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Napoleon in rags (2011)

As for me, by the blessing of indifference, I have simplified my politics into an utter detestation of all existing governments; and, as it is the shortest and most agreeable and summary feeling imaginable, the first moment of a universal republic would convert me into an advocate for single and uncontradicted despotism. The fact is, riches are power, and poverty is slavery all over the earth, and one sort of establishment is no better nor worse for a *people* than another.

— Byron in his Journal, Jan. 6, 1814.

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Note en passant on the Arab Spring (2/25/11)

I had the feeling, even as it was going on, that I understood the collapse of the Communist empire: it seemed to me that this was the natural conclusion of an age of revolution neatly bracketed by the years 1789/1989, and that the whole thing was explained, as well as could be, by the second song on the first side of *John Wesley Harding*, the haunting ballad in which Dylan imagines himself “Out one morning/To breathe the air around Tom Paine” (What is that air? the Spirit of the Age), and is accosted by a fair damsel who walks the grounds in chains — *La Belle Dame sans Merci*, of course, but more than that: she takes his arm, he feels a thrill of commingled fear and desire, and cannot help but listen despite his horror to her plea to take her away. “I will secretly accept you/And together we’ll fly south,” she suggests. There is a temptation here, in short, which Dylan (master of negative capability) does not explain; rather he concludes the song with the timely appearance of “Tom Paine himself”, who comes running to the rescue — “shouting at this lovely girl/And commanding her to yield” — and apologizing profusely: “I’m sorry, sir, he said to me/I’m sorry for what she’s done.” Who is she? and what is the temptation? Paine obviously is the spirit of Revolution, but Revolution in the sense of the Age of Reason; the magnetism of the damsel, I think, is the temptation of power, and the terror lies in the apprehension that this power will corrupt. Robespierre and Lenin succumbed to this temptation; Washington, by the grace of the God who used to watch over our destiny, did not. So that was the history of this era, a long series of revolutions which (as Hegel would have said) derived their own contradictions.

Finally, two centuries later than one might have hoped, the values of the Enlightenment did indeed run to the rescue. And Tom Paine finally won.

There's another, shorter periodicity however, which we see in the way the phony revolution of 1968 begat the real revolution of 1989. And this seems to be a second echo of that. It is somewhat reminiscent of the doubling of the rainbow, which is just (as it turns out) the second term of an infinite recursion, analogous to the Regge poles of S-matrix theory.

Maybe a joke of Mahler's explains it, then: he had a love/hate relationship with Vienna, and he used to say that when the end of the world came, he would be sure to go there "because everything gets to Vienna twenty years after it gets everywhere else."

And, I guess, to Cairo a couple of years after that.

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Heraclitus at the laundromat (12/24/2011)

It also tells me, this voice I am only just beginning to know, that the memory of this work brought scrupulously to a close will help me to endure the long anguish of vagrancy and freedom. Does this mean I shall one day be banished from my house, from my garden, lose my trees, my lawns, my birds of which the least is known to me and the way all its own it has of singing, of flying, of coming up to me or fleeing at my coming, lose and be banished from the absurd comforts of my home where all is snug and neat and all those things at hand without which I could not bear being a man, where my enemies cannot reach me, where it was my life's work to build, to adorn, to perfect, to keep? I am too old to lose all this, and begin again, am too old! Quiet Moran, quiet. No emotion, please.

Samuel Beckett: *Molloy*.

On the kind of men who matter to me I wish suffering, isolation, sickness, ill-treatment, degradation — I wish they may become acquainted with deep self-contempt, the torment of self-mistrust, the misery of the overcome: I have no compassion for them, because I wish them the only thing that today can prove whether a man has any value or not — his ability to stand his ground . . .

Nietzsche: *Late notebooks* 10[103] Autumn 1887.

Before I was homeless and destitute I was, variously, a mathematician, a theoretical physicist, a programmer and designer of computer languages, a composer of advertising copy, an occasional poet, songwriter, novelist, film critic, philosopher; even the author, once, of the libretto of an opera.

But now on Christmas Eve as I sit here in the Doozy Duds, the laundromat across from the campus at the intersection of Broadway and University Avenue in Boulder, Colorado, in the company of my Australian shepherds, Wolfgang and Constanze, who are playing with my fellow bums as they roll on the floor in toothless drunken laughter, I am not thinking about Einstein, or Eisenstein, or Wittgenstein, or even Heraclitus, whom I am reading, in desultory fashion, in the copy of Burnet's classic edition of the pre-Socratics I came across in the university library. (How it is I have staff privileges at the library is another entertaining tale, but let that pass for the moment.) Instead I am recalling my years as an amateur farmer.

My then-girlfriend and I had the annual ritual of sending off for day-old chicks, shipped live through the mails. They would generally arrive late in the evening, and we would get a call and go down to the mail-handling facility to pick them up; bring them home, and construct a pen from cardboard boxes in which the little birds, balls of fluff no larger than pingpong balls with little toothpick legs, would mill around in a mass pecking at anything that might be edible under the light and heat of a couple of reading lamps. After we fixed this up we'd sit and watch them for hours. It beat the shit out of television.

One year, however, the ritual was varied, because when we pulled our twenty-five chicks out of the shipping container we discovered one, the victim of some random mutation, whose wings were attached upside-down. It seemed as healthy as the rest, but the others kept pecking at it, so we separated the population into the mass and the outcast, put a partition between them, and left a small hole in the divider through which the odd hen out could look at her fellows and be reassured by their company.

Then we sat down to watch, as usual, and what happened was appalling. The little bird with the funny wings didn't keep to its own side of the cage, but kept going over to the hole in the partition to look at the others and try to join them, and they all responded by pecking at it through the hole. I grabbed it and pulled it away and it kept going back. I shooed the mob away from the partition and they kept lining up to take turns pecking at the cull. I blocked the window and they all pecked through it. It became obvious that no matter what I did the mass and the outcast could sense each other's presence and would do whatever it took to be united, so that the mob could peck the little oddball to death.

Which they succeeded in doing, within twenty-four hours. End of experiment.

All things come into being and pass away through strife, says Heraclitus.

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Most people react to this story as a sad one, but the inherent pathos of the situation was not what fixed my attention. I was instead puzzled and annoyed, because the behavior of the chicks was irrational. Chickens are essentially flightless birds, who can at best occasionally get over a fence just ahead of absolutely flightless dogs; their wings are largely cosmetic, a kind of fashion statement. So the protest of the mob against the deviant wasn't really that she couldn't fly, since they couldn't either, but rather that she wasn't maintaining appearances; doing her part to uphold the illusion that the others could.

Moreover our neighbors had a breeding pair of geese, who really can fly, indeed span continents; and who had, by some similar accident, hatched a little sport with exactly this condition. He'd grown to adolescence and now walked squawking around the yard with his parents, flightless and admittedly funny-looking but otherwise healthy and certainly not an outcast and pariah.

So the mystery I labored to resolve was why chickens, specifically, were programmed from birth to recognize and exclude other birds who deviated, even in inconsequential ways, from the norm. And then kill them.

I decided, finally, that it had to be a simple heuristic, designed to eliminate mistakes and preserve the genetic purity of the tribal unit, the flock. It looked stupid to me because I understood it was pointless, but the birds, of course—less rational, less self-conscious, less self-modifying in their behavior—did not. God the Grand Designer might have a purpose in His every line of code, but Nature the Impatient Bitch is always

in a hurry to get to Her next idea, and resorts to hacks and kludges.

Time is a child playing draughts; the kingly power is a child's, says Heraclitus.

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My laptop sits open on the table in front of me. They have wifi here, which allows me to verify that I have 13 cents in my bank account and have received no mail from my Fairy Godmother.

Then I put a movie on, an old Flash Gordon serial, *Purple Death From Outer Space*.¹

I find it comforting to have a computer with me, so I have to use it for something. It is a sort of security blanket.

Still, I'm rather furtive about it. It is best to hide folly, says Heraclitus.

{...}

I loved my life as an amateur farmer. For years after I had to quit it I continued to lug around the old milking stand on which we restrained the goats while we performed our morning and evening obligations, with the rubber mat that kept their feet from slipping — old goat turds still caught within the webbing, turning into coprolites. It worked on the same principle as

¹ AKA *Flash Gordon Conquers the Universe* [1940].

the stocks, trapping the head of the goat between a couple of hinged two-by-fours, with the difference that her face was planted in a tray filled with grain — restraining and distracting her while you violated her personal space at the udder end. You would sit sideways on the bench, position the milking pail, lean into her hip with your shoulder to discourage any unauthorized movement that might knock the pail over, give the udder a quick massage, grasp the teats (only two on a goat), and squeeze rhythmically.

I lost the stand finally in the last desperation move, when I only had time for one trip with the rental truck and had to leave behind everything that wouldn't fit. It seemed a shame, after I'd managed to preserve it through all the previous desperation moves. But this was the last and most desperate, and there had been a finality about it.

I still have the milking pails, though. I'll hang them over the kitchen sink, when I have one again. — The things that can be seen, heard, and learned are what I prize the most, says Heraclitus.

{...}

So I understand what has happened to me. I have been cast out. I have been culled from the herd. The tribe has voted me off the island. — The exclusion of the deviant, the expulsion of the Other, follows a universal logic. It is the work of the same force that expels the thorn from the flesh of your hand.

Which isn't a force, exactly, though it behaves like one. What it reminds me of is the hydrophobic force that contributes to the folding of proteins. That isn't really a force either, but it acts like one; you see it at work in the way that oils introduced into liquid water tend to minimize their surface area by forming balls.

Water is an unusual substance with properties that are in some respects unique: water molecules attach themselves to one another, even in the liquid state, by forming hydrogen bonds, partly ionic and partly covalent; these are directional, attach the hydrogens, which stick out like prongs, with the oxygens on other molecules, and have the effect, when water molecules are drifting around in the liquid state, not simply of tugging them toward one another but aligning them in a particular configuration. Substances introduced into water which do not form such bonds disturb this matrix of interactions. You can picture the situation as something like a square dance, in which people are moving around the floor joining hands and swinging around one another in an organized fashion; if you introduce people in straitjackets into this situation, they will get in the way and be jostled about unpredictably by dancers trying to join hands. You realize that the people in straitjackets will be pushed around randomly until they find their way to the wall of the ballroom. Or, if there isn't a wall to push them to (or they can't be persuaded to fall off the edge of the Earth), they'll clump up in groups around which the dancers can move unobstructed. (When these form in water they are called clathrates.) You get pushed off the dance floor because you get in the way. You're an obstruction, spoiling the fun. That is the mechanism of exclusion.

The tribe has spoken, says Heraclitus.

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Everybody stinks. I usually don't notice it, of course, though the guy who wets himself is an exception; him I've discussed with the management at Starbucks. We shake our heads, but really who am I to talk. Souls smell in Hades, says Heraclitus.

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Also, everyone but me is drunk. It is a pleasure for souls to become moist, says Heraclitus.

{...}

Regarding the abuse of alcohol, though my observations are not scientific, what I see suggests that the usual commonplaces about alcoholism among the homeless invert cause and effect. It doesn't seem that people are homeless because they drink, rather that they drink because they're homeless.

This point was made long ago by Samuel Johnson, who often slept in the streets himself when he first came to London in the 1730s; Boswell relates his annoyance when one of his well-off female friends sniffed she could not understand "what pleasure men can take in making beasts of themselves." "I wonder, Madam," replied Johnson, "that you have not penetration enough to see the strong inducement to this excess; for he who makes a beast of himself gets rid of the pain of being a man."

Many homeless people drink, at any rate, but not that much, because they can't afford to; I would often see two guys share a quart bottle of beer in a bag for the better part of an afternoon. Really impressive excess is only possible for the affluent.

One would think this should be obvious in a university town which is home to one of the most famous party schools in the country, but of course self-awareness and the sense of entitlement are mutually exclusive. I find it amusing nonetheless to perform the thought-experiment of proposing to the City Council the eviction of the inhabitants of the fraternities of University Hill and their replacement with the homeless: the citizens of Boulder would doubtless storm the meeting to register their outrage at such a proposal, though under cross-examination every one would have to admit that alcohol consumption in those residences would instantly drop by ninety percent, and associated vandalism and property damage (very considerable, for anyone living within lurching distance of the party nexus)² would decrease dramatically. The homeless, in other words, drink much less than the students do, and are infinitely less destructive. Best of all, they are far less numerous.

So why pretend they are a problem? Of course this is really a question of money and class.

The way of man has no wisdom, says Heraclitus.

² I was forced to park on the street, and so my car suffered about three thousand dollars in body damage over the course of the last year I lived in the neighborhood.

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I have no taste for maudlin fables, but here pro forma I suppose I might insert a little fantasy about visitations from the Ghosts of Christmas Past, Present, and Yet To Come — portrayed no doubt by women with grim but strangely familiar visages though really, why bother.

Christmas Present is — well, what we see before us. Wolfie and Stanzi are enjoying themselves. That doesn't suck.

Christmas Past has never been a big fucking deal, to tell the truth, possibly because I added it up once and figured I had to work some demeaning job or other on the holiday on at least fifteen occasions, possibly because I have generally lived by myself and the celebration has consisted of splitting a pizza with my dogs. I recall one Christmas morning, the first one after I started delivering newspapers for a living, when I was on my way out of an apartment building around 6 a.m. and found a bum sleeping in the entryway. I woke him up, warned him the managers would bust him if he stayed there, took him to Seven-Eleven, bought him coffee, and gave him five bucks. Well, we can see now how much good karma that earned for me. Last year I was newly out of doors, and was sleeping in a dead van parked in the back yard of the mother of a soon-to-be-ex-friend. She allowed this because she was in the hospital for a month, but left strict instructions that I was not to be permitted to enter the house to use the bathroom, presumably to prevent contamination by Loser Cooties. In consequence I found myself washing my hair outdoors in December under a nearly-frozen garden hose, and walking two miles down the highway to the nearest Starbucks to take a dump. There was no sidewalk,

only a ditch, and I had to do this at least once in a whiteout blizzard with cars sliding out of control a few feet away from me.

Rest assured I remember the names and faces of my generous benefactors. You're a funny guy, Sully (says Heraclitus in *Commando*), I like you. That's why I'll kill you last.

(Spoiler alert: he lied.)

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And the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come?

In Argentina they shoot off fireworks at Christmas and New Year's. Nothing about the display is organized, it is folk tradition, *la gente* buy *fuegos artificiales* and set them off at midnight. The sky lights up over Mendoza. I watch it all from a hill overlooking the city, among a crowd of my neighbors. The kids shriek in appreciation and clap their hands.

God bless us every one, says Heraclitus.

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Someone comes by to lock the laundromat up at eleven, so we must take our leave by then. When the hour seems sufficiently advanced, we pack up our things, slip out the door, and commence a devious and deliberately obfuscatory roundabout perambulation that takes us up and down several side streets watching, always, to make sure we are not observed, and if we are that our destination cannot be inferred, the whole process is

something like ditching a tail — until we finally re-emerge on Broadway a couple of blocks down the hill, and cross the street to a small park. We've tried sleeping here once or twice, wrapped up in an overcoat lying on the ground under a tree, but it isn't an optimal location, to say the least, so we pass through it, follow a trail through the woods to a spot overlooking the creek and the back side of the high school, and unwrap our sleeping bags (they're light, it's best to double-bag); I don't bother to remove my boots. If it's really cold the dogs will sleep on top of me, but otherwise Wolfie and Stanzi are part Bernese and sleep in the snow without discomfort, indeed enjoy it.

The laptop battery isn't good for much. I watch a few more of Flash Gordon's adventures on the planet Mongo and then close the clamshell, wishing briefly that the grounds were not so brightly lit.

The waking have one common world, but the sleeping turn aside each into a world of his own, says Heraclitus.





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“Liberal” and “conservative” are poorly chosen labels which have largely lost whatever meaning they originally possessed, but adopting them with bad conscience for the moment — then the traditional liberal condescension is that the poor are poor because they are ignorant (don’t know how to do useful things), thus education is panacea and everything reduces to the “acquisition” (whatever that is) of “skills” (whatever those are); the traditional conservative condescension is that their “values” are deficient, and since unfortunately it is no longer possible to punish them with debtor’s prison, they should at least be herded into churches, where they can be reprogrammed for productive serfdom.

A better theory is that the poor are poor because they lack social connectivity; because no one knows or cares about them, and in turn they don’t know anyone important enough to be of help. Because they have not succeeded in drawing attention to themselves. Because they are unattractive and unpopular.³

Or one might simply say the poor are poor because they’re poor. That poverty simply is what it is. A is A, says Heraclitus. Sometimes a cigar is just a cigar.

{...}

³ It may be it is so easy to be appalled by social media simply because they lay bare the underlying logic of the human universe: to an alarming extent, your place in the world can be read directly from the number of followers you command on Instagram.

Not to know the right people — this wasn't it, exactly. I might have known them. They certainly didn't know me.

They are estranged from that with which they have most common intercourse, says Heraclitus.

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Of course the moral reading of poverty is that it is a punishment for the failure to grasp the necessity of delayed gratification; the Grasshopper's punishment for failing to be the Ant.

Here the Grasshopper may reply that all pleasure is ephemeral, and to eschew it on those grounds alone is to render life painful and meaningless. But this would still accept the terms of the fable — which is propaganda, really, so much gaslighting.

Because it should be obvious that the exact opposite is the case: poverty by definition is a state in which gratification is delayed. Often in perpetuity.

One gratification that is delayed, for instance, is that of going to the dentist. Thus teeth are an infallible class indicator. My mood is surprisingly light, but I cover my mouth when I laugh, and only guardedly smile.

Another gratification which in my current circumstances I find I must delay is taking a bath. There is a bad stretch in the spring when the opportunity for total immersion does not present itself and (since it is cold) I go a month without removing my boots. In

consequence my toenails turn black and fall off. I don't worry about this, assuming they will grow back later; and they do eventually, albeit thick and gnarly. It rests by changing, says Heraclitus.

{...}

Others have attempted to explain my situation to me, of course, presuming that my condition proves my own judgment to be defective. But only the poor understand poverty.

First, it is expensive. Consider my telephone, for instance, nearly useless anyway since I have had to block two hundred numbers for collection agencies (they have developed some method for spoofing Caller ID that changes them automatically), but now in addition shut off half the month because they started adding fifty percent to the bill on the theory that I should be fined for being unable to pay on time. Clearly this can't go on much longer. (Indeed it does not.)

Second, it is illegal. This follows from the moral interpretation of being unable to pay your bills. In practice it means, for instance, that if you didn't have the money to renew your car registration, you can be ticketed and fined an even larger amount. When you can't afford that either, additional fines and penalties will be assessed until the next time your luck runs out, at which point you will be incarcerated. Really insurance is a worse problem, but a still better illustration is this: for a long while I fell behind on my utility bills, and struggled to pay them before the shutoff deadline, at which point service would have been terminated until I could pay an impossibly enormous

deposit to reinstate it. One year on three separate occasions I managed to forestall this disaster by first mailing a check written on an account which had been closed (guess why), and then going into the office before the check could bounce with another copy of the bill (they always helpfully sent several death threats) and paying the delinquent amount in cash. Really I don't even know: was this felony fraud? no matter, in this rare instance my luck held.

But third, and by far the most important, money is power, the poor are powerless, and the powerful *prey* upon the powerless instinctively, without thought, not even noticing that they are doing it; this is inexorable biological law. So in reality poverty has nothing to do with tightening your belt, or temporarily doing without,⁴ or making sacrifices to begin clawing your way back up the economic ladder. Poverty is about other people taking everything away from you and your being powerless to stop them: your free time and disposable income first, of course, and your love life with them; then your job, your house, your car, your possessions, your friends, your self-esteem, your time, more and more of it — your life, if they can get it — because as you eventually figure out, they really *are* trying to kill you, and by the time you are homeless they have very nearly succeeded.

If you want a picture of poverty, says Heraclitus, imagine a boot stamping on a human face, forever.

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⁴ The old New England proverb was Use it up/Wear it out/Make it do/Or do without. But a glance at my shredded jeans should have confirmed that I absorbed this moral with my mother's milk.

Thus it is that despite insistent suggestions by assholes who think they mean well, I never consider giving up my dogs for adoption. They are my best friends and the only family that counts, my companions when everyone else has given up on me. And I have a responsibility to them which I simply cannot abandon, since that would deprive me of my last excuse for simply giving up and offing myself. Which is what the world desires, of course, the logical conclusion of everything that has transpired; this is the corral into which they are trying to herd me.

But I'm too fucking obstinate. I refuse to die and give the bastards the satisfaction. Character is destiny, says Heraclitus.

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Really, the phone was a particularly elegant example. I never used it, save to call time and temperature periodically to verify its continuing functionality — who wanted to hear from me, after all — but I held onto it as long as I could, on the theory that it might still come in handy. But there was a slight phase misalignment between the billing date and the date I received funds, resulting in a steadily escalating self-amplified cascade of late fees and penalties. This resulted finally in termination and yet another unpaid debt added to the mountain.

I imagine the bill has been passed from one collection agency to another in the intervening years, old debt never dies, rather it is sold and repurchased on the theory that it can be turned into a producing asset for the rentier class, and somebody, somewhere,

is absolutely convinced that if they try hard enough they'll be able to get me to pay ten thousand dollars for the half-dozen phone calls I made in the fall of 2011. The most esteemed of them knows but fancies, says Heraclitus.

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Mike Tyson's post-mortem on his career: "I'm a peasant. At one point, I thought life was about acquiring things. Life is totally about losing everything." It is not good for men to get all they wish to get, says Heraclitus.

True, but it is worse for men to lose everything they have.

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So I can't throw anything out either. Everything is in my storage locker.

It is, of course, a large one, since it must contain an entire houseful of shit. I like to go there and commune with my junk; looking for a book is always a good excuse. I gaze fondly at my mothballed computers and disk drives, with my music and film libraries on them. Pick up my guitar. Work out a bit with my weights. Ordinarily I lack any semblance of discipline, but when the alternative is the complete disintegration of the personality I hear the voices of my German ancestors. The dogs eat bowls of the exotic designer chows we scavenge from the Petco dumpster, I grab the sleeping bags, we wander off into the woods.

I have tried sleeping in the storage locker once or twice, in principle a great idea because there is no shortage of pillows, blankets, bedding, flashlights, pens, notebooks, but this is more trouble than it is worth. The lot is patrolled, albeit sporadically, and though there are several other people who appear to be sleeping in their units they don't have a great many possessions at risk. I have had a few encounters with the management, they are obnoxious assholes, and if they throw me out I'll have to find another place to put everything and move it all again. They might even lock the container from the outside while I'm still in it and force me as it were at gunpoint to accede to some draconian conditions. As always, it comes down to a balance of power, which is never in my favor.

No question of contract law or moral principle enters into these calculations, of course. It is a simple matter of assessing probabilities and performing a risk-benefit analysis. I can't afford to get caught, that's all.

You're a stray dog, trying not to get hit by a car. But sooner or later you'll make a mistake.

The House always wins, says Heraclitus. Or maybe that was Darwin.



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Occasionally somebody walks up and offers me money. I always thank them and take it, without guilt or false pride. When I had money, I gave it to bums. When I have it again, I'll resume the practice. I have a generous nature, and in this regard I behave toward others as I would have them behave toward me. There is no problem here. And every little bit helps.

Handouts are as nothing, however, compared to the cash drunken students let drop in the street. If only their parents knew; if only their parents wanted to know. I have seen altogether too much of the undergraduate population in the

decades since Reagan, and (foreign students excepted) despise them uniformly: the steady decline in their literacy has been matched by a steady increase in their sense of entitlement; they know nothing, they learn nothing, and they think they need never learn anything more — though eventually, I expect, they'll have to pick up enough Chinese to take orders.

I dress in what I discover in the dumpsters. Shoes in particular are remarkably easy to find, indeed they seem to materialize, precisely in my size, just when I need them. This reinforces the delusion that there is some twisted Providence watching over me after all. “All right, we've fucked with him enough. Give him a pair of hiking boots.” I have the feeling it is waiting to see whether I have learned some lesson. Something about endurance, presumably. All this is just my punishment for always having been such a quick study.

I also find packs frequently. Even suitcases; I stash a couple of them against my eventual escape.⁵ One pack I discover while taking a shortcut across the railroad tracks east of town; somebody vomited into it profusely and dropped it on the spot. I run it through the washer and it's good as new. It becomes a favorite.

The lord who is the oracle at Delphi neither utters nor hides his meaning, but shows it by a sign, says Heraclitus.

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⁵ And sure enough, I used them.

The dogs and I do walk everywhere, often eight or ten miles a day. We enjoy this, actually.

I have observed that the homeless trudge. They have nowhere to go, they seem burdened by cares, aimless and unmotivated; they have become fatalistic about loss and suffering, and have that vacant dispirited/defeated look in the eyes, the one you associate with Third World peasants beset by natural disaster and pictures of Okies from the Depression. The psychologists call this condition “learned helplessness”⁶ it is as if gravity has increased, everything is heavier, it is harder to move; because what is the point?

I react against this from the outset. I walk rapidly and with purpose, bounce off the balls of my feet even though I’m usually lugging a heavy pack around, and regard my surroundings with animation and interest. I know I am supposed to crawl off and die. But I never do what I am supposed to.

Of course we walk without ever really getting anywhere, but it doesn’t matter, the journey is its own destination. You will not find the boundaries of soul by travelling in any direction, says Heraclitus.

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⁶ Discovered by Martin Seligman during his doctoral research in 1967, for which he performed experiments in which he administered electric shocks to dogs under restraint, trying to condition them into accepting pain as their fate. His methods were later adopted by the CIA for the (“enhanced”) interrogation of suspected terrorists.

One awkward problem is the problem of too many packs. To the extent that it is possible, you must avoid making yourself conspicuous: that makes you a target, someone upon whom their natural instincts will lead them to prey. And therefore it's a mistake to haul a giant pack around, as many do. But the functional necessity is there nonetheless, and so I have a tendency to multiply smaller ones. At one point I find myself carrying five (including one dedicated to my own coffee pot, which I plug in when I can find a convenient outdoor outlet), plus sleeping bags. This isn't terribly heavy or difficult to manage, but leaves me walking around with a small mountain of stuff heaped up on my shoulders, destroying the illusion I am trying to maintain. Thus I develop a system for stashing the packs in secure spots and grabbing them only when I need them. This tends to complicate our itinerary, but we spend most of the day walking around anyway.

Sleeping bags in particular are easy to hide, and also easy to replace if lost, since the homeless have a tendency to abruptly disappear and leave their camping gear behind them: my favorite spot on the hillside above the creek is many layers deep, like Schliemann's Troy, and contains canned food, clothing, several blankets still in good repair, and at least three abandoned tents.

At a minimum I carry a laptop (not the older and more fragile Powerbook, but the relatively robust though alas heavier Sony Vaio),⁷ some books and notebooks, my shaving kit, some

⁷ Purchased originally for its bluray drive. It died young, alas, no doubt a victim of this constant abuse.

shampoo and a large plastic glass I can use to rinse my head rapidly when I duck into one of the public restrooms in which it is possible to wash my hair, and my food supply. Unfortunately I have to eat a lot, since I eschew the sensible diet of the bum, which would be something like peanut butter and Fritos, in favor of yogurt and fruit, which may be healthier but takes up a lot more space. It's frequently necessary to hit the grocery twice a day.

I also have an electric toothbrush. Plugging in the laptop at Starbucks is normal, of course, but recharging the batteries of the toothbrush without making myself a public spectacle is tricky. Still I love the silly thing, and I enjoy the reaction of the morning joggers when they find me using it at a public fountain at 6 a.m. on the bicycle path along the creek. I probably should be mugging the assholes for their phones and credit cards, but failing that at least I can fuck with their heads.

Men do not know how what is at variance agrees with itself, says Heraclitus.

{...}

Periodically something snaps and I have to check into a motel. This is expensive, and I can't afford to do it more than two or three days a month, but it turns out to be essential for preserving my sanity. I take many showers, read in the bathtub, watch Turner and ESPN.

The dogs sleep on the bed. They love it too.

It is like a pressure building up which finally leads to an explosion.

It doesn't necessarily make me feel human again, but at least I feel like an animal whose cage is occasionally cleaned.

Thus I attain a perfect understanding of how it was that when the miners came down out of the mountains they blew all their money on liquor and whores. And of course that is how this town came to be here in the first place. It is hard to fight with one's heart's desire, says Heraclitus.

{...}

Why are cheap motels so expensive? as usual a close examination of the question illustrates broader principles. These same run-down old dumps have been sitting on the main drag ever since I can remember. I've stayed in many of them in earlier periods of transition. Nothing about the motels changes, or ever will (except that eventually they'll all be torn down to make way for upscale condos to rent to rich students) but the cost of a room continues to rise, not continuously, but in abrupt quantum jumps when their ownership changes hands. This is a law of rentier capitalism: the only reason to own such a property is to flip it at a profit; whoever buys it goes into debt to the bank and must immediately raise rents to make the loan payments. The banks collect their piece of the action; the buyer and seller turn profits; capital amasses more capital. Those who have money get more of it, those who spend money spend more of it. This is the way of the world.

Recalling one vermin-infested apartment house I'd inhabited in the slums of University Hill, where mud backed up into my kitchen sink for five years while the rent doubled: one year the roof leaked more than usual, the walls of the girl upstairs rotted out, and we'd looked into the space between them to discover with amazement the insulation favored by Primitive Man: newspapers from the Nineteen-Forties. Nature loves to hide, says Heraclitus.

{...}

I still read the *New York Times*, though I no longer have my own subscription. Instead I get a copy from one of the other bums when he's done with it. It might seem strange to hear a guy who has slept in his clothing for a month explaining why the Obama stimulus fell short of the Keynesian ideal, but everyone reads Krugman now, I guess. A different class of people are starting to show up in the streets. I feel that once again I have anticipated a trend.

The *Times*, however, long since ceased to be the newspaper of record; the baton was passed at the moment when the *Onion* greeted Bush's election with the announcement that "Our long national nightmare of peace and prosperity is over." This simultaneously [a] exposed the implicit moral-restoration premise of the Bush campaign⁸ [b] stated succinctly, as no major

⁸ It should be noted that Bush circa 1998 was expressing alarm at the new level of personal attack that had been employed to pursue Clinton and, obviously worried that his own personal history would render him an even more attractive target, expressed his reluctance to run for higher office in such a poisonous environment. Presumably someone took him aside and explained he would not be subjected to the same kind of scrutiny.

media outlet ever did, the real motivation for the manufacture of the Lewinsky scandal, i.e. to get even for Watergate, and [c] was prophetic in its prediction that the Bushies would seize upon the first excuse to go to war.

The *Onion*, at any rate, wonders whether the cost of living has begun to outweigh its benefits. I have to admit I too am no longer sure.

When the going gets weird, the weird turn pro, says Heraclitus.

{...}

Sometime earlier in the year I made my last visit to the Video Station, the best — now really the only — video store in the city, which I had visited two or three times a week continuously over a period of twenty years. On this occasion, however, I hadn't shown up in several months, and speculation had circulated about what had happened to me. I was candid; I told the owner that my finances had suffered shipwreck, and I had gone down with all hands. "Picture me," I told him with a smile, "like Leo at the end of *Titanic*, frozen in a posture of farewell as he sinks into the abyss." He laughed, but seemed concerned.

Well. At least someone was.

And how did I go bankrupt? Sure enough, it happened as Mike Campbell said, in two ways: gradually and then suddenly. It is

the thunderbolt that steers the course of all things, says
Heraclitus.⁹

{...}

Starbucks to its lasting credit does not ask many questions of its customers. For a while when I was sleeping in the garage I got up at four in the morning to avoid observation by the neighbors, walked the streets for an hour or so, and then went in when they opened at five after tying the dogs up on the patio. Since I pulled out a laptop and immediately began working, like any other guy who used the place for an office (of course there were many such), I could pretend to be an eccentric professional, and the staff treated me as if I really were one. I became a valued

⁹ Heidegger and Fink [Martin Heidegger and Eugen Fink, *Heraclitus Seminar 1966/67*, transl. Charles H. Seibert; University of Alabama Press, 1979] translate this as something closer to “Lightning steers the universe,” and then proceed to debate what “lightning” is, what “the universe” is, if it is “all things” then what “things” are, what “steering” is and whether it presupposes the direction or control of a helmsman, what power the lightning-flash possesses to illuminate, the nature of the conflagration which will mean the end of the world, etc., etc. — in short to parse every extant syllable in an attempt to reconstruct a hypothesized Heraclitean masterwork, lost for millennia, from its fragmentary remains — philosophical paleontology — but it is perfectly obvious what Heraclitus was talking about: of all the guys who ever lived here is the one who would have been least surprised by the revelation that the dinosaurs were wiped out by the impact of an asteroid (he would indeed have laughed and said “How else?”), and that the Earth spawned the Moon when it collided with another planet — the prophet of catastrophe, the philosopher of the quasi-stellar object and the gamma ray burst, the photographer, in imagination, of the black hole that powers the jet that emerges from M-87 — the author, in spirit, of the idea that the chemical constituents of the world began as dust scattered by exploding stars — indeed the spiritual father of the Big Bang itself, the notion that the universe began with an explosion (Einstein’s original static cosmological model, long since discarded, was explicitly Parmenidean) — the guy whose intuition of chaos at the dawn of Western philosophy showed him that creation is catastrophe, that the essence of the world is fire, that everything begins in strife. — No, we know all about this guy, the one guy who at the beginning of philosophical history already understood everything, who saw it all in advance. No seminar required.

customer, in fact, the frequent recipient of favors and discounts, and they had my signature triple espresso waiting before I even got to the counter. This cost a few bucks a day, but I could usually afford it; in fact I would probably have hung out there all the time, particularly in bad weather, but as always the puppies were a complication. I tried leaving them in the car, when I still had one, but people kept calling the cops; eventually some anonymous defender of the civic order claimed I'd left them there overnight in subzero weather, I was issued a ticket based upon this fiction, and in due course since I couldn't afford to contest the charge I was apprehended and incarcerated, the vehicle was impounded, and I lost my last capital asset.

All things are an exchange for fire, says Heraclitus.



Stanzi and Wolfie waiting by the back door at Starbucks.

{...}

In jail I had no appetite. I gave all my meals to a densely-tattooed Mexican biker who was in on some kind of bullshit meth bust, figuring he looked like somebody I should cultivate. He was a great dude, as it turned out, and we talked at length while he ate. In general the population consisted in roughly equal parts of homeless people recursively busted for their n th camping tickets because they'd been unable to pay the fines the first $(n - 1)$ times and thus had that many outstanding warrants, and those who were theoretically hardened criminals; maybe just because no one knew who might really be dangerous we were all extremely polite with one another, and got along very well. Indeed predictably the only assholes were the cops. I wondered briefly about the perennial question of whether this was nature or nurture, but of course that had long since ceased to be interesting and I rapidly stopped worrying about it. Water is wet. The sky is blue. Cops are dicks. This is not the banality of evil but the evil of banality. Better to think about something else.

I kept trying to use the phones to call out and find somebody to make bail for me, or at least check on my dogs, confined to the companion slammer at the Humane Society, but of course they didn't work and no one cared that they didn't. They did give us little Walkman radios on which I discovered an oldies station which still employed the same disk jockey who had ruled the airwaves when I was in high school. He was still playing the same tunes. That wore out rapidly. I got a few sheets of paper and a stub of a pencil and tried resuming a calculation I'd been

working on, but couldn't read what I was writing and made indifferent progress. Then I discovered the library, and began to read continuously, far into the night, even after lights out, sitting next to the door holding the book up to the window. It took a day or two to get up to speed, but then I read four books a day, and of course was just getting back into shape: another day or two after that and I would have been doing six or seven, but they finally gave me a hearing, I got to talk to a public defender who had no difficulty making me sound good to the judge, and I was sentenced to time served on the condition I agreed to be guilty of something I hadn't done; the only alternative being to wait another month or two and stand a real trial to be exonerated. Thus was I released once again into the wild; but only after I had permitted the machinery of justice to redefine me as a criminal who had paid his debt to society.

It was a three mile hike back into town. I hadn't had any caffeine for a week, the longest stretch cold turkey since I first sat up all night writing a term paper in the eleventh grade. I got a four-pack of canned Starbucks espresso-and-cream at the grocery along the way and drank two as I walked. These were easily the best coffees I'd ever had.

It is sickness that makes health pleasant, says Heraclitus. evil, good; hunger, plenty; weariness, rest.

{...}

I walked all the way back the next morning to bail the dogs out of the Humane Society. We went straight to the motel, and spent a couple of nights watching television and taking long hot

baths before our money ran out and we resumed camping out along the creek.

And so I spent a week in the Boulder County Jail for doing nothing — a week more than John Ramsey ever did — and it taught this poor white boy a valuable lesson about American justice: that I should be happy. Because if I'd been black, obviously I'd still be there.

Men would not have known the name of justice if these things [i.e. injustices] were not, says Heraclitus.

{...}

Andre Weil did his best work, on the Riemann hypothesis for curves over finite fields, when he was imprisoned at Rouen in 1940 awaiting trial for the comedy of errors that commenced when he chose to leave the country rather than serve in the army. About this he wrote in a letter to his wife “My work is proceeding beyond my wildest hopes, and I am even a bit worried — if it is only in prison that I work so well, will I have to arrange to spend two or three months locked up every year?”¹⁰

He notes that when he later arrived in Princeton and began writing up his results, Hermann Weyl made the kind offer to use his influence to have him put in prison again, since his previous stay had proved to have such a positive influence on his productivity.

¹⁰ *The Apprenticeship of a Mathematician*, p. 146.

It is the opposite which is good for us, says Heraclitus.

{...}

At best the police are bureaucrats with guns, and I have to wonder who came up with this idea, not one of the great inspirations of the Dead White Males. At worst they are a reminder of why “police states” are so called. It is instinctive to avoid the cops, since they too prey upon the powerless, and no interaction can work to your benefit. This has absolutely nothing to do with right and wrong the idea that my dogs and I represent some kind of menace to society is prima facie absurd it is just recognition of the fact that the law is a machine which will crush you if you get caught in it and you can't afford a lawyer. You avoid them for the same reason you try to keep your hands away from a drill press.

Fuck the police, says Heraclitus.

{...}

Cold per se is not a problem, nor snow, if it is dry. The combination of wet and cold, however, is not simply uncomfortable but potentially life-threatening. There are evenings in the laundromat when I waste many quarters trying to dry my boots. When such conditions prevail it is necessary to find real shelter.

Moreover after the City Council meets and passes a new-and-improved anti-camping ordinance,¹¹ the Occupy protesters are run off the courthouse lawn and forced to seek temporary quarters elsewhere. Meaning that I am displaced from my fairly sheltered favorite spot for a couple of months in the middle of the winter. Thus it is that I decide, reluctantly, to investigate the campus more thoroughly.

Without the dogs, there is no question but that I could elude the university cops and find a warm place to sleep; even inside one of the buildings. I took classes here in high school, I've worked here in many capacities — all of course menial, but so much the better for learning the lay of the land — I've hung around here for decades, and know the campus better than any cop or any of the few security guards left on patrol; I know which doors are unlocked, which roofs are accessible, which buildings don't have a night crew. Not to give very much away, I could simply tell the police I was sleeping in the University Theater, and it would take them a week to find me in that labyrinth. Outdoors the grounds are densely overgrown, and there are patches of forest which in summer are impenetrable; even in winter I could hide there easily enough. If I were alone, at least.

With the dogs, it's trickier. I am already under suspicion for reading in the outdoor theater every afternoon: it's quiet, sheltered, has easy access to bathrooms, there are exterior

¹¹ A study for the Homeless Advocacy Policy Project of the Sturm College of Law at the University of Denver found that 1767 camping ban citations were issued in Boulder from 2010 to 2014 (two of those were me, both thrown out of court); in the same period, 15 were issued in Denver. (See www.law.du.edu/documents/homeless-advocacy-policy-project/2-16-16-Final-Report.pdf.)

outlets which allow me to recharge the battery of my laptop or even plug in my coffee pot; but thanks to the tireless efforts of the numerous spies who apparently have no better occupation than to peer through their office windows at unwanted interlopers, I have been denounced to the police and interrogated a couple of times. If I were to actually sleep here, as some are already claiming I do, the dogs will bark at skunks and foxes all night and give us away. So I have to avoid getting caught at all costs, or I'll be dealing with a serious trespassing beef and a ban from the campus which may or may not really be legal, but which will certainly be enforced.

So this is a delicate calculation.

I decide, after further investigation, that the stadium is most promising. A gigantic addition has gone up on the east side to accommodate sky boxes for the high rollers of course and despite the obscene expenditure involved, the facility is not really intended to be used more than half a dozen times a year; for the rest it is occasionally rented out for parties and receptions. So passing over camping out in the bathrooms themselves, which are warm and left open 24/7, but may for just this reason be inspected by the guards (I have bad memories still of an earlier attempt to sleep in the bathrooms in one of the public parks, an experiment which lasted only a few days before someone ratted me out to the park rangers and the doors were all locked) I discover nonetheless three ten-story stairwells leading up to the rooftop edifice; all warm, dry, their doors always unlocked, and of course completely unused indeed there is still trash lying on the floor from the last home game, months earlier.

And here we stay for a couple of months. There is some minor discomfort in sleeping on bare concrete every night, and there are occasional close calls when unexpected traffic comes through and we have to bolt on a minute's notice, but basically it's cool: no one patrols the site after ten o'clock, and no one seems to notice us when we leave in the morning — indeed it is an added bonus that it is safer sleeping late and insinuating ourselves into the dense pedestrian traffic that appears around nine. There's even good reception for the university wifi network. So, save for one or two panic attacks that send us to the motel, this arrangement lasts until the weather improves and we can go back to camping out on Boulder Creek. Where, presently, harried by newly-empowered cops dispensing camping tickets, we migrate eastward out of town to a really pleasant spot (convenient to our storage locker, which is a plus) where we hang on for months, reading Gibbon by flashlight in the sleeping bag at night, harassed only by coyotes and the occasional psychopath wannabe. Every beast is driven to pasture with blows, says Heraclitus.

{...}

Nor iron bars a cage





{...}

Making the stadium the ultimate destination complicates the lengthy perambulation following our evenings in the laundromat enormously, entailing as it does a lengthy circuitous walk through the campus, avoiding cops, scanning for security guards, killing a few minutes with a stop at the Engineering Library because why the fuck not, examining the upper stories of the annex with paranoiac focus, trying to decide whether the local jet set are staging some kind of reception in the lounge, what do those lighted windows mean — finally strolling casually through the edifice (sometimes even nodding to the security guy on his final patrol) — hitting the bathroom — slipping through the unlocked door into the stairwell, up a couple of flights to a landing — checking the telltales I have left, like Bond, whether anyone has picked up the big baggy sweater I found here earlier and dropped casually on an upper landing — since not, grabbing it for additional padding

Occasionally I climb the remaining stairs to the top floor and the entrance to the lounge and the skyboxes of the high rollers to examine the locks, but it is no use: these are the hardest kind to pick, and anyway even could we gain entry we would probably trigger alarms and be captured on surveillance video. Too bad, it would be the most elegant hack of the system of control to crash in the private sanctum of some wealthy asshole and leave dog hair and empty yogurt containers for him to discover next September when he returns to lord it over the little people.

Or perhaps even better yet to take the elevator to the penthouse during a party, and to emerge with my dogs, like Maria with her children in *Metropolis*, confronting the Sons of the Oligarchs. It is fascinating how completely the logic of

these sky boxes has recapitulated Lang's symbology, the architectonic of late capitalism.

The way up is the way down, says Heraclitus.

{...}

In January snow falls upon the keyboard of the laptop as I type outdoors in the courtyard theater where in more affluent seasons I have attended the summer Shakespeare Festival. Everything is familiar here. I sit crosslegged with my back against the exterior wall of the building where I took classes in my days of whiz kid innocence; Elvis and mathematics have long since left the premises, but they still, ironically, house the philosophy department.

Here I text long-distance conversations with my Argentine muse, who is trying, unsuccessfully, to figure out why her uncle has disinherited her. She tells me tales of excess, horror, evil, and ruin, and I take it all in stride, because what else can be expected of a borderline hysteric who dresses like Morticia Addams.

The weather gradually improves. One afternoon I am sitting outdoors at work when a seminar relocates to the open air and a posse of posers and wannabes install themselves on the seats about thirty feet away — paying no attention to me, of course, manifest incarnation that I am of the Platonic Idea of the Loser.

I am trying to ignore them, but somehow the discussion gets hung up on the question of the existence of negative facts. Here I cannot help but raise my voice and interject that this is the

subject of a famous story Russell told about Wittgenstein: that Wittgenstein insisted there were not, that Russell had proposed as an example “There is not an elephant in this room,” and looked under all the desks in the classroom for errant pachyderms; that Wittgenstein had still insisted, No. I added that this incident had been depicted in Derek Jarman’s (rather inferior) biopic¹² that the problem actually was relevant to logic programming languages like Prolog, where one assembled a database of positive statements of fact and had to look through all of them to verify a negative that ...

... no little consternation.

Some curiosity is evidenced as to how I might have acquired this knowledge, dread and wonder at my diminished circumstances unspoken but obvious. I laugh, and tell them a familiarity with the philosophy of logic is no guarantee of economic viability.

The learning of many things teacheth not understanding, says Heraclitus.

{...}

Out of reflex reading the rentals on Craigslist. Seeing a listing for the carriage house on the property of the art collector on 4th Street whose house I walk by all the time I’ve spoken to him, his dogs and mine are friends, they sniff at one another through

¹² *Wittgenstein* [1993]. — He tried to make Wittgenstein over as a gay icon, without much success. Turing is a better choice, as proven by *The Imitation Game*.

the fences when we pass, border collies and Aussies, practically relatives. It would be a done deal as soon as I called. Except of course it's two thousand a month. I waste a fair amount of time fantasizing about how I might miraculously acquire an income of this magnitude. If only I possessed the serene gall of a Michel Simon....no, impossible.

Since I am often out walking the whole fucking day, of course I explore every corner of the city like this. I am particularly fond of the affluent neighborhoods on the west end. After all, I used to live there.

In the circumference of a circle the beginning and end are common, says Heraclitus. Though this is more like a downward spiral.

{...}

The legend of Merlin, as it first appears in Geoffrey of Monmouth, is the story of a Welsh king driven mad by the horrors of war who flees civilization and becomes a wild man who lives in the woods.

I envy him this freedom. Now, of course, within a day or two he would be ratted out to the forest rangers, ticketed for illegal camping, and (his indigence once established) summarily incarcerated.

The logic here is something like the one Foucault was trying to identify in his history of madness: the growth of a certain industrial organization that demarcates the boundary between

civilized order and what it chooses to define as the outer chaos. And then represses that, with bureaucratic efficiency.

The wise man is not known because of men's want of belief
says Heraclitus.

{...}

Superficially this is a practical question, however: why not just live in the woods? Particularly since fuck the campus, forget the woods along the creek I also know the mountains west of Boulder like the back of my hand.

But I run through it in my mind, over and over again, and it simply won't work. First, without a car I need to stay within walking distance of a grocery; it might be possible to bicycle up and down the canyons a few miles, but that would leave the dogs at risk, tied to a tree or hidden in a cave somewhere, so really that is out. Near the city though there are hundreds of sheltered spots where one might pitch a tent, the trails are so heavily trafficked and patrolled that it would be impossible to escape detection for long. And food caches attract bears.

With the appropriate vehicle, it would certainly be possible, at least if we kept moving around. I know many places where we could camp out temporarily, though any attempt to take up semipermanent residence would be sure to bring down the heat. It would not be possible to light a fire, since that would attract attention even at a distance, but one might make do with a Coleman stove and a portable heater. For that matter there are still many abandoned shacks, old miner's cabins, streams

with fresh water in which (in better times and warmer weather) I was once wont to bathe, old unused mining roads to provide access, at least if one had four wheel drive. (And in winter, chains.) My old Jeep would have done, had it not died long since, victim as were so many cars of the paper routes, which (a heavy sigh of reminiscence) devoured vehicles like Goya's Cronos.

But it *sounds* possible. At least if I were willing to renounce the use of computers and the internet and go back to writing longhand. Though why not; it worked for Villon, after all, and what better model for the gypsy scholar.

There would be other possibilities: I could drive out into the desert and simply squat, for instance, for as long as I could stand it. Or find an abandoned town in Nevada somewhere, and wait there to be abducted by aliens.

For that matter I might go back to Detroit, move into an empty house, and shoot rats for food. Though in Detroit the rats probably shoot back.

But can I escape civilization completely? No. How can one hide from that which never sets? asks Heraclitus.

{...}

Walking through the retail district of University Hill early one morning after a heavy winter storm, I discover a guy sleeping in the doorway of a shop. He is covered with snow, but ingeniously

has contrived to wrap his sleeping bag in a plastic Hefly bag. This keeps moisture out, and adds a layer of insulation.

The dry soul is the wisest and best, says Heraclitus.

{...}

Sometimes when the weather is bad my colleagues and I hang out in the laundromat during the day. This might be awkward if anyone were actually using the machines, but it is Christmas vacation, the place is deserted, and even though the bathroom has been locked to discourage deadbeats like ourselves from loitering one can, with the exercise of caution, get away with pissing in one of the laundry sinks.

One afternoon a few of us are sitting around (like characters in Gorky's *The Lower Depths*, I am thinking, and wondering whether this is more like the Renoir version or the Kurosawa version) when a stranger who is obviously not a local enters with some laundry, loads a few machines, looks around at us, and leaves. Shortly he returns with takeout from one of the adjacent restaurants, and hands the containers out silently. The other bums all eat quickly and leave without so much as looking at him; contrarian as always, I linger, thank him sincerely, and engage him in conversation. It develops that he drives the tour bus for a band that has just pulled into town for a gig at one of the clubs on the Hill; he explains in a pleasant Tennessee accent that he'd been down and out himself in Nashville before he happened on his current gig; conscious always of his good fortune, he takes pains to assist those in trouble when he can. I tell him when I was better off I did as much myself, and will

resume the practice when my circumstances improve. We talk for a bit about the musician's life upon the road, and how it steers him into odd adventures such as this. He remarks that I seem very calm and confident, different from the other guys, and I laugh and tell him not to worry, all will be well with me, this too shall pass. He says that he believes this too. Pulls his clothing out of the dryer, shakes hands, and takes his leave.

I am different from the others, he's right about that. But it isn't that I'm better than they are, superior in some way that would satisfy a Puritan moralist. I'm luckier, that's all: stronger, smarter, healthier.

And what brought me here, the fact that I don't fit in anywhere, means that I don't fit in here either. I am an outcast among outcasts. Wherever I am, I refuse to belong.

I make no statement without metalinguistic re-examination. Even the collapse of my fortunes is an ironic gesture.

And so I'm still an anthropologist, and this is just another field expedition — an experiment I am performing upon myself.

Men that love wisdom must be acquainted with very many things indeed, says Heraclitus.

{...}

Eventually I did escape. They voted me off the island. Fuck you, said I, and left the continent.

But if this was an experiment, it remains to explain the results. How did this happen? What is my feeling about all this?

First, of course, that it was always inevitable. I had come close so many times, after all — the grim week after I'd been evicted in the spring of 1995, for instance, when I lived with three dogs and two cats in a van without valid license plates or registration that had run just as far as the cemetery before it too dropped dead — it was obvious that I was being steered toward this catastrophe, that it represented the attractor of some kind of dynamical evolution, that some dire teleology had been invoked. — This despite the fact that my whole reaction was one of disbelief, of unreality, an inability to accept that this was really happening to me — even though it was simultaneously the most crushing and omnipresent reality. How can something be both inevitable and unbelievable?¹³

Again, that nonetheless it was desirable, in that only by being cast completely out of society can it be possible to gain an exterior perspective, and see it as a whole. That this was the only way to understand it.

And yet again I also had the feeling that — this is complex and difficult to express — if some are cast out and must experience this, then I had no right not to — something like, if it were a case of “There but for the grace of God go I,” then God by denying His grace to some and not to others has proven Himself a malevolent despot, and the — Satanic? in the sense of Milton — posture is to express solidarity with the oppressed by

¹³ Clearly this was an interior monologue that could only have taken place before 2016.

sharing their experience. Though here we are, sure enough, finding bad reasons for what is known by instinct. And also there is a fascination with the nadir of misery, with debasement, something like the the disturbing urge I had felt standing on the ledge of the Millikan library as Higgins and I hurled water balloons at the pavement ten stories below, the lure of the abyss. Heidegger had wondered why anything should exist, and not rather nothing; of course you could not understand that any way but dialectically, by passing from being to not being and then embracing the impossible synthesis somehow attaining the wisdom Nietzsche ascribed to Silenus.

Or it might be interpreted as a sense of duty, the same instinct that led the saints to share the misery of the unfortunate and oppressed to debase themselves, to embrace suffering, that Christian self-effacement, the mortification of the flesh, the renunciation of earthly desire.

So I am not sure whether this is the Faustian seduction, the need to court damnation, the thing that made Rimbaud think he had to fuck himself up to become a seer; or whether it is the moral imperative Father Damien obeyed when he chose to share the misery of the lepers. Or whether these are somehow the same.

But then again I am also angry that I have been reduced to these circumstances very, very angry at being preyed upon, victimized *pecked at* I am certain now that they really are trying to kill me, and that this justifies anything and I find myself remembering that Che too went into the jungle to work with lepers, and emerged the scourge of imperialism. That he wound up at the head of a peasant army that overthrew a corrupt

government, and spread the fear of the guillotine throughout the hemisphere. That he died a martyr, and became the patron saint of Revolution.

Fire in its advance will judge and convict all things, says Heraclitus.

{...}

Diogenes Laertius says of Heraclitus that in the end he became a complete misanthrope, and wandered about the mountains feeding on grasses and plants.

One story has it that he expired finally of a dropsy, which he attempted to treat by covering himself with cow dung; in this unrecognizable state he was devoured by dogs.

I have sought for myself, he said.¹⁴

That was Nietzsche's favorite text. No fucking wonder.

¹⁴ Lennon/McCartney render this "Nothing you can do but you can learn how to be you in time."

{...}

The Antichrist (2011)

Nietzsche considers the Christian the type that has been bred for domestication. But is it specifically Christianity that is at fault? I think not. It is more like this is the general purpose of religion, to program the individual for submission, for subordination. So even though he is correct in considering the priestly class the enemy, I don't buy the rest of it — the condemnation of otherworldliness, for instance. No one had his head in the clouds any more than Isaac Newton; and yet no one had a greater love of working with his hands. One can be both involved in the world, and still removed from it.

That the Roman empire may have been corrupted by Christianity is another matter. This was Gibbon's scarce-disguised theory as well, and though it doesn't seem as though that was the worst of its problems, it certainly didn't help. But it was all a function of the historical context. Nietzsche prefers Islam, more obviously a religion of the sword, but in the course of time surely more people have been killed in the name of Christ.

{...}

*Down goes Frazier (2011)*¹⁵

“Frazier is dazed, he is getting hit again and again.....Frazier is dazed, he doesn’t know *where he is...*”

What is the sick fascination in this? Frazier gets knocked down, again and again, he is out on his feet, stumbling around blindly, nonetheless trying to put his hands up and continue to fight he can’t quit you have no doubt that if the referee hadn’t stopped it he would have kept getting up over and over, back to his feet and down again until he was dead in the ring....

And there’s your metaphor. It fascinates you because this is precisely your own situation: *You are Frazier.*

¹⁵ This is as close as we will get to a meditation on the phenomenon of YouTube addiction: *what* exactly is it that attracts us in our meanderings? And why?

{...}

Independence (2011)

“What I must do is all that concerns me,” says Emerson, “not what the people think. ... the great man is he who, in the midst of the crowd, keeps with perfect sweetness the independence of solitude.”¹⁶

But independence is problematic: a burden, almost a curse.

In terms of its effects viewed extensionally, as it were as a behavioral phenomenon it is hard to distinguish it from ostracism. You might as well have the mark of Cain upon your brow.

Because society, in general, is not an object with which the independent soul can have some mutually beneficial interaction, any more than a comet can with Jupiter. It is a gigantic gravitational vortex that either sucks you in, to the destruction of your individuality, or flings you away into interstellar space. The House always wins, says Heraclitus.

¹⁶ “Self-reliance”.

{...}

The scapegoat (2011)

A curious imperative: the social order must not only exclude, but punish. It is not enough that the geek should be cast out for his deviance, he should also get his ass kicked by the football team; and witches must be hunted down to be burnt. The public spectacle associated with the institution of the stocks; carried to its logical conclusion, we cannot picture the guillotine without the crowd gathered to watch the aristos lose their heads.¹⁷ The chick must be pecked to death. Everyone must cast a stone. There is some low-level mechanism, some piece of machine code, that demands that you single some poor asshole out to make an example of him.

The phenomenon may be general among the social structures of the animal kingdom; I have observed something like it, e.g., in dog packs. Smaller groups are usually stable, but aggregates of more than half a dozen or so display a pronounced instability: suddenly, for no apparent reason, random barking will enter upon a runaway feedback loop, all will become excited, one among them will be designated the runt, and all the rest will turn on it.

In early cities, banishment. Tossing one outside the walls and forbidding him to return. We do not want this one among us. We make him a symbol of what? the will to violate the rules? perhaps the mere possibility of transgression? and cast him out.

¹⁷ Admittedly my mental picture derives from Baroness Orczy, but —

Perhaps simply the principle of exclusion. Inclusion demands its complement: no one can belong to a community, if no one can be kept out of it. This is natural: in a way the principle of the gated community is just the principle of the cell wall; the division between order and chaos.

But how is the scapegoat selected? I take a personal interest in the question.....

{...}

We find the idea in the Bible (cf. *Leviticus*), of an animal which, in time of plague or famine, could be ritually burdened with the sins of the people and then cast out into the desert. The Greeks also followed the practice, but with humans: in theory some person of importance was to be cast out (in some cultures even sacrificed, see any volume of *The Golden Bough*);¹⁸ in practice, naturally, some poor schlemiel would be substituted to take the fall instead, and it is in this form that the practice survives into the present day.

The odd thing is that the Hebrew name¹⁹ associated with the scapegoat is (suitably Latinized) *Azazel*, which in an Apocryphal text — the *Book of Enoch*, claimed by tradition to be of antediluvian provenance, but more likely composed two or three

¹⁸ In the cinema my favorite illustration of this theme is *Eye of the Devil* [J. Lee Thompson, 1967], in which modern-day feudal lord David Niven ends up the victim of a ritual stag hunt (led by David Hemmings and Sharon Tate, clad head to toe in ninja black) after the crops fail on his French estate.

¹⁹ In the Bible not so much the name of a person as the name of the place to which the sacrifice is sent, but, whatever.

centuries B.C., and subsequently elided from canonical scripture²⁰ is the name of one of the fallen angels cast out of heaven who taught mankind the arts and the sciences; specifically, he who taught the fabrication of swords and daggers and breastplates, and the working of metals. Which sounds suspiciously Promethean, and confirms us in our guess that the unlucky stiff selected for ostracism and exile would probably be a geek who had authored some dangerous innovation. Why not kill two birds with one stone, after all.

About this work Sir Walter Raleigh, in a *History of the World*²¹ written while he was imprisoned in the Tower of London, after noting that Enoch is supposed to have engraved various prophecies “on pillars of stone and Bricke” which since have disappeared, says

“But of these prophecies of *Enoch* Saint *Jude* testifieth; and some part of his Bookes (which contained the course of the Starres, their names and motions) were afterward found in *Arabia fœlix*,²² in the Dominion of the Queene of *Saba*²³: (saith Origen) of which Tertullian affirmeth that hee had seene and read some whole pages.”²⁴

²⁰ Save among Ethiopian Jews, who have preserved the most complete manuscript. See Michael A. Knibb (with Edward Ullendorff), *The Ethiopic Book of Enoch* (2 vols.); Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978.

²¹ “At London Printed for Walter Burre”, 1614. Cf. “The first Booke of the first part”, Chapter 5, Section 6: “Of the Patriarchs delivering their knowledge by Tradition; and that ENOCH writ before the floud.”

²² I.e., Southern Arabia.

²³ I.e., Sheba.

²⁴ P. 79 of the edition preserved on the Internet Archive; the spellings are Raleigh’s. — He also claims that Augustine made mention of Enoch, though this isn’t exactly footnoted either.

though he bases these assertions on evidence no one else has been able to discover. Speaking from the perspective of one who has labored in similar circumstances, I don't find this surprising. Sometimes you just make shit up. Enoch, at any rate, was supposed to have recorded certain secret mysteries later communicated by God to Moses but not transmitted to the vulgar masses (here insert the Rosicrucian mantra), related to the Kabbalah. Unsurprisingly these are lost. What remains for our inspection is less cosmic in significance but admittedly entertaining, painting as it does a picture not of revolt in heaven but of a renegade band of angelic voyeurs ("the Watchers") who decide after beholding "the beautiful daughters of men" to take off for an extended weekend in Vegas, with predictable consequences:

And they took wives for themselves, and everyone chose for himself one each. And they began to go in to them and were promiscuous with them. And they taught them charms and spells, and showed to them the cutting of roots and trees. And they became pregnant and bore large giants, and their height was three thousand cubits. These devoured all the toil of men, until men were unable to sustain them. And the giants [i.e., the *Nephilim*] turned against them to devour men. And they began to sin against birds, and against animals, and against reptiles and against fish, and they devoured one another's flesh and drank the blood from it. Then the earth complained about the lawless ones.²⁵

²⁵ Knibb and Ullendorff, op cit.,

clearly a prophecy of the role of billionaire oligarchs in global capitalism, and one which promises us a Flood is forthcoming that will cleanse the planet.

The fate of *Azazel* in this account is particularly instructive: he is singled out to be bound and buried under stones and cast into a darkness which sounds suspiciously like the Caucasus:

(8. 1) And Azazel taught men to make swords, and daggers, and shields and breastplates. And he showed them the things after these, and the art of making them: bracelets, and ornaments, and the art of making up the eyes and of beautifying the eyelids, and the most precious and choice stones, and all (kinds of) coloured dyes. *And the world was changed.* (8.2) And there was great impiety and much fornication, and they went astray, and all their ways became corrupt.

Thus predictably:

(10.4) And further the Lord said to Raphael: “Bind Azazel by his hands and his feet, and throw him into the darkness. And split open the desert which is in Dudael, and throw him there. (10.5) And throw on him jagged and sharp stones, and cover him with darkness; and let him stay there for ever, and cover his face, that he may not see light, and that on the great day of judgment he may be hurled into the fire.”

Which doesn't sound promising. Even Shelley might have had a hard time writing him out of this one.

{...}

In more modern and presumably more reliable literature, Jan Bremmer²⁶ after citing *Leviticus* notes the existence of similar rituals in Greece, Rome, among the Hittites, in India, “and even in mountainous Tibet”, and analyzes at some length the practice of driving the designate from the city with rods of the *agnus castus* aka *lygos*, a relative of the willow;²⁷ and, remarking that it was the marginal members of society who were selected for scapegoating, notes also that these were sometimes singled out to wear the *lygos* wreath, which aha! was associated with Prometheus, that notoriously marginal Titan. Scapegoats were escorted from the city through a designated gate, led around the walls in a procession (I would bet not clockwise but widdershins),²⁸ and then, in the best traditions of reality television, driven off by stoning.

It is in this spirit that the hapless boob who becomes a ritual sacrifice in *The Wicker Man* [1973]²⁹ is burnt in a manshaped cage made of willow branches. And here was the original Burning Man, worshipped by California hipsters to the present day.

²⁶ “Scapegoat rituals in ancient Greece”, *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*, **87** (1983), 299-320.

²⁷ Frazer says the *agnus castus* was “a tree to which magical properties were ascribed” but is no more specific.

²⁸ Though it is one of the little-noted ironies of theoretical physics that the sense of a rotation is assigned according to the right-hand rule, and thus the (left-handed) clockwise direction is negative, while the counterclockwise direction is positive. — I leave reinterpretation of the rituals of witchcraft that also take into account charge conjugation and time reversal to some other scholar.

²⁹ Described elsewhere (letter to Cocktail 2/6/01, “Frazer in the Hebrides”) as “the first, last, and only Druid nudie musical”. — Directed by Robin Hardy but, more significantly, written by Anthony Shaffer.

The developmental arc of human society is once again revealed to be either a vicious circle, a Slinky [a/de]scending an Escher staircase, or a vain attempt to find the inside of a Klein bottle.

{...}

Which is all clever in its own way, but explains nothing.

Frazer devotes Part VI of *The Golden Bough* to the scapegoat, and as usual refers everything to magical reasoning: it is an instance of transference; the sins of the people are responsible for their suffering, and must be passed on to an object, an animal, or a person, which then is cast out.

He offers countless illustrations in the ritual practices of a variety of primitives,³⁰ all of which are clearly designed to bestow Cootie Protector upon their practitioners — writ large, the crucifixion of Christ to remove the stain of original sin from mankind; on a less cosmic scale, variations on the theme of Huck Finn lecturing Tom Sawyer about remedies for warts. “A German cure for toothache,” says Frazer, “is to bore a hole in a tree and cram some of the sufferer’s hair into it. In those cases, though no doubt the tree suffers the pains of gout [similar recipe] or toothache respectively, it does so with a sort of stoical equanimity, giving no outward and visible sign of the pains that rack it inwardly.” Plagues similarly are caused by demonic possession, and

³⁰ I think we must agree the word is here used ironically.

All this seems to presuppose a capacity for symbolic representation and a lamentable tendency to confuse names with things, which — rather as lactose intolerance is gradually being eliminated from the gene pool — one may presume will slowly disappear as cultural evolution continues to debug the existential software of *Homo sapiens*.

{...}

Of course that is bullshit. It is the instinct to expel the Other that is fundamental; the rest, the elaborate justifications for the expulsion of the deviant, is mere epiphenomenon, rationalization after the fact. No kind of sympathetic magic is involved when the thorn is expelled from your flesh; the social order is simply finding excuses for what it would have insisted on anyway. Frazer is doing metaphysics in the style of Bradley, finding bad reasons for what is believed upon instinct. The real question is, who will be singled out? who is the undesirable?

And I know the answer to that one too. Look out, kid. It's something you did. It scatters and it gathers; it advances and retires, says Heraclitus.

{...}

Nietzsche [*Twilight of the Idols*]: “The free man is a *warrior*.”

Admittedly it seems to solve the problem of subjugation if you take charge of it. But where does it end? Nietzsche the reclusive scholar has no idea how *boring* endless fighting is. How boring warriors are, how limiting it is to make that the sole purpose of life. How counterproductive: Poncelet was an officer in the French army; he invented projective geometry only after he'd been taken prisoner during the retreat from Moscow and tossed into a cell.

{...}

Le Carré asks “What is the difference, in morality, between the totally anarchic criminality of the artist, which is endemic in all fine creative minds, and the artistry of the criminal?” Though this sounds more like Austin Grossmann, in his portrait of the Mad Scientist.³¹ Again, compare Nietzsche: the purpose of art is to destroy the State; of science, to destroy the world.

³¹ *Soon I Will Be Invincible*. [New York: Pantheon, 2007.]

{...}



Nun stehst du starr,
Schaust rückwärts ach! wie lange schon!
Was bist du Narr
Vor Winters in die Welt entflohn?

{...}

However even though we find things like

The crawling glaciers pierce me with the spears
Of their moon-freezing crystals, the bright chains
Eat with their burning cold into my bones

I doubt Nietzsche ever had to sleep outdoors in the winter.

{...}

Snow



In

practice it isn't a problem finding a place to sleep. The real problem is finding a place to sit down...

{...}

Heidegger on the lawn (6/1/2012)

Whatever his limitations, Heidegger makes great reading for a homeless guy. I time myself: it takes exactly seven minutes to dash into the University library, run up four flights of stairs, sprint into the stacks, grab another volume (it is fortunate that 'B' in the Library of Congress classification lies close to the entrance), dash back to the front desk to check it out, and get back to the hiding-place where I have tied the dogs up in the bushes before the campus cops arrive to write us a ticket. If I am late inevitably there ensues a long and profoundly boring argument about whether leashed and extremely friendly Australian shepherds represent a menace to academic society which I must always pretend to lose if I wish to avoid incarceration. Then I can sit out on the lawn all afternoon, drinking canned Starbucks espresso-and-cream and indulging the nihilistic Schadenfreude of the gypsy anarchist yucking it up over the darkening of the world, the flight of the gods, the destruction of the earth, the transformation of men into a mass, and the hatred and suspicion of everything free and creative. No man is poor who can do what he likes to once in a while, says Heraclitus.





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Stardust (6/26/12)

A meditation on this theme, prompted somehow by Robert Musil: if everything I see on this spring morning around Varsity Pond was cooked in a supernova and blasted away and ended up here in time to form this world that I see, then the dispersion time is small, relative to the age of the universe; this means that

spores could have arrived here as easily — and (recalling the pingpong balls and the hydrogen bomb)³² might have been blown away by the shock wave without being vaporized; one would have to verify this with an explicit calculation (does radiation pressure dominate? I really don't know), but it seems plausible. — Then to model the rate of diffusion. But surely in a billion years or two they could be all over the galaxy. Certainly dust clouds are everywhere.

So you would wonder then whether there is some RNA signature that could be detected by spectroscopic means beyond, say, nucleic acid fragments. — Or proteins, perhaps, but it is still easiest to imagine panspermia as the spreading of the *idea* of self-reproduction; of the Von Neumann replicator, of the genetic code. — Or perhaps one could not identify the most complex molecules, but rather the set of products characteristic of their breakdown. Really I think most of these have been seen.

It would be natural to look for the residue of the primordial goop on comets. Conversely, if life originated independently here, would it have spread to comets? a few bacteria here and there, perhaps more, meteoric fragments get knocked all around

³² Cf. Chapter 8 of George Dyson, *Project Orion: The Atomic Spaceship 1957-1965*; Penguin, 2002. — During a series of nuclear tests in the mid-Fifties, the Air Force physicist Lew Allen experimented with hanging steel spheres covered with layers of graphite or plastics from the towers on which the bombs were detonated. Remarkably, even though they were literally 20 feet from the center of the fireball and exposed to temperatures of as much as 150,000 degrees Kelvin, many of these specimens were propelled to considerable distances and recovered intact. These surprising results convinced skeptics, among them Ted Taylor himself, that the idea of a nuclear rocket propelled by bombs wasn't completely crazy. — The key, it developed, was to coat the object in question with a layer of something that would ablate to dissipate the heat efficiently; plastics turned out to be a particularly good choice. — Anaerobic bacteria buried within the fragments of the body of a planet, or a comet, of course, could be similarly shielded.

the solar system. So that if the sun went boom, the spores would be scattered. (The cosmic puffball hypothesis.)³³

Difficulty: how long they could remain dormant? Even on the Earth the sell-by date is fairly short;³⁴ the cosmic radiation field can't make things easier. On the other hand, would they really need to be alive or even intact? Seeding might be accomplished simply by providing the local chemistry with the appropriate hints.

{
interstellar comets viz. 2I/Borisov
}

{...}

Consistency check: obviously we would expect to discover life on other planets in the solar system, also (perhaps even more likely) on comets. Presumably we wouldn't even know what we were looking at if it were not carbon-based and very similar to our own, so grant that. The test would be the genetic code. If the same, we expect that the Earth has contaminated the solar system, and analyze the samples for divergence from a common ancestor, by looking at the sequences that code for specific

³³ The discovery of interstellar comets, viz. 2I/Borisov, has added an interesting twist to this argument.

³⁴ The question of the sell-by date is a matter of controversy. Various authors have claimed to have recovered and revived bacteria preserved in amber (shades of Crichton/Spielberg) as much as 120 million years old; see for instance C.L. Greenblatt et al., "Micrococcus luteus — Survival in Amber", *Microbial Ecology*, **48** (2004), 120-127. Others express extreme skepticism about these results and argue for a maximum DNA preservation time of less than a million years; see Eske Willerslev et al., "Long-term persistence of bacterial DNA", *Current Biology* **14** (2004), No. 1.

proteins, e.g.; the same analysis can be applied to life on Earth, of course, and we can use this clock to figure out when the branch occurred. If billions of years, we suspect a common origin; otherwise we can date the meteoric event that knocked the seed loose, and even guess whether this occurred more than once. If not the same but close, creative confusion: after Crick we suspect some bottleneck, look for more samples on other worlds, and begin to entertain Hoyle-like hypotheses: could even mitochondria be evidence of multiple seeding events?

If not the same at all, we start to get paranoid.

(Dead giveaway would be different handedness for amino acids.)

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Annals of natural history (2012)

One annual visitor, whom I see over a period of several years alternately in the creek east of the city, or in the marshes south of it, is a solitary blue heron. It is extraordinarily beautiful, and I can never help but stop and stare at it when I see it on my daily walks, though it is extremely shy, and does not appreciate my attention. (The dogs don't help.) I have no idea, of course, whether it is male or female, though my instinctive guess is that it is a guy lost in the mating season, come to Boulder to hang out in a mountain stream in the hope that some girl heron will come along and they will Meet Cute.

Just another poor geek trying to find the party. I know the feeling.

{...}

Maddin's Dracula (8/1/2012)

I have to admit, the city has its moments. One afternoon I am out walking Wolfie and Stanzi and let them loose on the high school grounds to play with another Aussie belonging to someone I peg as a random techie, with whom I strike up a conversation. He is a recent arrival from Canada, and hails from Winnipeg. "You probably don't even know where that is," he says. I tell him that, 6th grade geography aside, I am a film geek, and therefore know that it figures in a famous question put to Mister Memory in Hitchcock's *The 39 Steps*, and that it is at present the home of Guy Maddin, one of my favorite film artists.

He tells me that his girlfriend there was a dancer, and appeared in Maddin's film of a ballet based on *Dracula*. I have seen it, of course. "Dude," I tell him, "I am uncharacteristically impressed."

{...}

Thanksgiving (11/2012)

In the evening I walk back to sleep in the office, and realize belatedly that everything has closed and I have nothing to eat. Finally I pass the gas station just below the building, and find that they are open and have a convenience store. I tie the dogs up outside and inspect the shelves; select a large bag of (Chili Cheese) Fritos, and buy them from the girl behind the glass barrier. She seems to like me, or maybe it's just Wolfie and Stanzi. I smile and bid her a happy holiday; sneak into the building, eat my dinner, which actually isn't bad, and pass out watching space operas on the big Mac. Trying to compare this feast with Thanksgivings past, which have featured generous repasts like dinner at Denny's, frozen pizza, peanut butter sandwiches, and (the previous year) a cold can of chili before reading myself to sleep in my storage locker.³⁵ On balance, not so bad.

³⁵ Actually I recall this episode fondly, since what I read was Neal Stephenson's *Snow Crash*, whose principal ("Hiro Protagonist") despite being a legendary hacker and (as his business card declares) the world's greatest swordsman, lives in a storage locker and makes his living delivering pizza. — Irony may not be an armor impervious to circumstance, but if it is not, that statement is my Gödel sentence.

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The Arab Spring (again) (2/1/2013)

The outcomes of revolutions tend to resemble Faraday's demonstration of the reality of the magnetic field: you scatter iron filings on the surface of a piece of paper, and it somehow comes as a surprise that they arrange themselves in alignment with the lines of force emanating from the bar magnet hidden beneath it.

