light, his friends made their homes as best they could: the unicorn, rambunctious by nature, shoving Charles Darwin off his perch by the shell collection. Shells collected at Prevelly Park after storms. They were not bright shells, but Thomas had seen bright shells in the north when he’d visited his father working on the ships, the iron ore ships, the mine vessels. Shells that sat empty, waiting for their owner to return. Thomas thought the shells living things. In his dreams, he crawled through their spirals, closing the door behind him. Darwin would repeat the same words over, the unicorn telling him he’d ripped off even those:

“The fact of varieties of one species, when they range into the zone of habitation of other species, often acquiring in a very slight degree some of the characters of such species, accords with our view that species of all kinds are only well-marked and permanent varieties. Thus the species of shells which are confined to tropical and shallow seas are generally brighter-coloured than those confined to cold and deeper seas. The birds which are confined to continents are, according to Mr. Gould, brighter-coloured than those of islands. The insect-species confined to sea-coasts, as every collector knows, are often brassy or lurid. Plants which live exclusively on the sea-side are very apt to have fleshy leaves. He who believes in the creation of each species, will have to say that this shell, for instance, was created with bright colours for a warm sea; but that this other shell became bright-coloured by variation when it ranged into warmer or shallower waters.
When a variation is of the slightest use to a being, we cannot tell how much of it to attribute to the accumulative action of natural selection, and how much to the conditions of life.”

When was it he went down the river, out through the harbour, into the wide wide seas? It was on Mr Hubbel’s yacht. Mrs Hubbel lolled on the deck in her string bikini. Thomas, she said, am I a cliché? Thomas replied: You are a beautiful cliché, it’s true. A beautiful cliché. This clearly delighted her and she asked for oil to be rubbed into her back. It will cook me a little more, she said. Mr Hubbel. Hopped from foot to foot at the wheel, singing: “Hadna sailed a league a league a league but barely three...” An apothecary is always good for oils, stuffs for rubbing. One night, Thomas recalled, he swam out to board Mr Hubbel’s yacht. In the wee hours, he basked beneath the moon. He snapped open the padlock to the cabin with the little jimmy bar he’d stuck in the band of his boardies for the purpose — it was but a little lock, a lock worth jimmying — and he’d curled up in the cabin to feel the rock the rock the lap lap lapping of the black and silver-rimmed waters against the hull. And then he swam back at dawn. Some bastard broke into the boat, Mr Hubbel said. I am going to put silver nitrate on the next lock and it’ll stain their fingers for good, stain their fingers for good. It was then that Thomas realised that Mr Hubbel alone could not read his mind, and that around Mr Hubbel he could think the worst things and get away with it. Or maybe that’s what he dreamt.

And thus Thomas spake when he emerged from his room. I asked him about all of the above, and he came back as he always did: I have written a poem. I asked: you have written a poem about writing novels? Stories? He said: I have simply written a simple poem. Is it about dragons? I asked. They are always about dragons, he replied. I said: But dragons are extinct. And Thomas replied: No, it’s a case of dragons becoming afraid to fly. Dragons are afraid of flying. But they are still there, resting, lying low, becoming part
of the landscape. You know, those dragon-teeth hills, the scorch-marks around ancient landforms. The scales we slide on making our way down from high places. The caves they light up like jewels: the petrified organs. I flew MMA when I was young, on my own. I like flying but I am afraid. That’s a definition of a door of perception, he added with a nervous but smug shrug of the shoulders. I am, he added, as the session ended, an alliterative and assonantal person. Oh, I almost forgot, here is the poem he handed me (which I emphatically believe was ghosted by the ghost of Henry):

I broke my fall
on the jagged edges
of the breakaway: a jolting
like the train, skewif
railway sleepers, pins
resting on oily beds
of blue metal.

The dragon tore
our travelling.
Our flight was rapid.
As rapid as red-tailed
black cockatoos
which aren’t astonishingly
fast, not like falcons,
but can wind it out
when they want to: as a flock,
individually.
As he handed me this poem, I noticed, again, the skin rubbed bare. I commented, and he said: Down to the whites of my eyes. I have laid aside discussing his ethnicity with him, his obsession for race. Each time, he rants against his “white heritage.” When I insist that he is not “white,” he rubs at his skin furiously. One time, he showed me his penis rubbed blood-raw and said: I am not a redskin. I fear that if I push this point too far he will be lost to me, to himself.
Migraine

Division of the Diseases of the Head

THESE diseases of the mind, forasmuch as they have their chief seat and organs in the head, which are commonly repeated amongst the diseases of the head which are divers, and vary much according to their site. For in the head, as there be several parts, so there be divers grievances, which according to that division of Heurnius (which he takes out of Arculanus,) are inward or outward (to omit all others which pertain to eyes and ears, nostrils, gums, teeth, mouth, palate, tongue, wesel, chops, face, &c.) belonging properly to the brain, as baldness, falling of hair, furfaire, lice. &c. Inward belonging to the skins next to the brain, called dura and pia mater, as all head-aches, &c., or to the ventricles. caules, kels, tunicles, creeks, and parts of it, and their passions, as caro, vertigo, incubus, apoplexy, falling sickness. The diseases of the nerves, cramps, stupor, convulsions, tremor, palsy: or belonging to the excrements of the brain. catarrhs, sneezing, rheums, distillations: or else those that pertain to the substance of the brain itself, in which are conceived frenzy, lethargy, melancholy, madness, weak memory, sopor, or Coma Vigilia et vigil Coma. Out of these again I will single such as properly belong to the phantasy, or imagination, or reason itself, which Laurentius calls the diseases of the mind; and Hildesheim, morbos imaginationis, aut rationis læsæ, (diseases of the imagination, or of injured reason,) which are three or four in number, phrensy, madness, melancholy, dotage, and their kinds: as hydrophobia, lycanthropia, Chorus sancti viti, morbi daemoniaci, (St. Vitus’s dance, possession of devils,) which I will briefly touch and point at, insisting especially in this of melancholy, as more eminent than the rest, and that through all his kinds, causes, symptoms, prognostics, cures: as Lonicerus hath done de apoplexia, and many other of such particular diseases. Not that I find fault with those which have written of this subject before; as Jason Pratensis, Laurentius, Montaltus, T. Bright. &c., they have done very well in their several kinds and methods; yet that which one omits, another may haply see; that which one contracts, another may enlarge. To conclude with Scribanius, “that which they had neglected, or profouncerly handled, we may more thoroughly examine; that which is obscurely delivered in them, may be perspicuously dilated and
amplified by us:” and so made more familiar and easy for every man’s capacity, and the common good, which is the chief end of my discourse.

Richard Burton, *Anatomy of Melancholia* (First Partition)

Thomas had suffered migraines since his last year of primary school. His were of the aura kind: a visual distortion preceding an attack that had him flat on his back in a darkened soundless space. Once at school he’d seen the teacher morph with the blackboard, and tried telling her so. She came down on him hard but he fell to the ground from his chair, cradling his head, the throbbing coming on fast and strong. Sent to the sickrooms, where the nurse placed him in a semi-dark and semi-silent room, telling him she’d have his mother pick him up. Every particle of light and every sound that made its way in slew his spirit. He could not differentiate. It did ease slowly, the pain and obfuscation, and he managed to distinguish words in the adjoining sick room. It was the nurse talking to someone who was likely in the toilet coming off that room. “Feel for it... find the strong.” Sounds of weeping and wailing, verging on hysteria: “it’s lost, it’s lost... it’s gone up in there.” He sensed a body eating in all directions. Eating itself out of house and home. He felt the waste in his intestine bulge and search for lateral escape routes. Then he experienced something like a short-circuit — for one of the few times in his life Thomas felt decidedly uncurious and even respectful of another’s privacy. He shook his head violently and the pain came back so intensely he could hear or see nothing through every sound and sight attacking his senses. He vomited green into the green half-darkness which became a sea of blue. Possession had its caring side... it came to him, a bolt out of the blue. Somewhere he’d mislaid his notebook, his little notebook of vampire poems. The change-room morons would get hold of it and attack his genitals. They attacked his genitals at any opportunity. He wants it sucked, they’d say... poofter bastard. His poems would circulate,
growing more tattered with their passing. Maybe he’d planned it this way. The headache, the distortion, the teacher ranting, his slipping from the table and dropping his notebook. Behind him the footy champion, his big paws reaching down to take a look, asking his girlfriend to decipher the symbols, the code. Long teeth buried in her neck, breasts, box. The footy champ getting hard. Blood rush to the head. Migraine all round. Maybe that was the way he wanted it?
My head on a placemat, the table is set. I chatter. I went inland to the wheat, then down to the sea. Then deeper in to the place of ore, where mountains are eaten away and cyclones are frequent. The odd-shaped lozenges of ore, rusty on my temporary bed-head. At Mill Stream the date palms cluster the waters. The range looks on. I remember tales of the Afghans and their palms. The planting. Oasis. Thomas went silent. Towns blossomed then with beer and porn. Towns that would never become old. Fly-in fly-out wealth. Where did you learn the name of this mob, Thomas? Yinjibarndi? I will travel further south, again, said Thomas. And he went down to the place where the wheat grew over the iron, where the mallee fowl watched the hills being eaten away by iron dragons. Time bulged out there, and Thomas sought a craft of healing as the hills shrank. He muttered a psalm. I am David, he said. How to make metal without ore, to manifest in air without residue. His twin selves wrestled. David says...

Each emptied from the decay of the other. Self-prescribing new growth of evergreens, analysing the wastes of the body. He wrote piss poems, made piss art. “That which is above is one with that which is below.” Resting during his travels — by the river, the river coiling past the university, he marvelled as two dolphins darted and surged through the shallows, almost beaching themselves. This hylozoic universe, this life come of dolphin flesh, water’s water. The matter-of-fact intactness of what he could see, described with certainty, leaving no doubt. No doubting Thomases. Here, he was only David wrought from *mysterium magnum*. He implored the river-water, he implored the water to fill the bit of his body that wasn’t water already. For it to arc out of its basin, over the thin whitish beach, onto the grassy foreshore, and to swallow him. A dolphin on its crest, slapping down. His dorsal fin. And then separated into a watery matrix, all loves would flow like the tributes of mining, of farming, of the material exercises of the valley. I would feed the city, then the sea. He would taste salt up from the sea, he would taste the sweetness of fresh rain, the bitterness of contaminants, the sour
threads of algae blooming red with the sun. And thus life. The life of Thomas and the life of David. In balance with the joys and miseries of water, he would reach... attain... *ens naturale*. Marketable, sporting — like skiers cutting the suddenly glass surface, all timing and indifference, sing-song salivating of adrenaline.

David revelled in cask wine. Mrs Hubbel liberated him with her panache and care, her red nails and wrap-around skirts. She had him in her lap, Riesling in one hand, a copy of *A Clockwork Orange* in the other, her belly busy hustling and bustling and jumping and teasing the cotton of her loosened waistline. She crooned unto young David: “But then I viddied that thinking is for the gloopy ones and the oomny ones’ use, like, inspiration and what Bog sends. For now it was lovely music that came to my aid, there was a window open with the stereo on and I viddied right at once what to do...” David’s eyes rotated not in imitation, not mimetically, swooned by the talk talk, a sequential disco of flexion, abduction, extension, adduction, the eyeing off, the apple, the bird, the whole circumduction of vision and sympathy. He did not want to poke her in the belly, but he did, but O so gently. He wouldn’t hurt a fly. He would embrace the new medicine. He would arise from the chaos. He would mix dolphin and river and tidal empathies of amniotic fluid. He would scour the tailings of the deepest mines, of the open-cuts, the pits wherein green water would gather though it was dry eleven months of the year. He eyed the gold on Mrs Hubbel’s Mr Hubbel-ring-finger. He thought of atomic weight: 196.966569. A compound: auric chloride. That’s just one possibility. The emergence of David. Mrs Hubbel put the book down and stroked his forehead. Thomas, she said, I pour my wine over your forehead as I would crouch on you and piss. Or, if you prefer, here are my waters. And pour she did. Poured over David and Thomas and the demiurge. *Ens veneni... ens veneni.*
I do not sleep, he said. I do not and cannot sleep. Do you wish to sleep? Sometimes. Mostly not.

It’s only a twenty-two bolt action rifle, but I like to know it’s there. When I’m up there, I take it out of its carry bag, and drop the pendulum through the barrel, tauten the thread, and pull the brush through. It amazes me how much residue is left in there after just a few shots. My father has a thing against parrots. Against twenty-eights. I told him they are my bird, my totem, but that makes no difference. Maybe he shoots a few more. Eat the fruit, he says. Early mornings and evenings you’ll hear their cries as they flock in, especially during fruit season. Then pop pop pop. It’s only got a small clip magazine — holds eight bullets, and you’ve got to flip the bolt back for each single shot — but he can get them off fast. Sometimes he lies in waiting, and uses ratshot on them. I can see the little lead dots opening out of the crimped brass case. He says to me: not much good, the ratshot, I need to get a twelve-gauge shotgun. But I like the rifle, and I rub oil into the gun metal, and I keep the bolt folding smoothly, and I work linseed oil into the butt. The telescopic is old, but it gets reset every year and is pinpoint accurate. Plinking cans, short solid bullets do me, but Dad always goes for longs with hollow points. Amazing the damage a small calibre can do if the bullet moves fast enough and spreads out on impact. Sometimes when my thoughts are too loud to cope with, and day after day of wakefulness has made it difficult to walk in a straight line, I think over the wisdom of the fast bullet, the hollow point. I am not for a violent revolution, though.

Why do you want to join one of the factions in Italy?
I don’t like the military-industrial complex. It is the root of all evil. It has many faces. I don’t want to hurt people, but objects...
Surely violence is violence?
Yes, violence is violence.
I walked down to the river one day. Just got up mid-lecture. We were talking about Agamemnon’s mask. That beaten gold mask. He was talking about it, we were listening. But I was talking back, you know, conversing silently. He was talking to me only, though not looking at me. I was in Troy. I was an archaeologist. Then I needed to walk down to the river. Near where the boats are. I’d been out on one of those yachts with Mr and Mrs Hubbel and their menagerie. We’d drunk wine and sniffed laughing gas and giggled into the twilight. I’d trailed my hand in the water and flotillas of brown, white speckled jellyfish collided with it. Or vice versa. I didn’t get stung. Then down at the river mid-lecture, I saw half-a-dozen of the same species of jellyfish marooned on the river’s edge. I directed some back into the water, scooping them up. They floated back in. I waded out and trawled them in my hands. They caught one of the micro-currents, one of the eddies of the bay and went elsewhere. Back on the shore, two of the jellyfish had already dried out and set as discs in the sun. Beneath, their propulsion and feeding units, their tentacles, had dried like half-moons.

*

Grandma Flynn tells me I walked before I crawled.

Did you speak early?

Apparently so, but I said the same things for a long time. Nothing more.

What?

Big small big small big small...
Not Mum or Dad?

No, big small big small big small...

In that order?

Yes, I always said big first.

Your parents were big and you were small.

No, I was big and they were small.

When did you first see the unicorn? Was it around the same time that you saw the dragon?

Dragons. There were more than one of them. There was only one unicorn. There is only one unicorn. And it’s a white unicorn.

Naturally.

Don’t patronise me.

I wasn’t. It just seems natural that it be white. I am quite serious.

I saw them not long after I dreamt of polar bears.

You could speak then?

Only big small big small. I dreamt the other night — I only dozed briefly — that on another planet this guy made his living hiring out polar
bears for sexual gratification. For human sexual gratification. Seriously, I dreamt this. Maybe I read it somewhere, maybe I just dreamt it. Anyway, this guy lived on an icy planet and drove this snowmobile around with a huge cage dragged behind it. He kept an assortment of female polar bears locked away in separate compartments. He had his small son with him, who stayed in the snowmobile while his dad did business. When they reached a miner — it was a planet inhabited by small-stakes miners...

What were they mining?

I have no idea. It didn’t seem relevant.

Anyway, the miner would pick a bear, then the bear man would shoot it with a sedative dart, and when it was groggy enough, let the miner in to have his way — whatever his way was — while the other polar bears gnashed and growled and struck at the mesh walls of their cage compartments.

Were you the little boy left in the snowmobile?

Maybe. Though I seemed to have an omniscient point of view. I could see everything happening simultaneously.

Did the dream distress you?

What do you think? Of course it disturbed me. I thought there might be something really wrong in my clockwork. But then, dreams are a cleaning-out, aren’t they? I’ve let it go.
Thomas found Henry at the train station, studying the Midland line timetable. One due in ten minutes, he said. Due to leave for Midland. Thomas sat down beside Henry on the bench, pushed back his tangled hair, scratched the twists and urgings of a beard, and dropped his head down between his knees. Henry kept studying his timetable. Thought I might have a drink in Midland, he said. Walk up to the rail yards and chew the fat with a few of the old timers there. Some good union action there back in my time. Meant business. Thomas whipped his head back up, reached into his jacket pocket and pulled out a curled book. Still studying his timetable, Henry said: What you got there, Thomas? What are you reading? Villon’s Testament, said Thomas. I have been annotating it.

* 

I found those poems I’d misplaced.

Your dragon poems?

Yes. I had left them at the station. A girl with very white legs who smokes a lot picked them up. She returned them this morning. She said she hadn’t read them.

You look disappointed. You’d left them there for her to pick up and read?

Yes, yes, I had. I’ve been trying to make contact with her. I think she had read them, though.

How could you tell?
I don’t know.

Is what’s written on the page the same as what you think when she hears your thoughts on the train?

Yes. The poems are in my head and they are overheard. But other people only hear the words and don’t see a picture — the layout, the design — as I do. I suppose if she even glanced at them on the page what she’d been hearing, at times, would have fallen into place.

I’d like to see them on the page. Did you bring them along?

Thomas reached down to his briefcase. He’d just acquired it at a second-hand shop. Vinyl and board. He zipped it open and produced a manila folder labelled “Dragon Poems.” He opened the folder a crack, peeked into it, and slipped a sheet out crisply. He held it up in the air at an angle, so he and anyone else in front of him might see the text. The paper, with the window behind it, cast a shadow over the emptiness. He read aloud:

A cauldron on our bundle
of wealth: ash of paper money

coins as eyes, the dead
mortgaging the dead.

How bright a day can be
when fire licks out
of the cavern, adds to daylight?

Heat and its sources. Accumulation.

Folded in, the fluvial warmth, seahorses and their young vying, bobbing inside the current.
Confirmation was Thomas’s affirmation to drink. I hail thee my All Things in Moderation Church. Sunday School had shown him the fiery furnace and the sufferings of Job. He was appreciative. He liked the cloth of the offering bag. When the plate was passed around, the All Things in Moderation Church wanted no embarrassment, in any direction. The men standing at the ends of pews waiting to take it back after it had made its way down one, then up the one behind, back to the men, then another U-sequence repeated. Watching over, Thomas knew — not just helping things run smoothly. Then the little envelopes slipped into the cloth bags, plush as kingdoms, on the flat austere bare wooden plate. Wooden plate-bowl. Yes, the envelopes plotted out ahead, the families with a little more giving a little more on a weekly basis. Marked on the front. Totted up. And Thomas with his twenty-cent piece, anonymously onto the hoard, into the pile. And the vestry kept going. And so the minister fed his family. And so the church newsletter and so the electricity bill. Special occasions: starving children on the front of special day envelopes. Out into the wider world. Out to where the All Things in Moderation evangelists pecked just a little of the pile for their costs overheads upkeep to pass on what’s left. A well. A school. Medicine. In small doses. Not good for recruitment to solve all problems at once. And the organ, the little organ going phweet phew faw phweet phaw few... His voice cracked as he was confirmed. He sang low, then uncontrollably high, wrecking the song. Someone laughed. That’s not done in the All Things In Moderation Church where there’s a Time and a Place. One Sunday he got an erection and never went thar again... Organ organism ora orang orgy oral ora onanism. The mistake, he yelled, is in the cross. The cross, the wine, the bread!

*
What about sport? Do you play sport? Did you play much at school?

High school? I can’t recall primary school. Not at the moment. Maybe another time. It’s a mood thing. Affect thing. You know. We were forced to play, but I resisted.

How was that?

School was a place of ungrowing. Of being crushed and humiliated.

Were you crushed and humiliated?

I resisted.

How did you resist?

I avoided the change-rooms, I read *Das Kapital* and *Le Rouge et le noir* in the library.

They had Stendhal in your school library?

No, I brought a copy from home. I read fast, but I read it slowly. It took me a year of sports time.

And Marx?

They had Marx — they taught history. It took me two years of sports time to read *Kapital*. I slowed the pace of the world down. I read it outside my usual timeframe. Sport does that.
You enjoyed history?

Thomas took work in the State Laboratory. It was an easy bus ride. And not far from the cricket ground. He could watch Western Australia when he finished work at five. If the light was okay, when they were playing at home, the match would go until at least six each day. He couldn’t believe his luck. He’d topped the state in his TAE chemistry exam. Let it pay dividends. First morning, he ran into the head honcho, the head chemist. Not so old. Slick. Gold chain. Very white teeth. English accent. Cut above. Why did you drop out of uni? he asked. Can you be trusted to stick with this for a while? I need a break, Thomas said. In his white lab gown, he looked intense. He had brushed his hair. He stood upright. A pair of safety glasses — his own — swam in the top pocket of his school lab coat. Just need a change. Good experience working in private labs during the holidays for the mineral industry? Yes. We will have to contact your referee... Henry X? Yes, managed my busyness in the lab. Okay. You have used a spectrometer? Easy enough. Prepare the solutions, put them through, record the results, and clean up after yourself. Yes, I can do that. The chemist laughed. He laughed very hard. Sorry mate, nothing that grand. You’ll be cleaning glassware. You’d need to be qualified to do anything more. You don’t even have a lab assistant’s certificate. In those private labs no one gives a damn, but this is government-run, and there’s such a thing as standards. Scrutiny. I know how to make LSD, Thomas replied. And small creatures that look like babies. This was true, as we know.

*
Mrs Hubbel like the dandy likes the sickly sweet pole-vaulter of the suburbs especially when they’ve absconded from the country, from the back blocks, from the paddocks, and have taken up the call of the sophisticate, have made the break with all that was and all they were, will call a hick a hick, and listen to recitals in the university music room with legs crossed and nod at the right times and drink south-western wines with the odd bottle of French of German or even Spanish plonk thrown in, who will only venture back to the country to peruse old buildings at New Norcia and try the monks’ wares or to travel down down to Mount Barker to bring back cases of the best red direct. Mrs Hubbel will lap that dandy up who has crossed over, come over to her side, who will shop for silver cigarette cases and smoke Dunhill Reds and sit in her sports car as she races through the beach-side suburbs, who will whisper tales of play with oik girls smoking behind the bushes, up on the oval, being bad where the skies are wide and the roads go on and on and triple-trailer triremes ply the trade routes, their cargoes of slaves heading to their doom. She told Thomas once, beneath the phallus swinging in its sling above their convulsions, that she had fancied, had sampled a soldier, a young member of the Australian Defence Force, and that he’d told her of his brutalities, of his stripping down a “black bastard” out in the bush, that humiliation is the Australian Way and that God’s Own country is made more Godly this way and she said: I wouldn’t tell my friends who are O so judgemental but it did whet my appetite and I tell you now to get you going. Thomas stopped mid-convulsion. His J-stroke of lightning apprehension. But that is wrong, Mrs Hubbel, so very wrong. But you must stomach my adorations, she came back, because your insides will hurt and you need to let it out and you’ve got me up the duff and will be held accountable: a relationship is a sharing and a bit of me is part of you and vice versa. Thomas shook and the four-poster bed shook with him. What have I left behind and what have I become? He pictured Therese and resumed his ridings, the smile on Mrs
Hubbel’s dial so devout, beatific. Am I that skilled? he wondered. Mrs Hubbel laughed inside, he knew, I am her puppy love.

*

The Dragon Strip Club. Thomas visited thrice. The girls had dragon tattoos on their bellies. He shuffled nervously before the magazines. The man without shape behind the counter watched him, Thomas could tell. Thomas took a tissue from his pocket and used it to flick the corners of the upright stacks of mags. Cherry. Anal. Black. Asian. A cornucopia of cunts, cocks, tits, anuses. And cum. A squirtfest. He screwed the tissue up and carefully placed it in a plastic bag he had in his pocket. He sidled over to the counter. A strip? the shapeless man asked, suggested. Yes. Two girls are on today. An Asian girl and an English girl. She is from England? Thomas asked. No, she’s Australian-English. The Asian girl is not from Australia? Wouldn’t know. Well, she’s a Boat People. A Boat Person. From Vietnam. You know, Hello Charlie. Thomas thought, it’s a tangled web we weave. The Asian girl will throw in extras, if you know what I mean, the shapeless man nudged. Thomas would wash his clothes scrupulously later. You can see both in the peeps. Thomas changed ten dollars into twenty-cent pieces and went through the peeps door. It was sticky on the floor and Thomas knew he’d have to burn his boots afterwards. He avoided touching anything, but crouched like the Hunchback of Notre Dame, and dropped his coins into the slot and the light came up and the girls came in and wiggled close to the slot, one then the other, then both together further back. Panorama. I will have them both, he decided. Removing another tissue he opened the door, handle inured from his flesh, and paid the man forty dollars: I will take both for fifteen minutes. And into the strip room whence they shortly appeared, Thomas naked from the belly down, sitting on the bed on his jacket, another item lost. A box of Kleenex on a table nearby did not lure him, all those
wanky sticky hands having reached there before, and he pulled his own wad of tissues out to clean up his emissions once the performance was done. In their lingerie, they appeared and kissed and the English girl flicked on the cassette player and Supernaut’s “I Like it Both Ways” came on loud... “He goes out on the town/ and flashes it around.” Thomas remembered his ex-friend at school whose dad had built a bunker for his guns, for bombs and ammunition a-plenty. He remembered riding on the big old tractor out past the bunker: chug a chug a chug a chug. It was closer to a traction engine than a tractor: his ex-friend’s dad valued the old Brit engineering, the honest age of steam. Thomas’s ex-friend trained to kill with one punch, and he read Michael Herr’s Dispatches like mantra: “After enough time passed and memory receded and settled, the name itself became a prayer, coded to go past the extremes of petition and gratitude: Vietnam Vietnam Vietnam, say again, until the word lost all its loads of pain, pleasure, horror, guilt, nostalgia.” It’s the triptych, Thomas thought. The three panels of Hieronymus — Heteronymous — Bosch. Three panels. Not three panels becoming four. Sure of that? Sure. As he tugged in time with the other two, the room made the girl from school whose father had died in Nam all the more present, her saying: I know what you’d be like, Thomas. I know. And he wondered why it came to him now stronger than ever, that he would eventually convert to Judaism, as he’d promised another ex-friend a couple of years back. Believing in the taboos. Believing in the origins. The dragons breathed fire into each other and race burnt itself out, nation around its ankles, kicked into the corner. I have been reading Portnoy’s Complaint, he screamed at the girls, who’d finished their show and said: See you next time, Charlie. I am what I read. I am choiceless, that is, sans choice. Ill-directed. See you next time — we care too much. Thomas hung his head, then perked up: The Shapeless Guy said something about extras? The girls looked at each other and smiled, friendly-like. The Holy Roman Emperor Charles V sent Francisco Pizarro out to make wealth. Santiago Santiago Santiago! Do you
have pity for Atahualpa? Thomas rhetorically asked the whirling girls. Time had stopped and the cassette had stopped with it, but still the girls whirled and the streets were paved with gold.

*

Hugh had another gem. Hugh the handler. Panhandler. He had a sheaf of Doré’s prints. Image to Inferno 21 is the one you want, Thomas. There’s also Francesca and Paolo in there. Thomas swirled. Yes, Therese and me, earlier, incarnation-wise. Yes, that’s it, said Hugh. And Virgil being attacked by the demons. It is said that if you spill some of your own blood onto this engraving, you will bring the picture to life. Hugh the considerate. Hugh the facilitator. Thomas paid Hugh and backed out of the shop into Trinity Arcade. It was such a narrow shop. Tardis shop, with so many books piled high. Place of treasures. Hugh called after him: Now, just a drop of blood, Thomas; too much and Virgil will be let loose. A few demons aren’t going to make much difference, but Virgil loose in Perth could be a problem. It’s only an hour by bus and he’d be out in the wheatbelt. The ramifications are horrendous. So just a little dash, a pinprick, a blood-brother overflow onto the page, and it will glow. Same with Francesca and Paolo, just a drop of blood and it will be cinema. Thomas remembered the premiere of Poseidon Adventure he’d gone to with Grandma Flynn. She knew someone who knew someone. A radio personality had opened the show. On with the show, folks, this is it.
Thomas inhaled the smell of himself. He was hyper-sensitive to smell. It pained him to smell the smells of the world. Helen’s was not an inviting odour, when it was blended together. Helen, taken by Paris to Troy. It was not the cause of the war. The war was spatial, economic, ideological. All told. The smell of Old Henry was... inviting. Thomas had wandered here with Old Henry, on many a swarthy eve. Treasured memories. He watched the police cruising the park, slowing down by the swings, the slides, sticking their noses through tears in the cyclone mesh enclosing the storm drain,
rushing the toilet block. Homo Watch. Official policy. Someone’s in for a beating, he thought. He took the Doré demon print out of its folder, pricked his finger with his pocketknife, and spilt a small drop of blood directly on to one of the demons. Naturally, the world smelt sulphurous and shitty. A demon lifted off the page and darted towards the MEN’S. I am not a vindictive person, Thomas said to himself, but that’ll give those cops something to go on about. Seek and ye shall find. He was not proud of himself. Spring, and the world smelt overwhelmingly now of daisies. He poured half-a-dozen jubes of Irish Moss into his palm and tossed them into his mouth. His olfactories flooded, he chewed and swallowed. I am Chu Chulain, he declared, enemy of all Poofter Bashers, and he sauntered back down to the city centre, taller than he’d ever been before. A giant in a sea of uniforms.

*

In the citadel’s chambers, inherent to its architecture, were gardens that swept between planets. From Radion across the Galactic Union of Worlds to Earth itself. Following with outpourings of waterfalls, Prince Planet came across pools of jewels and columns of petrified wood. There was no nature in there, only dead nature or built nature. He felt the forces of evil approaching and he used the energy of his pendant to transform a piece of petrified wood into a living tree, with whose energy he protected himself. The pendant’s energy diminished, he waited — as Thomas waited — for it to be recharged from the tower on Radion. I am Bobby, I am Bobby, he repeated, as Warlock approached, flanked by the giant naiads. Warlock was saying, I constructed all of this, this beautiful trap for you, Prince Planet. He quoted in a slippery, mesmeric voice:

Not trees, but colonnades
Surrounded the dormant ponds
In which gigantic naiads,
Like women, were reflected.

There’s no hiding from desire, Prince Planet. So quoth Thomas, the drug in his veins, and his face breaking into constant nervous laughter. This is my proof, he said. This is all the proof we need.

*

Mr Hubbel had a scheme. Do you have friends who could shift this stuff, Thomas? Thomas said: I despise profit, Mr Hubbel, and cannot help you. But surely, Mr Hubbel said, you’d enjoy the decline and chaos it would bring? My business is not doing so well and I have ways and means of procuring powders that some would pay plenty for. No records, and as clean as the day they were invented. I hear that the more pure, the more likely there’ll be deaths. The surprise of it, said Thomas. You’d wipe out your customers quick smart. True, said Mr Hubbel, there is much to be said for cutting. Well, I can cut pure as the driven snow. Low percentage, but nothing that will cook the circulatory system. Thomas turned to his Leader, and said: Virgil, now you can make a trumpet of his rump. Virgil replied: Why thank you, Thomas, I have always enjoyed Mr Longfellow’s take on things. Thomas lamented: I am without feelings, I only have opinions.

*

The crows, always the crows. He communed with them. Parrots chopped past fast. Thomas lifted the rock and revealed the centipede. It was blue, and forks waved at each end. The pale twinings of roots made a bed, which it had excavated. A mish-mash. The centipede’s rest had been
disturbed. At night it would be scouring, hunting. Black ants immediately rushed in and tried out the quarry. Enemies. The centipede whipped around and the ants backed off, communicating something somewhere. The rock itself, the lid to the centipede’s underworld, was a chip of exfoliated granite encrusted with lichen. Way above it, the arched branch of a York gum. He could smell the sweating eucalypt leaves. The oil. The sun strobed through. All time stood still for Thomas. This is my day out of the city, he said to the centipede — my return to the native. He replaced the rock carefully. The wind had picked up in the few minutes he had studied the micrology. It smelt of the sea. A seabreeze that has crossed the city and the hills and found me, he thought. It smells of people. Of the beasts of the city. He pinched his nose. I cannot hear things so well now — the sheep still muffle through, the birds, and insects moving over the leaf litter. But it is blurring. The sea breeze strengthened.

* 

An ill wind blew the day Thomas gave up eating. He told Henry: It’s offensive. The body is an offence. Henry shuffled across the room with his dry toast, cooked on the wire toaster over the gas flame. Sorry, Thomas, but I’ve got to eat something. Been shitting liquid for days. That port we’ve been hoeing into. It’s rough. You should put some food into your belly as well. I am not going to eat again. They’ll put you on a drip and feed you that way, Thomas. I’ll tear the drip from my arm. Henry shook his head and sat in his armchair. The toast crumbled as he bit into it, falling by the wayside, onto his lap. The old man tried to catch the pieces, but they fell to the floor. There’s something wrong with you, boy, he said between the crumbs. Eating is a beautiful thing, it’s one of the pleasures of life. It is the beginning of all sins, said Thomas. It is the alpha and omega. “Then I set my face toward the Lord God to make request by prayer and supplications, with fasting,
sackcloth, and ashes.” I renounce sustenance entirely, and will wander out into the Negev, and further into the Wilderness of Zin. Eventually I will crumble like the crumbs of your toast, trodden into the floor. My remains will become dust not far from Kadesh Barnea.

*

In his reversion or conversion or desiccation to dust, Thomas contemplated the nature of nostalgia. He said to himself: I remember the first camera I was allowed to use — a Box Brownie. Grandma taught me to load the film — a yellow Kodak film on two spools stretched over the space behind the lens. Closing the trapdoor. The strap cradling the hand against the box. The viewer, distorting as a showground mirror. Many cameras came later. His father had once owned a Land Camera but later favoured the colour pack Polaroid. His father didn’t have much interest in photography, but loved the Instant Camera. He was slick at pulling the photograph out, waving it, waiting the precise amount of time before peeling the wraps off to reveal what had just been seen, what had just been captured. In the albums, those photos were fading and discolouring. Chemical breakdown. Thomas had been given an old Canon 35mm camera but he hungered after the positive-negative dichotomy of his father’s chosen vessel. A Polaroid to photograph myself in the final stages. A self-witnessing. Way up north in a shot-hole canyon, his father had photographed Thomas pointing to something up on a ledge. Thomas couldn’t remember what it was, and the photo had faded too much to decipher — rock and sky had become one. Each component is of itself, he said, though one would expect them to be separate. The Polaroid is... was... the alchemist’s machine — a tool of Nostalgia, a medicine bag, a remnant of imagination. Like hair still growing after our deaths. It was all chemical, electrical. He’d known this in the womb. Flash packs. Flash bulbs. Flash cubes. You can taste the acridity of
the light-bursts. Smell them. Watch them collapse after going supernova, get lost in their wiry fractures. Thomas would stare and stare at the flashes. Setting cubes off with a battery. Driving himself to convulsions. An affirmation of life, he said. But on the flipside... the delays in developing, development, fixing the pictures. The loss of stories that — once — surrounded the pictures.
I’ll bring the nightmares ...

I end up in No Place. A vast dark green plastic sac I stumble within, each sludge step twisting the sac around so I go nowhere. I am always at the same spatial co-ordinates and there’s No Time. I do see other opportunities, though, and can take none of them. If I were to paint those “visions,” they would be funnels. Coronal funnels. They are my taunts — a lover of night, I am placed in No Place where darkness — my living body the luminous, numinous, illumination — is circumscribed by solar winds out of the funnels. And it is so disturbing to the touch. The grease on the cogs of the chaff-cutter: wet and dry, over-intense viscosity facing off with the dust. So intermeshed. In the hegemony of machinery I swerve like a hand dragged into the working parts. Remorselessly eaten. All eating ends, and all learning. Language inimical to freedom, I keep at the membraneous walls, my open mouth equating to pleasure without the stricture of definition. It’s a narrative ploy, my being outside myself, describing my actions in the plastic sac. Treading water in my own stomach, gall bladder. Or further out, omniscient. Dirt under the nails, smell of underwear worn for days, the need to wash out the crevices of fingerprints. Its construction I wish to delete. I wish as s/he. It irks so. It coagulates.
S/he rides what she eats. S/he tugs the woolly forelocks, and enters the hall to slay the suitors. A hot wind rushes across the bay which is mica, glistening and bloody with her severed penis. The piss fountains, and they all drink deep, begging for mercy. It is harvest and appeasement is made. Local elections. The donkey-voters place Chrissy decorations in the main street. They are the national colours plus red. They are the we-they. Us by indirection, all curable. In the meaty paddocks they slay for the feast. Snicker snack. Looking at the bits they shouldna. We-they watch the rootings, the breeding manifests, the fondue they’ll share on the wealthiest property. Old money old land early gun-slits in the masonry. As the blacks came down from the hills the rifles sang their sing-song. Outswung us, family... I’ll bring the nightmares.
“Then I stood on the sand of the sea. And I saw a beast rising up out of the sea...”

Thomas walked to the end of Busselton Jetty and awaited the beast’s arrival. A driving wind and spray and the old jetty seemed to be swaying. A large fish will be caught here, he said. The technology of capture, rending. A great fish with an identifiable tail, but the rest of its body will be a surprise, unimagined. Embryology. Abnormality. Something was seeping in, penetrating him with the arrows of spray. A common foundation, for a science of... A relative, or a bunch of relatives, had been whalers. Off the coast, reeling them in. The big beasts. Thomas had been in their tunnel near Fremantle, leaning up against the wall, his head kicked in. Dirty prick, they’d said to him. Queer bastard. Technology. He’d sat there, propped up, broken. Waiting for someone to pass by, to hoist him up, set him sailing out to sea, away from the rocks. He waited. Then he went down to Bathers’ Bay and washed and anointed his own wounds. He went to the scrub-line along the limestone walls and retrieved a bottle of Green Ginger wine and drank deep, deep. It warmed him and the wounds throbbed less viciously. Redemption, he cried.

He’d wished in his dreams the night before, and not forgotten his wish. He waited now as the leviathan approached for their fulfilment. Filaments. Fulminations. I am what I read, he declared not for the first time. I bring the inland to you. He felt as old as André. He discovered that he was not male. He realised he was alone at this moment of confrontation and that there was no one around to record the event, to tell his story. The weather was too rough, and only a fool would be over a mile out to see on a wooden structure already pummelled and damaged by storms, long neglected. He thought: someone brought me here, to jolt a memory, to end my dreams. I
won’t give them up that easily. He took a handful of pills and dropped them into the sea. This will calm the beast down, I no longer have need of them.

He wondered why Therese had deserted him when it counted. He wondered about his parents, the Hubbels, Saratino, Darwin, Themistocles, Paracelsus, Ezra Pound, Catherine, Mary, Grandma Flynn, Callimachus, the Chimney Sweep, even Zek and Peter and ... he couldn’t remember who else. Dragons didn’t enter his thoughts, which gradually became entirely fixed on the approaching bulge of water, giant wave with waves furious about it. It will come as a mist, as a surge, and sweep us away, he thought. Music: the harpsichord. Goldberg Variations. Theatre with the Hubbels. The Hole in the Wall. Suburbs and restaurants. He’d been here and there, wandered between them all. Each event succinct, memorable. The black and white television giving way to colour. The saturated colours. His mother liked the colours deeper than real life: made it special. Grandma Flynn working the pressure cooker. Cooks faster. Basic technology. The university: the Arts building, the peacocks, the New Fortune Theatre. Heaven, earth, hell cascading. He smiled, though his glasses were reshaping around his head and he could barely see the shape. The shape of things to come... This is my supreme Luddite moment, he said. Shelley has already gone under, it’s a while yet before Byron sinks:

As the Liberty lads o’er the sea
Bought their freedom, and cheaply, with blood,
   So we, boys, we
Will die fighting, or live free,
And down with all kings but King Ludd!

When the web that we weave is complete,
And the shuttle exchanged for the sword,
   We will fling the winding-sheet
O’er the despot at our feet,
And dye it deep in the gore he has pour’d.

Though black as his heart its hue,
Since his veins are corrupted to mud,
Yet this is the dew
Which the tree shall renew
Of Liberty, planted by Ludd!

Thomas laughed as he sang blindly into the wind, into the gaping mouth of the beast drinking the sea, closing on the jetty timbers, the guts of the forest his family had logged, had “settled.” I am culpable! he cried. I am accountable. The beast reared up. Smash the state! it bellowed. Thomas opened his arms and embraced what was to come. It’s like freshly-laundered cotton snug against the genitals, he thought... no better feeling, something worth dying for. The storm ceased. The horizon stretched blood: romantic, poetic, pandemic. The world, was indeed, pretty.
Coda: The Phrasing of After Death Images

I say, that’s me, Thomas, that Old Meph translates as: I see myself partially but take all of you in in a glance. The “you” interests me. Me? I’d say so, that personal relationship I have. So, I’ll tell you, I did dress up as Henry and appear to Therese in a dream. You — you — know the story of those Halcyon birds and the floating nest and those few days of calm passage for mariners. So I turn up in her dream as dead Henry and she wakes and goes to the shore to weep buckets and become a bird. Fact is, I’m a damn good impersonator. She didn’t dream it was me for a minute. She wept to her handmaidens in the morning. She tore at her hair — all punked out. And I heard Armand-Louis Couperin in her head, so loud and clear, like a place we know well and associate with sounds and sights and tastes we experience elsewhere. Therese only dreams in sonatas, so it’s a matter of timing — butting in. I painted a backdrop, a picture for her to configure Henry against, his drowned self. Like an AA meeting at Holyoake Drug and Alcohol Reform Centre: Ulysses Deriding Polyphemus. Turner’s turning point, said Ruskin, resay “I” via another “I.” This Latinate stuck stuff, like the fluttering upper chambers of the heart. Imagine, such a young bloke as you in there on your last legs, as legless as Henry, among the old dying women, dying. Imagine. It’s such an urge to get to the depths of the human character, reply I. The doctor brings the interns around in the morning and they all touch you, Thomas Icarus! The wonder of the pisspot and how orange sick urine, that cleanest of fluids, becomes. Good taste prevents me saying more, the curtains so thin. The wonderful violence of hospitals. Extractions and intrusions. Ah, “Suite en si bémol”! I change, I change. It’s not what it looks like as I sign out, sign back in. I am not sure what it is that keeps the signatory steady. And their show of faith in the dead, as if ghosts had rights.
The large bear-like man who exposes himself to the girls in between the corridors has had his medication increased. It helps, he says, it helps. And then he’s alone. He fossicks about the toilet as if there is no other world. But I am not part of that now because my fluids are fluids of the sea. You can see my particles swishing back and forth thirty years later before the windows of the underwater observatory at the end, the distant end, of the storm-battered Busselton jetty. The history of family and Therese and even Henry tied up in that. He used to fish there as a boy and you know what Thoreau says about poets and fishing... Henry, and his flimflam language, his impressing Therese, his visitations. Our little triangle broken. Isosceles triangle. Ah, solutio! So big, his dead cock, his dead Henry cock of religion. He believed so wholeheartedly in his blasphemy. And all I ever wanted to do was blend meld run into the fluid of Therese. To drink her blood and have her drink mine. We old pair from oldest times. Henry, that interloper, that doubter. He once killed a man, you know. So no triangle knows the way down, no leadweight to hold a fishing line with deadly hooks, to rip the jaw of the big fish. No running out into the greater water like ancestors’ graves too close to the shoreline. Which will always change, as Midas drank gold and the river benefited from his change of heart. Each component of time, each passing, leaves me open-mouthed waiting to drink it all in and burst. This marking, this passing. O mighty God Terminus, consider the boundaries of the city, the district, the region, the surrounding ocean. O Kan, my little bubble belly that makes a new Therese to unleash on the dead world. It burns in the water, this spread of self everywhere currents are, everywhere she goes, everywhere I follow.
John Kinsella is the author of many books of poetry, fiction, criticism and plays. He is a frequent collaborator with other poets, critics, fictionalists, artists, musicians, labourers, activists and friends. Recent fiction includes *In the Shade of the Shady Tree* (Ohio University Press, 2012), recent poetry includes *Jam Tree Gully* (WW Norton, 2012), and recent criticism includes *Activist Poetics: Anarchy in the Avon Valley* (Liverpool University Press, 2010). He is a Professorial Research Fellow at the University of Western Australia, a Fellow of Churchill College, Cambridge University, and the poetry editor for the literary journal *Island*. But most relevantly, he is an anarchist-vegan-pacifist.