

Parse Three



After The Docking What Lies Beyond?

Time passes. In her second year of graduate school, Catherine became more seriously involved in her studies and in her writing. She had begun to publish in some institutional journals. She managed to studiously avoid the various attempts at courtship.

She also made several trips to William's abode, as many as she could practicably handle, otherwise continuing her contact with William through e-mails and phone calls.

Her sisters had visited the island during the summer the two following years, during the time Catherine was present. Lydia would be entering her fourth year of Law School, and Theresa, her third year at Antioch. Theresa had become very accepting, and enamoured of William; Lydia still a reluctant supporter of her older sister in her choice of men.

A Fondness For Another Sister

Before the sisters arrived for their summer interlude, Catherine needed to unburden herself of a troubling matter.

"Mr. D., a sensitive subject, if you will permit me."

"Of course, Catherine. Need You ask?"

"Its Theresa. You seem to have grown very fond of her. Perhaps another surrogate daughter?"

"I think Theresa is very much like you. She very much admires you and wants to be part of your experience. She is willing to put some of herself out there."

"But, aren't you being a bit physical with her?"

"Don't you mean that I am reciprocating, responding to her affectionate nature?"

"I suppose that is one way of looking at it."

"How do you look at it?"

"Now that you ask, I am not sure."

"I am not unaware of how I am interacting with your sister. She is so much like you; I feel very comfortable with her. But let me assure you Catherine, I would never take any liberties with her. It is more unthinkable than you might imagine.

"Your sister is a very warm person; I am drawn to that warmth, as, I imagine, is everybody she might meet. She is very accepting of me; and our relationship. She is engaging, has a sparkling intelligence; she is gorgeous. She is your sister.

"I love her for who she is. She is so like you. Because I say these things, it only means that I am doubly enriched in knowing you, and in knowing her; and in feeling what I feel for her. You must know how I appreciate her.

"Catherine, there is little else I can say."

"How do you feel toward Lydia?"

"Why not ask how I feel toward you?"

"Or your wife, maybe?"

"You might mention others."

Catherine suddenly looked pierced as though by some unseen blade, a very hurt expression appeared upon that lovely countenance.

William, for his part barely responded to that expression. He knew he had lashed out at her, but did not feel remorse. He was annoyed by her interrogation. Theresa was a very lovely person toward whom he could not help but feel many things. Mostly as an extension of Catherine, but even more, as a beautiful young woman so full of life, so vivacious, lively, stimulating. He thought of the phrase he had seen in the Family Of Man 'And shall not loveliness be loved forever?' Let it be so. He also remembered his first partner's jealousy over his affection for their daughter. Must all affections be suspect, tainted with some dubiously evil intent?

"Catherine, trust me, love me if you will; don't think for a moment I would ever betray you.

"We came together, remarkably. We are still so much at the beginning of our relationship. Perhaps there are doubts in you, about many things, about certain aspects of our relationship. But Theresa should not be amongst them. For one thing, it would be even more unthinkable that your sister would betray you. At least, trust in that."

Catherine's expression changed to one of simulated shame, or embarrassment. "Mr. D., I ask because of 'who I am'. I am sorry if I have offended you. I warned you it was a sensitive subject. Obviously it is.

"Don't assume the worst however. I am very pleased, maybe more than pleased that you have hit it off with Theresa. I realize I have no right to set limits on how you interact. After all, it is I who wanted you to meet both sisters. Whether or not I had thought of what that might mean; I had suspected that and truly hoped Theresa would like you, would love you?."

"I asked about Lydia curiously enough. I realize I spoke out of turn by bringing up your wife. For which you slapped me pretty hard.

"I would still like to know about Lydia."

“Catherine, I did not slap you at all. You were out of line. I wanted you to move you back on track with me, without any debate.

“I will try to answer your question about Lydia.

“I do not dislike her; again my feelings are affected by the fact that she is your sister; she is also gorgeous; easy to give her many chances of a decent reconsideration. There are times when she reminds me of you.

“If it had been her in your dorm, everything would have been perfunctory; she might not have tolerated my presence without a chaperone. A done deal.

“After this last gathering, I have begun to feel she is mostly very reserved, unlike you and Theresa in your openness, and generosity of spirit.

“I don’t know if you noticed, early on, when all four of us were sitting on the bluff a few summers ago, when Lydia and I were alluding to her possible prejudices with regard to yours and my relationship, she offered she might even be envious of your happiness; she momentarily put her hand reassuringly on mine. I believe, in that gesture, she wiped away the ogre. I became real, and was not to be spat upon. But that was then. I haven’t felt any increase in the warmth beyond that.”

“Yes! I noticed; and I had taken it as you expressed it.”

“Otherwise, I suspect she is very much a Tellerman; a very fine, intelligent, decent human being; but, not especially warm.

“Catherine, I cannot tell you enough how much your coming into my life means. I think you know. What I feel for you cannot truly be expressed with any ordinary, or familiar language.

“Once again, the happenstance of our actually coming together tests any notion of credible reality. That you were the primary impetus in that happening cannot but amaze me for all eternity; but, as you already know, I will need to answer to a more finite time line.

“Your sisters are people in their own right. I realize how privileged I am to know them as well; and know that I would never have met them, and if I had ever met them, I would be another amongst many of already too many; if I had seen them, I might have notoriously, desirously gazed upon their startling beauty.

“Perhaps, they, in turn, might realize that some old people do have something left in them to offer, even such as they are.

“For me, it is easy to love, I say love, Theresa. Yes! I feel affectionate towards her; I want to express that affection. She does not shy away from it. I can’t tell you what that means to me. It would be terrible if suddenly she saw me as a dirty old man. ‘Gawd’ help us all!”

“Oh!, Mr. D., I too would feel terrible. I trust the discretion of Theresa. I believe she feels many things; I know she is genuine in her feelings; and I know she trusts her own feelings. Yes!, she is affectionate by nature; but not with everyone. She reacts to the huggy friends of the family the same way I do. She trusts you; and mostly she likes you; a lot; perhaps more than she likes many other people; and Yes!, a lot of it has to do with me; sharing my life, my happiness.

“Yes!, besides she is also a very beautiful young woman. I know it gives you pleasure to be appreciated by her, to be hugged by her.”

“To be truthful Catherine, this is all so dreamy. I feel the author titillating himself with things that could never be, because the world is not made in such a way to account such drivel; he gives in to something almost defiantly; as though he didn’t care; and as though he damned well had the right to do anything he wanted with his creation; his life. If he can’t get hugs one way; he’ll get them another. One never gets enough hugs from the right people. One finally hugs oneself.

George Washington, And Abraham

“Our author realizes most of us live schizophrenic lives; that is, double lives. The one we are living out of training, mimicking, habit, conventional wisdom. Then the one that arises from the doubts about that life, where we begin to imagine something different, and live this different life in our imaginations; and perhaps still others, branching into multiple personalities. After all, in essence, we have the potential to become any other life that we have imagined; or perhaps have witnessed. In many ways we are expected to be like George Washington, Abraham Lincoln; Yes!, even girls, who are not segregated in our public schools, are expected to be like these guys, certainly not like Martha or Mary Todd. They are intended to serve as models to be sure; but what happens when we put on their shoes. Shazam!?”

“What do we really know about the reality that lives outside of our selves, beyond our senses, outside of our skins?”

“I realize this is all a rationalization for setting oneself against a perceived circumscribed reality; a set piece. But as we have discussed before, every reality we might sense is in a transition from one state to another; this applies to all social mores; ‘intersocial volition’. We oscillate from a very violent society, to a very quiescent society, from that something that seemed

important enough for which one would sacrifice his life, to an apparent indifference to all that happens around us.”

“I hear you, Mr. D.

“I do recognize the author’s handiwork. I have quarreled with that handiwork. I am more than a Barbie Doll. I take the author to task to clean up his act. I have accepted him conditionally; but, it’s a two way deal. Only in that way can I accept what we have been regarding as the improbable. I don’t want him messing with my sisters; I should be enough for him. Like the man says ‘be cool’.

“Mr. D., without knowing precisely what it is we are seeking, we impose this proscription upon the credulousness of our fellow man, all the while hoping for acceptance for our selves, as though we might be made an exception, so concerned are we, in who we are, what we are and what we say. More concerned, are we? So what!? We haven’t any entitlement or assumed prerogatives. Two more thrown into the hopper along with the rest, in the company of the best and the worst, with or without our substantiality, or insubstantiality. If we did not exist we would not occupy a space in an otherwise seemingly empty-headed world. We are forced to occupy a space that yearns for occupancy, and hopefully it is not in, what you characterize as, a cesspool. Even with our non-existence, we are more than existential; we are not waiting for the end, with or without curiosity. We venture; we compete for space in the imaginings, in a very dull human climate.

“Enchantment, we want enchantment. Yillah, Rima, wood nymphs, mermaids. What of Dulcinea? Do I want Tagi, Abel, the satyr, a merman; or Quixote?

“Beyond enchantment lies pleasure; all consuming, each time the last, because we have tried so resolutely to let it all go, all of ourselves lost in an oblivion of erotic sensation, however momentary, however out-of reality, floating in space, Chagall-like, Klimt-like, feeling to our depths as we devour each other. So sublime, resolving to a changed rhythm of respiration, after deep sighs; D H Lawrence and Henry Miller, mere dabblers in a lusty denouement.

“Then it must begin again, the onset of enchantment, the quickened palpitation, the increase in that rhythm of respiration, the alteration, clouding, ignoring reality, the odors, the warts, wens, moles, hair in the nostrils and in the ears, the awakened parts all somehow immersed in this rutting, seeking that momentary surfeit; and that glowing once again, and yet another subsidation; all mindless, so bleary-eyed, Modigliani-like; yet, so useless. But without this lost swoon of entwining, we become

agitated, neurotic, schizophrenic, even mad; we copiously eat or starve ourselves, our bodies, our corpus crushing, and depriving our minds and spirits.”

“Catherine, what you say does go beyond what we can know or express. Yet we like to express our ignorance with such eloquence. We stand revealed, undramatic, only to ourselves important, lest some predator lurk, salivating, not at all interested in our feelings or thoughts; another thirsty blood-holding mammal after a good feast. Probably less palatable than it imagined.

Catherine’s Father

“Unfortunately for us, the social ethic mocks our union. Like your father’s paramour said: ‘they make us pay’.

“A fixed idea – intolerant?”

“Yes! When my daughter was being ogled by the older gent, her first kiss, I stepped in. Why?”

“I’d like to be able to be the one to answer your question, but I am party to our relationship; I cannot be called upon to testify for or against.

“Until I met you, I had not truly imagined, beyond girlish dreams, what kind of relationship I might want with a man, or anybody, for that matter. I might still wonder what I am doing with you.

“Mr. D., my father will not step in. But that does not mean he is more accepting.

“I feel confident my father wants me to be happy; he already knows he cannot tell me how to be happy; he can laugh with me, he can cry with me, but he cannot cry when I laugh, nor laugh when I cry.

“If he harbors a fixed social ethic, he does not speak it in adamant tyrannical terms. As a physician, a humanitarian, he sees and hears many things, most, about which, he cannot speak; and he cannot interfere; he cannot judge; he must heal, everything from broken bodies to broken hearts – broken spirits, and broken minds.

“By law he is obliged to report what he thinks amounts to child, maybe even spousal, abuse. By conscience, he is obliged to counsel battered women to seek another kind of help, which he will arrange.

“He will do almost anything to alleviate pain and suffering. He would do so for me – if my heart was broken – without any hint of moralizing. He loves me that much; he cares that much.

“In a certain sense, if I was to love a man for what he is, it would be my father; and I do love him unconditionally.

“I imagine I would like to be like him, but somehow sense I could not be so selflessly dedicated, even as much as I might believe his way is the best way to serve humanity.

“I know I could not be like my mother, even as much as I might suspect what motivates her. She has fully absorbed a fixed social ethic as a wife and a mother; she feels a duty to do the best in both; but she follows rules; she is not creative, intellectually.

“My father was not thinking when he fell in love with her; she was the reigning beauty, the princess whom he desired. That was that. She came from a certain class of people, traveling in circles that sought out a certain kind of partner; she seeking a professional person. Father was less certain what he sought; he simply fell, when she whisked him away in the right setting; and not a casual encounter, in my opinion.

“She has been a suitable partner for him, from the very beginning; he has fulfilled her as a man, a husband, a father; with the one exception. She feels she sacrificed an imagined career for his. She, suddenly that modern woman, a little behind the wave, can't help but wonder what she might have become if she had not become the dutiful wife and mother.

“Many younger women, like myself, intend to do both, if possible; and not to sacrifice ourselves to a fixed idea; perhaps even intend to do without the neat little package.

“We do question the assumptions inherent to the social contract, the social fabric; it seems imperative that we do so, even as an objective study in social institutions.

“We are not unaware of the countless failures, of countless unhappy faces, not all to do with the pursuit of fame and fortune, but the failure of what one might assume was the promise of a basic intimate relationship; one that began with fluttering hearts – or was it something else - more animal – more hormonal?

“Do we look too closely, or do we not look closely enough. What are we intended to become, as individuals, as a species; can we really know that before hand, a priori? We seem not to trust our elders to tell us, those whom we feel have screwed things up irretrievably.

“I doubt many young people find themselves asking these kinds of questions outside the classroom, where such probing, perhaps dangerous questions, are provided with ready made answers; wherein the teacher usually is not inclined to leave the questions unanswered. The really good teacher will beg off the answers, leaving the individual to answer for him or herself; and wisely so, because that individual might be me.

“Well, students, the lesson for today does not end with a period.”

“That’s good Catherine, I like the way that came out.”

“Mr. D., ideally that is what I want, the open-ended intellectual exercise. After all, as we interpret the nature of things, life appears a fluid happening, in flux, as an adaptive, evolving circumstance, always undergoing change; ‘transitional’, as we have intimated; how can we presume to arrest, to freeze, to cast in concrete, so to speak? Does that not seem anti-something – unnatural, at least?”

“Of course, we answer in the affirmative, because it is what we deduce is the resolution to our observations; and our learning; and our instincts; somehow seeking a fit.

“But this does not answer or resolve a quandary for those who seek an absolute?”

There Are No Absolutes

“We, you and I, assert, there are no absolutes.

“There are only way stations, half-way houses, partial truths, ‘A Holding Action’, as you have described it, en route to discovering a more complete understanding, mostly wordlessly absorbed, more than can be known in definitive terms”

“Harkening to TAO – ‘You name it, you kill it’ ‘Pinning the butterfly to the cork’. Suddenly lifeless – a ‘still life’ - the thing, the truth, that soared; that was beautiful in flight, stiffened, crashing to earth. Not incidentally, the gist of life reduced to a word!

“In my early days, when I was using these hands to sculpt, modeling, animating a portrait was the most difficult thing. It was easier to carve a figure suggesting an illusion of motion through the use of drapery, gowns, dresses; leading the eye around something. The more detail of the anatomy one used the more the work tended to stiffen. We derive as much or more aesthetic pleasure from Michelangelo’s unfinished Captives as we do from his flawlessly finished work. They are emerging; our imagining of their final form is far more absorbing than in a finished work, which leaves us thinking things like David is mighty handsome fellow, or that the Bruges Madonna, or the Pieta are very moving in what they depict or symbolize. But for me the other is a far more meaningful sculpturally, as an aesthetic experience.

“Metal sculpture allowed one the freedom to use any number of extensions, whereas woodcarving from the block, as carving from the marble block, was confining. But as it turned out the use of extensions was only successful as an extension; like an exclamation mark. For me the carving was a more pleasurable

experience; following an imaginary line with a tool all along the whole of it; the line never escaping; perhaps disappearing, but we know it is there somewhere; we search for it.

“Constructing in metal sculpture wasn’t nearly as satisfying an experience, certainly a less sensuous experience. Modeling in clay gave a more immediate sensual experience, however completely lacking in permanence; fragile, and something a casting medium stiffened; like, froze.

“I forget the fellow’s name now, but there is one sculptor who uses exotic metals to create sculptures that will endure all manner of weathers, all manner of pollutions, all manner of explosions, including nuclear ones; perhaps all but volcanic eruptions where molten magma might provide enough heat to destroy its integrity. He is thinking in terms of relics for future generations to discover; not a shard, but a whole perfect thing, brand new looking, untouched by the elements and the ravages of the ages.

“Oddly we have been taught that sculpture is a plastic art form, more depicted by Michelangelo’s slaves, than by David.”

“Interesting Mr. D., truly interesting. The way you describe carving makes me want to try carving something, as a process, as you describe it sensually; following a line, with a tool, that is, with your eye-hand, together.

“From what I see and feel here with your carvings, I anticipate the sensual feeling being somewhat preserved on the carved surface, particularly in wood, a smooth groove created by the sharp scalloped cutting edge in the hard wood; coursing the fingers over the series of small smooth scallops, as they follow a line, a form, a curve; as though you are caressing something, a human body.”

“Catherine, you read me well”

“Mr. D. I am speaking for myself, but I imagine you!”

“Also a wholly different experience than ‘pinning the butterfly to the cork’, even though neither one nor the other is more lifeless than the other. The butterfly must be encased; so fragile; and never touched.”

“As perhaps truth herself – illusory – No!?”

“Yes, Mr. D.

“All the more to argue against rigidity of thought; ossification of thought; imagine unearthing a thought, frozen in time. Laotse?”

“Very good Catherine!”

“Mind you, I do not flaunt this opinion; a precarious position to maintain, although one that follows from what we have been discussing.

“By way of extrapolating, would it follow, and be misconstrued, that what I say supports, or promotes conditions like anarchy,

and lawlessness. While I know you know I do not in any way advocate such behavior.

“The question is how rigid is the rule to become? How much does it prevent us from becoming something we want and ought to become; provided we can know anything of what we want.

“You and I - becoming, Mr. D.?”

“My mother horrified! ‘Where have I failed?’ “

“We have gone over this ground too many times

“Catherine, our covenant is between ourselves.

“My task is to affirm that, not to doubt; before you, especially.”

“That is mine also – love – I will leave it at that.

“We have much else that needs doing, much else to accomplish.

“The ‘intelligent design’ has resulted in a premature rigor mortis; the world is flat; we must undo these things. We can most assuredly do these things better together, and before long, perhaps Tess and Lydia will join us; Tess, for certain.

“We will be attacked for our relationship – our imaginary Achilles heel - when it is our ideas that will really cause the affront - so be it!”

Off Into The Sunset?

William inveigled Catherine into sailing, and cruising, in his sailboat, also known as gunkholing. Although, during the summer, one traveled some distance before he found a gunkhole that was not already plugged by several other boats. William didn't mind sharing anchorages with other boats if the people who were in them showed some couth. So often these boats anchored too close to each other, and oneself, drowned out the natural sounds with the all too-familiar and mostly detestable human ones; and towed other little things behind them, that William derisively labeled motorized condoms, their owners feeling obliged to use them to destroy the equanimity of anyone else nearby. Oars had become a thing of the past. Summertime brought out the worst elements in the boating public, turning the waters into greatly disturbed super highways, and the gunkholes into very noisy parking lots, like Wal-Mart. The same holds true for that segment of the population that can afford PWCs, snowmobiles, trailbikes and Quads. Somehow man has not figured it out. His supreme conceit augurs against what is natural. Better known as multiple use; something for everybody. Yeah! Well!

Despite these considerations, William had ventured out with Catherine, since it would not be all that possible, with her University schedule, to undertake them with her after the ‘season’

had passed. He managed to find a few holes off the beaten track that did not afford much protection from adverse weather, but did minimize the effect of too much humanity in too many boats. Too much humanity in too many boats carries with it a most significant meaning. Even William's tolerant and social wife had characterized the melee as so many assholes piled so high upon each other as to create a navigational hazard.

"Mr. D., I have been studying your hands, now so reddishly tanned. They have seen the years; romantically revealing that appearance of the old salt. With several assorted scars. But I realize it must be mostly age that is showing. Not a terrible ugly thing, but something noble, enduring; and fascinating to me. They are your hands. They are strong hands, still. Your one little finger bent almost uselessly. Yes! Hemmingway's Old Man and The Sea crosses my mind."

"Catherine, quite a contrast to your most elegant perfect hands, in appearance, and in the tale they tell."

"What tale do mine tell, Mr. D.?"

"Utter refinement in manufacture. Smooth as smooth. But deceptive in a way, because I know you to engage in athletic activity, a tennis player; gripping something very firmly. The strength does not show; more the elegance; a sort of drawing-room elegance and sophistication shows. Very beautiful to me, even if they did not belong to you. I sense you know this thing; for often you gesture as though you did."

"Mr. D. I am not unaware that my hands are not an embarrassment to me. But I do not use forced gestures. I simply gesture. Hands are expressive, did you know that?"

"Yours are special to me whether they gesture or not."

"You are avoiding an answer. That's fine."

"While they may no longer be the hands of a virgin, they are none the less virgin hands. They have created nothing; made nothing. They haven't even planted or dug potatoes."

"Anyway, it was my observation; and I love your hands; they endear you to me. I do not know their full tale, but do know some of what they have done; and what they still do; some of which can be done by none other, and will never be done by any other."

"Catherine, I thought I was an incurable romantic."

"Let's not trifle, Mr. D., my statement may have lacked something; but still carried a great deal of meaning to me."

As Catherine said these words, she placed a hand upon his, which was tending the 'wheel', as they cruised along with a following sea. Her 'gesture' was gentle, caressing, and loving. She also leaned against him, as she sat along side him in the cockpit, turning her head to look at him very intently and fondly.

Whereupon William nodded his head in turn, touching her cheek with his. She then followed with a snuggle of her head upon his neck.

“I love you Mr. D.”

“I, thee.”

“Its settled then.”

The reader asks: ‘Are we finally ready for the sail into the sunset?’

‘Alas!, in my mind, not yet.’ The author replies. ‘Posterity will judge me, will judge us all. I could not allow the reader of the present or of the future to influence me. I must continue until I have said what I have wanted to say, some of which is unknown to me at this moment; or until I have lost interest in the project (humanity) altogether.

‘Catherine holds my interest in her youth and her loveliness, and in her fine intelligence; and in the quality of her empathy and reverence for all forms of life. William is my alter ego. Tess is the soft intuitive, beautiful, humorous, enthusiastic, totally lovable, brilliant child, the child after our own hearts. Lydia is the tenacious interrogator, very disarming with her poise and her statuesque beauty; and a person of penetrating intelligence and fierce convictions.

‘All four seethe with ideas, and concerns for a planet they envision ‘on the brink of disaster’. All four know of the millennia that have been required to carry us forth to this day, which the short-sighted, short-term gain, ubiquitous occupant proposes to convert into a ‘standard of living’ – NOW!; not as a socially conscionable thing to do, but as a means toward another end; fortune; profit and gain, pleasure in both, regardless of the how, or the consequences.

‘Even without these four, only me, on my own, preaching, I cannot traipse off into the sunset; or retire to my ranch in Montana; allowing all else to burn without comment. I must not yield to my feeling of impotence. Though I be my only reader, the muse commands this undertaking.

‘All of us, with any kind of conscience at all, must do our part to thwart the forces within the human community that would sacrifice us all to attain their short-term objectives.

‘Adam Smith was totally wrong for the sustained health of this planet, as well as the sustained health of a stratified society based upon profit and gain. Thomas Robert Malthus was right in his concern for number. God will not interfere. It is ours to do with! One wonders whether Smith, a Scot, and Malthus, an Englishman, both economists, overlapping in time 24 years in

their adulthood, had ever spoken to one another. Can you imagine their conversation?

The species operates with an excess of unconscionable greed, getting its share while it can; totally without love for the planet, which belongs to us all. The air we breath, the water we drink, from which we obtain our sustenance, is polluted from afar, beyond our property boundaries, even in Montana, dude ranchland. We are not safe anywhere; we are not out of harms way. Siberia and the Sahara were thought to be desolate forsaken places; think upon it; no longer!

None of what we are can be left to chance, to whimsy, to dubious argument, to ambivalence, to equivocation; to disinformation, preemption, to deliberate obfuscation. None of it can be left in the hands of God; certainly not man, as we have come to know him.

We are too great in number; in what is rapidly becoming a terminal redundancy, totally lacking in a cohesive purpose, not even united in a reverence and love for our nest which we befoul with every move.

Yes, I want you to believe that it is almost hopeless, so you will get up off your ass and do something besides consume, consume, consume; and defecate.

Think of Catherine as yourself, and William and Catherine's sisters as your allies.

There can be no sunset until we have made certain we can sleep an untroubled sleep, confident that man has got the message. That man cares, cares, cares.

I am not one to recommend what we should do with those who do not yield. They must be made to yield, either through common sense, or through other means. We must wrest from them what they have taken from us; mostly they have taken our peace of mind. They have created a gargantuan monster we all fear. They must be made to realize they cannot escape their own creation. There is no paradise, or heaven beyond. When we die, we die in this shithole we have created. Armageddon will only happen here without any reprieve, either in heaven or hell. A grand stench! Finis!

'Clean up your act; man!'

"Wow!, how about that author, Mr. D.?"

"We needed a boost, and we need to be reminded that our time in the sun comes with special responsibilities; special obligations.

"When he speaks of taking back something that has been taken from us, he has provided us with a purpose; as well as an overwhelming task.

“He speaks of the millennia required to bring us to this time and place. It is implied it all came about without the intervention of man. But, now through the intervention of man, the millennial process has been disrupted, the consequences of which we can only imagine. Yes! some of us prescient ones can predict, even without the numbers that show something is amiss; like the dolphins you discerned were off to a conference of the sea. Our intuition informs us of things; we infer things from an uncertain knowledge base, as experts, scientists, war with each other regarding the effects of the consumption of the planet; those on the right, and those on the left. We must decide for ourselves what is right. Most importantly, we must act. That is where it all leads. The forces arrayed against us are powerful. They imagine they can escape, like those who escaped the plague in the Decameron. They can retire to some imaginary fortified enclave; safe with their ill-gotten gains.

“Not so, Mr. D.; not so!”

“Yes! Catherine, it seems everything man does has consequences; and there are so many now, many surviving using the most primitive means, as well as the most sophisticated means. Agribusiness on the one hand, and slash and burn of the undeveloped on the other; each in its own way destroying what belongs to all of us; our most precious commodity, our life.

“No, none of the land, per se, belongs to us, that is, it is not deeded to us, but our right to life, our survival, is threatened by the current ‘legal’ holder of that which sustains us. This cannot continue. There is a higher purpose than mere survival on the one hand, and gain through exploitation, beyond the realm of survival, on the other. Everyone must know the land cannot belong to any one individual; although we selfishly cling to that dubiously outmoded notion.

“One of the most disappointing things coming on line is the China thing, what she is doing to her environment, in the end, everyone’s environment, as she industrializes. A lesson not learned. A ‘we’ll take care of that afterwards’. A purpose horribly narrowly defined. An opportunity for The Ancient Civilization to rise up to the New? Alfred North Whitehead; Affwed East Chen.

“What might that higher purpose be, Catherine? We do know, do we not?”

“Yes!, we do. As do many others. We must enlist these others to yet awaken still more. At least get them away from their complacency, their acquiescence, yes! even their imaginary impotence; get their attention some how; try to make them aware that their ship is in danger, despite the panaglamoramacia from above.”

“Instead of a beginning, it may be the end, from *Sinanthropus Pekinesis*, to *Made In China*.”

“That was amusing Mr. D.; can we change the subject to something less depressing?”

“One supposes, dear love, that possibility exists.

“Perhaps something to test your sincerity, to edify you upon matters that may seem to you droll, or out of place? These headier matters tire us; we strain our encephalons to produce answers to truly insoluble problems. We cannot move on.

“Change the subject?! Hmn? The droll it is, then.

Fatal Attractions, Involvements

“Catherine, you have asked how different each of my involvements with the female, the lasses, alas, of our species, has been.

“I would like to be able to answer that question honestly, as though some enlightenment may ensue therefrom, for whatever purpose such enlightenment might serve, whether to excite or titillate, or expand our knowledge.

“From the very beginning, using hindsight, and my feelings as measure, in as much as I am able to recall them, I would say that feelings, sometimes overwhelming, always dominated my involvement, that is, a certain kind of objectivity was lacking. When overwhelmed, sensibility seemed lost. To my knowledge, I was never consciously on the make; never out to ‘find ‘em fuck ‘em and forget’ em’. I wanted a relationship based on another four lettered word, harder to understand, to achieve, and to express: ‘love’, however little of it I was prepared to understand or offer into the bargain.

“‘Falling in love’ is perhaps an apt description, but using hindsight, there appear to be degrees of falling. Like ‘head over heels in love’ might describe my feelings for Sonja, and Rose, but not for my first partner, or any of the others. Marie might be characterized as a ‘adolescent’ love, somehow, a pure awakening, but someone who proved unattainable, because of who I believed I was; surely, a faint heart. When I think about her eventual end, it makes all the extraneous self doubts seem paltry and irrelevant to her life; she seemed to deserve better.

“Possibly, if my first partner had been of a different temperament, a sweet loving person, not so insecure, aggressive, competitive, things might have been different between us. ‘Falling’ for her had begun as a sexual thing, a desire evoked through inadvertent revelation of certain parts of the anatomy; unintentional of course; but at that time of my life, the mechanics

were simple; a young male animal interested in the female, however complicated my warped psyche regarding the fact that ‘art and wimmen don’t mix’.

“But before she came along, there had been the others, most notably Sonja, where ‘falling landed me hard upon the concrete’.

“Sexual adequacy was always a hangup for me. I cannot say why specifically. Perhaps if my father had told me I was something other than a disappointment to him, I might have felt differently about myself. If only one girl I might have liked had singled me out as somebody special. If Dorothy, that farm fresh peach blossom of a cheerleader, had told me what she told me fifty years later, that I had a ‘twinkle in my eye’, my whole outlook might have been different.

“With hindsight, I know now that girls are not any different than boys; they have their hang-ups, their feelings of inadequacy. I suspect this has much to do with advertising, the Madison Avenue hype, our fascination with models, and celebrities, constantly shoved in our face as a means to get into our wallets. If we reached instead for the real thing, we would be thrown in jail for molesting.

“Nearly everyone is suckered by this projection phenomenon; this sham fake thing; the Imitation. As ourselves, we know we appear drab in comparison. Girls, young women, adolescents, in particular, to themselves. Somehow they are, we are all suckered into a makeover; into a denial of ourselves; our ill-shapen disgusting selves.

“When I became involved with Rose, things were different. I had fallen hard, but she did everything humanly possible to soften the landing. She loved and she cared. Never even a hint of inadequacy. I was 37 years old; and for the first time, wholly accepted by another person; someone I loved and cared for, as much as it was possible for an ingrown selfish me to love and care for anyone.

“You, Catherine, a most unlikely happening. Again, how different!

“I don’t want to make any comparisons for fear of doing an injustice to others. I do not wish to diminish what in one moment seemed supreme, by displacing it with something else that is also supreme.

“Of course, our relationship is unique; but in my mind, fraught with danger for me. I feel ultimately vulnerable; still apprehensive about rejection, despite all your advances and assurances.”

“Mr. D., I would not use the word ‘advances’ to describe my interactions with you.

“Yes!, from the very first I was attracted to you. Let’s say, the rapport excited in me something I wanted to explore. I followed my feelings.

“Perhaps when a young woman does as I did, and continue to do, by the way, one might think she has lost her mind, but I do not feel I labored intentionally to seduce you. I believe there was a mutuality of feeling, a kind of appreciation of the other which continued beyond that first encounter.

“You were bothered by scruples, ethics, seemliness, but I was not. I did not ignore completely the appearance of things, the seeming inappropriateness of things; but only as pertained to one set of values; values, which for the most part, were untested by me. I was also aware of the hypocrisy, the duplicity, and the myriad failures of so many relationships founded in this one set-piece of values.

“Did I not feel a little bit cautious? Of course. I also felt that you were being even more cautious. A mutual reinforcement through negatives created the positive.”

“Hmn, a fitting observation Catherine?”

“I did not choose my word very carefully, ‘advances’. I measure that in terms of my own perception of ‘retreat’. I responded to you immediately, in my heart. One might consider that an ‘advance’, even expressed as, ‘I’m sorry, besides not expecting any students, I must confess to being taken aback by the appearance of such a lovely girl’.

“When I uttered that sentence, I was fully prepared to ‘retreat’, but you did not react at all; at least, I might have missed your reaction. You continued our conversation without the least indication of affront, or of having taken any particular notice of my expression.”

“Your expression did not go unnoticed, but I did not perceive it as anything but an honest statement. As I have told you I have not been unaware of how men regard me. Yours was a very unthreatening statement; and kind of sweet; a twinkle, Mr. D.

“There was a look about you, your manner, the way you presented, and carried yourself, that intrigued me; and that I trusted immediately.”

“Gosh! Catherine, how wonderful it is to replay that scene.”

“Since we are on the subject, Mr. D., allow me to interrupt. Can you remember the occasion of first meeting Sonja, or Rose?”

“Sonja, No. Rose, I cannot recall whether it was the first instance, or the second. I think my employer, whose office was next to mine, had interviewed her upon the recommendation of someone else in another University; Yale. He was only in the process of recommending her to someone in our Institute; he might have casually introduced her in passing. Shortly thereafter I learned she was indeed employed by the other PI in the department. Every Friday afternoon the Institute indulged itself

with a social occasion called 'Goodies' where all personnel were invited. Rose was there; I did notice this svelte tallish auburn haired lovely with more than one appreciative look. I was introduced to her, but did not venture such a remark as I made to you. At the time she was 25. I was 35. It was some time before we became friendly enough to confide in each other. I saw her almost every working day. I was the one person most apt to be called into any lab during the day with a problem that needed solving. I had the singular reputation as the person you sought when someone had a problem. Imagine that!

"Given that she was married and I was in a long-term relationship, and since I was not an overt pursuer of the fair sex, this new relationship developed slowly over time. I can only estimate the time period before I got up the courage to declare my feelings for her; perhaps a year and a half, in the spring, not incidentally. As I had indicated, the feelings were not sexually motivated; more an affair of the heart, as it was with Sonja."

"How would you describe our affair?"

"Affair!? Affair!? What is there to describe that you do not already know; if you know what is happening inside of yourself, you will know what has happened within me."

"Understood, Mr. D., but I mean more, the sexual thing."

"Catherine, on one hand that is a simple question to answer, on the other it is more complicated.

"For me, there is the first meeting of a lovely woman. I am easily enthralled by the sighting. Then follows the woman's reaction to my presence; usually one of indifference, unless brought closer through some acquaintance, wherein some kind of polite innocuous exchange of greetings might occur.

"With you, that did not happen, and would very seldom happen; perhaps only in this script. You might have become another sighting that would have enthralled me, but at a very great distance.

"Enthrallment does not mean desire, unless an alluring woman is flaunting her sex in a way intended to bring about such a reaction. It has to be very subtly flaunted for my taste; usually too much is simply too much; gross, is what I might call it. More a turn off than a turn on. Wiggle not at me. Scintillate!

"Not you, not Sonja, not Rose. Of the three, perhaps Rose, who was somewhat preoccupied with her own sense of inadequacy. Everyone is plagued by their own self-image. But she only modestly felt obliged to emphasize her sexuality; her femininity. Feeling herself to be tomboy, but, at heart, very much a female, and underneath it all, a friendly animal."

"Interesting Mr. D."

“Allow me to finish my answer.

“The simpler answer, in our case; Proximity forced something upon me with some immediacy, coupled with your reaction to my presence. Call it a fatal attraction. I could look at you, admire you, and as it turned out, desire you. Desire is something that requires some encouragement. I might desire you abstractly, as I might any beautiful woman; apparition, if you will. That desire does not carry overtones of a sexual nature. Being in the company of beauty, being treated by it with appreciation and sensitivity is all I might hope for; perhaps simply a chance to ogle unimpeded; until I had my fill.

“If there is a ‘why’, I can provide only a speculative answer.

“The more complicated part of the answer, where sexuality enters into the relationship. Without question, I followed your lead.

“I would never have presumed upon you, not without your literally ‘taking me by the hand’. The sleeping desire, the sleeping animal, the chained beast, would not have been released.

“The situation was the same with the first love, Sonja, when she asked, “Do you not desire me?”

“But in her case, everything was much more complicated. Whatever desire was awakened initially by her beautiful face and beautiful smile, and her general femininity, long blond hair, shapeliness, movements, was more one of reciprocity, ‘I look at you, you look at me, I like you, you like me, as in the case with you. In either meeting it could have been the last. But with Rose, we saw each other nearly every working day.

“With hindsight, Sonja presented an interesting duality. When I visited her in Provincetown, where she was summering as many arty hopefuls do, to get close to the Guru, Hans Hoffman, for some karma time, rubbing elbows, rubbing off time. There I was squeezing in a long drive on a weekend hoping to see her, to spend a little time with her, totally exhausted, bags under my eyes, driven for brains, with a great palpitation in my breast; and lo and behold, like Carmen, she does not chase me away as a faithless intruder, but warmly greets me, perhaps flattered I would surprise her in such a way. She showed me around, took me to the place where the maestro was performing; and took me also to the beach, peopled by many summertimers. There she was, in a modest one piece bathing suit, out from under all those clothes, the longish skirts, the blouses and sweaters, somewhat revealed. My first impression was that of an Amazon, a large frame, big boned, long, but stout, hairy legs; again with this beautiful face and smile framed by long wavy blond hair.

“Yet when she sat alongside me, in my little Nash Rambler Town and Country in the city, she seemed petite, with her relatively

small breasts, however suggestive of her femininity under a soft sensuous sweater, with a pendant dangling between them. That face so close. Yet in all the year I knew her I never once kissed her. No wonder she, who might have been expecting something different from a male, would ask, 'Do you not desire me?'

"As I saw her on the beach, I was not particularly enthralled; however I easily fell into my gaga enthrallment empedalisting her when I saw her again in the city. Explain please.

"The lessons within *Candide* escaped me, as they probably do everyone in the throes.

"With Rose, we got to know each other, allowing each other into the other's space, feeling comfortable. She made me feel comfortable; good about myself. The interaction was reciprocal.

"We touched, I touched her, that is, I reached for her hand after we had gone, one afternoon, for coffee at the Student Union, where I had told her of my growing attachment to her, and where she also, afterward told me of her growing attachment to me; and we had returned to the lab, both of us staying longer than usual, after working hours.

"After that touch, which she did not discourage, but more welcomed, reciprocating with a gentle squeeze, we awkwardly parted for that day. You might say that was a first kiss. Different than with Sonja, whose hands I cannot recall, but whose, at some time I seemed to have held, on occasion, as we walked about the city; a good friend kind of holding of hands. Not like that sweaty thing with Marie as we walked up George's Big Thing, on our Senior High School Trip to the nations' capitol.

"Perhaps the next day, or within a few days following, Rose and I, again prolonging the day after working hours, when most everyone had left the building for the day, we sat close, at right angles to each other in a corner next to a window, on low seated writing height lab benches; I leaned toward her, for that first kiss; again, receiving a reciprocal response. Not a passionate kiss, not an embrace, but a casting of the die, nonetheless. The bridge had been crossed. The trauma began in earnest. She was wearing a white blouse, a knee length, form fitting skirt, with a purple plaid pattern, her hair gathered into a pinned swirl atop her head.

"Simple on the one hand, complications to develop later; and still no sexuality, unless one freely associates any interaction between the male and female as a sexual thing.

"There *you* were. Voila!"

"Here *I* am, Voici!"

"And I am allowed to more than imagine you?"

"For the purposes of this script, you are.

"I am happy to serve as catalyst for this exposé.

“I love you all the more for it.”

“The author would declare it a narcissistic thing, No!?”

“We have but one life to live. Let us wonder how best to live it.”

“Catherine, I suppose I ought tell a fuller tale than this which was broken into the two parts, the simple, and the complicated. There is that which is ongoing.

“Living this one life, and wondering how best to live it, we are equipped to follow our nose; and in my case, it seems I follow the ‘scent of the female’. Which never goes away, and which often inspired jealous concerns in Rose. She took exception to my looking upon any young-enough female with appreciation. Not a rational thing. Females abound, a certain percentage of them have their allure, however fleeting, which might disappear upon closer examination. A curve, a gesture, a look, even; the world is full of these. Temptations!? Appreciations!? Recognitions!? One is sometimes more than casually observant, one sees; ‘seeing is believing’ Are those real? Looking is more tantalized and encouraged by a beauteous object, which any other carnivorous animal might not discern; beauty is a bias in nature; Bambi and Bambini? However many ill gotten models she produces, the more beautiful ones are more destined to reproduce as a matter of number, seeking to couple with that beauty, in order to hypothetically produce more beautiful offspring, to further enhance and promote nature’s blind imperatives; assured continuance being primary, although we participants cannot know the purpose of such a ‘design’, or scheme of things; we are the instrument to ourselves, with horns.

“A remarkable fascinating mystery it all is.

“I think of father and his preoccupation with the female, with all of its sordid, predatory nastiness; its hypocrisy. I do not mean, by this, the breaking of the marriage vow to my mother, the adultery, the infidelity, but the crass appraisal of woman. The ‘find ‘em, fuck’ ‘em and forget ‘em’ thing, ‘stand ‘em all on their head and they look the same’ thing; the ‘art and wimmen don’t mix’ thing. The vile Machiavellian games he would play. The seeking out of vulnerable distraught women, as some men prey on widows, seeking their wealth. That beautiful young woman whom he cast aside as another juicy pudenda, even naming her Angela, after his mother, whom he claimed as the only love of his life. His espoused make of Sonja; and probably the try at seducing my first partner.

“Yeah!, and there’s me, think of what will be said about me as the rake in our relationship. Nothing complimentary! You will be seen as a victim.”

“If I have anything to say about it, rest assured, only the truth will be told; and I will make sure that it is understood you were not following in your father’s footsteps.

“I happen to know how much you love your wife; you never speak disparagingly of her; only that you supposed she was weary of your downcast, cynical self.

“I consider her a threat to me, to our relationship. She might realize you are still the only one for her; and suddenly reappear.”

“As part of this script that seems doubtful. It is more likely you will meet some young suitor astride that mythical white charger who will sweep you off your feet; and Away! And there will be I.”

“As part of any script, that might be nice, but for myself, in this one, you are it.

“In any sequel, if there is one, I would wish to be who I am in this tale, unchanged, taking the bitter with the sweet. Perhaps you will be only a wonderful memory, one which I would choose not to violate in any way. That is part of the life I want to live. Hopefully the prospective author, should he be the same one, will honor my wish.

“I am more than our relationship. I want not to be an exemplary one, because I have already acknowledged myself not to be so; it would be presumptuous of me to say ‘follow me’. I want instead for reason to assume its proper place in the affairs of men. I want equality, fairness and justice; and for these I will live my life; because I ardently believe in them; as you do; they are the mainstays of any human civilization.

“For the purposes of this script we are made as separate individuals carrying in our breasts the same sentiments, augmented further by my sisters who are intended to amplify those concerns. Through all of us the author speaks his concerns with all his hopes and all his despair.

“Let us continue with who we are.

“We are not saints. But we believe no less ardently than saints.

“Because we are not saints, in the beatified sense, does not mean that we are immoral; that we do not feel a responsibility for who we are and how we act. Our relationship does not signify anarchy, does not argue for a flaunting of traditional morality; albeit taboos. It does not argue against the idea of law, but always for equity, fairness, and justice, before any proscription by law.

“I do not want to speculate that we are nationless, but it would appear our thoughts run counter to what appear to be some of our purported national objectives. For this, our relationship does give sufficient cause for us to be considered outcasts. An easy mark.

“That will not save this nation. Only a rising up of enlightened humane people will save, not only this nation, but all of humanity. Your Alfred East Chen.”

“We are wiser than to hope for any such a happening, are we not?”

“This suffering caused by man, that gratuitous stuff, to which we have often alluded, as we do the ‘fatefully inevitable’. We return to that premise time and time again, inescapably. We do not arbitrarily seek to affirm a condemnation of man, as a hapless creature, selfish, tribal, visceral. But to add further, Sigmund’s other observations, and conjecture, that man is hostile, aggressive and destructive, that physiologically, as a property of his encephalon or his corpus, he is not guided by an ‘instinct to morality’, like he might be guided by a survival instinct, or an instinct to self-preservation.

“Only his human heart subjected to human reason; and vice versa, will enable him to find a better way.

“It must be founded in, and begin with, a ‘reverence for life’. Without a reverence for life, there can be no possibility of ‘salvation’. I do not mean ‘salvation of the soul’, but salvation of humanity, to be differentiated from some estranged animal.

“If we observe the animal, we might be impressed with its ‘built-in’ survival skills, whether a vegetarian or a carnivore. It should be noted that internecine struggle is not a characteristic of the beasts as it is amongst men. We may claim the characteristic of the animal is a dumbness; all animals being considered ‘dumb’ only in relation to man, the measure of all things, dead or alive. That man may be characterized as an internecine animal; perhaps the only one; not so dumb!?”

“In saying this, the animal is not being ennobled as better than man; only more deserving of consideration; perhaps as that of a child. We may learn from the animal. The animal, man, has evolved only so far in his physical capabilities, not having changed very much from his primogenitors. Such might be the observation we make with regard to all other evolved animal species. There are no living remnants of the primogenitors; only some fossil, or archeological, record of creatures that resemble other creatures. Time is involved; and perhaps cataclysmic planetary events that stressed all the survival skills of every living creature; annihilating many; and forcing accelerated adaptation, and favoring fortuitous adaptation, in others.

“Herd dynamics, flock dynamics, schooling dynamics; we might marvel at these in their apparent cohesiveness. We imagine this as a mutual protection phenomenon. The individual animal is more certain to become prey, whereas the group banded together,

staying together, although, on the run, perhaps only one of the mass will become prey as it falls behind, unable to remain with the pack; but the pack survives. It is so, us outsiders will surmise.

“There is not an exact equivalent situation for man, because now there are fewer and fewer predators that prey on man. Man is ‘domesticating’ animal life; and doing away with life that preys on his domestic stocks, and unfortunately nearly condemning all wild species as suspected carriers of diseases that will infect ‘his’ livestock.

“However, to return to the herd, the mass; amongst men, there is the clan, the tribe, the race, the sect, the cult, the union, brotherhood, the locale, the town, the nation; there is xenophobia, non-assimilation. There are non-compatible ideologies, and creeds. But the relationships are man to man, not man to some intergalactic invader; the only real threat to man is man. It confounds me why this is not more apparent, at least apparent enough that we will act upon that knowledge. Instead we seek to dominate each other, often brutally and fatally. I have yet to hear a good reason for such activity. Pointing the finger does not shed any light upon the subject.

“Where do we observe amongst the ‘animal kingdom’, within any given species, any of these brutal manifestations of homo sapiens-like behavior; homo sapiens-like mentality? Can you imagine any animal species seeking revenge?”

“Mr. D., we would like to think there is some kind of order, some kind of ‘intelligence’ operating behind the scenes. But we, you and I, believe there is none. Because we believe only in the fortuitous happenstance, that favors the one over the other, all rather blindly accomplished, we are driven to the same inevitable conclusion; repeating ourselves over and over again, as though reciting some kind of chant or lamentation.

“Man, people, individuals, must want something better, they must exercise some acumen, must examine things more closely; abandon their prejudices in order attain to a more complete and enlightened perspective. Perhaps above all, and perhaps the key to the whole gambit is the reverence for life; looking at life, ours, as well as other’s, as a somewhat marvelous property of matter; so intricate, non-duplicable; if one will allow himself the luxury of observing it, fascinating, absorbing, even in its simpler forms, because it is something man cannot create, even in its simplest forms. But, even more, is the whole, the big picture, an ecosystem, a prospect evolved through a process we are still trying to understand and appreciate; perhaps its singular uniqueness, in the whole universe as we now understand it.

“Dare I say it, ‘heaven is here; we stand upon it’?”

“Skipping over all the finer rhetoric, we must get up off’n our asses, we must open our minds to all possibilities, never losing sight of certain properties, peculiar to our species; and we must want to know something, even though we may not speak it. Truth cannot be trivialized and brutalized. Although ignored, she always welcomes us, cheers us, saves us. Tao.

“I want you to notice, I do not mention love, like, ‘love your brother as you would yourself’. We cannot get there by fiat; we must get there through true understanding, and acceptance of what we know to be the truth. We can dally with bullshit, with creeds, with prejudice, but we cannot alter the truth. Once we have accept the notion that a truth does exist, holding everything else in abeyance until we have achieved our knowledge of it, we might have a chance to lead some kind of decent life on this one and only planet.

“If we are to accept what some concept, such as, let’s say, some ‘Darwinian imperative’, as the only way, that is, the survival of the fittest, as the only truth, and as the blind thing that it is, then its ‘game over’. We cannot achieve anything. We might as well not have eyes and ears, a ‘higher’ evolutionary prospect; hearts and souls, balderdash, even any acknowledgement of evolution, ascent or decent, as though any of it mattered, but only fangs and fuck yous; show ourselves to be the really diabolical animals we are, the dominators, the enslavers; the killers; the truly irreverent schmucks we really are. Abandon all pretense; shoot from the hip at random, always shooting, shooting, get out of my way, get out of my way. I am king, I am the fittest, down on your knees. Even the lowliest beast would be impressed.”

“Wow! Catherine, you can really pour it on sometimes.”

“Mr. D., its both frustration and disgust that make me say these things. While in my deepest inner recesses I may believe these things to be true, I know I cannot submit to the fatalistic conjecture they promote. I cannot submit to the blackness and doom and gloom that they inspire.

“Out of that blackness arises a specter, the specter of self, and selfishness. Every individual, whether man or beast, and even the flora, is equipped, through the evolutionary aegis, with means toward an end, an unknown end. Ultimately dependant and integrated upon this planet, and none other. We assume it is only man who has the awareness and the ability to cease a kind of motion in this continuum, to observe what is taking place around him, to fathom things beyond what seems apparent, beyond the surface, to understand process, inner workings, and eventually deduce a finite system; at least, a self-sustaining, however changing system. Further meditation takes him beyond what he

understands to be process, perhaps Darwinian in nature, and Freudian in its rationale, to imagine human intelligence creating a civilization that assures for no further conflict within the human contingent, mostly as a practical matter; as if practicality can serve ideal ends, which it surely can. Selfishness, whether considered randomly, or intentionally operative, may build, but it also may destroy. Build an empire, while destroying others. Build an empire that will not sustain itself, because it consumes the very ground upon which it was built. Such is the lot we must contemplate now as we cease this motion of our selves, to observe what is happening around us.

“We argue the impracticality of the self-serving because it consumes and destroys; it leaves nothing for tomorrow, all the while claiming it builds, that it too serves practical ends. Are we quibbling here?”

“We, you and I, study the whole, and we believe, note, we believe, deduced from the evidence at hand, that the whole cannot not be sustained at the current rate of conversion and consumption. We are also compelled to denounce the practices that are at work destroying this whole; we do so in the name of practicality; but also in the name of an aesthetic we have come to know; and see disappearing, perhaps forever, before our very eyes; an aesthetic that we consider a vital part of our spiritual life.

“What are we, you and I, but tiny feeble voices crying out into the universe; not unheeded, but ignored for all that, as expedience runs amok like some wild uncontrollable thing, not approachable; unmoved, even through the loudest screaming; lost in the din of the self, driving onward, forward, upward; and downward.

“The Sisyphean hill has been leveled, the stone has been reduced to rubble, Sisyphus denied his atonement for unknown sins. It is assumed we are all sinners. Because it is thought so, we are weakened in our resolve to fight against the other sinners, no matter how grave their transgressions.”

With some mitigated slowing intent the author inches toward the end of his opus as these two attempt to resolve the riddle of man; albeit, of life. They do not ride off into the sunset within some imaginary la la land; they have come to reside in you, the reader, who like the author, must live within the confines of this planet. You will finish their tale as you see fit, on this planet.

The author would openly converse with each reader concerning the matters of import contained within his opus. The author, as much, and perhaps, more than his protagonists, seeks a resolution to the riddle.

The Sisters Aid Us In Our Project

The sisters arrive for a consultation.

“Mr. D., I am so pleased that Kate brought you into our lives. I am enjoying our stimulating banter; stimulating to me.

“Before meeting you, and listening to you, and you and Kate, I have only allowed myself an inkling of doubt concerning the future of man; and the planet, because of man. I have been an inveterate, however cautious, believer.

“I guess I should say, stimulating; and sobering.

“I have been made to realize how protected, and luxurious has been my life; so many of our lives.

“But suddenly I am thinking mostly of the hidden cost of that kind of life, somehow becoming more apparent. Yes!, we have all heard of the changes that are occurring in the environment, but we have listened too often to those who pooh-pooh the alarmists. We want to believe that nothing is happening, or if something is happening, the impact is inconsequential; its easier that way, to go on living this kind of life we lead.

“But what I am hearing, within my own lifetime, something radical could take place, something climactic. For which we will not be prepared; which may really jeopardize our life, ‘our way of life’, as we know it. This thing that might happen might happen regardless of man, something like a volcanic thing, or seismic thing, or even a meteoric thing. But ought we not preclude the man thing?”

“Theresa, for your sake, and your sister’s sakes, I wish these terrible reckonings were not so.

“So much of our planning for the future, what little there is of it, is predicated in unrealistic assessments of what will be here at the end of our tenure.

“We can imagine ourselves doing great works, building that better future; but it will be a different future than we imagine.

“How can I know?”

“I suppose if I was a mathematician, a statistician, I might be able to construct a precise model based on certain knowns, incorporating resources, numbers involved in utilizing them, and a constant with regard to man’s bad habits.

“I can’t say for sure, but it is unlikely a mathematician or statistician would have predicted ‘terrorism’ as a consequence of too many; for example; a systemic illness of the body politic. A prophet worth his salt would have predicted a rupture somewhere, somehow. I would like to believe this is a symptom of too many,

rather than a lesson poorly learned; one that man will never, never learn.

“We do not know as yet the true consequences of number, an exponentially increasing number, while the planet does not increase in size, in resources. The limits have been reached; we are not sure what to do next.

“All the models we might create, if honestly constructed, predict something different than what our yea-sayers and politicians promise. Only recently China has realized its one-child policy has resulted in an overbalanced, overburdened, older population, with fewer replacements than required. Annihilation of the old is not the solution.

“The parlayers are still hoping for the panacea, the tar sands, the shale oil, 'fracturing', hydrogen, the methane hydrate, other deep sea relief, the further development of nuclear energy, all to fuel this thing we are doing, this entrepreneurial thing with the planet, the peddling and consumption in the free-market economies of this shabby thing identified as a 'standard of living', what I have variously identified as a materioconsumeconomical system, founded on the consumption-acquisition of obsolescing goods; yes!, even shoddy, surely, impermanent, goods, the 'whatever the market will bear', or the 'low end of the market' claptrap, spewed out to keep the thing going. The so called 'free market' hasn't any conscience, it hasn't any sense of responsibility. By its very nature it gobbles and morphs into something gargantuan. Its natural proclivity, hence destiny, is to devour all, and crap in its nest. What had been viable before, ceases to be; becoming dependent on the leavings of the corporate maw. It is all predicated in the NOW, instant gratification.

“The mathematicians are telling us that it will not be possible to sustain any free market economy based on any current model, even factoring in certain panaceas.

“The environment as we know it, as we can measure it, cannot be sustained. We can no longer borrow against an uncertain future; the books already are not balancing; we are fudging, so that it will seem to be coming out as we had hoped; gain without loss. We are depleting resources, torching the planet, in order to maintain a self-sustaining economic model.

“There doesn't seem to be any politician who will argue for stopping what we are doing. Instead we seem to listen to politicians who will promise us the proverbial moon (not the real one, mind you). They are the true Utopians.

“Every word that is uttered is predicated in some kind of assumption about things as they are, as they seem to be. Like the

tale of the baseball umpires describing how it is they know enough to call a strike a strike. 'I calls 'em the way I sees 'em'; 'I calls 'em the way they are'; 'they ain't nothing 'til I calls 'em'. Which is a truer reality?"

"Mr. D., perhaps none of the above."

"Tess, you are so like your sister. Right there on top of everything that is being suggested, anticipating more; extrapolating."

"Mr. D., perhaps some of the above."

"I wonder if we can even construct a suitable model in this climate of overutilization. Our data outstrip our model. As the temperature rises, the sea level rises, as the ozone becomes overwhelmed, that is, as the carbon emissions increase, the CO² becomes dissolved in the oceans, as the pollutants of all kinds contaminate the air we breathe, and the water we drink, and the overused, over fertilized, soils become depleted, and blown or washed away, all in the name of some self-aggrandizing scheme, tell what we are to do."

"If the model is meant to serve us, to predict something, then why do we ignore its implications; because we want to construct another model using hypotheticals, instead of knowns, so we can continue what we are doing. A ruinous synthesis."

"I use the 'we' reservedly, because, in my ignorance, I have been one of 'them'; one of the assumers; but now, I must begin to reckon differently. Soon I will be able to say 'they', because I will have become an ardent conservationist."

"I am not sure exactly why I am saying this; perhaps I am playing a hunch. Perhaps I am anticipating something again. A sixth sense, the prophetic sense. Perhaps it is something simpler, like 'erring on the side of caution'."

"There isn't any 'pie in the sky'. Only drippings and droppings exuding from beneath the burner. The pie has been incinerated during 'blast-off'. You know, man, the blast-off. The 'green cheese' has proven unpalatable; more so than our very own 'dirt'."

"They' were unable to discover Heaven from Hubbell."

"They' do not want to believe 'this is all there is'. That Heaven is right here beneath and around us. Heaven is made of dirt; decomposed life, recycled remains; a functional unit, subject to 'natural calamities' as we like to identify them. Calamities because we cannot control them; they control us. Where we can control anything, we 'fuck it up'. Excuse the expletive, Tess."

"We don't really control; we assert ourselves."

"Yes, that's it, Mr. D., Assert!"

“Clever bastards, really. Prehensile hands, and an underutilized encephalon. One might wonder at nature’s handiwork, that she would allow something to evolve that would eventually destroy her.

“God’s little experiment?”

“We cannot lay the blame upon imaginary figures. All the Gods that we have imagined, throughout the ages, have been unable to contain the thing that invented them. Omnipotent, except when it comes to ‘you know who’. What good is that? Handy fellow, this God guy.

“I suppose we must give credit where credit is due. The creation of God symbolizes our awareness of our own ignorance.”

“I think you have something there Mr. D., a plausible rationale.

“But must we not go one step further; has not this ignorant little fellow also realized there is no God; that he is on his own, that he can no longer invoke something that does not exist?”

“The ‘fear of God’ is no longer credible.”

“There you go again, leaping ahead.”

“Mr. D., I feel I must take the tack of Kitty again. I want and need something to believe in. I want to believe that we can get it right. That with all the knowledge we have acquired, however negative, we must act upon what we know. We must; and to this end, Kate seems dedicated, as I feel I will soon be also.”

“You realize, of course, there will be opposition, sometimes coming from places you might not expect. There are many liberal thinkers out there, intellectuals, maybe, who are, by their very nature, more informed than most; but smart asses, sell outs.

“When it comes to arguing ‘responsibility’; that is, ethics and morality, you will be bucking a tide of irresponsibility; by that I mean, a blast of equivocation, justifying bad, unconscionable habits. Those who argue for free market economy denounce ‘socialism’, because anything that interferes with incentives, that is, with the accumulation of profits, the making of fortunes, is a no-no. There is an inherent irresponsibility to this kind of modus operandi. Those who are unable to participate must be accounted by another set of values; their own.

“In some liberal circles, taxation is not considered entirely incompatible with a free market economy. Education, health care, support for the aged and disabled, job creation, retraining, is financed through taxation without using the no-no word, ‘socialism’, although by most any measure this would be considered socialistic. It is through a sense of responsibility that we must account the needy, however you want to color the phrase that describes this accountability. It involves responsibility, it involves cost. Depending how serious the intent of those with the task of implementing the social contract, ‘breaking even’ might still

become a problem for the so called free market economy. If there is no real gain, the big bookkeeper in the sky may only see 'red ink' in any final tally.

"Using the USA as an example, our current administration has reduced the level of responsibility to the lowest level politically sustainable. The 'private sector' hasn't any incentive to support the needy; the needy have often been referred as 'social retards'. If you want to add insult to injury, you flash at them, 'God helps those who help themselves'. Not to be taken too literally. Very crass, dear Tess."

"Mr. D., exclusivity. We are not all in this together. To me, there is something basically wrong, with nature's design, or with man's civilizational aegis; perhaps these are inseparable from one another. Is there anything we can do besides watch and mourn?"

"Yes Theresa, something needs attention NOW. Any sober realist will tell us so.

"We have come to the end of many roads; many of us feel the same impending thing, because it is given to us to feel these things. We cannot be made not to feel them; even when yards of bullshit are heaped upon us, intended to convince us that this is not happening. We have heard it all too often; we are now convinced that something is out of kilter. Call it a sixth sense, maybe even a mathematical certainty that what is finite cannot be expanded. There are those who argue expansion is unnecessary, because what mere man does cannot alter the infinite. It is assumed by these ones that the planet earth cannot be consumed (subdued) by man. Yet every indication shows that the attrition is real; and those who ignore those indications willingly, unconscionably, are on somebody's payroll; these latter ones are in control, they have the most to gain, though only short-termed, through 'business as usual'; they are one step ahead of the rest of us, because it is we who react to them, rather than rising up against them, turning the tables, so to speak. We must assume the initiative. Get them to listen on the pain of death. It is our right to do so! Because what they do to the planet permanently fucks it up for the rest of us.

"We have certain information at our disposal; it seems we dispose of it, accordingly. One wonders why there is such a discipline as Science, per se, if what it teaches us is to be ignored.

"In real terms, it does not require a modern scientific discipline, such as ecology, to understand what mankind has perhaps understood innately for centuries.

"It is such that today the scale of the predation has changed radically, exponentially. It has become a significant numbers game.

“Instead of heeding the data, and its real implications, we search for a new panacea, completely lacking in data, wherein dirt becomes the new way to preserve our way of life, in a vacuum.

“The question is; are we up against the wall?

“Where is the weakness in their argument?

“If we were to use our best science, informed science, to plan a system, an ecosystem, starting from scratch, if you will, what would we propose?

“What must we consider? Do we act upon the available data to forestall what we predict from that data?

“Oh! Yes!, if we wait long enough, something will give. Are we that anxious and willing to prove our point?

“The initial pressure, Malthusian in nature, is to reduce our number significantly; reducing number reduces consumption. How much reduction is necessary?

“If it was not for thee. I would say, blow it all to ‘kingdom come’.

“To continue with the design of the hypothetical ecosystem, with the data at our disposal. Additionally, to reckon, sadly, ineluctably, what we have come to learn of man. Because man seems to lack consistency, he is not to be trusted. He can as easily think of the diabolical, as he does the more humane. If you imagine the worst, it might be truer than you realize, and perhaps far more credible that the best, if we are to truly understand man. His science has easily been perverted into alchemy, influenced by the desire of changing of base metal into gold.

“Part of the flaw, the flaunt to our egos, perhaps the hope of those of us who live with fear and trembling of man himself, lives in the small organisms, microbes, and germs. The diabolical in us has even seized upon these as weapons, destructive weapons; genocidal in nature. But even without the intervention of man; only through the mere fact of his increasing presence, creating a huge host and repository for any mutant beastie to develop, adapt and flourish; an inadvertent unintentional savior of the planet. Matter over matter. Do I welcome such a thing?

“In the past, man has had to deal with the bubonic plague, cholera, typhus, diphtheria, small pox, tuberculosis (consumption; speaking of a disease that is invading the planet in another form), (all flourishing in large communities); known and unknown pestilences that have arisen in the tropics: HIV, Ebola, carried, and flourishing by, and in, humans; to our modern day mutants of all of the above, plus the newer more fortuitous, opportune, evolutionary niche-filling thingies that care not one whit of this

vast conceit that wants to build empires. We have now become one huge community, linked together as one huge habit.

“Dinosaurs arrived and abandoned the premises for reasons yet undetermined; perhaps having eaten themselves out of house and home; perhaps invaded by some microbe. Could these huge beasts have altered the climate of the planet through their predations? Or did they simply get caught in the vagaries of cataclysm?”

“Someone is trying to tell us that on The Day After Tomorrow we will learn of the cataclysm. Will we have brought it upon ourselves? Which will come first; On The Beach, or The Day After Tomorrow?”

“Preposterously, people like Michael Crichton and George Bush are trying to tell us that this can go on indefinitely; not to worry; everything is in good hands. We are told the corporations are cleaning up their act, behaving responsibly; hah! declaring bankruptcy, or requesting to be grandfathered in their predations. They have been made to feel the pressure requiring them to reassure the public, but at the same time required to show a profit; profit is the basis of the empire. Without profit there can be no empire. Oh Yeah!, what profit a man if he gains the world, but loses his ass? May he!, and Soon! Into the bottomless canyon yonder with both of them, and their train of followers.

“As a fellow, I will also take the fall, whether directly through the hands of my look-a-likes in order to shut me up, or to be run over in the steamroller of general anarchy, OR, because man has fucked up the planet so badly that my life, most life, cannot survive; only the proverbially enduring cockroaches, may survive.

“Don Quixote, Harry Potter, ET, Arnold Swartzenegger, Jasus, cannot save us. They will all be invaded by the new microbe, the evolved niche-filler. It works this way, so they tell us. The vermin and the maggots reduce once living matter to dust. Yet others invade and colonize, like man has done, taking over, caring not the least, as mankind does not, what will happen on the morrow. If the host, the planet dies, so what? We will have had our time in the sun; or in hell. We will die with our bags full of gold. Michael Crichton and George Bush will welcome us through the portals of hell; true converts; of subduing and converting the planet into ‘our way of life’, the golden ‘standard of living’. Proudly we abandon Eden for a Hell on this earth.

“George (and his mentor, Dick) may believe in Heaven, maybe in other planets, perhaps filled with gold, or yet undiscovered precious things, and as a last resort, he will believe in a Heaven that does not exist, as he does in the gold filled stellar body. He imagines heaven as a bailout; is he ever in for an awakening; What! George, Awakening!? Never. But he is at the helm, steering

the ship of state over the edge of the flat mother, flat chested mother, getting flatter by the second. His ignorance is abysmal.

“Michael knows this is the only planet of its kind; he knows of none other. While he is on the payroll of the Corporations and sits at the table with George, he betrays his own knowledge. He knows that this planet in its entirety is a finite thing. He claims he cannot envision it used up by man, reduced to rubble. He lies. He has no morality, and no integrity. When he feeds the environmentalist to the cannibals, he thinks he scores on the laugh meter. A sadist as well as a liar. If the truth were really known, a pseudo-scientist, a patent-medicine man, a peddler of panaceas; wherein he lines his pockets with false promise. A tall man sunk into the mire by the weight of his ill-gottens.

“He’s not alone; there are others; there are always others. Like Teller and Libby. Libby, the physicist, claiming we could survive a nuclear holocaust. He even demonstrated how one could build an inexpensive bomb shelter in the Los Angeles hills. Then one day, one of those California fires swept through the hills, and destroyed his demo. Well, what can you say. A miscalculation; back to the drawing board; meanwhile, Rome still burns. Teller (Judas), the betrayer of Oppenheimer.

“Vindication?

“How can this be? Do we stand by passively, and masochistically, maybe even harbor a death wish? What does it portend for us who have this feeling that things are out of control, are on a roller coaster to hell, too many people for too few resources; would we feel vindicated if some kind of pestilence came along to avenge the imbalance; even if it meant we were one of the ones to go, so long as the assholes got it too, and first, so we could die happy?

“A solution to OUR Addiction. Our Vile Habits. Our Squirmly Crawly, Compulsions.

“We all need to go to AA, that is, an equivalent organization that would deal with our habits; that is, our addictions. This obsessive consumption in vicious cycles; where we have admitted complete addiction, an abdication, of abandoning our senses and our self-control. Where we have acknowledged our dependence upon something that is destined to ultimately destroy us; is destroying our wills, our sensibilities, our home, our planet. Where we will have to learn to live **without** for the remainder of our days. The action will necessarily become a group action; for the individual cannot save himself, or the planet, by himself. Everyone else must cease their habituated way, their tanking up on things, obsolescing things, things that reduce our planet to rubble, and ruin. We must resist. We must never consume again. We must not reduce the

planet to ashes by indulging in something we do not need. Cold Turkey! Folks!”

“Mr. D. you are a hard man.”

“Sorry for the sermonizing, that ole’ cynical outlook.”

“Well, not really, Mr. D., you are a soft man.

“I think underneath all of cynicism is a strong belief in something, however, implausible. How else could one be releasing such venom, if he did not care. Care, in a big way.

“Frustrated by impotence, Mr. D.”

“Some might say ‘cowardice’, Catherine.”

“Is it possible that cynicism reflects cowardice? I think not.”

“Well, don’t mistake desperation for bravery.”

“We are quibbling over terminology.

“The fact remains, we are up against that wall; that not to act, assures the wall will fall upon us and crush us. You push back against that wall with curses; but almost with a defeatist’s resignation, because you feel man, that wall, cannot be moved, pushing you over, during one single lapse inattention.”

“Yes!, and those strong beliefs to which you refer, as you have suggested, have become impuissant, as all things do, with age.”

“Not all things, Mr. D.”

“Mere things, Catherine.

“Whereas your youth and beauty, carry into the battle, for it is a battle, that requires all you are and more, totally lacking in me; your beauty, your youth and energy, your very intelligence; yours and your sister’s, and many many more like you, joined in battle against formidable odds; a battle I am convinced you will lose, along with your precious lives.

“Away with me, to what remains of the wilds, away, far away from this wall.”

“No can do, Mr. D.”

“I can’t listen to them anymore; because I cannot believe in anything they tell me. I cannot have any dialogue with them; I cannot question their assumptions. I am ruled; and damned well ruled out of order. Most of my more acute disenchantment began with the Vietnam War, when I was paying some attention to some of what they were saying. Secretary Rusk, Secretary McNamara, President Johnson; and sundry mouthpieces. In those days we had Morse, Gore Sr., Greuning, Case, Fullbright, and Gene McCarthy (for a while). But we had the political animals in there too, Humphrey and R. Kennedy. Then came a whole new breed with Nixon, Mitchell, Agnew, Ford, and sundry mouthpieces, Baker, Hatch, Chenny, and Kissinger, the most horrendous amongst

them. Morse, Gore Sr., Greuning, Case, Fullbright were gone; voted out of office because they stood for something besides flag waving. Then they awarded the peace prize to the most duplicitous, double dealing, secretary of state we ever had. After the establishment screwed over Jimmy Carter we got more of those bastards with Reagan and Bush, Baker and Meese; every goddamned one them talking down to us, taking us down. Telling it like it was; insulting our intelligence; whitewashing our concerns. Apes in Serge.

"I harbor a deep deep resentment. These assholes have such power over my life; **my** life. They are not any wiser, very often stupider; nor are they any more human; perhaps they are diabolically inhuman. But somehow they sit, like the Syndics, above me. Their faces are yammering about what I must understand is a peril to my life that only they have the power to confront. These new guys are the worst, Ashcroft, Gonzales, The Four R's Rove, Rice, Ridge, Rumsfeld, alas!, Wolfritz, Perle, Chenny, and the Big Bully; and all those weak sisters in the Congress, going along with it all.

"Can you believe they awarded the prize to that colossal freak, Kissinger, after he was responsible for the loss of hundreds of thousands of lives, plus the destruction of Cambodian society, where millions of lives were subsequently lost? Lets remember Chile! Those fucking idiots awarded him the prize, the same prize they awarded to Mother Teresa, and Jimmy Carter. What an fffing cockeyed world we live in! I imagine those discerning gentlemen would award the prize to Machiavelli, or the Borgias.

"Listen to me drowning you in my sorrows. That it were not so, that it were not so.

"Enough enough, lovely ones. In truth we do not know what will happen; and when it happens, we will not have time for regrets. Lamentations, perhaps."

"Mr. D., finally you rest your case. Thy will be done. The lone man on the bridge. 'I warned you, I warned you'.

"Perhaps you, along with the author, created this whole opus to unleash this final indictment of your fellow man.

"Theresa, Lydia and I are some kind of implausible hope, some sweet song wafting through the atmosphere; an enchantment for you and the author. At least you will have the song to accompany you over the precipice.

"While we are burdened with our awareness of things that could have been; already assigning the past tense to them, fully aware they may never be.

"We must stare at our nemesis as he strips us bare of hope."

“May I engage in a little redirect?”

“Theresa, let me ask you a question that might elicit a definitive answer, or may elicit only a hypothetical one.

“We have heard from our earliest days in ‘school’ the reference to ‘Lessons of History’. What do you suppose is meant by the phrase?”

“Well, gee, Mr. D., in light of some of our conversations, and in light of your manuscript, I would say the phrase contains something self-evident. But whether we are intended to act upon the inference is another matter.”

“Very good answer, Theresa. But lets expand the inference. Hegel was purported to opine, that as one studied History, all one saw was ruins. Do you think that a fair assessment of History?”

“I feel that question leads away from the gist of ‘Lesson’.

“Since Hegel studied History, even writing a Philosophy of History, which contained more than a single opinion or observation, it might be worth recognizing what he said; but was that a final judgment? I realize he felt that whatever might have been learned from the Study of History was seldom acted upon, even when principles had been deduced from them.

“What are those principles which are not acted upon? The self-evident part of the ‘Lesson’?”

“In a breath Seneca can observe, ‘It takes many a year to build a city, and but an hour to destroy it’; seemingly presciently appropriate to our own time; adding, ‘It takes centuries to grow a forest, but a few moments to reduce it to ‘ashes’ ‘.

“If there are principles, is it inherent that these are intended as ‘Lessons’, vis-à-vis principles, upon which we are obliged to act? Or are we not obliged to act?”

“The ‘lesson’: man is what he is. As our illustrious Secretary Of Defense so often utters ‘it is what it is.’! That might also be a principle about which we can do nothing.”

“I know, at this point in your life, you think otherwise, Theresa.

“I know at the same time, being a very rational person, you would like a rational explanation for the purpose of teaching History as a ‘lesson’. It would be better to teach History as an example of what to expect’.”

“I would venture you are partly correct in what you say. More than an explanation, I want the purpose enlarged to produce something of concrete value. For example, if this is considered ‘bad’, don’t do it again. Really no different than ‘the stove is hot, don’t touch’.

“If one stands to burn his ass if he ignores the principle, and will ignore it regardless, then we do have a problem with both the ‘lesson’ and the creator of the lesson, and the intended learner.

“Must it be that we feel compelled to repeat a certain experience, to learn first hand, to know something with certainty. Or do we believe we can escape the consequences of this experience, even when we might consider it ‘bad’ or ‘hot’? What is the operative here? Do we understand better if we watch the child flirt with the heat, increasing his proximity to danger; practicing a kind of ‘brinkmanship’?”

“Hah! but if we could finagle our little brother to test the thesis, then we might also observe, rather than experience. Not maliciously, as much as impulsively.”

“Mr. D., shades of nonsense.

“When men start wars, they must know the consequences; how can they not suspect, even know, the consequences? We move from the malicious, or impulsive, or impulsively malicious, or maliciously impulsive, into the realm of intent, preemptive strikes, and the accompanying rationale, ‘collateral damage’. Besides being an invented disinformative jargon, a pile of shit.

“What have we missed here?”

Catherine listening intently, restraining herself from interjecting, waited for such an opening.

“Geez, you guys, its been difficult not to join in the discussion; you two are doing such a good job. However I am insuppressible when an interesting debate is afoot. Dear tough polemicist Tess. ‘What have we missed here?’

“You missed a little something Mr. D. slipped in there, that perhaps ‘it would be better to teach History as an example of what to expect.’ ‘Rather than as a ‘corrective’, I would add.”

“I didn’t miss it Kate, I simply wanted to stick to one train of thought at a time.”

“I’m sorry Tess, I butted in. To respond to your question then, I say we have missed nothing. We know the consequences. We, as in you and I, but also those of us who act in our name. Since we are nominally aligned with some group, some tribe, some nation, we cannot escape the consequences of what is done in the tribe’s name. We share in the glory, we share in the shame. We are the only ones who can do something about the We.

“A question might arise, ‘Can the world endure the bad, sensing that it will end; that bad cannot endure. It is believed that bad will be brought low by some means. We only need to be patient.”

“Come on sis, you can do better. What about Germany and Japan in the last century? We were forced to deal with that bad. We also need to deal with the bad that is coming from Washington. We also need help dealing with this bad; maybe outside help; maybe the brotherhood of nations need to rise up, condemning our government, for starters.

“Mr. D. can plead with Congress to do something; but in a truly timid nearly fascist fashion, that Congress has become a yea-sayer, a rubber stamp. The ‘corrective’ cannot come from within, without a kind of revolution; from some other quarter than Congress. We live in a quasi police state, we have our own version of the Gestapo, our own SS. Our liberation from the bad must come from outside, a unified outside.”

“You believe you can equate what is happening today in the USA with Fascism?”

“Yes! It fits the description.. While real, ‘terrorism’ has become a red herring. Something to use to promote an agenda that is separate from we the people, without any kind of consensus.

“While there may not be any ‘lessons’ contained in the study of our own history, and by studying it we may not even know what to expect. We have had a few good administrations, perhaps a reflection of a president, and we have had some bad administrations, while having a basically good president. There is no general rule.

“The founders were aristocrats, land owners, plantation owners, for the most part; some of our early presidents were slave owners. Thomas Jefferson, the exemplary democrat, was one of these, as was James Madison, another exemplary democrat. I don’t use the term ‘democrat’ to denote a political party, only an individual imbued with a certain spirit.

“In those days there was a lust for personal freedom, whether an aristocrat, an ordinary citizen, farmer, and Yes!, a slave.

“The abolitionists demonstrated another take on the idea of slavery. Perhaps our greatest president carried that banner into a war upon ourselves. Union, States Rights, Emancipation of the Slaves, call it what you like. A man of great natural empathy was our president. He stepped up to the plate; the slave was freed, and he paid the ultimate price, as have other ‘humanitarians’.

“Had he lived, would Abe have sought to give women the right to vote? It took our nation, as a nation, ninety years to end de facto, slavery. It required fifty years after Abe’s death to empower women with the right to vote, not through any particular efforts of any president. Another forty to enact the civil rights provisions, largely led by an empathetic president. To date we have not ratified an equal rights amendment. A very poor track record.

“Abe showed us it was possible to expect something from a great man. We have seen some of it again when FDR was president, although the world was becoming vastly more complicated. Still there was a special kind of empathy for all of humanity that was suffering. Besides it was pragmatic outlook upon the condition of man. We have had other ‘humanitarian’

presidents who were shoved aside by partisan politics, and by inherently insidious elements, in, and around government. We had LBJ, a dichotomy; and a misled president.

“We have not had but a few great men at the helm; men separated from some kind of agenda.

“In a way, almost unavoidably, the system is corrupt, or has been corrupted by vested interests, all kinds; but mostly corporate, mostly business interests seeking favorable legislation, whether a reduction in taxes, gaining subsidies, depletion allowances, or relief from any responsibility in conducting their affairs. Since Abe, it has been only during FDR’s tenure that the nation was regarded as a whole; where effective legislation accounted the great needs of the masses; and the nation. With LBJ we only heard the lip-service to a Great Society, quickly perverted to Guns and Butter, Brown and Root, and Wag The Dog.

“The election process has become a bad joke for the voter, the plebe, the demos. Where truth and lies cannot be distinguished from the propaganda, disseminated by a not-so-free press, without relief, right up to the moment a ballot is cast. At such expenditure; it is insulting to the voter, and cynical toward the voter; and shameful, really embarrassing when one considers the need that exists out there.

“This is the part that is only apparently above board. What we don’t know about machine politics, wheeling and dealing would be cause for concern in any community.

“We have come to believe that our government is not forthright with us. We can count on it to lie, to deceive, to dissemble, ‘disinform’ us. How could this have happened? Are we finished with real democracy? If we ever lived in a ‘democracy’, after a long attrition we have achieved something else. Yes!, fascist seems the more apt description, where fear is the stock in trade of government. Give me one example of any humane act coming from this government (which includes Congress). One act that shows a recognition of need, other than the persuasions of vested interests. The fabric of a conscionable society and/or civilization is in tatters. The tendency is tear down the inconvenient good, the New Deal.

“Can we afford to be patient with any aspect of this, only hoping things will change the next time around? Will we clean up our act? Will we have learned what is plainly intolerable? We are assembling our history; what will be the ensuing generations take on that history; will there even be a nation with a history that matters?”

“Wow, Theresa, you have been thinking very hard upon things.”

“Mr. D., its only that my brain has been leaping lately, perhaps jumping to incorrect conclusions.”

“I don’t think that is so. Your intuition is remarkable.”

“I agree, Tess.”

Catherine interjects again. “This conversation is both germane and stimulating. One ‘Lesson’ that seems to go begging pertains to involvement. One should be able to adduce a principle; that we cannot acquiesce, we must always remain vigilant and involved; it is always in our interest to be involved.

“Once someone else has usurped your right, which you may have inadvertently forfeited, reclaiming that right might prove impossible. The ‘tough shit’ clause.”

“Most perceptive, Catherine.”

“Why is it we seem so willingly allow ourselves to be led to slaughter; why are we always so late in realizing we have been led there? What is the fatal disconnect in this scenario? Are we that gullible; is it that we are intellectually lazy?”

“As individuals it may be said we are self-absorbed, involved in our own thing, maybe even apolitical, or unsympathetic in some ways, or indifferent in our preoccupations, even to our own welfare.

“To me this latter condition seems inconsistent with nature’s design, to be alert, wary, rather than ‘trusting’, for the lack of a better term; somehow not consonant with our perception of an ‘organism’, that is intended to survive. Somehow antithetic; perhaps we are a contradiction in terms.

“In saying this, I realize I cannot know the intent of nature. I would like to believe there is some kind of intent; and not something random or arbitrary. Random or arbitrary suggests peril to me. Intent, even unknown, may be preferable.

“Obviously, the more or less faithful reproduction of a species represents some direction to the perceived natural imperative; that is implied. Besides reproduction, there are other survival aspects come into play to assure that reproduction serves its purpose, if not by intent, by evolutionary processes, through which some kind of continuance is propitiated. Some internal logic at work.

“I suggest this line of reasoning to bolster the notion that maybe acquiescence is an ‘unnatural’ behavior, an unnatural manifestation of the working hypothesis.

“Yes!, for the pack to run together; safety in number; that is, if I am in the middle of the pack I might not get et or shot; so, maybe to get there I acquiesced to mob or pack psychology. Even so, I may not have effectively assured for my survival - because - what if the pack is headed over the precipice?”

“That implies, I would guess, we cannot cover every eventuality; as well, it may be ‘fatefully inevitable’ that we will be confronted with such a dire situation, either alone, or as member of the pack.

“Process, evolutionary process, has failed in some way to account for all the permutations of the argument.”

“Catherine and Theresa, you realize we are attempting to understand something here. I think it is in our interest that we do so. At least you two, and Lydia, along with all of your peers.

“This world is fast becoming your world into which you must interject credulity.

“My life is finished, George Bush’s life is finished.

“What I stand for is not finished. The battle between he and I will not resolve the issue for you, for your life.

“You cannot wait for it to be resolved; you must seize the initiative while the older generation dukes it out.

“For several generations man has ‘consumed’, and has pursued the imperatives of that modus operandi, laying waste to the planet; when one wild species was exploited, and became exhausted or extinct, we moved on to plunder another, whether a forest product, mammals of terra firma, or all the fishes and creatures in the oceans, every creature that creepeth on this planet. There was only today, with all the arguments manufactured (rationalizations) for continuance in a system of diminishing returns. This consumption religion has caused the overthrow of governments, the invasions of others lands, all in the quest for resources, markets, consumers; albeit profit, gain, aggrandizement. Colossal conceit. Also egregious greed. HOLES!

“You must create - if not reclaim – if you are perseverant - and lucky – you might succeed – then you must ‘preserve and protect’. Unfortunately this can no longer be accomplished in isolation.

“In the political arena, there is such a crying need for inclusion and democratic operatives; it seems mankind, as any semblance of a survivable species, is at stake; perhaps even life as we have come to know it, that is, planetary existence, with such diversity, mostly evolved long before homo sapiens, and dreadfully irresponsibly undone by homo sapiens, only in the last three thousand years, exponentially. There was a history in process long before Herodotus and Thucydides, whereupon a collection of individuals became tribes, that became states; and states that went on the warpath - and all that entails – to conquer. One assumes there has been a point to all of this aggression.

“We can chew this kind of thinking over and over until it becomes an indigestible cud from which we can not extract any further nourishment; without ever bringing its implications to rest.

“There are times when I find myself wishing some benevolent force would materialize to kick our ass – because it needs kicking – not to dominate, unless we didn’t get the message; or make us subservient, unless we needed repeated applications of the kick,

to get us off 'dead' center, but also to teach us a Lesson in true humility, a deep regard for life and the living; and how utterly necessary it all is.

"When I regard you three (sisters) I know this world will be well-served, particularly in places where policy is determined and in places of trust. Policy based upon equity, fairness and justice, trust that every thought, and every deed would abide the highest principles established by common consent. In short, the three of you represent the hope of mankind, as do many of your peers the globe over. You are placed in a position of rescuing something from ruin – the ruins, the ruins, again.

"Is any of this relevant to the lessons of history?

"It must be so that we have learned something; No?

"What are we free to ignore?

"Doesn't much of what we learn argue for some kind of community awareness? as a matter of public health? Healthy people make it less likely there would be a susceptible population, susceptible to disease, along with all the social ills. There are so many of us now, that we have become an attractive host to evolving pathogens, seeking a fortuitous niche. Already we are seeing indications. Once a virulent strain establishes itself, even the healthy will not be immune.

"So it would seem imperative we do one of two things, for all who, for good or ill, are given life, we must assure for their relief from want and suffering, by the creation of a healthful self-sustaining environment, as a practical, necessary and vital choice; or given the choice, must we execute those who can't make it without our help, also as a practical matter? Abandoning them in want and suffering endangers us all.

"Dire? Perhaps. Can we be humane and practical simultaneously?

"Our 'benevolent' or benevolent' nation has coined a new political reason-to-be 'preemption', not to accomplish anything meaningful, that might assure either world peace, or create a healthful environment for humanity. 'Preemption' is a dirty word for exploitation by force.

"The idea of pre-emption is not without merit, but not in the case mentioned, as a unilateral action to dominate another nation.

"Let us examine the application of 'preemption'. That is, the taking of action unilaterally to, in the instance it was applied, rid the world of a bad dude who was viewed as some kind of threat to – whom!? the world!?

"Satellite pictures of trucks and what they might or might not contain does not warrant preemption. Child's play paranoia, or manufactured pretext, à la the Gulf Of Tonkin. But if it is known

that a nation of peoples like Sudan is starving, and is being starved, then we might have grounds for preemption, not only unilaterally. Invade them, feed them, and care for them.

“Even in the first instance, perhaps the suspicious trucks might have found an explanation, especially in a state that is under the restriction of sanctions applied by the world body, under constant surveillance, and subjected to ‘weapons’ inspections. It doesn’t add up, that any clandestine activity could prosper under those restraints. As it turned out there wasn’t a shred of proof. Even more, nothing was found that posed any kind of threat. **Somebody lied to us.**”

“There was a nation that had lived with those sanctions for twelve years, that had grown weary of inspections and the manner in which they were carried out. The sanctions were crippling their economy. The nation was heavily policed from the air with daily overflights of hostile aircraft.

“Unfortunately, posturing became a way of life, pride going before the fall. The world body did little else than enforce, while a dictator tried to keep up the bravado, mutually exclusive no getting along, in no man’s land. Not very politic on anyone’s part; the people of the nation suffer at the hands of the world body, as well as at the hands of their leader. Go figure. A little more belligerence is better than just a little belligerence.

“Could the situation have been handled differently?”

“Have we learned anything from this experience?”

“Let me answer”, Catherine offers.

“By all means, by all means, lets’ hear it, love.”

“Mr. D., the world body (the UN) is weakened by politics (the way a certain kind of politics weakens any concerted action, whether or not necessary, where an atmosphere of avowed democratic principles is corrupted by the undeclared (the hidden agenda). Alignments occur within an already flawed system, resulting in ongoing stalemates. The idea of permanent voting members with veto powers is not democratic, it is autocratic; child’s play, kid games.

“If the world body were organized differently, there might be a different result in the outcome of decisions - as you suggest - in more practical terms.

“Because of these politics, not all nations will agree upon an action, pursuant to some undeclared self-serving agenda, when rather they should be agreeing or disagreeing upon matters of policy before them, on the face of their reason-to-be, whether to take action in Sudan, or to take action against IRAQ; not spending their energies lining up votes, or reserving any decision for one veto. To me it is obvious no single nation should be given such

power, particularly over a decision which received the support of $\frac{2}{3}$ or $\frac{3}{4}$ of the majority.

“This implies also that there should not be permanent members on a council that involves all nations. It is not clubby thing. To me this is a ruinous flaw designed by our infamous ‘control addicts’.

“It is assumed that democracy must prevail, and that all members are basically of good intentions in this regard; otherwise they would not be allowed to become members.

“I’m sorry to protract my answer, but I wanted to provide some solid ground for what else I am to say regarding the case in question.

“Doubtlessly an aggressive act by a nation upon another nation, Iraq upon Kuwait, both assumed to be members of this august body, was met with sufficient resolve by the world body; ‘This will not wash!’. An appropriate action was taken to counter or offset the aggression, in attempt to restore the status quo ante.

“The action proved successful, followed by sanctions placed upon the aggressor, as punishment, and as curb on his proclivities. The aggressor was denied even further by restricting his access to revenues that he could use to rebuild or expand his war-making machinery.

“Fair enough!? For how long? For as long as he lived, and continued in power? Suppose he abdicated to a successor who was even worse than he?

“Questions for the class?!

“One. Should the whole nation be made to suffer, to pay the same price as its aggressive leader?

“Two. We know that weapons inspections were an ongoing part of the sanctions, but what else was ongoing? This gets back to the first question – what ongoing monitoring mechanism was in place to assure a reasonable economic environment for the populace faced to live with sanctions? I ask this question in light of what we know was imposed upon Germany in the way of reparations after the first world war, which the Germans felt crippled their economy, and which fostered a climate of deep resentment.

“I want to suggest that the ‘human’ ingredient was neglected, which only exacerbated a difficult decision; despite the singular culpability of its leader, the nation as a whole was punished, which in turn became resentful (there would never be any forgiveness), and unfortunately more under the sway of its dictator through propaganda generated to place the responsibility for the deprivations upon a vindictive world body, (in this case, enforced by two nations with veto power). Had we indeed witnessed this same thing before the rise of the Third Reich?

“A third question follows, if the world body had been structured differently, where a proposal of ‘preemption’ or removal of an aggressive dictatorial leader seemed more reasonable than punishing an entire nation, by vote of a reasonable majority, without any veto powers; first a request for a voluntary abdication, a new leader being installed by the vote of its nation’s people, all within a given time frame and/or at the end of given time frame, concerted action (en masse) by the world body to remove said leader. Somehow wisdom in this matter fell by the wayside. Hindsight is not proving very successful in this regard. A difficult problem that may never be resolved. The vetoing nations are being self-serving. They want control, they do not want interference from the outside; Period! Stone faces who want the right to whack away at human rights in Chechnya and Tiananmen Square. A hearkening to Sinanthropis Pekinesis and Cro Magnon. Square One. Square that with humanitarian ideals if you can.

“Alternatively, a more humane approach, to give the leader a second chance by forcing him to yield all aggressive weapons – immediately (voluntary compliance); to institute democratic reforms (sharing of government by popular consent) – the second part to be carried out within a certain time frame.

“This rationalization would involve a leader’s responsibility to his own nation; perhaps requiring a graceful exit.”

Lydia interrupts – “I’d like to throw a monkey wrench into this chugging choo choo; although I am mostly in agreement with the track it is following – Suppose, in recognizing the intent of the member nations to preserve ‘peace, lets say – at any cost – does the world body determine a ‘preemptive’ action for cases where it senses danger to world peace – that is, can it be empowered to take action against what it perceives to be a potential threat to world peace – for example – using hindsight and a glaring example, removed from OIL, what should the world body have done with Idi Amin?, when it was learned he was executing his own people in large numbers? He was in power for eight years, responsible for 500,000 deaths. How about Mugabe of Zimbabwe?

“And closer to home, and white, I mean, what about the butchery in Kosovo? I’d like to add Chechnya and Tiananmen Square to the list too. But, the more we add to the argument, the closer we get to our own abuses of human rights, which we righteously pretend to handle in a more democratic way.

“Anyway, where was the UN?

“Should we be asking where is the UN now, as if it mattered, asking about something that does not exist, disunited, a coalition of the unwilling, coalition of the damned? Ugly business! An ineffectual body on all fronts. Do we really need this sham thing?

“Somebody needs a kick in the ass alright.

“So the ‘terrorists’ bomb Madrid – a predictable outcome? Given the circumstances?”

“Isolate the real bad guy in this circus arena?”

“‘Good God’, what a shambles, this war on ‘terrorism’!?”

“Sorry you guys! It gets to me!”

“As it does us all, sis”. Theresa offers.

“One’s frustrations turn into a justifiable kind of anger, but I must argue we do need a forum where people conduct meaningful debate.”

Catherine exclaims “Yes!, we do.

“I like the gist of our preceding conversation. ‘Rescuing something from the ruins’; it seems appropriate.

“Withdraw – make reparations – pay our bills. Take care of our own needs (that is attend to our own affairs, put our own house in order), then see where we are.”

“We may not be able to pay our bills without stealing from someone else.”

“Are things really that bad?”

“Possibly –

“Not without big sacrifices will we be able to restore some semblance of worthiness in the eyes of the rest of the world, not to mention restoring some measure of pride in our own undertakings on the home front.

“It will require a profound change in our attitudes and in our leadership. That old rankle rises up in me when I hear that bully now claiming his administration was served by faulty intelligence. The lie again, the cover up again. He will not admit to his colossal error in judgment; being the man in charge; he’ll show ‘em. We cannot afford to have political hacks in any level of government. We need trained skilled people of the highest integrity, dealing with and meeting the needs of all the people – then maybe we can feel good about ourselves again, knowing we are doing our very best to do our job.

“If it has not already irretrievably happened, the old ways, the accustomed, habituated ways, will certainly bring ruin.”

“Yes!, most of the land might still be in tact, there will be survivors, like there are American Indian survivors, taken over by others; but if we should be fortunate enough to be in control of our own lives, maybe we will be able to rescue something from the ruins.”

“It all seems so dire, Mr. D.” Theresa laments.

“But necessary, Theresa, the price of our profligacy.”

“We are in need of closing the circle – upon the Lesson we might have learned from our own history.

“Can you imagine giving over yourself to this necessary thing? Not facetiously suggesting a Rebirth (Born Again)!?”

“Are we really at that place in our history?”

“Come now Theresa – you tell me where we are.”

“But Mr. D. – “

“Theresa, don’t look to me for anything –

“I assumed a lot – and had no part in formulating the status quo. Really, a non-participant until the Vietnam War. During the Korean debacle, although in the military, I was not a patriot – on the level of a participant, I was cannon fodder. Participation in the Vietnam debacle involved opposition (peaceful demonstration against) – patriotic? – in my mind, Yes!; Kent State became cannon fodder; and symbolic of where we seem to be headed. An Awakening! Our little Tiananmen Square.

“Yes!, there was a history from which it did not seem necessary to learn anything in particular - except slavery was bad, economic depression was bad, there were other bads that were not addressed; women not having the right to vote (if you can imagine it); racial and ethnic tensions are still with us, there is no safety net, no universal health care, or assured provision for sustenance and shelter (can you imagine, the most [propagandized] nation on the earth, not giving a shit?). My peers took everything else for granted – you know – life, liberty and pursuit – along with basic freedoms – without any particular obligation – or personal responsibility. We thought it was not possible for neglect to happen in the midst of abundance.

“Some things took time, from the Boston Tea party and Bunker Hill to Valley Forge, a band of revolutionaries seized the initiative to become a nation. The leaders of the revolutionaries were not the exemplary men as we have been led to believe; they were primarily aristocrats, who wanted their own little fiefdoms away from the control of the British Empire; they had their own brand of fodder for the front lines.

“A few of these fine examples became presidents; some of them needed to divest themselves of their slaves in order to be consistent with their preachings. As a nation of democratic humane peoples we were forced to carry the argument further; emancipation of slaves; such a word, such a worthy word, emancipation; and at such cost, such cost; to assure a man of his inalienable right. And eventually the fair sex was emancipated, allowed to exercise their inalienable right, however marginally, in a male chauvinistic world. The indigenous population of this great land got shoved aside. Our great nation’s bubble of greed burst into a foul, vile, humiliating depression. Greed had failed in its mission, and continues to do so; repeatedly, rest assured.

“As part of our reason-to-be, the industrialization of our nation in order to alleviate the travail of man, we ran amok into another kind of slave labor – in the worker – of coal mines, in all levels of manufacturing, where Corporations became the de facto slave holders – motivated similarly to the original slaveholders – GAIN, profit. I need not ‘belabor’ the point; we recognize the beast for what it is.

“Things have been taking time, labor is more abused than ever, civil rights have required legislation to prevent abuses to the average citizen’s inalienable rights, especially those born on the other side of the tracks. Nowadays the whole issue of civil rights is entangled with ‘terrorism’ and Homeland Security. 1984 has arrived. 2001 has arrived with another George on the Marquee.

“Part of this ‘taking time’ involves hypocrisy, where the Lord God Savior (In God We Trust) is invoked, but is readily ignored in application. God is fine for me, but mankind is an inconvenience; something like that.”

“O.K. Mr. D., I understand part of what you are saying – perhaps we have never really achieved this ‘something’ – ideal – or is that too strong a word – and part of what we have achieved is being sacrificed, while creating a situation where it will not be possible to achieve anything more; that we will be lucky henceforth to reclaim what was previously achieved; while even that achievement has been marred by resource exploitation and profiteering, reducing the planet into a mountain of waste.

“We have lost something along the way; we have failed; or would it be more correct to say, there is much we did not achieve; and which recently we have done our damndest to throw away?”

“That’s cute! Theresa.”

“Not intended as such, but somehow complimentary to the notion of ‘Rebirth’, where, in fact, some things were stillborn.

“Equity, Fairness and Justice. Words Mr. D. No Beef!”

“Stillborn – very good Theresa.”

“I guess we do need to face the music, Mr. D.”

“I believe so, Theresa.”

“Well, you two have certainly had a good go at things.”

“Very astute, your sisters, like you Catherine; three peas in the same pod. My sincere guess is you are exceptional people with exceptional minds and sensitivities; all three imbued with an idealism exacted from reading between the lines, imbued with a very great desire to right the wrongs found in human institutions, if one could call them such.”

“Mr. D., its very nice of you to include me in these generalizations.” Lydia felt obliged to say.

“I am of slightly different mindset than you imagine.

“I do not perceive the ‘ruins’ quite as you do. As frustrated and angry as I may become, I am not prepared to throw out the baby with the bath water.

“Most assuredly our system of government can, will and must withstand the bad apples.”

“I argue it can no longer do so, if ever it could – we cannot afford disaffection with and the lack of confidence in our government. It is only the most humane government that will not alienate these two – we the people – cannot tolerate stupid brutes at the helm; not even as something to hate and parody.

“With the multiplicity of well-endowed educational institutions one might imagine we could produce some good material for leadership; instead we get these political hacks; how can that be?”

“Come on Mr. D., many people hated Lincoln, many people hated FDR.”

“Well, Jesus Christ hasn’t won over everybody.”

“That’s not fair, Mr. D.”

“I’m suggesting that unanimity is not the only criterion for assessing the value of one’s education, or the validity of an individuals personal qualifications. Of course, I do not believe unanimity is possible. I do agree that there is danger in heaving the proverbial baby somewhere unintended. But you must be careful how you argue that position so that it will not be possible to get another Nixon, Reagan or Bush at the helm.

“You do assent to the notion of ruins – at least you made reference to them.

“By including you along with your sisters, I meant no slight to yours or their intelligence; and it is not important that you share exactly the same sentiments of your sisters. What is most significant is your basically unprejudiced view of things; and your critical acumen with regard to them; the ability to make fine logical distinctions amidst a confusion of doubtful assumptions.”

“O. K., Mr. D., I’ll accept the association; I didn’t mean to quarrel; more important to dissect the beast, for what we can learn, good or ill.”

“Cheers! Lydia.”



“You mock me, Mr. D.”

“Lyd, you are too sensitive.” Catherine opines.

“Oh!, what have we here, a conspiracy?”

“Please, you guys, this can’t be happening! A rift in our sisterhood.” Theresa laments.

“As Lydia indicated, there are more important issues at stake, that must bear up under controversy. The issue calls for a kind of intelligence not to be squandered on petty squabbles.”

“Mr. D.! Petty squabbles!?! Petty Squabbles!!,” Catherine irately exclaims.

“Well, sort of; I had assumed you three knew each other only too well, and stood together for the most part; I do not understand this niggling abrasiveness.

“I do not mock you Lydia, at least not deliberately.

“There isn’t any conspiracy of which I am aware.

“I don’t know if it is ‘inevitable’ that some of our differences would serve as some kind of personal vulnerability that must be exposed and rawly attacked.

“Honest differences are expected – and necessary to the unearthing of all possible scenarios.

“I suspect we do not enter into these polemics with idea of scoring points; I don’t.

“Once in a while, it is appropriate, in an egalitarian society, that a member of the older generation ask the younger what they think and how they feel. Surely one can eavesdrop upon that generation as they chatter amongst themselves, and perhaps deduce what they think and feel.

“But here I am a member of the older in the presence of three very astute members of the younger. I must say ‘I am privileged’.

“That is not a mocking statement.

“Catherine and I have covered a lot of ground in our rapping – in our discussions – we have not been trying to impress each other or shoot each other down. I acknowledge her, she acknowledges me. We have had a special relationship in addition.

“When I asked Theresa the question concerning how she conceptualized the phrase ‘Lessons of History’, it was not a trick question or a subterfuge.

“Perhaps it was somehow inconsiderate to single her out. I might have anticipated Catherine’s answer if I had asked her; I might have been challenged to be more explicit if I had asked Lydia.

“I chose Theresa because she is very open, engages easily, and I wanted to hear her immediate response, her quick-witted way, that appeals to me. She reveals her thoughts and is ready for more discussion with an equanimity that also pleases me.”

“I feel I am being put in the spotlight here.”

“Not by me, Theresa.”

“Can we drop it then?” Pleads Theresa.

“By all means.”

“Since I am more or less responsible for this confab, I should act as peacemaker, not you Theresa, or you Lydia. You shouldn’t be exposed to acrimony; its not fair, and is such a waste of good will.

“I assume we are interested in the truth of things, we are not interested in promoting something that can not stand up to closer examination or scrutiny.”

“I will agree with that last statement, but you are not to assume responsibility for what I say. I can imagine that it is easier for most people to relate more easily to Tess than me. I too find Tess engaging, and very open. I realize I am not like her in that regard – that I am looking for motive behind things; and Mr. D. is probably right that I would have made an issue of the question, what prompted him to ask it, before I would attempt to answer it.

“I think there is a streak of that in him too – like ‘are you trying to put me on?’

“But not Tess; she is open, she trusts Mr. D. not to be messing with her, that he is earnest; she would rather engage than contest! If she had any doubts concerning the question itself, she would have asked simply for clarification or elaboration.

“But no, she immediately seized upon the question, eager to answer, answering it succinctly and to the point, making an astute observation in the process – to which we all responded with genuine appreciation.”

At mention of this William put his arm around Theresa’s shoulder. It was a risky moment, but true to her trusting nature, bearing no ill, she accepted the hug with grace, and a sweet shy smile, leaning slightly into the embrace.

Catherine followed suit, while Lydia remained distant, but smiled in appreciation, without offering her self, characteristically slow to yield to any show of emotion.

Secretly, Lydia envied her sister Theresa’s ability to trust, and to go with the flow.

William wanted to test the atmosphere for good will, directing himself toward Lydia.

“Lydia, I realize it is difficult for you to be conversational with me, perhaps that is because of a basic suspicion of all my motives, and perhaps only because I am not particularly tactful. By that I mean I do not show you a proper deference and respect. Perhaps, ordinarily you would not choose to converse with someone of my ilk.

“When your sister and I first met, as much as I was smitten by her and wanted to find myself in her good graces, I did not withhold much of myself. I will say I did not swear, the usual goddamns, and bullshits, or whatever, but I revealed my cynicism immediately – and, not incidentally, my appreciation of her remarkable loveliness.

“That meeting might have ended at any moment because it might have seemed an inappropriate thing, and within any set of social parameters we would imagine for such a meeting; something we would imagine beyond the casual; or even something formally necessary for a moment in time.

“But your wonderful sister wanted more of this encounter, separating herself from form to explore something; even as unlikely as myself – in my opinion.

“Your sister saw something more, or sensed more, and I suspect she understood that at a word, I would be on my way, without arguing the formalities of the situation.

“I have never been so amazed by anyone as I have been amazed by Catherine; or quite so pleased, as to be drawn into a relationship with her.

“At her urging, you have become a part of the whole experience. Believe me, that is also very rewarding; truly, objectively speaking, a remarkable and privileged experience. I realize I can make no assumptions about any of it; the relating amongst all of us is still essentially formative.

“We may not meet often enough to develop a comfortable, easy-going relationship, but there are some things I suspect are common amongst us. We all seek a higher truth, we tend to get there analytically, Socratically, that is, through a deductive or reductive process, without prejudice.

“There are differences; for example, my age sets us apart; I have been at it longer.

“Catherine is very disciplined in her thought, much more so than I. She says what she has to say very clearly, earnestly, and with conviction, all stemming from a disciplined mind and a well-earned self-confidence, and a feeling of being comfortable with the truth at all times.

“My impression is that Theresa has a remarkable intuition, and a very active agile imaginative mind.

“That is not to say I know with any certainty anything of what I say. Believe me, I acknowledge and appreciate your intelligence, your analytical and incisive mind, and precision of thought.

“Of course, I am speaking of exceptional people, in my way of viewing things; that does not imply I am exceptional. I do not believe I am overly impressed. Simply stated, you are remarkable.

“After all these years, I have become something dogged intellectually, only really interested in the truth of all things, as best as I can know them – no bullshit! I haven’t any qualifications.

“Mr. D., you have every qualification.” Catherine asserts.

“Your every thought reveals that fact.

“But I would like to get back to first cases.

“We need to generate some history of our own. We need to be counted, not as acquiescent impotent nothings.

“I should like to suggest that all four of us write letters to our respective congressional representatives, and our senators, beseeching them to get back to their real, grass roots, ‘we the people’, constituency (not their bankrollers), in town hall forums, and frequently, throughout their districts and their states. Show that they really give a damn.

“Let us openly debate with these individuals, the caretakers of our voice. Let reason assume its proper place in the affairs of mankind, the test of our consent.

“Then urge them, insist, in fact, as an act of our will, return to those sacred halls, and therein raise their voices as if they were ours, full of our concern and our passion for fairness, equity and justice in the affairs of men; our dire concerns involving the environment, and consumption unto waste, and register our dissent in all those matters expressed.

“If something is wrong, it cannot be made right by waving the banner, the flag; every act that is based on lies, deception, temporizing, rhetoric, dissembling, disinformation, patriotic bullshit, only soils the banner, perhaps leaving behind a permanent stain.”

“Kate, let it be done!” chimes the ever responsive and enthusiastic, Theresa.

“Yes! Kate, it seems we haven’t any alternative, if the system is still working, we must avail our selves.” Lydia offers in support.

“There are other alternatives; we could take to the streets.”

“Not I.” Lydia retorts.

“Both perhaps. Hard to know where, when, what will have the most effect.”

“In the streets one encounters the mob, Mr. D.”, Lydia argues further.

“Well, in Congress, one encounters the duplicitous; that is, each representative not only represents his constituency, but also his support group, his campaign bankrollers, vested interests. Then he has his own self-interest; he likes his paycheck, his perks; he feels he has to wave the flag to keep his job, however soiled the banner. It has all somehow devolved into a shabby impuissant affair, in which we place little or no faith or trust.”

“But that should not dissuade us from action, for it is action that is required, action by us, as well as action by them. We cannot succumb to the status quo, it does not serve our interests, or the nations’ interests, to succumb to fascism.

“It is interesting to note that in the upcoming presidential election; all the words are there, all the pundits are punditing, but in a way it comes down to image, to charisma, fanfare, entertainment, exploitative opportunities for the media to promote their copy; their bullshit. The truth, the things we want to know necessarily, perhaps intimately, are obscured in the rant and glitz, and the name-calling, the besmirching, awarding the prize to the highest bidder.”

The Author’s License The Reader’s Dilemma

The author leaves the reader with something to ponder in his own life. ‘What should I be doing?’

Some people of great learning strongly recommend that authors never be seen by the reader; then, Hoil!, they appear in a mug shot on the dust cover of their tome in which appears their advice, along with a shit eating grin. This author can supply one of those.

This author does not jest when he suggests the readers would be awful stupid if they thought books wrote themselves.

They don’t, anymore than a painting or sculpture show at an art gallery is produced by a computer; and often the author of those works appears in coat and tie at the opening of the show. This author might not assent to the coat and tie, but might be convinced to make an appearance; to persuade the reader of his ordinariness, and his glorious reality.

Part of the argument offered against the appearance of the author follows from any uncertainty concerning what he or she puts before the reader, arguing facts in the text, debating assumptions, prejudices etc., claiming this frustrates the reader who wants to be absorbed in the flow of a thing, in a straight line, a ‘page-turner’, to coin a phrase used by literary agents, and publishers alike.

That being so, it would be a less credible author who would pander to the reader by offering only mock certainty, when any reader, using his own sense of things, would balk at statements that were too presumptuous, even overstated, or lacking foundation.

One supposes this matter can be argued both ways at length; that is the reader's problem, not the author's. If the reader cannot stand a little honest debate, let him get his entertainment elsewhere.

Is this author deliberately attempting to alienate the reader?

Much depends on what is available for the reader to read, and much depends on what the reader expects, and maybe what he wants. Does he want something that aligns with his own thought, or does he want something that deals with a higher truth, that challenges him, that stimulates him, provokes thought and feelings in him?

Is it fair for any author to assume, since he does the work, that he has the unmitigated license to posit things that are, in principle, only best guesses?

The question does arise. Is there a proper form for what it is we are purportedly doing when we use words, often flinging them at the world?'

It has been conjectured if we allowed a clutch of monkeys to while away their otherwise apparently useless lives, accessing a battery of keyboards, eventually their random ramble would produce Hamlet. The author doesn't in anyway believe this to be a credible conjecture. The author is not a mathematician; but his sense of probability discounts any such randomness ever producing such as Hamlet, or for that matter, *One Flew Over The Cookoo's Nest*, even if it was the entire human race randomly pecking on keyboards throughout eternity.

It is remarkable that only one individual could and did produce Hamlet.

Most of the words this author might use can be found in one lexicon or another; more than a sufficient supply; easily perverted to suggest many meanings.

Since most of what this author is, involves best guesses, because real truth is not available to him, the process of getting there may show some consideration for the reader who might balk at some best guesses, cloaked as assertions, even though they align with his own thoughts or prejudices. There are times when these thoughts or inklings, residing in the shadows of the readers mind are exposed to the light, they appear differently.

This author thinks it is fair to assume any reader, or potential reader, has many doubts and many questions concerning the world in which he lives; he might like to have every detail, every nuance explored, and debated. However, it is also possible he or she desires a fairytale or white wash, being convinced the world is no damned good; or may believe the opposite, wanting it to suffer no taint.

For example, he or she may nominally, from belief, or conditioned habit, be a patriot, that is, believe his country is only motivated to do good.

He may assent to certain notions that his or her country is 'making the world safe for democracy', or 'protecting their way of life'.

He or she may also be appalled by the terrible things that happen as his country sets out to do this good.

He or she may be appeased by the use of terms like 'preventative war', 'preemptive strike', 'collateral damage', or 'material breach'; 'coalition of the willing'; appeased because his or her feelings of horror, disgust, even embarrassment, are an affront to his or her sensibilities as a human being; even as a patriot. He or she may be questioning the assumption of doing good, and the price that is being exacted. When the same people who have presumed over him or her, with 'preemptive strike' 'collateral damage' 'material breach' 'coalition of the willing' come back to him with 'faulty intelligence' what is he supposed to believe?

If an author debates these things on the printed page, as though he himself might be a reader, or a reader-patriot, are we to condemn him for his lacks and uncertainties? Would you listen to him more avidly if he saluted while he was declaiming?

This kind of polemic can be extended. Some events should never be allowed to slip from our consciences; Hiroshima/Dresden or Vietnam/Cambodia should become everyday table conversation, the same as the utterance of grace and thanks before every meal.

There are times when this author lets loose with a string of epithets, assertions, angry outbursts, that might not set well with the reader, simply because they seem so strident, or reactionary; not even bothering to care what the reader may think or feel; but the reader damn well better think or feel something if he or she is any kind of reader, or any kind of human being. It should be understood apart from what fantasy he might write in his tome, the author is a real person, with real concerns.

Any author, seen or unseen, may lay claim to the truth, or may be motivated by a hunch, the best guess, an 'if' 'then' situation, perhaps visionary, which, when revealed in the manner of that particular author, becomes instructive; that is, contains a 'lesson' of some kind; gained through hindsight, most likely.

However one construes hindsight, as a judgment that involves dialogue between the reader and the author, let it be so. If the reader has any sense within him or her self, honest debate, covering of all bases, dealing with all the questions arising in the reader's mind, become part and parcel of the relationship (to the printed page, as it were).

Wonderful it would be if best guesses were in fact truth, or were even intended to suggest such a thing.

This author is unafraid to meet the reader in the text, as long as the reader doesn't feel he was being bullshitted or subjected to a fancy piece of propaganda, however the reader should perceive it; a little trust goes a long way.

This author understands that readers believe in many things; and in varying degrees of subtlety. There may be elite readers who know a great deal, or may possess very acute intellect, whose standard of truth may be very exacting.

There are others, also very swift upstairs, who have doubts about what they have been led to believe, and which they find inconvenienced to believe, if only to relieve their accompanying doubts. There are others who know very little of the real facts which the author pretends to put forward as best guesses, who have every right to question those things that contravene his or her assumptions, however founded.

The reader, to whom this author refers, must understand that the author is also a reader.

This author is put in an awkward position when he or she is obliged to leave little room for doubt. If he must prove every case, every assertion, hunch or best guess, whether in seeming fact, or arrived at through an unseen deductive process, the debate might never cease; however, this author believes the reader is well-served by the process.

When Catherine and Mr. D. attack the author, this may throw the reader into a tailspin 'What!?' 'The Hell!?', only because he does not expect such a thing, only because the author isn't supposed to be approachable either by the reader or his characters. How can a bunch of words laid out on a piece of paper become a conjuration that addresses their creator? As an equal partner in the process the reader feels he has certain rights; not to be hoodwinked by contravention of the assumed conventions, which in themselves have never been declared.

Let it be so. The author appearing in his own text explaining some things as he goes along. Perhaps it does step across the line. Then – Lo! – the characters get pissed off at the presumption and manipulations of the author; the liberties he takes with them. What gives?

Maybe the reader would like to be given equal time, a chance to get into the dialogue.

So, for the reader, the author proposes direct communication with him; he will leave his e-mail address, his mailing address, his phone number, his cell phone number and his favorite smoke

signal, so the reader can tell him where its at, or where to go – so there.

If the reader has plodded all the way to the end of Catherine, he might indeed have a few things to say. Like ‘Shove It!’; or he or she might even be more pissed off than the characters, who feel more subservient to the creator, hence more tolerant; or afraid of being written out of the script, as if they were in a soap opera; or for lack of interest, like some characters of Mark Twain, when he became bored with them.

When an author begins a work, he or she may have something specific in mind, and he or she might be writing for writing’s sake, to fill the tedium of the hours, or to do more than mull things over, to set them down in a concrete order; cast them, so to speak. Giving his thoughts, conceits, opinions, fears and tremblings some form; a sentence, a paragraph; a drawing, a sculpted figure, a painted scene, a song! Perhaps not too unlike the battery of monkeys dawdling before their empty abyss.

What is wrong with the characters being aware of their dependent position? Can’t they be a little critical of the author when he treats them too casually?

What is wrong with an author occasionally appearing to explain himself, or to josh around, so long as he doesn’t go off irresponsibly onto another tangent, unrelated to the theme at hand?

If we were not so rigid in our perception of things, we might find the approach imaginative and stimulating.

Is it so the reader is like the farmer who purportedly doesn’t eat but only that to which he is accustomed, although much excitement to the palate is to be found in other cuisine? So, it may be for the reader’s palate.

The author need not argue or persuade, for the likelihood is that he will only persuade some and not others, or – it is possible - none at all.

In Catherine, it may seem all too obvious that the author is, rather than someone creating a mould into which he will pour his thought, perhaps only to avert the tedium of his life, or to rid himself of a lot of baggage as he approaches the wall, merely a licentious old man, a man without couth or principle, who freely assaults conventional mores, or morals, without any concern for the repercussions – almost like attacking IRAQ.

Like the author of the IRAQ ATTACK, the author of Catherine is forced somehow to justify his actions. The author of the IRAQ ATTACK harangues with his own kind of propaganda, which may not differ much from the propaganda offered by the author of

Catherine, the latter somewhat less righteous. But, like the former, he ain't backing down.

This author does not seriously equate the two, only in the sense that, when one steps outside the norms of conventional behavior, mankind raises its eyebrows. The Great Un American Novel.

We all pretty much know the author of the IRAQ ATTACK is an asshole with a lot of power, which makes of him an even bigger asshole than has a right to be.

But, of the author of Catherine, you cannot say the same things. Oh! Yes!, perhaps an asshole, but a very different kind; not righteous, maybe only inconsiderate, maybe even a despicable old man.

There is far greater substance to Catherine than the IRAQ ATTACK. No oil is to be obtained from Catherine. Only another somewhat intangible substance, despite the denouement.

The author feels he showed considerable delicacy in the physical relationship between his protagonists. He did not feel a bed scene was necessary, wherein a lot of satisfied gyrations and groanings could be heard. Obviously that part of any relationship might be regarded in bad taste anyway (R-Rated, perhaps), although there is a definite current of such activity in modern literature, and in the modern entertainment industry. A little bit of flesh, a little bit of prurient excitement is a kind of guarantee of commercial success.

It is possible the censors, or raters might take exception to an old geezur and a sweet young lass making out.

When a child is killed in the IRAQ ATTACK, that is merely regrettable 'collateral damage', an expectation under the circumstances. Whereas an old geezur and a sweet young lass is not an expectation under the circumstances. Does regrettable 'collateral damage' apply to Catherine as well?

Both may be regarded as unconventional behavior, not something we would expect, perhaps, even less so of Catherine, which inadvertently says a lot about man's hostility, aggression and destructiveness, as expected behavior.

The author has managed this spiel without any reference to what is plausible, or probable, or even possible as a property of life, where we can imagine 'anything goes'. Everything we do is somewhat discretionary.

The realm of expectation expands or contracts depending upon the amount of exposure we have had to all possible manifestations of human behavior, however, implausible or improbable these would be considered in any arena of propriety. What is appropriate?

Some claim to know, as regards the IRAQ ATTACK, and Catherine, but it is all conditional to circumstances, and to transient mores.

If we are fully open-minded, and not the opposite, like obstinate, caught up in a rigor mortis or ossification of the thinking apparatus, we might totally reject the one - IRAQ ATTACK - while withholding judgment with regard to Catherine. With the IRAQ ATTACK there are no options - Rigor Mortis!

The one is real, very real, has happened, is happening; its rationale is all around us, constantly assaulting our sensibilities, whereas the other is fictional, confined to the printed page, however 'fictional' seems the former (that is, truly unbelievable).

Because we have to suspect the author of the IRAQ ATTACK for what he is, we no longer doubt the reality of his creation. We recognize his inhumanity, gross inhumanity, to man. The author of Catherine reveals entirely his humanity without justification, without prejudice.

Obviously these two authors are not comparable, not relevant to each other; this author taking too many liberties with the reader, however important his free associations seem to him. The other also takes a different kind of liberty. Every opportunity is an opportunity to lambaste the one, even when it doesn't seem relevant.

Assuredly this one author will take you into his confidence, and will not insist upon his prerogatives, although he might stretch the parameters of his assumed license. He would never preempt your credulity, or offer dubious disclaimers of his responsibilities.

As Catherine and William labor with their rationalizations and justifications, perhaps the reader does tire of the repetitions of something he or she has already tentatively accepted in order to continue reading.

Since this writing is only a writing without any stated purpose other than to provide a vehicle for the author's thoughts before the wall, and since such freedom exists to permit such advances upon credulity, even without a license, but only through the vagaries of a wandering mind, whose characters sometimes fail their mission, it hardly seems fair to exclude the reader, as a character. It is being suggested by this acknowledgement the reader could be allowed plug-ins that would reflect his arguments with the text, where he might like to substitute his own values. He might even insist the author be made answerable for all his apparent transgressions of conventional assumptions.

A suggestion. The whole is in the nature of an experiment. The Great Un American Novel. The author does not seriously suggest

that his authorship should receive any connotation of 'crime against humanity', as does the author of IRAQ ATTACK.

Everything may seem only a matter of degree, degree of severity of violation of what is perceived as proper in the affairs of mankind. What is proper in the affairs of nations has been incorporated into the UN Charter, The Geneva Conventions, The International Court, and various tribunals, and the precedents established by them.

What is proper in the affairs of authors seems not subjected to so rigorous a test, but censorship does exist. Far more likelihood exists that an author will receive censorship than will a loose cannon in world affairs.

Stopping the IRAQ ATTACK has proven virtually impossible through any means of public censure, whereas Catherine may never get published, because of one kind or another of censorship.

By now the reader has guessed, in this last argument, this is not about the author, but about IRAQ.

How Would You Like This To End?

The author("") continues thus with important dialogue between himself and his characters.

"How would you like this to end Catherine?" the author inquires of her.

"I had not given it much thought, I have been so involved in acting out my part.

"However, I have been mindful that I am only an experiment.

"I realize each of us will be allowed this freedom, right, privilege, to make her or his wishes known; including the reader and the author."

"The voice of the future, or posterity. "

"It is an important decision. But are we allowed only one alternative?"

"You are free to imagine several, but I think it best if you choose the best one for yourself, and see how it fits with the choices of others.

"I believe the eventuality will find you upon your own road out of necessity, in order to get on with life.

"More than likely, a road down which you would travel so far, you will not be able to return to try another; more than likely you will be forging a new one instead".

"I imagine we want everything, or that I want everything, if I had my choice; but I sense such is not possible, even in real life.

"I would want what has happened so far to continue into an indeterminate future. I do not want to forego possibilities.

“So, if Mr. D. and I find our ways to remain close and intimate, that would be my first choice. I no longer want to be involved in the pros and cons of propriety.

“I have work to do. I would want to be able to lead an effective life in those areas that interest me the most.

“What do you think.”

“What you request finds accord with my aims, which is to help you to discover that effective self; mostly as an extension of myself.

“I have encumbered your life with an old geezur whom I could easily write out of the script, but you have rather explicitly requested otherwise.”

“That is my preference at this time.

“The effective part of my life is equally important.”

“Of what would that effectiveness consist?”

“That I could locate those bridges that would make possible converse amongst all peoples of our planet; inclusive of all humanity; particularly those areas that bind us more than separate us.

“What you write and what I represent, or what I am, is beyond human experience, dream-like, Yes!, fictional!

“It seems all dreams, fictions, contain a wish, Yes!, perhaps, an ideal, a moral, an argument, a judgment, a persuasion.

“Mine would seek a return to first principles, almost Golden Rule like, in nature, without reference to deities, or Commandments.

“I am not so blinded by my desires in this matter to ignore what I have learned mankind to be. I can operate with a dream or a vision, but not with an illusion. If I yield to the thought that man is a hopelessly incorrigible animal driven by his viscera, by nature aggressive and hostile, then I will become paralyzed in my actions.

“I might perceive a need, acting upon that. Need exists everywhere, even in my own back yard. My one life, of acting where need calls, might serve better, in the long run, than several high-minded essays pertaining to the same theme.

“Not exemplary, but acting according to my true belief that I must do, must act – accordingly.”

“I support you in either Catherine, either as an activist, or as essayist, or both, more than likely, as I am certain will Mr. D..

“Mr. D., however, will be more solicitous of your welfare; as he has been throughout. He may even seek to carry you off to a safer place. I suspect when I ask him how he would like to see this end, he might – well – I will allow him to speak for himself. I will not attempt to second guess him.”

“How would you like this tale to end Mr. D?”

"I think you know, without asking.

"But to satisfy your trifling curiosity, I'll give you a hint.

"Catherine is my highest priority; her happiness and her safety.

"What I might want must be put aside for her sake."

"That can be arranged, but what do you want?"

"I want to continue a relationship with her. But I feel she is entitled to more than I can give her.

"I do not know for how much longer a meaningful intimate relationship can continue. I do not want that to interfere with everything else Catherine means to me, and what I assume I mean to her."

"What more do you want for your life besides Catherine?"

"In real terms, I cannot say. I guess, to be proven wrong about my assessment of mankind, would be a welcome relief."

"Mr. D. I suspect that will not happen.

"However, Catherine will require your support in whatever she attempts to do. Even if you think she is throwing her life away; even if she is the notable exception to your assessment, you cannot interfere, because every persuasion you use to dissuade, will only serve to reinforce her, and will also drive you apart.

"You cannot save her."

"I can physically kidnap her, take her away, to some safe place."

"Mr. D., as a captive. An animal, in a cage, might be said to be guaranteed physical safety, but not any degree of happiness; neither humans or animals were meant to be in cages.

"I am inquiring of you, as I have already inquired of Catherine, about an ending to this tale.

"This writing can go on indefinitely as it has been doing, until I tire of it, or expire in the process. I suspect I will expire in the process of writing something, whether this, or another improbable experiment in the struggle between cynicism and hope.

"It cannot end mid-air going over the precipice, as did the ending of Thelma and Louise, or the Monkey Wrench Gang.

"It will not serve as a moral. It might end with an assumption, that the reader will take up the banner of Catherine and her sisters. Become active where there is need, that is, do the 'human' thing – always."

"To me, that would be the best kind of ending."

"You have already become superfluous; not because of your age, but because you do not believe that any one individual can make a difference in the affairs of an animal that is doomed.

"It will be in the hands and minds of the readers to bring to fruition this endeavor.

"Most likely the reader will be variously moved, as most of us are, and have been, as we read other writers; at times being

motivated to follow through with our convictions, and at others to shelve the work after some time, maybe never to be read again.

"We might not have acted, but we have incorporated into our beings various aspects of what our readings have engendered by way of feelings and thought, perhaps made more thoughtful as a result, somehow having our feelings and thoughts more clarified; perhaps even becoming somewhat less tolerant of those who do not make any effort to better the world in which they live, of bettering something that needs bettering.

"Mr. D. one might regard you as the other pole, the cynic, as you so characterize yourself, and in which you seem to take such pleasure – "

"Bitter pleasure."

"Alright, it makes you feel vindicated in your cynicism every time man fucks up."

"I suppose I am that narrow.

"Does Catherine suspect this of me?"

"Catherine loves you, she knows you to be sincere. Not a devil's advocate, opposite for its own sake. She believes you, because she cannot be certain you are wrong; or cannot refute your arguments, not in any sufficient way, not in numbers of people who have acted in the best interests of humanity. She feels inclined to accept a good deal of what you say at face value, in short, she is still a very impressionable youth; and she is being influenced, or should I say, sobered by your judgments.

"Largely, it is because she believes in you, she does not suspect or distrust your motives; she knows you will look any truth squarely in the face, and not back away from it - she would desire the same for herself – this is where you will be a great support to her."

"I should be content to do that, not without apprehension concerning her welfare."

"To answer your question whether she might think of you as being narrow; her sensitivities are such that she might understand you to be formed by your experience, your temperament, and by other factors that conditioned you to think a certain way, to feel certain things.

"I suspect If Catherine goes, so go we all, if the Homeland Security people take action against her, we all will be involved in an ending that spells an unaccountable doom.

"We cannot think of that possibility, it is the wrong kind of ending; all we are and all we have been, cannot go in that direction."

“So often we have seen it happen, that brutal mindless violent cruelty, indiscriminately wielded, only attributable to man and to none other. None other.

“All dissent must be silenced!. All heirs to the throne must be executed. Go figure.”

“What of Theresa, that lively lovely, if you don’t mind my asking?”

“I haven’t spoken to her, which I soon intend to do; so you will learn soon enough.

“Do I sense a deep affection in you for that girl?”

“Most assuredly you do. She is a complete gem; you have done well in creating her. I suspect you had not intended it so, but you are so in love with the notion that loveliness has such a great potential to work wonders in the world.”

“Have me figured out, do you?”

“It would seem that Helen could have done more than skip town with Paris.”

“Hah!, but what of Medea?”

“Can’t win them all.

“I suspect Theresa will be in the final crescendo.

“I haven’t warmed to Lydia, although to look at her, she is stunningly lovely, and her mind is startlingly sharp, ‘brilliant’, as the saying goes. I would like her to become more of a compliment to her sisters, but feel I would need to go backward to redraw her, because any thing I might do now would seem inconsistent; she must remain this somewhat cold beauty; with only some apparent vulnerability, which may provide sufficient charm. Her humanity may triumph over her reserve. She is not mean, spiteful, or vindictive. A bit of stickler for form, but she is just. However, she is less apt than her sisters to make allowance for our common human failings.”

“Theresa, how would you like this to end?”

“Must it?”

“Do you really think I could go on ad infinitum, drawing every breath of every character?”

“Better than conveniently offing us, to get ‘closure’.”

“Of what do you suspect me?”

“I cannot be certain of anything here, either the fiction or the reality. Do I need to make up *your* mind? After all, this is your tale.

“You might want to shock the reader by emphasizing the brutal cruelty of man, by destroying Catherine in some inhumanly disgusting way?”

“Let me assure you, I could not write such a thing; although some of what you have suggested defines a familiar brutal fateful aspect of reality; also the habit of some authors to shock the reader.

“Theresa, in the last analysis, I feel I must offer some kind of hope; I would not be true to myself to end on a downer, as much as I might sense that ‘fatefully inevitable’.

“I am mindful of those ancient Greek dramas wherein the Chorus intones the heavy tread of inescapable Fate. The individual, Antigone, does not make issue with the state without suffering the inevitable.

“Still there are those of us who feel there is a higher order than the state. Through Mr. D. – No – through one, or all three of you young women, the torch will be carried.”

“Is there a problem?”

“I would expect more of the reader than I would of Mr. D.

“His time is up, for the purposes of this narrative; his utility is rife with liabilities. He is not credible. He is too easily parodied or caricatured. An old geezer stumbling about naked, wrapped in a barrel, carrying a lighted candle during broad daylight in search of ‘truth’, an honest man, it is said; with his tongue hanging out, panting after little Red Riding Hood. An old crust, soon to vanish forever, with a little shove, which the reader will gladly provide.”

“That does not set well with me; and Catherine would walk out of the script if she could hear you say these things.”

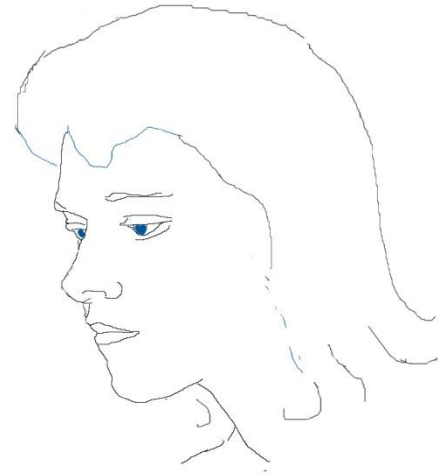
“For your information, Catherine hasn’t any choice but to submit to the exegesis of this script. – Yes!, even though I have inquired of her how she would like to see it end. I am not obliged any more than any creator is obliged to look upon his creation, including the biggy creator who casually dumped us all here to squirm away in a mushrooming heap, as an unlikely accretion.”

“I seriously doubt you have spoken to her in this manner.”

“We have an understanding – ‘without obligation’.”

“Oh!, so what are you anyway, a prankster, playing with people’s lives.”

“I have angered you.”



“More than that. You think we are made of clay, that you can mould us, make us subservient without recourse.

“Don’t imagine the reader will sympathize with your indelicacies. He will know what you had set out to do, and how you will have failed, or how you have betrayed your avowals.

“The reader may be dangled in time, but I doubt he misses the point of integrity, even in such as you. Be careful you don’t join Mr. D. in the ranks of doubtful utility.”

“I’d say you are the toughest of you three, although you seem the most open and pliable, least antagonistic, least hostile.”

“My sisters are not hostile.

“If they seem so to you, it is only the expected reaction to your provocative probings. You are the hostile one.

“Be consistent in your characterization.”

“What about Catherine’s reaction to you and Mr. D. getting chummy?”

“That was deliberate on your part, the word ‘licentious’ in place of ‘license’. You toy Mr. Author; its not nice; a cheap shot.”

“Were not you and Mr. D. chummy?”

“Drop It!”

“O. K., Theresa, to return to the beginning of this conversation, you asked, ‘Must it (end)?’

“My initial impulse is to say, Yes.

“I could simply cease writing at this moment, that would be the end, which I could make very clear - FINIS – FINAL No sequel.”

“But you cannot, because you want to explore my character more.”

“Don’t be so presumptuous.”

“I’ll ignore that.

“In your fashion, you began with Catherine, who brought her two sisters into play; you can’t let go of me, pretty thing that I am. Like Catherine is pretty, perhaps prettiness being essential to your lascivious predilections, and reason-to-be behind this whole charade.”

“I have already confessed to an improbable denouement, perhaps not to you, but to your sister.

“But a charade?!, in the negative sense?, No!

“Let me explain something.

“Where to begin. Hmn!

“I am a product of my upbringing. A rather simple-minded person, really.

“In Sociology class, one reduced human behavior into an only somewhat meaningful superficial system of classifications. Complexes, they were called. They involved the dominant preoccupations of the social milieu, like automobiles, sports,

celebrities; wealth and social status. Associated with each of these complexes, and a seeming integral part of them was the persona of the female, the alluring object, who rode beside one in the shiny chariot, who cheered the players on the court, or in the field, or acted out the heart throb on stage and screen, riding off into the sunset, and who were the status symbol of the wealthy male. Somehow if you owned a shiny chariot, or were a shinning sport's figure, or a handsome lothario captured on celluloid, or had a pocketful of moola, you were somehow guaranteed a pretty girl, with whom you made out, and rode off into the sunset, to live happily ever after.

"These complexes are still with us. Always it is the pretty girl (and the hunk) at the center of it all, the driving force, reaching into our wallets through our underwear (romance).

"Our external world seems to function in this manner, and would seem to aspire to little else; a vast external involvement in consumption of that world. So Yes!, pretty girl, targeting a desire, rather crudely. Playing fast and loose with our susceptibilities.

"Our social complexes do not involve homely girls, and none of us yearn for a homely girl, and no one really writes about showing off the homely girl; only homely girls write about homely girls; glorifying their hidden qualities. Our social complexes address only the illusion of success; they do not address the participants who must live their lives without hitting home runs, or making the big score; or those who walk everywhere instead of drive; because they are not good enough to hit home runs, or are too poor to afford their own motorized transportation.

"The 'pretty girl' celebrity, is flaunted for all to see, as though we are all medical students attending an anatomy class; so much flesh is exposed; very little remains for the imagination. Maybe it is best that way; one is allowed to see what he is getting. Flesh is as flesh does.

"Cheer leaders, pretty girls, that is, do not cheer for ordinary people, pretty girls do not seek out ordinary partners. Being pretty is the desirable asset that must be properly (advantageously) utilized."

"Alright, I get the drift.

"I assume I would be less interesting as a homely girl, even though I might possess all the other traits with which you have endowed me."

"To borrow a phrase Catherine and I have used frequently – 'fatefully inevitable'."

"Yes!, I recognize the phrase. Kate and I have also used the phrase for some time. I'm sure it applies.

“However, I do not think that lessens or mitigates the characterization of ‘charade’.”

“Have it as you will Theresa. Your sister balked at my way of doing things. Not so much the pretty girl aspect, as the feeling I was messing with her.

“She acknowledges her existence, even as a fictional entity. Once the reader became involved in the description of her, imagined her, maybe even identified and desired her persona, she was as substantial as any other entity, real or imagined; as part of the reader’s conscious or unconscious life.

“She felt she had some say in what she was to become.

“That same decision confronts you and I at this very moment.

“In the reader’s mind, you have been imagined, so you have become a fait accompli. You are as real to that reader as any other individual who the reader doesn’t know personally, about whom he or she may have only heard, but has never seen.

“In the end, that reader might feel closer to you, if he or she should take a liking to you, which is very likely, particularly as you have been described in this manuscript. One thing leads to another; you are imagined to be a tangible presence, who is shapeable in the reader’s mind.

“Understand me, Theresa, I am testing the reader’s credulity, he or she is looking for something when he or she enter a library or book store in search of the written word; perhaps only a diversion, but maybe more, a romance, a fairy tale, or fantasia where everything comes out ‘just right’. Perhaps he or she only want absorption in time-killing, illusorily desiring some real romance, real fairy tale to happen, which never seems to happen in real life, but is desperately imagined, nonetheless.

“In addition, I get to say things, not so much about pretty girls, but about all the other things that matter to me.

“It matters to me that you are this enthusiastic lovely young woman; also with a very keen mind, a lively imagination, and a pleasant disposition, eager to engage.

“Complain, if you will, of being exploited in an old geezur’s charade. You feel what you feel.”

“I’m confident the reader will not appreciate any of what you are doing, undermining his grasp of any part of what you have already concocted for him.”

“It is a risk we must all take in this business of creating.

“I thought it might be productive to have these discussions with the characters before pulling the plug on the whole affair, perhaps out of boredom. It is getting on, repetitive, as all things eventually become, circular; the reader utterly pissed off at being led nowhere, no catharsis, no big sendoff in the grandest Hollywood

tradition. A big fizzle, where the zero fails to become a hero, and because he is incapable of becoming a hero; and because he is after all, a real zero, he must perish! Why?, because, allowing a zero to continue onward into the future is a totally worthless idea; at least in his demise there is a moment of empathy, or a moment of satisfied disgust; and there is 'closure' a finality, a last chapter, a final solution. We may be disappointed, but at least we are not left hanging. The zero and the homely girl; O.K. give them life, let them live! Happily ever after, like the hunk hero and the pretty girl heroine. Give them a little privacy behind the curtain, so we don't have to look. FINIS!?"

"You do get your jollies, mocking us all."

"Part of my upbringing; the foul exhalings of my father."

"I do not mock you Theresa; you are one of the favorites whom I would not."

"You already have; because, in reality, I am even more than you make me, the part you have left out."

"I am sympathetic to those who are less fortunate; the zeroes, if you will, the homelies."

"What makes you think I am not? Because I do not drip with pathos?"

"Do you really imagine that I cannot be sympathetic? Is there something I am that prejudices you against me?"

"You seem so clever, so facile, disingenuousness; Yes! there is also something about you that is calloused, almost as though you delighted in pushing someone to the threshold of pain; only to pull back, to soothe, toying, playing God – Geezz!"

"What do you want Theresa; how do you want this to end?"

"Do you want me to off you in some way, like Nell, for example?"

"You're stuck with me; and the audience."

"Will you be asking Lydia what she wants?"

"I should, but I know she will become even testier than you. I could not ask her, without some go-between."

"She might pound on your door."

"You're forgetting who is writing this script."

"Theresa, I felt you and I might get along, but I suspect your need for independence is even stronger in you than in Catherine. I imagine that having older, very accomplished sisters, tends to create that kind of environment."

"I think you assume a little too much. My sisters never put upon me or put me down; they never acted superior. We always shared everything, our thoughts, our feelings. I was never excluded from any discussion. As a result I felt comfortable, and felt I was able to hold my own, that my participation was as an equal. If anything, I may have irritated my sisters with my incessant

questioning; but they only circumspectly revealed 'time out', but never indicated to me that I was an irrelevant pest.

"So, if it seems I want my independence more strongly than Kate, that is probably an individual thing, possibly some of it in reaction to you. I feel certain Kate prizes her independence as much as I do mine; and I know Lydia insists upon hers, as a matter of principle; as her inalienable right.

"Are you not confusing the reader again by continuing with this kind of dialogue, this near harangue?"

"Had we not already settled upon the niceties of an ending; and here you are resurrecting the dying beast for one last gasp?"

"Keep 'em guessin'."

"Don't be that way, show some deference, some humility before your audience."

"There never will be an audience.

"We all will be locked up in this cell forever.

"The key will be lost amongst all the precious rubbish, all the piles of useless accumulations tossed out in the cleanup of, and ridding of this hapless occupant; waste; refuse; not even worth recycling; the leavings of a consumed planet; testament to our lives.

"The potential reader, or audience, if you will, will have other concerns, like his or her survival, without frills, without romance, fairy tales, and quirky denouements; hanging onto the little that remains; ruins.

"Our diversions, if you will, are destined to become unheard of luxuries in the future.

"I recall those images of poverty, not of beggars, or wasted bodies, which we so often associate with that condition, but of human rats clawing through immense garbage heaps for bits and oddments of utility and, only He knows, for something edible; not a single human rat, but hundreds, a pack of mostly spindly-legged, raggedly clothed, following behind some machine that is trying to control the mountain of waste that cannot be buried fast enough to keep up with the generation of it. That's how I envision our future; culling through what remains of our planet after it is all used up, made unfit for human habitation, all converted and consumed.

"Who can we blame?"

"You may have seen something as you describe, but it is not a universal thing. Yes! poverty goes with the territory, especially where there is uncontrolled breeding. It is part of the human condition. Who do we blame for the human condition?"

"Perhaps mankind is being swallowed up in an acquisitive materialistic thing. The 'thing' has brought status. Even though we know it is a hollow pursuit, we still subscribe to it.

“We are all responsible for the human condition, even though we do not individually hold ourselves accountable.”

“The Muslims destroyed the WTC. Ted Kazinsky tried to off Corporation Executives. External, Internal. There have been other internal indicators that something is wrong. McVeigh, Weaver, Koresh, Singer, Speck, Whitman; Columbine, Thurston; others going off the deep end. All kooks?, Perhaps. Not excluding the president.

“Kent State and Horiuchi, wait in the wings for future deployment.

“What is there that is not satisfying in the great paradigm of civilization? Was this also true when I was growing up within the great walls of civilization, or has it all suddenly gone bad? Perhaps it boils down to who I was then, somebody easily bullshited. Am I different now; am I seeing what was there all along; somehow triggered and brought to the surface by the advent of too many? Since my burgeoning gullible youth the world’s population has tripled.

“What is the fit, what is the fashion?

“From this great paradigm, rises the sphinx of W. W in his predicament with Saddam, and greasing, promoting Our Way Of Life. Now that they have the ACE, what do they do with him; how many times can you punish him? Put him in the dock like Adolph Eichman? What do you do with a Pinochet? Alas! what will we eventually do with W? or what should we have done with Kissinger and Nixon? Shove him into the pillory, heaving rotten eggs and tomatoes 24 hours a day, a hole in the ground in which to crap, a hole, since we have already been exposed to too much of his crap; and a man who comes around with a sponge soaked with gall for this new-age man of God; who has finally found his place of abject humility for which he has labored, and connived, for so long.

“Don’t only capture him, try him, find him guilty, and condemn him, but don’t just put him in the dungeon; expose him in a public place, donned in all his nakedness, revealing the paltry thing he is. Let all who pass by, who have been harmed have their opportunity at revenge by hurling curses and epithets at him; and their GOD DAMN YOUs.

“Forgive me, did I not not know what I did?

“Theresa how could it be that the apex of civilization could spawn this thing?

“Have I misread something, or misinterpreted the purpose of the Holy Chalice. Have we been driven into the abyss by this triumphant boor, riding his steed, whoopin’ and hollerin”, swinging his ten gallon hat as his Homeland cowpokes herd us into oblivion?

"It has been noted that when the Jews of Europe were being led to the slaughter, they suffered every indignity, without protest in the hope they would be spared. Step by step, taken from their homes, herded into railroad box cars, to the barbed-wire compounds, to the removal of their clothing, the appropriation of their goods and valuables, the sheering of their heads, the separation of their families, to the very last act of stripping for mass delousing before the gas was released; all with barely a whimper.

"This didn't happen too long ago, Theresa; during my lifetime.

"Here we are, Theresa, during your lifetime.

"Is it any wonder that I want to imagine beautiful youth triumphant with their ideals emblazoned on their banners. A desperate act?"

"To be truthful, I am a bit overwhelmed by all of this. I want to respond to all you say. I do not say this to somehow escape.

"You and Mr. D., one and the same. Somehow I seem to understand Catherine's attraction.

"That sense of fate, of inescapable tragedy. Yes!, the inevitable, the cursed inevitable. One ignores something at his own peril; but is perilous all the same?

"Yes! Catherine would, of course, she would, and Yes!, I support her, I too would be attracted, even if the reader thought me leaving my senses.

"So it must not end. We must see something through, if even only in the reader's mind."

After Such Prevail, A Reprieve.

The author cautions the reader not to expect too much as this tale winds down to the sea, where all rivers and torrents must end. The tone has been set. William, the cynic, will not be able to prevail against the natural empathy of Catherine.

William admires beyond all reclaim the heart of this lovely woman. He cannot do otherwise, for it is the same heart that loves him. It is her heart, however, not his.

Catherine continued with her studies, becoming more and more imbued with the purpose she was assigning to her life. She became a very prodigious writer, all concerning the human condition. She submitted her work to the Wilson Quarterly, Foreign Policy, Stanford Institute of International Studies, Review of International Studies, even the Hoover Institute; Stanford Social Innovation Review, Conservation In Practice, and submitted Essays to be published by the Stanford University Press; and She emerged from Stanford with a Doctorate in Humanities. Her career

seemed set. She was becoming a recognizable entity amongst the enlightened, social theorists. Her diligence, her humanity, and her practical, no-nonsense arguments and proposals were being regarded with some approbation. She did not confuse issues; she defined all her terms. One could trust her motives. Her words came at a time of great need in the affairs of man.

‘Good Afternoon Everyone.

‘Today is a very special day.

‘Ms. Catherine Tellerman, our Commencement speaker, is one of our graduating doctoral students.

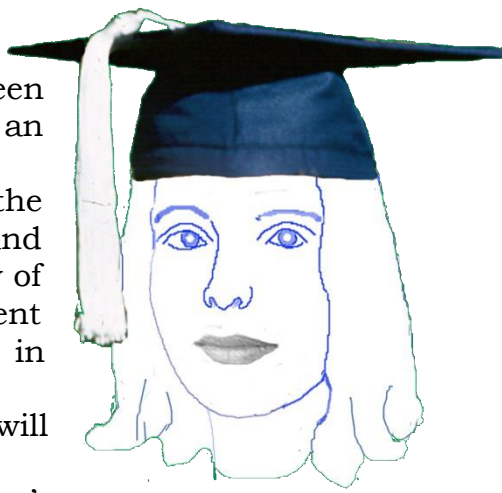
This is a ‘first’ for our institution.

‘Ms. Tellerman – Catherine – has been an exceptional student; and is an exceptional human being.

‘Catherine has chosen a career in the Humanities. She has published early and often. As a writer, devoted to the study of man in the landscape, her student essays have been widely circulated in prestigious journals.

‘Her work speaks for itself. She will also speak for herself.

‘Please welcome Catherine Tellerman.’



“Thank You President Leland

“I am honored.

“I do want to express my gratitude to the people of this institution, teachers and students alike; I wish also to honor my parents, who gave me life, and taught me humanitarian values. I wish to thank my two younger sisters, who have been my staunchest allies. I wish also to thank a very close personal friend who has proven challenge to my thought, and has helped to shape my awareness and perception of the world of man; what we have chosen to label, the ‘Big Picture’.

“I welcome this opportunity to speak to you all.

“I will apologize for what most of you will recognize as some oft’ repeated phrases, instead of coining new ones. I recognize the utility of the familiar, while at the same time knowing the potency of provocative invention.

“However, I will not mince words. I will not use high-flown rhetoric in an attempt to persuade you of something; but I will attempt to stimulate you, to energize you to think about where

each of us might be headed, in what is evermore appearing to me, to be a very dark, uncertain future.

“We live today with ‘terrorist’ alerts, as one day not too long ago, we lived with the Nuclear Clock and Mutually Assured Destruction.

“How can this be so?

“During my tenure as a student over the last nineteen years, I have heard so many times the expression, ‘Lessons of History’. To me, the connotation of that expression is self-evident. But there are those amongst us who argue that each historical case is different, and unique; that we cannot extract hard and fast lessons.

“Despite such cant, for all of our enlightenment, and dissemination of information regarding the diabolical horrors of War, that awful ‘collateral damage’, so much with us in the last century, and still ongoing, one does wonder how it is possible for man to even consider that option, War and armed conflict, ever again.

“Is there a lesson here? As a species, are we so unavoidably hostile, so aggressive, and so bent on destruction, that the lesson does not, and, cannot apply?

“It is not my task here to argue the pros and cons of something in which I do not believe as an option.

“It is more to my purpose to ask, ‘What kind of world do we want to live in?’

“Not only do we hear of ‘terrorist’ alerts, we are apprised of alarming statistics regarding the pollution and contamination of the air we must breath, the water we must drink, and earthen home from which we must obtain sustenance; all vital to our well being. As much as we would like to continue with our industrialization of the planet because of its fruits, as conscionable caretakers we must reexamine the dubious promise involved in converting the planet into a ‘standard of living’.

“Do we really want to sacrifice the planet to this ‘standard of living’? If we can’t have that, then life is not worth living; is that it?

“I do not believe so. To me it is illogical.

“There is an imperative here. That every nation sign on to the Kyoto Protocol; Montreal Protocol, Johannesburg Summit; and all future extensions of Environmental Awareness; these are first steps in establishing even more stringent requirements concerning the load placed upon the environment in which we must live.

“We haven’t any choice in the matter. Do not mistake what I say. Perhaps these words seem dire; not at all. It is with utmost urgency you heed them, NOW!

“We must sacrifice.

“Where do we begin? When do we begin?”

“Here and now! All of us together.”

“We can no longer afford the luxury of living in denial; we can no longer listen to the propagandists who promote the notion that there is no danger, or worse, who harangue us with, ‘Don’t think of it as less later, but more now’, or even more unconscionably, ‘In fifty years, no one will know the difference’. Or those who would argue that nothing we do matters, for we are soon headed for Armageddon and After Rapture. While we debate the pros and cons, each day the planet dies a little more.”

“As once we imagined bizarre, even frightening, life forms on other planets, we now imagine our own planet on ‘The Day After Tomorrow’, as we once did, and perhaps still do, with ‘On The Beach’. Only in the last few years we have been forced to consider the possibility that we are very vulnerable to some unknown pestilence that fortuitously adapts, and thrives amongst our egregious Malthusian number; perhaps truly, insidiously, relieving us of all choice in our destiny.”

“We know very little concerning life forms on other planets in other galaxies, and we know very little of what the future holds for this planet.”

“One thing we seem to have discovered, and more and more believe, as we explore the universe, that Earth is Unique. That everywhere else we have looked, there is no life, despite all our high-falutin fictional accounts of outer space.”

“So - don’t fuck up Mother Earth!”

“Unsavory language?”

“You tell me how to get the message across.”

“Yes! Immediate measures, things already in place, requiring far greater and insistent emphasis. Reduce, Reuse, Recycle. Sharing equally in importance with Reading, Riting, and Rithmetic’.

“Reduce population. Even out of love, and desire to produce geniuses and saints alike, we are gambling; the stakes are too high. It is imperative that we use restraint; we have more than an adequate supply of raw material. We are not mice, or rats; we are human beings, sentient rational creatures, are we not?”

“By this time, with the aid of computers, and the kinds of information we have at our disposal, we ought to be able to design an optimum social, economic, and humanely viable system, and plan contingencies, as well.”

“The computer part is the easier part of solving the problem of man in the environment. We have yet to confront the harder part, compliance with what we have obtained from our knowledge base.”

“There is the concept of necessity; there is the concept of excess. By implication, excess leads toward testing the limits of finitude; our sensibilities tell us we must back away from the concept of excess, immediately; we must know what is possible to achieve by following the dictates of necessity.

“To clarify what I have said, to give it a context, I offer the following as a social ideal.

“I proceed with a hypothetical. Let us suppose we all agreed that a primary social goal was to provide sustenance, shelter, and health care for every human being alive today, what emerges from the political annals as 'a safety net'. I speak of a conservative human environment, not a luxurious one; one that addresses a basic physical as well as a spiritual and emotional need. In doing this we cannot ignore the place to which we are consigned, and where we are obliged to play out our destiny, this, our only true home.

“Could we do this one thing? Is it within the realm of possibility to do this one thing?

“I believe it is. If we did so, we would be validating the higher purpose of our sciences, and our search for an egalitarian society, as well obliging and gratifying the sense of our own humanity.

“All well and good?

“I wish I could stand before you to sing the praises, but I cannot. It may seem grandiose, and unrealistic of me to think that I, Donna Quixote, can make a difference. There are a few individuals who have made a difference; in recent history, acting alone, Mother Teresa, Albert Schweitzer, Jimmy Carter; perhaps these individuals show us what is possible. I do know that all of us gathered in this assembly, acting together, would make a difference, a significant difference.

“What do I mean by ‘difference’? Will I be able to make it clear what I mean?

“I think of others who have tried to make a difference, the Ted Kazyinskis, Timothy McVeighs, the Vickie Singers, Randy Weavers, David Koresh, the students at Thurston and Columbine, individuals, acting alone.

“Why did the latter not act as the former?

“What motivates the one individual to do the apparent good, and another to do such an outlandish thing to be thought bad? Is it a firm set of criterion that determine what is good and what is bad?

“It is far from a perfect world in which we must live. Often it seems to have no rational basis. There is rage out there, anger, frustration; rage and anger, at a monster without a head, frustration at not being able to strike at that head.

“I recall now an individual, a student, who has become a symbol for me. A young woman, who became a focus for many

discussions, some very heated and controversial, in our family; and also an important focus in my own thoughts about what can be done to counter the outrages of a remote unfeeling bureaucracy, in this case, the government of the United States Of America; to some, a very great monster indeed. Such a singular thing she did, a singularly courageous act, that symbolized her disbelief, her rage, anger, frustration, disappointment and grief; an appropriate act of dissent, which was intended to reveal her kind of patriotism. Those of you who have read my essays know already that I am speaking of Toni Smith.

“Counterpoised to Toni was Jessica Lynch, the wounded warrior from the siege of IRAQ. Both patriots; how do we resolve their differences? I do not believe that Jessica was enraged, angry, and frustrated by what her government told her was happening in IRAQ. She enlisted in the military as way to pay for a college education. Perhaps also she believed that she was doing the good, through the auspices of her country, in which she believed, and did not question; while Toni, not believing less in the principles which governed her country, questioned their application in IRAQ.

“Another of my essays undertook to analyze the phenomenon of Michael Moore, the populist entertainer who became a provocative critic of corporations and government, and the individuals who represented them. Counterpoised to him was the phenomenon of Rush Limbaugh, a populist talk show commentator, saying provocative things about those who do not support ‘our way of life’.

“Now, and, in those essays, I was unable to reconcile these differences.

“It boils down to choice. What do you choose to do? Is it possible to make a choice? Toni Smith made a choice. I believe Jessica Lynch didn’t think of all her options, when it came time to make a choice; she was swept up into something wherein hers was to obey. The damage to her body may be worth what she will gain for her future. Will she still get that college education?

“Toni obtained her college education without becoming a warrior. Is her future more secure than Jessica’s? Will she have the same opportunities as the wounded warrior?

“Food for thought. Real people in real situations, doing real things every day. We, acting as judges, perhaps with prejudice, eulogize some, and condemn others.

“My special friend and I discuss anything and everything. He is writer also, generally cynical about mankind. He admits to having high expectations of his fellow man; to him, they can never be too high. He feels keenly the discrepancies between what happens in

the classroom and what happens outside the classroom. He asks, is this great educational thing, a perpetration; commanding us to attend, to socialize us, and to unify us in ignorance? To hype ideals, when the real world was a terrible betrayal of those very ideals? To lie to us, distort reality in so many ways? He claims, in order to discover the truth, he must unlearn most of what he was taught.

“If what he claims has any semblance of truth, we have failed in the purpose of our institutions.

“I argue with him, of course; it has been a challenge to me in trying to persuade him to see some positive things in what man does and what he attempts to do. He is adamant; he will not yield his point; he forces me to consider it.

“I ask him, ‘Will man ever be good enough for you?’.

“Indeed, what are my expectations?

“Like my friend, perhaps under his cautionary influence, I must weigh my own idealism against what I have come to know of what is happening in the real world. I find I must question every assumption.

“Even as a rational being, I have assumed many things. Chief amongst those is the assumption that if I present an individual with enough data, enough plausible rationality, that individual will respond in kind; that individual will acknowledge what is presented to him, or her, and will recognize its import, will act accordingly, and conscientiously.

“Also, as a rational being, essentially a pragmatic individual, I caution myself against ‘pie in the sky’ idealism, reliance on hope and good will. Our choice for a better world must come from a solid foundation; and will require commitment, dedication and perseverance to bring to fruition. The saying, ‘erring on the side of caution’ has been with us for a long time; there is wisdom in those words. To me, it has become imperative that we observe this basic tenet, especially when it comes to the unconscionable ransacking of our planet, in attempting to make our fortunes.

“Without rationality serving as a basic building block in the construction of our social edifice, we do not stand a ‘hope in hell’ of achieving anything of what might be my expectations. That is, I would be defeated in my expectations.

“My friend, the cynic, sees me throwing away my beautiful young life in futile causes that will only wear me down, and greet me with greater disappointment than if I had done nothing at all.

“The test of my basic theses lie ahead.

“If grandiosity propels me in the Quixotic direction, ignoring the windmills that are bound to unhorse me, then it is you who might well view me as a foolish comic figure, or an inspired tragic figure.

"I cherish my friend, and do heed his indulgent advice, but I cannot sit idly by with my expectations, without doing my utmost to bring them to fruition.

"In my essays, I have labored very diligently to choose my words carefully, knowing that even the soberest, most well-intended, most objective sentence, will be examined for inconsistencies, contradictions, prejudices, biases; the dissembling, proselytizing, sermonizing, moralizing; haranguing, faulty logic; and yes, treason, vis a vis, patriotism. Very often I find I will need to define my terms, so that they will be understood in the sense they were used. I wish to remain credible at all times, not merely plausible, but credible.

"However, already I realize that I will not be able to live by words alone. Our libraries are full of words. They are silent emissaries of man's desire to communicate, to express his hopes, his aspirations. They cannot speak aloud that we might hear them, as I speak to you now. Even as they are read, and even as I speak, these are only words. They too argue silently amongst themselves, virtually nullified, or paralyzed, riddled with contradiction. It is only we who can act. Act we must. While you might act one way, which becomes the antithesis of the way I feel I must act, we must strive for the mien that yields the most good for all of life on the planet. Let that be the measure of our actions. I do not doubt our ability to recognize the common good. I do not confuse the good with self-serving propaganda.

"I leave you with these few thoughts then. With assurances that I will be found somewhere on the front lines, or in the trenches, laboring for the things in which I believe. I will do so with full knowledge that it is my choice. I ascribe my choice to no known deity, but to a concept of humanity, living in harmony with his environment, a concept yet to be fulfilled, with nothing more to go on than the hope of its possibility."

William continued with his writing as well, in a very different vein. He had mostly abandoned the reasoned approach to solving the ages old 'inhuman condition', having little faith in its prospect, resorting to juxtaposition, exposing horror for its own sake; hoping to excite disgust. He found that nearly everyone turned aside from this exaggerated stance. Some ventured he had become mad.

Despite his 'madness' William and Catherine remained close, still very attached to each other; however William confined himself more and more to his island retreat. Catherine would spend time with him, bringing along her computer, very industrious in keeping in touch with that world she seemed committed to saving.

They debated and argued for long periods the pros and cons of worldly affairs, as they had always, William still maintaining the cynical fatalistic outlook, whereas Catherine could not help but feel differently because of her involvement, the acceptance of her work, and the belief her work was making a difference. She was not unaware of the circles in which her efforts circulated. Those in government were mostly oblivious to the refinements of the ivory tower. When you have other means and weapons, you don't need input. The interdiction and control over self-interest, i.e. vested interests, special interests, was a long way away. Although this might be considered a defeat to her expectations, as she had indicated to William, retreat was not possible.

They had found common ground in their love and appreciation of each other. Instinctively they knew the other was right in their own way. A foil to each other, a check against conceit and grandiosity.

The author is fudging here. His private beliefs are those of William. But because he writes, he wants to feel the truth lurking behind every word. Since he feels he cannot know the truth in absolute terms, he gives credence to Catherine. He wants what she represents to succeed, perhaps more than any other. He supposes the way to that success is only enhanced by her beauty, her studiousness, her refined intelligence, her rationality, her integrity, and perhaps her youthful zeal. Whereas William appears more and more a crank, a demented, demoralized old geezer.

While the author does not really want to end this tale, he realizes he cannot prevail upon the reader very much longer. As much as he has grown attached to Catherine, and her lively and challenging discussions with William, the author senses too much is too much. Should the reader want to read more of the Author, he or she should be advised that he leaves behind other writings that reveal more of who and what he is. But all the while he suspects the reader is enchanted with Catherine about whom he does not speak anywhere else; solely in this volume.

Catherine might be construed a culmination of the author's rough intellect, his haphazard discipline, but also represents his earnest desire for a better world. He feels he has discovered the one way to further that desire by this denouement of Catherine.

In these days of sequels, this is the place for the reader to insert his or her modified non-ending; or continuation. The reader suspects enough the fate of William, and is free to imagine Catherine anyway he or she chooses. The author would only suggest that she continue with her labors, dedicated to the betterment of human society. She did indeed become a much

sought after speaker and lecturer. Even those she might have criticized the most harshly could not easily dismiss her incredible humanity. She had earned the respect of her enemies. Those whom she championed felt hope rise with her every word.

No less lovely than when we first met her, she attracted and was courted by many. But she gave no cause for gossip in her relations with others. Her answers to questions about her love life always included William, without fail. In fact, William was ever present in her mind, and in her heart. She could imagine William's cautions to her about the scandalmongers attempting to discredit her through her associations. She carefully avoided all seemliness.

Was there a child, and what happened to that child? Perhaps her sisters, or her mother knows. A closely guarded family secret?

Her sister Theresa was, in fact, her constant ally, helping her in everyway possible with her labors. Theresa continued as she had begun, a spirited open minded free thinker, sharing Catherine's natural empathy, herself contributing much to Catherine's endeavors. She had graduated from Antioch University with honors, imbued with the same spirit as Catherine.

Her sister Lydia did not make it a threesome initially, becoming a Harvard graduate in law, eventually finding her place working with the American Civil Liberties Union.

During this time William had aged considerably. He had grown more self-conscious of his infirmities; what he had described as navigating the Islands Of The Decrepitudes.

The reader reserves the right to quarrel with the whole fabrication. As did the readers of Charles Dickens with whom they maintained an almost intimate relationship; and which Mr. Dickens invited, and encouraged, in many ways. Always before the public as a serialized writer, as an actor, as a nearly barnstorming reader of his own works, and as a director of many stage productions, he certainly exposed himself to the public. But Mr. Dickens was the doing the job; he got to determine the final form of whatever he created; sometimes to the public's dismay. The offing of Little Nell; the cruel prerogative and license of the author.

Others did not enjoy such a cozy relationship, especially his contemporary in Amerikee. Herman Melville became mostly ignored or rejected by the public, not tuned into his kind of think. Melville was a heavy, perhaps like one of his characters in Mardi; Old Bardianna. Amerikee, that great land, up for grabs by every entrepreneur, huckster, and scoundrel, all in search of fortune and the easy life, at war with itself, didn't have the time or the inclination to indulge in anything that required Pondering.

One, thus, ought to be wary of the public.

