

The Alps: Aphoristic Logico-Psychoanalysis

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts at George Mason University

by

Blake Wallin  
Bachelor of Arts  
Wheaton College, 2015

Director: Sally Keith, Professor  
Department of English

Spring Semester 2020  
George Mason University  
Fairfax, VA

## Table of Contents

	Page
Abstract . . . . .	iv
1. . . . .	1
I. In Which the Patient Votes . . . . .	2
II. In Which the Patient Death-Defies Slowly. . . . .	3
III. In Which the Patient Treats Himself. . . . .	4
::Incident:JesusinHeart:: . . . .	5
IV. In Which the Patient Has Acute Heartache. . . . .	7
V. In Which the Patient Discovers a Problem. . . . .	8
VI. In Which the Patient Goes Clubbing. . . . .	9
::Incident:FirstGradeBleachers:: . . . .	10
VII. The Patient Learns His Lesson. . . . .	12
VIII. The Patient Becomes a Joke. . . . .	14
::Incident:Writing:: . . . .	15
IX. The Patient Thinks Twice. . . . .	17
X. The Patient Etherizes Himself. . . . .	18
::Incident:TheLordoftheRings:: . . . .	19
XI. In Which Patience Is Learned. . . . .	21
::Incident:Novel1:TheKingpinKangaroos:: . . . .	23
XII. In Which the Patient Is an Actor on the World Is a Stage. . . . .	25
::Incident:Nick:: . . . .	26
2. . . . .	28
XIII. In Which the Patient Acts. . . . .	29
XIV. In Which the Patient Senses, Tells Tales, Kept Time. . . . .	30
XV. In Which the Patient Goes Total Recall. . . . .	31
::Incident:Classics:: . . . .	32
XVI. In Which the Patient Had Rabies . . . . .	34
XVII. In Which the Patient Ate a Banquet . . . . .	35
::Incident:Europe:: . . . .	36
XVIII. In Which the Patient Told Time. . . . .	38
XIX. In Which the Patient Returned to Logic . . . . .	39
::Incident:Mason:: . . . .	40
XX. The Patient Visited the Rothko Chapel. . . . .	42
::Incident:Tennis:: . . . .	48

3.....	50
4.....	54

## Abstract

### THE ALPS: APHORISTIC LOGICO-PSYCHOANALYSIS

Blake Wallin

George Mason University, 2020

Thesis Advisor: Sally Keith

In which memory is brought to heel by the overwhelming concern of the superego. Semper fidelis into the long, bright, winding hallway of the soul, only to emerge back into the body.

The body has always been the you.

1.

- I. In Which the Patient Votes
  - 1 Freud waves his genitals at a face no longer caring that what came before us divides its lines along nil.
    - 1.01 I cared for those things that brought me nothing but the unearned joy of a morning's rest.
      - 1.1 We farmers bleat along our own fields like the sheep that led its shepherd towards other pastures.
      - 1.2 One thing we don't understand is your readiness to call a spade anything but a spade.
        - 1.21 Defrost your conceptions away from what I surely have no business hearing.
        - 1.22 Your state legislature looks different – oh my, did we do something to it?
      - 1.3 Put some weight upon the light fixture, for it looks as lonely as a granite headstone.
        - 1.31 Elegy only looks like a Trojan Horse, when you look a gift horse in its lacquered wooden mouth.
        - 1.32 Your death was/has met with local town officials.
      - 1.4 Why you have brought this destruction on your own head is beyond me.
        - 1.41 But then again, I don't understand our state legislature, and maybe the ballot broke.
      - 1.5 Vote me into oblivion, and I promise to meet you at the end of Voting Day.

- II. In Which the Patient Death-Defies Slowly
- 2 The properly lexical understanding of Freudian discourse died with the last of Freud's patients to die, kaput.
- 2.1 When one lies on the couch, a person expects to see red, blue, the colors of a rainbow only they invented.
- 2.2 No one expects to see the fact that their childhood amnesia holds the secret to their understanding of self like mania.
- 2.21 Father, this bookstore is too big, and I will lose you surely, amid the picture books, and faux stage, and employees...
- 2.22 The time lifts away from any sort of conception I had about why the narrative shifts away from what I'd known.
- 2.3 Don't expect me to remember something that never happened; that would be tantamount to mental treason, the king my mind.
- 2.31 I logically set up the rejoinder to match your tone of voice, but you looked so cold, and I had no sweater to alleviate.
- 2.32 But then again what lesson have Morgue Days provided us, that we couldn't get literally anywhere else, on any other day?
- 2.04 I don't believe in the *before* of the event – once the novelty wore off, I was just left with a sadness impossible to describe.
- 2.4 The event itself looked like me in retrospect, but I found out from someone other than you that your death was slow.
- 2.5 What in any case would have been the benefit of lying to you?

### III. In Which the Patient Treats Himself

- 3 I've never understood the whos and whys  
of the situation beyond what I can control.
- 3.01 so it should be said that I've never truly  
understood any situation – I look to the side
- 3.1 and see fields of amber waves of hayseed  
and enough flaxen to feed a township.
- 3.2 But I'd started the maze a little too late,  
and I kept turning to the left but to no avail.
- 3.21 But inside the maze there was a parrot  
who looked at me and gawked and said
- 3.22 a few words in French, but it switched to  
German before I could make out what it said.
- 3.221 The maze hedges grew roots that reached  
up to grab the parrot and it squawked and squawked,
- 3.222 until the only thing left was a portal to hell  
and me at the center of the maze confused.
- 3.3 In terms of the time of day it happened,  
I could tell you more, but I'm not predisposed.
- 3.4 You're probably right that I'm getting older, and  
it seems clear there's something at stake.



::Incident:JesusinHeart::

I have very few early memories, but the one supposedly sacred one rubs against the others so much that it becomes apparent to me now the need to describe in detail every single one I can remember. The act of remembrance will hopefully therefore become an inaugurating insight within my life. That is the hope.//The first memory was when I was four, living in a Montgomery neighborhood my family lived in during the entirety of my time there, just in two separate houses half a mile from each other. I remember sitting in a hammock and feeling the breeze against my face, the leaves' attempts to land on my face drawing smiles from me and my father. He asked what I was thinking about, and I responded that I was thinking about the big things: what happens when we die, where we all go, how it is that some people die and some people don't. He responded that everybody dies, but that there was an opportunity to go to another life. I don't remember the specifics on the next life he was citing, but it sounded more exciting than the current one with all its death and uncertainty, its trials and tribulations, and so I asked how it was that some people were granted access to that life, and he said it was only through this guy named Jesus, who died for all of our sins and was allowed to enter into our hearts if we sincerely asked him to do so. It made intuitive sense to my child-mind – this transference of inter-world agency through the mediator of a kindly (male) savior. I had no reason to doubt my father's words in that moment, and I was already predisposed to understanding life from a male perspective, from a savior perspective (my father was a neonatologist who saved babies' lives), and from the perspective of somebody who had just been granted life in the world as we live it – I took the words as I took all my father's words at the time: at a face value that became all the more trenchant because he was the one speaking it.//My family would go on walks throughout the neighborhood when I was growing up – the miles around where I lived so trodden that often I thought the pavement would buckle under the weight of my small feet. My twin sister Allie and I were at first relegated to a joint stroller, one that we rebelled against as we saw fit, although it was usually her either harassing me or trying to get out of the stroller. We kept the time against the world we slowly were beginning to know, and then came across more metaphysical concerns as the second house was starting to be lived in, stronger concerns about death and what happens after, how we can make the world better (which at the time meant More Christian), and the various jokes and addendums to our family's trips and general sadness and lack of serotonin.//My last memories of the first house are both sacred and secular: after soccer practice one day, my best friend at the time – named John John (later John of course) - he was playing with Lincoln Logs, and I launched one at his head and felt so bad that I destroyed my soccer participation trophy (we were on the same team), saying I didn't deserve it, that I was worthless, that it would make no difference to anybody if I participated. My parents disagreed, and told me to apologize to John John,

whose house I stayed at often, who I played educational video games with, who I snuck downstairs to watch *Dante's Peak* with through the railings along the stairs leading downstairs in his house, and who put up with me even though I was vicious, snobby, and wore extraordinarily long and big shirts to bed because the fabric going all around my body and engulfing me gave me reassurance – even though he often said it looked like a dress. I told him it wasn't a dress, and then went back to either reading or watching *Tom and Jerry*.//At the first Montgomery house, I had a dream that I thought was reality until well into living in the second house: I dreamt that I jumped off the railing of the second story (where my room was) and onto the wood foyer below without injuring myself and just carried on with my business.//John later told me this never happened, but what did happen was he and I playing *Jurassic Park*, pretending we were dinosaurs in the computer room. (I had never seen the movie, but he assured me it was actually a perfect setting for that, based on the movie itself – seeing it later, I have to agree.)

IV. In Which the Patient Has Acute Heartache

- 4 The things that pleased me I no longer take  
at the value of their own individual faces;
- 4.1 I take them as the slight they are against me.  
They wreak the lot into some kind of fracas.
- 4.12 I turned the tables on their sides and shot  
bullet-holes into them – from each side –
- 4.121 well, it was more like I was at war for the  
first time, and the battlefield looked scant,
- 4.1212 you know, like deserted or whatever, like  
the time it would take to find me would leave,
- 4.122 and I'd be left picking up dead arms or legs,  
no longer attached to the reason I picked them up.
- 4.123 And wouldn't you know it, but I remembered  
Wittgy's time in WWI, and I recalled he was captured,
- 4.13 so I set about trying to be captured as well, went on  
some websites, found nothing, ate some food, went to bed.
- 4.2 But when I slept, I heard a smallish voice creep into my ears,  
and even though I was sleeping between the two tables, I still
- 4.3 hit my arms against both tables, waking myself up and giving me  
a scare, such that my dog scampered towards me concerned, and
- 4.4 I thought to myself that if I went out like this, not only would I not  
be captured, but I probably wouldn't ever wake up in the first place.

V. In Which the Patient Discovers a Problem

- 5 Cartography your losses, for I've uncovered  
a problem – it looks similar to you, to you.
- 5.1 I never really told him goodbye, and I think  
the saddest part is that he didn't need one.
- 5.2 He walked away, after waving, it looked like  
some last gasp of air from a waterless fish,
- 5.21 and it was only then that I understood his  
hesitance to be so close to the measure of him
- 5.22 that any sort of breaching it could take his soul  
along with it – that my ride on his wave had
- 5.23 reached such an unfortunate impasse to cut the  
loss would look very different from staying same.
- 5.3 So what could I do other than take a trip to the  
country, near where I was born, the water tipping
- 5.31 its salt embers onto the surf, and my mother's laugh  
making such a most that the moment's notice left?
- 5.4 I think about that whenever the need arises to have you  
leave my mind posthaste – how your wave is so different
- 5.41 than my mother's laugh, how one gives life and one takes  
all the time in the world to take it away.

VI. In Which the Patient Goes Clubbing

- 6 I looked at her so long I thought my eyes would leave me.  
They were equidistant from her and all of the club glittered.
- 6.1 Whatever fresh face she had put on looked like grace, and  
we danced until whatever was left of us went away slowly.
- 6.2 My partner sidewinded into my view and I shut down like  
a computer when he touched my arm lightly – it felt like
- 6.21 when I had seen her smile earlier, and I felt such a cam-  
araderie that its ending began to flash before my eyes:
- 6.22 I understood this to be the last time we'd be together, all of us,  
under the glinting sun of the lights where we felt good, all of us.
- 6.3 She danced a jig – her arms moving side to side as her feet  
shuffled underneath her waving torso – while my partner
- 6.31 smiled and laughed his way into the arms of another man, and  
I felt jealous until my eyes met his (not the man's), and I
- 6.32 immediately understood his look to be apologetic – sorry, but  
this man is hot too, I would have fallen into your arms but
- 6.33 you were so far away, and I'll fall later tonight, when the club  
has left its imprint on us, and I will mark the measure of
- 6.34 your arms against my chest instead, and it will look exactly like  
our mutual friend's smile as she lifts her arms to Beyoncé, and
- 6.35 all the time we've taken to get to whatever conclusion life grants  
us will be clocked against your jealousy (my jealousy) right now.
- 6.4 I wanted to believe we'd taken our lumps before the outing, but  
what I gradually realized was that we all felt good then, such that
- 6.41 any kind of distraction away from it would've felt so unholy that  
my feet and arms would have measured up to each other instead.

::Incident:FirstGradeBleachers::

The friend I made in my first-grade class was Gant. He was, by all accounts, a troublemaker, but he for some reason had a soft spot for me – perhaps because I ached to cause trouble in some form or other. The trouble I was content to make was through my artworks: cluttered landscapes of squiggles and people bleeding out from bullet and knife wounds. My first grade homeroom teacher must have discussed the art I was making in class with the art teacher, because she not only was she completely fine with this more unfettered form of art, but – probably because I was among the more talented students in the formal art class – she actually encouraged it, laughing and asking which PG-13 movie *this one* was, or *this one*.//The faces I drew were always either sad or angry, or some complex mixture of both. The people I drew were always either attacking or bleeding, but were almost always in a movie either rated PG-13 or R, depending on the target demographic of that particular faux film.//My twin sister was in a different class of course – this was the second year of the inauguration of the separation between us – and she was placed next to a boy named Frank in homeroom, a boy who many years later would die of a drug overdose in his parents’ sleepy Montgomery neighborhood, which at that time was also ours. Her placement next to him was strategic: they wanted her to organize him, to soften his many, many rough edges and try to help him see the light of Christ that was apparently emanating from my sister’s nascent OCD presence.//In any case, Gant told me to do many things, knowing that I craved rebellion. A part of me later wondered whether he was taking advantage of me, and that same part of me also knew he did. But another part of me knows of course that I was a willing participant in his sycophantic games.//Among the last truly awful games I played with him convinced me later of both the fact that he was taking advantage of me, and the fact that I was more than a willing participant. That morning I was supposed to dress up as either a Native American (Indian, as the 90’s Montgomery nomenclature went) or a Pilgrim (settler, as the New Millennium nomenclature went), and much to my chagrin they relegated me to dressing as a settler, the garb for which was not only itchy but considerably lamer. During recess, us kids in our various garbs played near the bleachers, at the top of a hill. Gant kept taunting me, saying I would never stick my finger in the bleacher, and I told him I would, that I wasn’t chicken, etcetera.//My finger went into the hole in the bleacher, but when I tried to pull it out, it wouldn’t budge. Stuck there, I pulled and pulled but couldn’t get the finger to slip out at all, my finger swelling up in the process. Then I just screamed bloody murder for thirty minutes straight, causing the children to run away, causing my oldest sister’s class to point out the window and laugh at me, causing me to flip off my oldest sister’s entire class through the medium of the window and through my helplessness, and finally causing the fire department to drape a cloth over me as they sawed three feet above where my finger was and two feet below the trapped finger. They put me on a stretcher in an ambulance, with the large metal bar resting against my prostrate form. I

looked like a saint with my drying tears being lightly brushed by metallurgy, and, when my parents got to the ambulance and then got in it, I told them I would rather be on the Mayflower, and they laughed and laughed and said they bet I would.//The diligent yet laughing doctors got the finger out of the bleacher through gauze and strings, applying the gauze and then using the strings to get the pressure of the tissue right for the finger to slip out of the bleacher. Then they let me keep the bleacher, and it stayed in my family's Montgomery house garage the entire time we lived there, even when I changed schools the next year, not being able to live down my reputation, and my sisters not faring much better.//Kids didn't fuck with me at the school anymore, at least in front of my face. I became clever, vicious, and cruel, inciting small fights and picking frequent verbal fights with other students. I started hanging out with a girl named Lauren, who asked if I'd ever seen a girl's bloomers, and I had no idea it was a come-on until several years later when I suddenly remembered the incident and began to laugh really hard.//I hung out with a kid named Billy – a family friend I treated like absolute garbage, but only because Gant treated me like garbage. Billy always wanted to play video games, but I never let him play with me, because the only games I wanted to play were ones involving the imagination. I also frequently played with his sister's dollhouse, turning her kind family of dolls into an absolute melodrama, making the parents fight, murder each other, or cheat on each other, and adding so much soapy intrigue that Billy's respect for me (and faith in my ability to hold my sanity) began to dwindle with each visit.//I was rebellious in a strictly intellectual and creative way, and this confused so many kids in my peer group that I became an object of fascination to them, a totem of a previous time, something they could attain if they were similarly inclined. Looking back, many of those friends had severe brain-trust, even when I treated them like shit.//One of my creative projects was during Computer Lab, and I made my project for Lauren, showing it to her but then changing the ending because she expressed disgust. It had been about a James Bond-esque man who watches babies die in the various settings the computer program allowed for, but then at the end they all get rescued, as per Lauren's suggestion. I believe the initial text read "Oh no, the baby is dying. That's cool." Then the revision read "Oh no, the baby is dying, that's not cool that's bad." My teacher strenuously encouraged the revision.//But first grade taught me that art, low and high (given the premature circumstances), could be as much of an escape as reading fantasy books, a truth punctuated by the low to the ground ceilings and corridors of the maze-like school I attended in Montgomery, AL.//I moved schools after first grade, after winning the Art Award for my grade, after gaining a reputation for years to come, and after Gant let me have a Charzard Pokemon card even though I hated Pokemon like it was the plague. He told me it would be priceless one day, but I didn't believe him, and so I threw it away after graduation.

## VII. The Patient Learns His Lesson

Miscue miscue miscue  
I'm so sorry that I missed you  
frumpelstiltskin on the dial  
ringing for you, only for you.

We trill our lives in sepia-toned differentials, and  
cope the losses until there are none left, or rather,  
until the writing on the wall becomes so much  
blather, and we would rather be so much matter.

Trying to lift the curtain away from the edge,  
placing it lengthwise along a river finding out  
how much line we have left to go until crossing;  
out of the way, sir, my portraiture view's blocked.

Reminded me of that time on the Seine when  
I painted your portrait, and you said it looked  
like the first time the sun had ever hit a person,  
and I said that you were wrong, very wrong.

The comma begins to splice,  
direction equivalent to valence  
I began thinking of a time  
when rhyming meant leaving.

Get my good side, you said, and I remarked that  
there was no getting around the lack of it thereof,  
such that you laughed and poked holes in my theories,  
and I remember him to this day as doing just that.

Climb into our skiff, skive the day away underwater;  
we promise to get you back before sundown, or  
at least before the sun's departure makes your  
painting impossible. Our word is good.

Then the metrical variations hit the side of the boat  
on the route we'd marked in blood, but nothing



could beat the howling of the wind, so we  
stopped trying, and to look, softly, at the sea.

We kept the time to sail,  
hailing from time-hauntings.  
We don't register any of your  
variables, talk-a-thons, driftwood.

## VIII. The Patient Becomes a Joke

“You wanna commit suicide  
you wanna commit suicide,”

the children taunted as I turned upon  
a turnstile and made the Noise Inherent.

I screamed lungs-out like a solid good time,  
and made dressing nines to the occasion.

To look at it now one might see nothing doing;  
we know not doing nothing needs to get done.

Escort me to the gravesite before I'm twenty-eight,  
because after that is my responsibility.

I am not having this conversation.  
Somewhere far back, someone else is.

::Incident:Writing::

At my new school Saint James the elementary school was on a small plot of land between the football field and the high school, inextricably caught in the middle of two equally positioned lies. But in the second grade I didn't care about either lie; they both circled around each other too much for my taste, and, even though I looked to the future with fondness – a future of football and high school – it didn't register at the time that neither of them held any promise for me. So I stuck with being funny and developing a good reading habit (read: destructive) and a healthy sense of self (read: one that would become destroyed easily before the end of my time in grade school and then completely annihilated in middle school).//My homeroom teacher, Mrs. Shoemaker, was the English teacher and had us do reading comprehension questions to go along with the assigned readings, then had us discuss them in reading circles. This was my favorite time unless Kelly was also in the circle. A fellow reader, a fellow snob, and a fellow budding intellectual, she drew my ire immediately, with her never-settling, her primness, her quick but trenchant analyses.//Mrs. Shoemaker gave me the Bob Newhart Award, because she thought I was hysterical, but looking back she was a sad older woman, and it wouldn't have taken much to make someone that sad laugh that much. What I mean is that I was clever in only the way an ignorant child can be and nothing more – nothing more would come of my humor, even in middle and high school, and she was watching a candle at the height of its ember and probably knew it.//My greatest artistic rivals at the time were Joseph and Nick, the former for general pop culture knowledge and drawing and art, and the latter for cartooning. They both would doodle often, and I would look at each of them ashamed that I couldn't capture the will of the world through my drawings, only monsters and their prey. Joseph would later become highly influenced by manga and anime and would later grow up to be an amazing cartoonist and illustrator, and I don't know what happened to Nick. But I do know that neither looked at the world like an accident, which is what art was slowly telling me, and what I was beginning to want to transfer onto my own art.//The school book fairs were always ones for the books, and I attended them all with the relish my childhood leisure could allow me. But everything I was learning about art seemed incompatible with the clinical nature of my science classes; everything in those classes seemed to turn on their own facts and I became quickly uncomfortable with the sentience those facts were afforded of themselves. I retreated into books, away from studies and away from my family and sisters. I took up the ultimate anti-hobby of reading and began to separate myself from not only my class but my own family.//In the third grade production of *A Midsummer's Night Dream*, I wanted to play Puck, but they insisted a girl play the role instead. I was so mad about it that I to this day can't remember what role they gave me instead. In the fourth grade, I played Hernando de Soto in the school play, and in the second grade, I asked my friend from across the street in my hometown – across the street from my second Montgomery home – if I could wear his

traditional Korean garb for a cultural event or something (it wasn't Halloween). I don't remember Matt being entirely put off by my wanting to wear the garb, but looking back it had to be weird for a white kid from across the street to want to wear the sheer pink linens that clothed me that day. I just wanted to feel the way the linen would flow against my jeans when I jumped down from the library's ladder.//I didn't realize it at the time, but I had sealed my anti-STEM fate so solidly, even though I was thoroughly enjoying and excelling in my science classes. Because, at that time, it was just fact regurgitation, it wasn't actual science, it didn't involve math. In the third grade, I was almost held back because it took me several tries to figure out how to complete my multiplication tables. The teachers told my parents that I was clearly gifted in most everything else, but they said this was a sticking point I would need to resolve before middle school. While that didn't exactly happen, they were right that the humanities fit me better – even though it was a too tightly fitting glove potentially with spikes in it, blood trickling down from the glove and onto my arms.//My third grade homeroom teacher taught us about science through us using her computer – it was called a Computer Lab, but we all knew it was her trying not to work as hard. Regardless, this became a sacred hour every week for me, separate as it was from the chatter and underhandedly overhanded taunts.//I watched the children's anime *Medabots* with my Korean friends across the street, a family of three boys, and I began to understand myself in relation to boys in the same way I had understood myself to be among my sisters yet different. Now, it was a different kind of different, and I would happily be over at their house, never playing their video games, but always providing my fun and imagination to their proceedings. I remember hearing them squabble often – the oldest attacking the youngest, the middle child rolling his eyes, and me off to the side smiling and watching the mayhem unfold.//At the beginning of third grade, the world changed in a day. September 11<sup>th</sup> happened, and I remember being let out of school early, my parents letting me know what happened in the car, and me saying I understood completely. But I was speaking out of my ass, naturally, and had zero clue about the event, even after watching reams and reams of news footage that day, that night, that week, and then until the news stopped covering it, until it fizzled into a mist of misunderstanding, jingoism, and patriotism.//I remember my dad taking me out of school one day, saying I was “sick”, that I would need to leave for the day, and then taking me to an Atlanta Braves game. We cheered on Chipper Jones and the rest of the team, and I ate ballpark food and looked at the surroundings like they were different from my hometown because they were.//When my sister went to summer camp, I laughed that a girl had a picture of Chipper Jones above her bed in the camp lodge. Later, I understood that too.

## IX. The Patient Thinks Twice

Why didn't we appreciate the cobbler  
while we still had the chance? He said  
we'd be better off examining the cadavers,  
so imagine our surprise when he showed up,

covered in molasses and just hoping against  
hope that we would tar and feather him. The  
patient examined his wainscot, found himself  
lacking, and told off the act of reading.

Like, "Hey, look now here Writing, I can see  
you're awaiting a kind of terrible festival; I  
wish I could have that kind of devotion to my  
craft. We divide lines along what we can't see."

X. The Patient Etherizes Himself

A Tableaux for the Old Times becomes  
a Tablet for the End Times, and I couldn't see  
the Difference to Help My Life and allow old  
theories to Acquiesce to My Demands, such that  
my Boredom Repeats Itself into fault lines  
running the length of this Border Moat that  
separates my Actual Experience from my  
Lived Experience, and what couldn't I see  
down there, explaining everything like My Life  
depended on what I Would Discover: branches,  
loose cans, Ethereal Garbage, movie tickets,  
plastic, plastic, plastic, plastic, plastic, plastic?

::Incident:*TheLordoftheRings*::

I rejected *Harry Potter* as inferior, me superior to everyone in the class – the real reason was that my parents would not let me read the book out of religious zealotry and misplaced fear of witchcraft, out of deference to whatever bullshit Montgomery church was telling them at that time. According to my parents, *The Lord of the Rings* was Christian, and so I began to read those books instead, reading *The Hobbit* in third grade, and all of *The Lord of the Rings* in fourth grade.//I sailed through the horrors of elementary school on Tolkien's tide, being carried by the prose and the fantasy. When it was time to take my comprehension test, I chose *The Lord of the Rings*, but for some reason I did poorly on it. At the time I was shocked – surely I knew this book backwards and forwards! But time has told me that it's just a massively complex book.//When it came time to present on our favorite books we'd read that year, I presented on *Lord of the Rings*. But so did a girl in the class, which infuriated me because I just knew she hadn't read the books, that she'd only watched the massively successful movies that had started coming out the year before. (I was a closet sexist at that point in time.) I was also furious that I couldn't see those PG-13 movies yet, but I was telling myself at the time that I would be better for having read beyond my reading level, that my reward would be later – in heaven or on earth but I hoped it was the latter.//I started cycling through friends quicker, as everyone thought I was insanely weird, that I was an oddball whose edge was starting to show through the intellectual surface. I cracked raunchy jokes all the time, thought it was inseparable from living an aesthetic life, that it was inseparable from living as an authentic artist no matter the faith, that if I didn't swear it would be fine. So my vocabulary grew two sizes too big, and the size it should have been began to look forward at my friends who started shunning me because I was either reading or being a weirdo.//I remember one friend Rob who invited me to hang out at his house, and as his friends were taunting him about how hot his mom was, I began to say much, much worse and much more crass things, things that incriminated me tenfold and began to spread through the class like wildfire.//When it came time to have the year-end race in my class, I was told to not go to the bathroom so that I could run faster. I was told by Joseph, and I knew he was wrong, that he was just trying to get me back for punching him in the stomach between classes that day when he developed his grudge on me, when I started it. But a part of me wanted to believe it, and so I did that – I held it in the entire race, and then raced weakly to the bathroom after it was finished, to finally piss.//But before all that, my eardrum became perforated, and Joseph was with me when I found out. I was at the Wynlakes pool in Montgomery, and I jumped into the water, but when I came up for air, my ear felt like it had water in it. I tried to get it out frantically – by tilting my head vigorously to either side – but the water still wouldn't leave. So I panicked, started crying and screaming, got out of the pool, and made just about the biggest scene Wynlakes had ever witnessed. Seeing my snobby self so helpless and panicked must have made a strong impression on

Joseph, because he taunted me about it the next week, and that was why I punched him in the stomach.//Like my older sister, I started taking tai-kwon-do lessons instead of a team sport like everybody else. This would transfer to tennis in middle school, but for now I wanted to learn how to use my body as a weapon.//I heard a town legend about a child who was struck by lightning on the way back from his tai-kwon-do lesson – on the way back to his parents' car, and I began to wonder why I wasn't the child who was struck, what right I had to not be struck randomly by lightning. I reasoned that if the child were me, I would be unlucky. But I knew luck didn't factor in because of divine providence, so why was it that one child was randomly struck by lightning but not me.//I had tried baseball earlier, but stopped going after Allie got a railroad spike stuck between two of her toes in the parking lot – it just lost its appeal and I liked watching the sport from the sidelines better anyway.



## XI. In Which Patience Is Learned

Blasted-out windows from beside bed frames,  
where you caught the growing sickness –  
wind playing less fair than anticipated.

Disembodied voices crying out for mothers –  
they neither see nor understand which is –  
which one of you can point me towards town?

The decanting goes smoother than we thought  
it would go, away from when we'd pluralized love.  
I pay attention only to the truth in love, nothing in life.

~

The town has just about done with me what  
they could to keep the want alive – tremors,  
shaking, inside voices. We trust too much.

The town has grown three sizes too big,  
and all the time we've spent analyzing it  
becomes equal to all of its very own time.

I missed you in the crowd of spectators –  
you must have seen me almost/dying, because  
the drawbridge broke when you were there.

~

I began as a sexton, and ended up as a nonce,  
the trials lasting as long as townsfolk had lungs –  
bring me to the stockade laughing in silver.

When they cut out my tongue, cut off my hands,  
let them see what they're missing instead,  
and let their good deeds go so punished.

Consult the witch, not the doctor, about this new

bloodletting ritual that so differs from the past –  
it will heal my humours and provide safe entry.

::Incident:Novel1:TheKingpinKangaroos::

I remember going to the library and that being a sacred place where books and movies were consumed, independent of the learning that took place in the classroom, but only independent by necessity not by design. The lofts retreated towards to read *The Adventures of Tintin*, and trying to find the best spots in the library to sit down and read that; the Computer Lab where *Oregon Trail* was played like a religious ritual with its saints, martyrs, and implicit doctrines.//Movies about composers were viewed in music class on a regular basis, and I cherished learning about these lofty minds, about how they created the art they created. Many of the premises for these programs relied on problematic Romantic conceptions of the Artist, but to my developing mind they were the substance missing from my studies – they trailed along down their own fineries like a waterfall of mental fodder, separate from the lectures, the recorder lessons, and even my favorite class: art.//In art class, I drew monsters mainly, taking full advantage of swirls and swivels, teeth and gums, monstrosities and what monsters can do to much smaller humans. One day, I was concerned about the quality of one of my pieces, and sought reassurance from my overly gruff art teacher, so it was entirely up in the air as to whether she would in fact provide said affirmation. I asked her if this recent change to my piece had improved it, if it was looking okay. She stopped what she was doing – grading I think – and looked me dead in the eyes, as if she didn't have time for such a stupid question, and said, "Blake, everything you create is good."//I asked if I could go to the bathroom, and she told me to hurry back to finish the artwork. I began to cry so hard in the bathroom that a teacher knocked on the stall door, but I didn't respond and waited for him to leave before collecting myself, going to the bathroom mirror, and looking at myself fully in the face.//My struggles with math continued unabated, but even though I was bludgeoned by the facts of school in the daytime, the promise of gutter playtime lingers in the mind far beyond the actual play. So I invented a toy action-adventure and soap opera drama show entitled Blagamon, where fighting occurred and conflicts only occasionally resolved.//The things I remember about fifth grade was an adult asking if I watched *South Park* and then saying I should watch it, at which I scoffed and told him I was a Christian. I remember watching documentary movies frequently, about history, with the most affecting (albeit negatively) being about Adolf Hitler growing up as a failed artist and then, because of abuse and horrific ideology, becoming the monster he was. It humanized such a horrible person to such a degree that I began to wonder if everything could be humanized in the same way, if everybody and everything could truly be subject to the humanizing gaze of artistry. We watched a movie about the Alamo. We watched a movie about Helen Keller, not *The Miracle Worker*, but a documentary.//But all that was in the History and Math section of the dual divide, but when I crossed the hall into the Reading and Writing room (not my homeroom, however), I became a different person, devoted to my small research paper on Lincoln's life, devoted to the reading comprehension questions about abridged versions of

classics like *The Last of the Mohicans*, and striving to understand the hidden depths of *Tuck Everlasting* and *Goosebumps*, the former making me question my faith for perhaps the first time ever (another secret rebellion I cherished) and the latter imbibing in me a love of horror.//I read and did a book report on *The Westing Game*, idolizing the young girl in it who can follow and provide input on complex, adult matters like stocks and bonds. I wanted to be the male version of her, and my ego became fed so much that I was able to start writing a fantasy novel, very clearly modeled after *Eragon*. From fifth through eighth grade, I handwrote sixty pages of the novel; the pacing was actually fine – I basically wrote a long side-quest, a one-shot scene. When I first started writing it, I had frequent daydreams about becoming a famous novelist, with all the attendant wealth and prestige, and the things adults had told me thus far gave me no reason to doubt this vision of mine. I was bound for glory, it seemed, and there was nothing anybody or anything, including my own work, could do to change my destiny. I once even heard God say I was destined for greatness, but it was just me literally thinking out loud until my parents asked me what I'd said. I told them, and they said that wasn't from God. I asked if it was from Satan, then. They laughed and said it wasn't him either, that it was me, that with those kinds of thoughts, it will always be me and just me.//One day, in between the two classrooms, a kid named Alex, on the floor, grabbed my leg as I reached for my lunchbox, so I hit him in the head with a lunchbox with a Dasani water bottle in it. I cried after flipping another boy off and had to be calmed down and promised I wasn't going to hell. He had told me it was fine to flip the bird every once in a while. Like Gant, he saw my rebellious spirit and was either taunting me, or, more likely, was trying to get me to loosen up, open up, so that I could become a well-developed individual. But I never got that message and a school counselor had to reassure me that I wasn't bound for eternal hellfire, as I cried and sat on a bench outside her office.//The last thing I remember about fifth grade is when I went to a party, danced on a trampoline with my Tolkien-inclined rival Sarah, wanted to kiss her, didn't kiss her, and went into the car moody and then crying tears as warm as they were slow going down the cheeks. My parents asked me what was wrong, and I told them it didn't matter, because up till then my life didn't matter at all, and a part of me knew enough to know that, to know that deep within whatever bones I was apparently granted by God.//Our fifth grade class planted a time capsule under a tree next to the elementary school building after graduation. I can never remember what I planted.

XII. In Which the Patient Is an Actor on the World Is a Stage

I took my IV tubes and fourthed them into the birthrate cleanly:  
put them on the stage of this Globe, this world I no longer see.

My bleary eyes went to West End after the play and began to  
use themselves beyond the purview of my mind, and I

saw my own nature speak to the bartender and ask for more drink,  
only to crawl back to my apartment at day's end, greet my body.

::Incident:Nick::

The summer between fifth and sixth grade, I played Dogberry in Alabama Shakespeare Festival's youth summer camp's production of *Much Ado About Nothing*. (Whoever cast me in that role was either extremely sardonic and dry, or a genius, or both.) I would cut up endlessly over the catered lunches with my castmates, especially an older boy named Patrick, who thought I was really cool because I supposedly knew so much about sex and just general raunch.//Looking back, I wonder how much of it was him and his friends laughing at me rather than with me, but I was so buoyant and playful at the time that I thought nothing of it: it was just a matter of getting through the camp and having fun while doing so.//I told myself that this was *training*, that I was going to become a better writer because of all this training, that it would help me immensely in my pursuit of fame and fortune. But the show ended, I did well, I got noticed, and nothing happened.//My friend Nick (the cartoonist) and I started to get closer, and we went to baseball games initially. I remember tasting Chik-fil-a's chicken biscuits for the first time on the way to the ballpark. He was funny and alternately boisterous and shy, and I took him on my family's trip to the beach. During a pit stop, he pointed to a canister in the men's restroom and asked if I knew what was in there. I didn't know, didn't really care at that point anyway. He whispered condoms, and I didn't understand or care at that point, as I said before.//At a grocery store my family had stopped off on closer to the beach, Nick and I started taunting a random white boy slightly younger than us (but dressed like a hick), laughing at him and Nick asked if we could be his "urbuddy." (The song "Topsy" had just come out, and there was that one line where J-Kwon requests that everybody in the club get tipsy but slurs "everybody" into "urbuddy".)//At the beach, we had a swimmingly good time until one night when we tried to catch Goldfish in our mouths, agreed Beyonce's Crazy in Love video was the best music video of all time, and then played old-school Nintendo games until late at night when I tied him up with the Nintendo cords and pulled his arms away from his back as he started laughing out of fear.//Nick slapped me in the face and told me I shouldn't do that. I couldn't help crying for a long time that night as he slept downstairs.//His mom drove him home, and she regarded me with suspicion from then on, and so did my next friend Mason's mom.//I didn't know how to handle my affection for this new boy who had been such a good friend to me. I'd liked the way he carried himself, and how supportive he was, and didn't know another way to tell him this other than the vehicle of cruelty that I had learned through being manipulated by Gant and bullying Billy.//After Nick left, I sullenly watched the 1989 *Batman* movie for the first time, which my parents actually allowed for once. Looking back, I know it was because they felt bad for me – that I had my friend leave while Allie's friend stayed. Maybe they even knew what caused the event, but they never talked to me about it because of how upset I clearly was. I just watched the movie over and over,

went to the beach when everybody went to the beach, and went home when everybody went back home.//This was the summer before middle school. Nobody fucked with me in middle school.

2.



### XIII. In Which the Patient Acts

We walk along trails not made for us,  
hoping against hope the work will measure up.

I've far-flung my assumption to a moon  
I only recognize if we're being honest here.

Wanting to say you'll be better in the interim  
is like saying you'll be better over intercoms,

hoping against hope people will listen to you  
this time, but they won't – they'll just sigh.

I became your worst nightmare and began to be paid  
by the local theater on commission – they said

I played the role well, but we all know  
I was being fed the lines.

#### XIV. In Which the Patient Senses, Tells Tales, Kept Time

I wonder how often being bi has come in handy,  
how often I've let myself become lines themselves,  
how when I cry it's somehow different than  
when you cry, and I sense something, but  
only because my senses are different.

Let me stop being for myself what that road  
was for you before we ended things, and  
I'll let you never stop forgetting the garden  
walks along promenades we were banned from –  
disallowed from keeping time, even via sundials.

We kept time by me patting your head, and you  
pating your own stomach, but we frequently  
confused the two, eventually settling on being  
so lost that the time could never keep up,  
keep us from being pre-divine beings fed on hope.

Don't be for me what I was for you,  
because then the ghost would be given up,  
and all those times the soap was dropped  
would become more clearly a good tiding.  
I've walked along this trail so long that

all my thoughts trail behind me, breadcrumbs.

## XV. In Which the Patient Goes Total Recall

I remember lights, little injunctions to stay different  
inside lines of fairground activities frowning on us.

The time spent itself backwards and cascaded  
into space and its spatial awareness increased tenfold.

I don't remember how the lights shone off your dress,  
or how long it took for my eyes to adjust, but

just there in the floorlights – among the floorlights –  
I saw the folds in your brain curved like so,

and I began to think of all the time we've missed,  
and how much your family misses your old self,

and I will think to the future of when this  
diagnosis meant something to anybody instead of

being just an excuse to treat you differently, and  
when I next remember, remember to bring me home.

::Incident:Classics::

I can't remember what spurred my interest in reading beyond my cloistered fantasy series of *Lord of the Rings* and *Redwall*, but I think I just wanted to move past high fantasy and established literary children's books. The next logical step, therefore, were actual literary classics, handed down by canonical interests and basically the unabridged versions of two childhood loves: the *Illustrated Classics* series of canonical works for children, and the PBS television show *Wishbone*.//So I set off on reading the new ones, starting with very slim volumes in sixth grade, such as *Of Mice and Men* and anything by H.G. Wells. A classmate recommended *Tales from Earthsea* and that whole series to me, and I scoffed at him because it didn't align with my mission – until I read it a year later and found it difficult to understand regardless of my higher reading level, which irked me and which I never spoke to the classmate about. So I imbibed the shorter classics like the realist water I needed to understand the world around me. I was beginning to form an intellect, beginning to learn about the world around me just as my oldest sister was reading *The Lovely Bones* for her AP Literature class.//In sixth grade, I dreaded gym class, where all the boys cared about was taunting each other (they avoided me at all costs now) and becoming the football giants they thought they were destined to become. I remember sitting outside either waiting for gym class to start – next to the grass – or power-walking during the mile run we were required to do for the class, forming a bond with a troubled boy named Jay and with the newly manga-obsessed Joseph and newly video game-obsessed Slade. Together, we formed the rejects of the class, and we knew it, but their conversations alternated between bitter and vicious, and lively, and frankly I cherished the times when the conversation reached the upper pitches of lively conversations, usually about the various aspects of popular culture the world was offering our young souls then.//I remember being over at Slade's house and vetoing just about every bit of pop culture because I was super Christian then (read: dogmatic) and didn't allow any input from "secular" sources – I wanted to keep my mind pure and clean, but didn't know that that had several drawbacks. One of the drawbacks of course was that I didn't go over to Slade's (or Joseph's) house very much anymore, and it was mainly Slade whose house I went to because his parents wanted his grades to improve, and because Joseph still bore a grudge against me something severe.//I confessed my sinful watching of *Family Guy* to my dad, but his reaction left me cold. He was so glad that I confessed that he didn't punish me, and I found that inconsistent with his disciplinary model, so the next time my friends invited me to watch something against my parents' standards, I let myself watch it. But that wasn't for a couple years – because in seventh grade I was too obsessed with my schoolwork, and in eighth grade I was too mentally ill and miserable. More on that later.//I remember excelling at science class, and the science teacher asking me to see her one day, and she said, "Now, the second half of your exam wasn't filled out. For some students that

would be intentional, but I don't think it would be for you. Do you want to finish the exam?" I did, of course, and it took me all of ten minutes to regurgitate the facts I began to spew out of my head like vomit, and when I was done I turned it in, smiled at her, and said thank you.//My math teacher had to console me at the end of that year for my science egg project breaking – I just was being hard on myself, she said. She said I should be easier on myself, especially in terms of school, and that God wouldn't be mad if sometimes my assignments were missed, or if sometimes I got the answers wrong, or if I didn't make the highest grade in the class.//I began to make notecards for classes, religiously applying myself to fact regurgitation to get high marks in classes, because I either began to understand that fact recall was the method of choice for my teachers in middle school, or because I was bored and hated myself, my classmates, and the situations I was consistently placed in – in my family too, with me watching my sisters become embroiled in the drama from literal drama classes.//My sisters began to compete with each other for roles in high school plays, with my younger sister being the star far more often and causing my oldest sister quite a bit of grief. But – for one brief spring dramatic play, *Fiddler on the Roof* – all four of us were in the play: my twin Allie was an extra, I had two lines (perhaps based on my ASF training), my oldest sister had a side role, and my older sister had a main role in it. We were an unstoppable cultural force, was the message, and it would never be at that same level again, after separate events caused my three other sisters to become dogmatic and religious in their own ways, each in response to individual events that happened to each of them fully and without compromise.//During rehearsal, I read about fantasy writing and novels and tried to hone my craft, so that I could transfer my knowledge and newfound intellect towards a successful writing career.//But Jay was the one whose short story he called a novel was read to the class, while I sat in the next room crying and not wanting to participate. I heard it was amazing, and I think I would have liked it, but they had me sit in the other room because they knew I was hard on myself.//I heard laughter from the other room, from behind the walls, even from a hallway across – and I resolved to have my writing reach a wider audience than my classmates, not just to beat Jay at his own game (one he was winning at that moment), but to also reach a full potential I knew was imminent even despite this minor setback.//I told my sixth grade literature teacher about my novel, but she seemed nonplussed because I was too eager, and she supported Jay's project much more, leading to that fateful reading. I heard it was a good reading, but, because I wasn't there and because email wasn't used as much then – especially by middle schoolers – I never received a copy of his story, which was a shame because I secretly fucking loved it.//It was about him and his friends hunting butterflies who were trying to take over the world, and now I understand that as a thinly veiled metaphor for how people under duress hunt beauty because they are trapped. And, to me, that is an extremely supple and beautiful metaphor, and I was jealous then and I'm appreciative now, not for the further drive it gave me to try to create something equally good, but because it was another beautiful thing in the world, just one I recognized too late.

XVI. In Which the Patient Had Rabies

Put me out of my fucking misery, please.

XVII. In Which the Patient Ate a Banquet

“Gather round and hear my tall tale of how I came to be mentally ill!  
It will go quickly if you drink the goblet to the hilt, I promise.

When we examine our lives, what do we gain from the effort?  
I like to think we gain what we could never gain otherwise –

which is to say I don’t think we gain anything other than stalling  
on the way to a funeral we don’t plan on attending – we don’t know

about all that we keep close to our chests, and I don’t think we could  
ever reminisce about actions not taken by us anyway.”

The choirmaster smacked the table and snacked on bugs from a page’s  
large tuft of hair, almost pausing the eating proceedings, such that

when I had begun to speak again, I ate the rind of the apple core  
like that dichotomy didn’t exist, and neither, or so I thought, did I.

“I will show this world what couldn’t be gotten except through hard work:  
the recompense at the end of a moat, all boated things, swirling toward.”

## ::Incident:Europe::

Since my twin and I were thirteen and going into seventh grade, since my oldest sister was eighteen and going into senior year, and since my older sister was sixteen – our family took a big trip to Europe, during which we went on a cruise on the Mediterranean (visiting the coasts of Spain, France, and Italy) and then during which we traveled to Paris and then London.//When we arrived at the cruise, my parents saw that some of the siblings would need to room together, much to our collective chagrin. Allie and Melissa went to the room next to our parents, and I was across the hall in a cramped room with Megan. While the latter three sisters complained severely about their assignments (Megan’s argument: he’s five years younger and I deserve my old room because I’m the oldest; Melissa’s argument: Allie kicks in her sleep; Allie: I don’t want to room with someone else in general), I kept to myself mostly, tending to my inner life as best I could. While it looked a lot like wisdom to the untrained observer, any therapist or even counselor would have seen my general reserve and too-frequent reading and writing as the harbingers of a much more dangerous mental health storm to come. And, unlike my sisters’ arguments, they would not have been wrong.//My sister and I watched endless amounts of *Alias*, which she became obsessed with and which probably inaugurated her lifelong love of binge-watching supposedly important television shows, something she was aided with when the streaming age was initiated during her college years. I would laugh and throw pillows at her as she was trying to watch the show; she would cover up my eyes whenever Jennifer Garner’s character became usefully sexy; we would laugh at the dialogue sometimes in earnest and sometimes to make fun of it; we made the best of a bad situation doing that, something my oldest sister appreciated – mainly because I think she needed a break from the taunts of my sister Melissa, whose star was rising farther at the time and who had a more established identity within the high school system even though she was two years younger.//Barcelona was my first exposure to Europe, and I took to it immediately, glowing at first because our dad made our jetlagged selves walk through the entirety of the Gaudi Park, with us collapsing on the lobby sofas when we finally got to the hotel, him waking us up for us to go up the elevator and towards our semi-final resting destinations upstairs. We toured the Sagrada Familia, went to coffeeshops and Italian restaurants, and generally lacked our collective serotonin deficits for a brief moment, as we became more comfortable with our roles and sticking to them when in doubt.//Nice and Eze were next, and I walked and chased my sisters through the cities and read every plaque I could come across, learning about mosques nearby and wondering further what religion had to say – if anything – to my burgeoning sexuality, even if it was largely straight at that time.//In Italy, we toured Florence, where I learned in a square that the writer of Pinocchio lived there but that he was burned at the stake because of religion, something my parents didn’t like hearing from who they were paying at the time. It was also



where I saw the statue *The Rape of the Sabine Women* and complimented it feverishly to a tour guide, who gave a look to my dad, as if to say, “You better watch this one in the future”. But I had no other expression for my growing sexuality, so I intellectualized it, and this trip gave me the perfect opportunity to do that. I wasn’t masturbating yet, and so my intellect took over, with me asking the Pompeii tour guide if our tour group would get to see the tablets of menus the prostitutes in Pompeii offered their clients, and with him having to shut me down and wink at my parents by saying that they went away after Mount Vesuvius erupted. I walked around on this different continent and thought to myself about why I wasn’t the one to be there when Vesuvius erupted, something that struck home for me even more when, as we were leaving the site, the tour guide let us know that Vesuvius was due to erupt any day now. But it didn’t that day, and I couldn’t figure why it didn’t within the schema I’d given myself religiously. It made me doubt, and it made me doubt severely, but nothing could crush my faith at that point in time.//When we went to Paris, we toured the Louvre and saw the Notre Dame, and I enjoyed both but never understood why Louis XIV would need to keep his nobles at Versailles, and then saw Versailles and understood how opiates work, but never made the connection to my own chosen opioids until later. I took everything with the grains of salt youth afforded me and was able to do so only because I had never been tested emotionally or physically.//In London, after we toured the Tower (in which both my bloodlust and curiosity were satiated), we went to the Globe theatre, and my dad cracked a joke about Shakespeare being a poor writer and that’s all that writers were, and I began to cry softly in the backseat – because if this was what my dad thought of the most successful writer in history (in the English language), then what hope did I have to make my dad satisfied, let alone happy with me, in my already-chosen vocation of writing. It didn’t bode well.//On the way to the airport to leave for America again, I would look at the billboards of women scantily clad – which, for me, meant swimsuits – and wonder why I had the simultaneous urge to fuck them *and* wear their swimsuits. The cognitive dissonance of it all made me laugh, even in the airport.

## XVIII. In Which the Patient Told Time

I went right up to that Time, and I said,  
I said, “Hey, you over there – stop calling  
my friends in the middle of the night and  
taking them down into the street and beating  
their brains out underneath the moonlight as  
their friends and family watch, not able to do  
anything, much less watch, much less try to  
not do anything that might upset Time, who  
keeps a ledger of everything that’s wronged  
him, and we’re on that ledger, I believe, and  
you *were* on that ledger, until you made your  
peace with his spirit, that night I held your  
hand as the ambulance came to get you  
and I was sobbing each tear onto your  
hands, such that I was barely able to hold on,  
such that that night as the red lights shone  
outside, I envisioned us growing old together,  
the kitchen whirring in magic deference to  
what we could achieve together as a couple,  
and we both began to have memory problems,  
but solutions were being made for that right  
when we started to, so we only had to re-  
member how to go to the doctor, in which  
direction his office was, how to get to the  
*Dunkin* on the same street as the doctor after,  
and how to not cry when they carted your live  
body away, with a needle still in your arm.  
And you just smiled and said *Danke*.”

XIX. In Which the Patient Returned to Logic

- 19.1 Give me my own wishes, so that I can see better,  
and grant me my own clemency for my own acts.
- 19.12 Trill the line inside the slickness of a corposant.  
Live like we're dying, but we are truly actually dying.
- 19.2 It seemed like the right thing to do, this Going Away,  
this Time of No Remorse, this Breathtaking Leave,
- 19.21 but we're wiser now, in thought if not in action yet,  
and we know how much this means to you.
- 19.3 I can't imagine knowing the time of one's own death,  
but people tell me it happens every day, I just
- 19.31 didn't believe when they said that, when they  
grow wicked wings only to fly into your hair.
- 19.4 I porchswept the intellectual remnants you left –  
It seemed like the right thing to do.

::Incident:Mason::

My seventh-grade literature teacher was wary of me from the start of the class – she'd probably heard from the sixth-grade lit teacher that I was an arrogant handful.//I went towards my schoolwork full-force, and into the church's youth group, which I was finally allowed to enter. I took the Duke TIP the fall of 2006 and got the second highest score in my class – the first highest was Kelly, of course, my past and present rival at that time. I began to think of myself as head and shoulders above the rest of my class at school intellectually, having scored a 20 on the ACT in the seventh grade – it does something to a person. I began to think about myself only in terms of the books I was reading and in terms of my intellectual idols, not in terms of where I stood in the class. I looked towards the higher goals of high school and God in order to cope with where my social situation was. I would go over to Slade's house and would try to convince him to play games that involved our imaginations more than the media he was consuming at the time – it never worked, and we always ended up just watching *Futurama* or *Dodgeball*. Everybody started to look at me as if I was a nerd, or, worse, a homo.//I made friends with a boy from New Zealand, who just spent all day every day reading fantasy, like I used to. He of course had no interest in hanging out with a zealot like me, but when I suggested he come to a church concert – of a famous Christian rock artist at the time – he obliged me, and I went over to his house and saw his trinkets from abroad, his books, and his parents, blending together into the impetus behind him even joining me. The idea was to convert him to Christianity, but I didn't know myself enough at the time to see that I was attracted to him at least a little bit, at least in terms of he and I sharing interests and me being intrigued about all that his life entailed. As I watched him busy on his phone during the Christian rock artist's concert, I looked sadly back to the concert and realized that I was the one who needed him and not the other way around. When my parents dropped us off at his house, before I got back into my car, I asked him if he would do this again, and he said he absolutely wouldn't, that he was only there because of his parents. I said I thought that was the case, and cried on the way home.//I was friends with Mason before that, who filled in a Nick-shaped hole, something that became apparent when, during a play-acting of feudal times in my sixth grade history class, I knighted him by saying, "I knight you M and M," thinking I was making an allusion to Eminem but really just making an obvious reference to the candy, in relation to Mason, which made him clearly uncomfortable, and I became suddenly aware that my Freudian slips had immediate social consequences. He still hung out with me even after that, and I took him to church often, which I think his parents appreciated. But his parents were wary of me because of the Nick incident – his mom especially – and my growing attachment to this boy was being questioned by everyone at every corner, so we decided to not hang out with each other again eventually – all the tennis games, movies, Legos, and conversations became null

after he realized I needed more from him, after he realized I didn't know yet that I needed more, and after I realized it wasn't working anyway. But before that happened, one day when he was at church with me, a younger boy wet his pants and me and Mason helped the crying boy clean himself up, and we both got closer to each other then. We didn't grow closer after Mason fell on a scooter one day and had to yell at me to get help because I was so frozen with fear, maybe fearing that I cared too much, I wasn't sure.//One time, when I was studying my English diagrammed sentences, my parents saw that I was working diligently, so they let me watch the movie *Bedazzled* on TV. I remember being so shocked at the concept of Brendan Frasier's character being turned gay by the Devil, and I began to have a thought wondering whether God could or even did make me gay, but I began to think nothing of it because all my thoughts sexually thus far, despite the strong attachments to boys, had been for girls and women, so I put it out of my mind.

## XX. The Patient Visited the Rothko Chapel

“The Rothko Chapel is Closed for Renovations,”

I thought to myself on Google search results  
something akin to my time in Houston OCD Program  
that house half a mile from the city’s museum district  
where Rothko’s art was a shrine penitents would  
visit to acclimate to their own life’s changes  
and I would sit in on everything there without a  
hint of responsibility’s merit for times spent separate  
from the mind’s puzzle,<sup>1</sup> black shaded wall paintings  
going up against primary whiteout backing walls  
between which sat several benches, sometimes  
used for meditation but I would always just sit  
on a pillow four inches away from the painting and  
stare like my life depended on it,<sup>2</sup> stare like I was  
inside the mind of Mark Rothko, before his break  
after a restaurant owner tipped off a galleyist,  
before the curator wanted what money couldn’t buy,<sup>3</sup>  
before the bouts of alcoholism spent up his inheritance,<sup>4</sup>  
and way before my uncle died of alcoholism and

---

<sup>1</sup> “So much of understanding his work is personal, and so much of it is made up of the process of getting inside the work” (Mark Rothko’s son Christopher Rothko’s intro to *The Artist’s Reality* xii).

<sup>2</sup> “Rothko was fastidious about presenting his works at a distance that would increase their perceived luminosity, and of course the level of ambient light” (John Cage 262)

<sup>3</sup> “His work communicates on a level that is explicitly preverbal” (Chris Rothko xi).

<sup>4</sup> “I think he kept the book to himself because he feared that by offering people the beginning of an answer, to his artwork, they would never find a more complete one (ibid xii).

made my mother cry unholy tears with my father  
barely able to console her<sup>5</sup> and I definitely couldn't.<sup>6</sup>  
It is hard for this poem not to become a "he succeeded/  
I didn't" inspirational manifesto for the lost souls of  
mental health<sup>7</sup> like two-timing visions only some people  
ever really truly see; but life and art don't work that way,<sup>8</sup>  
and what I'd really learned at Houston OCD Program  
was never really as forceful, never really as ever-present  
in the mind of the holding or beholder—it looked similar  
to the left of the brain and towards the 100+ degree heat  
cascading down onto the museum district portion the  
Menils had funded, with Rothko at the center, always at  
the center, my feet crossed below my legs as I sat in front  
of varying lightness and darkness,<sup>9</sup> the brushwork under-  
neath quantifying what was possible for any creative mind  
to achieve if the time, energy, and determinative inclusivity  
were engaged with—I looked to the side often in that chapel  
but only because every time I did I saw varying lightness and  
darkness, grey shadings and some kind of white peeking out  
from between the folds of intricacy and deft colorwork,<sup>10</sup> some

---

<sup>5</sup> "Apollo finally speaks the language of Dionysus, and thus is attained the supreme goal of tragedy and of art in general" (Cage quoting Nietzsche 258).

<sup>6</sup> "Whether he knew what was going on with the gallery is less clear. He knew he was not... free. I suspect things were planned for a while before he died." (interview with Rothko's daughter Kate Rothko Prize, 2008)

<sup>7</sup> "We rarely talked ... about formal problems. It was about content problems" (Motherwell on discussions with Rothko).

<sup>8</sup> "These paintings suggest a world beyond reality" (Diane Waldman 16).

<sup>9</sup> "Contrast, opposition of colors, gives life to a picture. The painter is here not concerned simply with the coarser, all too common contrasts, such as green-red, blue-yellow etc., of the various 'color-circles,' but with the color combinations which are his own, and which have not been seen and felt by others. He can harmonize in this way seemingly impossible contrasts, and, relying on his own emotions, create new color values" (Cage quoting Doerner 253).

kind of wonder to look to the side and see what was in front of me<sup>11</sup>—it didn't measure up to what was around me.<sup>12</sup> I got my own suite there at the house,<sup>13</sup> second floor and above Eric, the Jewish man whose level of orthodoxy I never knew<sup>14</sup> but who joked about what my evangelical friends must be like in front of a Jewish person: like, "Oh my gosh, we have so much in common, because of the Bible, because of so much, don't you think so?" and I would laugh and reply that they weren't as bad as Messianic Jews, and he would laugh back and say, "Oh God don't even get me started on them," and I would mention my trips to the Houston Holocaust Museum but leave it at that, a reason notwithstanding, not with standing, and he would go grave like he always did after his dry laughs,<sup>15</sup> and at the end of my time when everybody did a send-off,<sup>16</sup> Eric mentioned how cool it was that my generation had shed the shackles of antisemitic hatred and that he saw a new era

---

<sup>10</sup> "He layered and blended colors to enhance surface texture luminosity and created surfaces by applying paint with rags and rubbing wet colors together. To vary texture, he built up brushstrokes..." (James C. Harris, MD)

<sup>11</sup> "I looked down at the border of the maroon below. I was no longer gripped by the tragedy of Rothko's death, and I could see that the maroon grounded and balanced the ethereal green above" (Harris)

<sup>12</sup> "Yet Reinhardt, concerned with the finite as well as the infinite, was unhappy with what he saw as Reinhardt's mysticism" (Cage 261).

<sup>13</sup> "Yet he did not permit himself to slip over into the climate of the mystic. Rather, he hoped to wring miracles from his own depths, from his material existence" (Dore Ashton's intro to Bonnie Clearwater's *Works on Paper: Mark Rothko*, 13).

<sup>14</sup> "To survive, art may be temporarily deflected, to appear as something it is not. But more often it will disguise its true appearance, and at the first opportunity throw off this disguise and appear as it should in its rightful domain" (Mark Rothko's *The Artist's Reality*, 16).

<sup>15</sup> "By the constant rearrangement of these properties, art, like every other species, proceeds according to logic through stages of change that we call growth. It grows logically, definitely, step by step from the exhibition of one set of characteristics to another, always related to its past equipment, and bearing at the same time the promise of the future" (Rothko's *The Artist's Reality*, 14).

<sup>16</sup> "The viewer, enveloped in a room of the artist's canvases, becomes an active observer in a metaphysical drama, seeking the imageless and universal in the facades before him" (Clearwater 38).



dawning,<sup>17</sup> one devoid of the hatred he saw growing up, not violence but casual hatred, and I look around at the news stories of antisemitic hate-violence committed often by my own generation and I think back to his words that day and they ring not more falsely in my ear but sadder than ever before,<sup>18</sup> before a time of before, before, before, before.

---

<sup>17</sup> “in which color acts as form, volume, space, and light” (Waldman 11)

<sup>18</sup> “Both form and color seem disembodied, vehicles for an expression of transcendental existence” (Waldman 29).

Tucking further and further into abstraction was a way for Rothko to eclipse his artistic and personal problems into a purist form of altruistic creative gift-giving, a little way across the bridge between the Dionysian and Apollonian, eons away from Surrealism and closer to the center of the heart of the color-matter the heart's made of, and when we speak of the dead we do it in greys, whites, and blacks, not for austerity or propriety but for radical purity,<sup>19</sup> a Nietzschean ubermensch but only in the form of the art itself, the form itself, the incubation chamber of the impulse to destroy or draft something, kill or be killed in a process everybody around me in Houston knew was going to yield some kind of fruit, whether it was me getting over social anxiety and coming back to my Xtian campus purified of at least one sin, or whether it was instead the kind of thing that made me watch Wes Anderson's *Rushmore* and then weep afterwards<sup>20</sup> because it'd been my favorite song on a mix my ex-girlfriend had given me, and I began to realize that no one is special and we all die<sup>21</sup> in the face<sup>22</sup> of the glory<sup>23</sup> of the artwork.<sup>24</sup>

---

<sup>19</sup> "In his *Fear and Trembling* (which Rothko kept at his bedside), Kierkegaard referenced Philippians 2:12, 'continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling'" (Harris, MD).

<sup>20</sup> "Although he diminished the figure-ground relationship, he did not altogether abandon it" (Waldman 24).

<sup>21</sup> "The chapel was dedicated almost a year to the day after Rothko committed suicide" (Waldman 29).

<sup>22</sup> "He often spent hours sitting near a blank canvas in quiet contemplation before proceeding to paint" (Waldman 26).

<sup>23</sup> "I do not believe that there was ever a question of being abstract or representational. It is really a matter of ending this silence and solitude, of breathing and stretching one's arms again" (Rothko).

<sup>24</sup> "What we recall are not memories but old emotions disturbed or resolved—some sense of well being shadowed by a cloud" (Harris).

## Annotated Bibliography

Clearwater, Bonnie, et al. *Mark Rothko, Works on Paper*. Hudson Hills Press,

1984<sup>25</sup>

Cage, John. "Rothko: Color As Subject." *Mark Rothko*, by Jeffrey Weiss, Yale

University Press, 1998, pp. 246-263.<sup>26</sup>

Cooke, Rachel. "Kate Rothko Talks About Her Father, the Artist Mark

Rothko." *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media, 13 Sept. 2008. May 6<sup>th</sup>,

2019.<sup>27</sup>

Harris, James C. *Green and Maroon: Mark Rothko*. *JAMA Psychiatry*, vol. 71, no.

2, 2014, p. 107–108. doi: 10.1001/jamapsychiatry.2013.2711.<sup>28</sup>

Rothko, Mark, and Christopher Rothko. *The Artist's Reality: Philosophies of Art*.

Yale University Press, 2004.<sup>29</sup>

Rothko, Mark, and Diane Waldman. *Mark Rothko in New York*. Guggenheim

Museum, 1994.<sup>30</sup>

---

<sup>25</sup> Start by leaving the Houston OCD Program house, pace the grounds for a bit before leaving the property.

<sup>26</sup> Walk north down the sidewalk and make sure to avoid any cars and look both ways like a child.

<sup>27</sup> Definitely look both ways when crossing the major intersection to get to the museum district.

<sup>28</sup> After going down Marshall Street past the Annunciation Orthodox School, take a left on Montrose to pass the University of St. Thomas and then take a right onto West Alabama Street all the way to the chapel.

<sup>29</sup> \*The Houston OCD Program is no longer located in Montrose, but is instead in Greater Heights now, according to Google Maps—the paradoxes and contradictions of Rothko's chapel and art a ways away now.

<sup>30</sup> We all find ourselves eclipsing some kind of context.

## ::Incident:Tennis::

The summer before eighth grade I remember doing nothing other than 1) going to Malawi on a medical missions trip with my dad, and 2) playing tennis by myself at the Wynlakes courts in my Montgomery neighborhood. I would spend hours practicing my serve and bouncing the ball back to myself against the backboard they had set up at the end of one of the courts, a clay court. The amount of time spent honoring whatever conception of tennis player I wanted to be in the future was coequal to the amount of time spent whittling away at my shots and also dreaming of being that player.//I had been playing tennis all through middle school, and my shots were finally improving but also matching my improvements mentally on the courts. I was playing tournaments, would go to them with my friend Logan from church, but never won a tournament before eighth grade because I let my opponent win one time I was so discouraged (back when I was in seventh grade). My warmup music was a bizarre mixture of Coldplay albums (up through *X&Y*) and alternative standards like Nirvana. I would practice against the principles I saw developing within myself, and began to understand my Christian call as something that could happen on the courts – not through any proselytizing on them, but just by being the best tennis player I could be at that time.//I had a tennis instructor to this end all through seventh grade, but I had to quit using him in eighth grade after everything fell apart. He wasn't the only African American person I knew, but he was the only one I interacted with, and this came to a head when I said he thought he was too cool for me, what I thought was an innocuous comment at the time, but now one I know stems from racism. My parents didn't call me out on it – again, mainly because I felt bad about it already – but looking back, they probably should have.//One time, when I was in the Wynlakes workout room, I started making sexist and chauvinistic comments aloud, talking to the guys there and engaging in locker room talk. I said women were created for the enjoyment of men, and that that's the way it was and even should be, based on the Bible. I was out of my gourd at the time, but the social experiment worked regardless: two of the guys were like “hell yeah” and high-fiving, while the other two were treating my comments like they deserved the utmost concern, and trying to talk to me about it. None of the men there thought I should be kicked out of the gym for the day, which, looking back on the situation, would have made probably the most sense.//I had finally found my thing, and, even though it was a separate instance of a thing than most of the people I knew, it still was whatever it needed to be to keep the time sated against the growing undercurrents underneath my mind. It grew along its own lines until those sight lines became less the sum of their parts and more just whatever I needed at the time.//I had a renewed sense of purpose, and I recall that summer as the last time until recently that I felt truly happy in a complete sense – as in, not slaphappy or dumbly happy, just a chastened form of happiness that didn't take itself for granted. One thing I took for granted was my wisdom, which I thought I'd earned by that point, but I had no idea.//Then, of course, the next year the

mental illness hit full-force, made the hit intelligible – but before that our class took a trip to Memphis. The principal of the middle school would ooh and ah at me looking with diligence at what was written on the plaques at the MLK museum. I remember it as the last moment someone looked at me with promise instead of sadness.

3.

One thing Blake didn't anticipate on the way to his bank in London's West End on a Friday, was the way in which nothing solved his brain's troubles. Not the pubs, not drink (at the pubs), not English birds walking by, or actual birds either, not jaw-chiseled men passing by, and not the blare of trolley horns, always, in the distance. No, this was a nothing-doing – one that threatened his well-being and made everything so much rancor by comparison.//The bank teller was always friendly, and it's not like his job has any competition in any case, so why wouldn't he be? But still, Blake found it difficult to square the circle of his own mind to such a degree that even bystanders to his mania began to comment either ruefully or wistfully about the fate and folly of his dwindling youth. They'd say, "Oh, there's that nutty writer, always thinking of ways to get out of his own head for a change; I remember when I was in *that same boat*, and what a *horrible* boat it was, always adrift in seas of its own making, making no progress."//Blake tackled his way against an unseasonably windy day, and began to curse, his curses progressively louder and louder until a woman walking in the opposite direction had to shield her child's ears from the invective, giving Blake a stern look as she finally passed. The ways in which the teller brooked conversation was truly a sight to see – he would fidget nervously with his pens and then ask about weather that was always, almost always, the same. He would sigh and say that that sounded right (every time), before finally doing whatever banking business Blake needed to be done that day.//As Blake crossed the street, he remembered growing up in Montgomery, Alabama and then Atlanta, Chicago, Fairfax – he began to see some sort of continuity, a chain that stretched the length of the time it took him to get to the church on the street

corner right before the bank. It was a small but ornate Catholic establishment, in an almost even smaller parish, and Blake had taken to going there – as a sort of penance – every time he made a bank transfer or deposit, or whatever he did at the bank that particular day. Up until this day, he would go in, share with the priest that he needed to confess, and then describe in excruciating detail (but not too much detail) exactly what transactions he would make at the bank, and then he'd tell the priest he was so sorry to be engaging in this unfettered capitalism, and then finally he'd ask the priest if there's any way God could forgive him.//The priest would then nod sagely and gravely say that that was a grievous sin indeed, that God's grace may not even extend that far, before Blake would ruin it by bursting out laughing every time, which of course would make the priest crack up, and nothing would ever get done in these sessions, religiously or otherwise, but Blake felt it necessary to be as honest as possible in front of a God he knew didn't exist, and a man he knew did in fact exist. Which is all to say that Blake should have been banned from this church a long time ago, but never has been, either because it provided that certain priest a distracting lark, or because the parishioners who did talk to him found him generally agreeable, as he never interacted with them like normal humans and therefore was freed from the shackles of normal human anxiety therein.//Blake wondered about his experience at a Christian college, and at an oddly funded graduate program, and began to loosen up his mind in preparation for the oncoming tide of what he would tell the priest and then the teller. With one he always knew the route to take (the teller), but with the priest every conversation almost folded in on itself to such a pleasing degree that Blake for a millisecond would think that religion may not only be possible but preferable, to his current state of affairs. The hospital system here provided him with medications on a much more regular (and cheaper) basis



than in the States, but he did miss having a dependable psychiatrist, with a private practice and whatnot. Then again, he thought back to all the ones he'd had in the States and could only name one or two good ones out of like ten anyway.//In any case, he figured he could go get his medications after visiting the bank and turned the street corner to enter the church for at least one final time. He was always amazed at how heavy those fucking doors were, the way they would extend towards the heavens and be just as heavy as them as well.

4.

Blake  
Is it okay to enter?

Priest  
I suppose. (beat) Who's asking?

Blake  
Blake, from the bank. (beat) Here for my confession.

Priest  
Ah yes, "Blake from the bank." How could I forget.

(beat)

Priest  
Well, don't be shy – come to the confessional. Confess.

Blake  
Well that's the thing – not much to confess this time.

*Blake enters the church and walks up to the confessional.*

Blake  
I seem to have gotten in, not with loan sharks this time, but more dignified sharks – sharper loans.

Priest  
Only as sharp as those doing the transactions?

Blake  
Yes. (beat) Forgive me, Father, for I am in over my head.

Priest  
Are you not when you're here?

Blake  
Not the same.

Priest  
Is it not? What, more contained?

Blake  
Yes.

Priest  
Well, we can hardly choose our surroundings at a certain point.

Blake  
I just never thought it would catch up to me.

Priest  
What?

Blake  
My life.

Priest  
To what?

Blake  
To me.

Priest  
Seems a bit foolish. (beat) But what's troubling you?

Blake  
A publisher has agreed to a substantial advance.

Priest  
Mazel tov. For what?

Blake  
For the autobiographical writings. I showed you last week...

Priest  
What's wrong with an advance?

Blake  
I didn't earn it...

Priest  
How so?

Blake  
My life's a lie.

Priest  
But those experiences weren't, surely...

Blake  
I show up to work and exchange only angry glances—

Priest  
I don't see what that has to do with—

Blake  
The books I'm editing don't deserve to see the light of day—

Priest  
But surely yours does...

Blake  
I'm trying to say my life doesn't fit into the narrative prescribed for it.

Priest  
Then how should it appear?

Blake  
It should appear as a drama.

Priest  
Don't all lives?

Blake  
No, as a drama that I'm in.

Priest  
You're not in your own drama? I'm confused.

Blake  
No, because it's not a drama right now. (beat) It's a morality play. (beat) Or a closet drama...

Priest  
Surely closet dramas are dramas, no?

Blake  
No, they're not. They have preconceived strictures they must adhere to—

Priest  
So do dramas—

Blake  
But theirs are respected—

Priest  
You can't choose the shape of your life—

Blake  
But I grew up as an American, so I thought I stood a fair chance—

Priest  
Nobody does, not even Americans. They just think they do. (beat) You should know that.

Blake  
But I would rather think that and be blissfully ignorant.

Priest  
No, you wouldn't.

(beat)

Blake  
What do you mean?

Priest  
I mean just that: you'd hate being ignorant. (beat) You'd rather be dead.

Blake  
If I was ignorant, I wouldn't know enough to tell the difference—

Priest  
And therein lies the rub – imagine if you had Alzheimer's...

Blake  
My family's myelin sheaths are fine, thank you.

Priest  
No, just imagine.

Blake  
I literally can't.

Priest  
Then don't proclaim empathy for experiences not your own.

Blake  
What?  
Priest  
Don't pretend to be able to know the first thing about living with Alzheimer's...  
Blake  
I didn't?  
Priest  
We won't know completely until someone comes out of that for the first time.  
Blake  
Hasn't that happened already?  
Priest  
No.  
Blake  
Nobody's been cured?  
Priest  
No, nobody yet. (beat) But, complete my experiment. (beat) Imagine you had it.  
Blake  
Okay, fine. I have it; I have Alzheimer's. Now what?  
Priest  
What a question! Now what? (beat) Now you have it.  
Blake  
Great, but now where does this experiment go from here?  
Priest  
Nowhere – there's nowhere to go. Nature has done with you what it will, what it would, or does.  
Blake  
I'm still a person...  
Priest  
You don't think memories are part of what makes us people?  
Blake  
No, I don't. I think people with Alzheimer's are people.

Priest

And you're assuming they don't have the memories.

Blake

They don't have access to them – what's the difference?

Priest

No, they do have access to them, it's just blocked by Nature.

Blake

Why would Nature attempt to block our memories? What purpose does that serve?

Priest

[laughs] It serves the purpose of shielding us—

Blake

Alzheimer's isn't a protective mechanism—

Priest

It is for our biology—

Blake

Not sure where you're going with this...

Priest

So, if our biology threatens our memories, then they're important, i.e. a worthy target, yes?

Blake

Sure.

Priest

Now, imagine how much protection is needed in your case, where the memories compound?

Blake

Extra, I guess?

Priest

No, just as much. (beat) You only think *your* memories are special because they aren't being attacked.

Blake

Okay, great, now what about the rest of this experiment?

Priest

Look at a clock and try to draw it.



Blake

I wouldn't be able to.

Priest

Right, because time is the first constant to leave.

Blake

Great, so what is this? Some Proustian confirmation of how time and memory influence each other?

Priest

No, it's a confirmation of you biologically not being able to tell the difference.

Blake

So I'd be living in a dream?

Priest

Yes, but who's in charge of the dream?

Blake

God?

Priest

No.

Blake

Me?

Priest

No.

Blake

Nature?

Priest

No.

Blake

Oh god, you can't mean a combination?

Priest

Sure, if you want to look at it like that, or if you want to take out one or two of them—

Blake

But you're saying that would heighten the influence the others have on the dream?

Priest

Yes, that's what I'm saying.

Blake

And now I'm going to say that, were I actually in the dream, it wouldn't matter, biologically, etcetera.

Priest

And I would counter that, in the same way, you taking this advance is no different...

Blake

Than being in an Alzheimer's-induced quasi-dream?

Priest

No, than not knowing the difference between reality and not.

Blake

What?

Priest

The reality of you entering into the publishing agreement is different than the one where you don't.

Blake

Yes.

Priest

So, by stalling and equivocating, you are in essence establishing a dream-state.

Blake

I can't believe this. (beat) Who are you, Shakespeare?

Priest

No, just a priest who's read him.

(beat)

Priest

You know one thing I've never understood about these sessions?

Blake

What's that?

Priest

Why do you come here if you're not religious?

I don't understand the question. Blake

You are not religious. Priest

Yes. (beat) Correct. Blake

You come to confession. Priest

Sure. Blake

So, there's no need for confession if you're not religious... Priest

[muttering] The therapists are bad here. Blake

What? Priest

The therapists are bad here. Blake

I don't believe that. (beat) Well there are still counselors, and – gasp – even therapists. Priest

But they don't provide the context necessary for this? Blake

The religious context? I'm confused. Priest

What's there to be confused about? It provides an overarching structure. Blake

But that's one of the successes of therapy and psychoanalysis – how un-contextual it is... Priest

I just wanted to go back to a time when I thought I understood everything. Blake

Priest  
You want to be dogmatic, then.

Blake  
No, I want the benefits of dogmatism.

Priest  
Yes, but you don't need to lose your memory to gain that.

Blake  
But I don't want to become that – dogmatic. (beat) It scares me.

Priest  
Is that your confession, then?

Blake  
Yes.

Priest  
Nothing to do with capitalism this time?

Blake  
No, not this time. (beat) The topic bores me.

Priest  
To think you can escape it is folly.

Blake  
I know I can't escape it here, or anywhere really at this point.

Priest  
You could live on an island.

Blake  
You could not give me asinine advice.

Priest  
I'm sorry. (beat) Maybe you should say some Hail Marys.

Blake  
Maybe I won't.

Priest  
I still don't understand why you come here.

Blake

I don't believe, and I don't even want to believe, but I do want to eliminate that as an option.

Priest

What, belief?

Blake

No, the option of belief. I want to not be able to believe.

Priest

Why on earth would you want that?

Blake

To make the choice easier.

Priest

But you would still need to make the choice, c.f. C.S. Lewis...

Blake

Oh God, don't throw him at me. (beat) I just hate that I even have the choice.

Priest

Would you want to live in a world without it? (beat) Then what would make you human?

Blake

It wouldn't be a question of human versus not anymore, then.

Priest

That makes no sense.

Blake

Sure it does. (beat) Nature would eliminate it as a viable choice.

Priest

According to evolution?

Blake

Yes.

Priest

But then there would be no ultimate human advancement past it – there'd be no line between eras.

Blake

The line would be the individual decision we make to not engage in the dilemma.

Priest

But. ... But then there'd still be a dilemma. (beat) That makes no sense logically.

Blake

All great human advancements don't make logical sense.

Priest

*That* makes no sense.

Blake

If we were meant to be aware of all of our memories, we wouldn't live with them constantly.

Priest

Right. (beat) So now we have the issue of your advance plus your memories.

(beat)

Priest

I'm just trying to say that you shouldn't let the advance cover the memories.

Blake

I would never do that.

Priest

You're doing that by coming to this confession on those grounds.

Blake

Please. (beat) This is holy ground.

Priest

You want the cancellation of Christianity within your soul to be its own form of salvation.

*Blake looks distractedly at the dust motes outside the confessional.*

Blake

I love the way dust motes catch light from stained glass windows.

Priest

Why is that?

Blake

Because of the way they light up my brain – the descriptive elements.

Priest  
Yes, I enjoy that too.

Blake  
Art can't cover over a multitude of sins.

Priest  
Yes, but it can try. (beat) It always does.

Blake  
Maybe that's the difference here – the approach.

Priest  
Be careful what you approach.

Blake  
No, I just mean that art can approach these things, and that that should be enough.

Priest  
Well, you know I personally don't think it's enough. (beat) But that's not a bad way to live.

Blake  
I will live beyond my memories.

Priest  
I think you probably will.

Blake  
I will live past the memory of my art.

Priest  
That too.

Blake  
The length of time between my memory and my becoming will shorten. (beat) I will not need this.

Priest  
I believe that will be so, yes. (beat) I like to believe that.

*Blake exits the confessional.*

Blake  
Right, now I'm off to the bank. (beat) And then my psychiatrist.

## Biography

Blake Wallin received his Bachelor of Arts in English Literature at Wheaton College (IL). His publications include the microchapbook *The Lucidity of Giving Up* (Ghost City Press 2016), the chapbook *Otherwise Jesus* (Ghost City 2015), the full-length poetry collections *No Sign on the Island* (Bottlecap Press 2018) and *Occipital Love* (Ghost City 2018), and the forthcoming novel *Papal Glow* (Maudlin House 2020). Besides all of that (and this thesis), during his time in the program he wrote an additional three full-length poetry collections and one more novel. He just wanted you to know that.